



## CHAPTER 4

# Why People Fight: Inequality, Exclusion, and a Sense of Injustice

Many of today's violent conflicts relate to group-based grievances arising from inequality, exclusion, and feelings of injustice. Every country has groups who believe they suffer one or all of these ills in some measure. Most of the time, the attendant tensions and conflicts may simmer for long periods without boiling over into violence. It is when an aggrieved group assigns blame to others or to the state for its perceived economic, political, or social exclusion that its grievances may become politicized and risk tipping into violence.

On their own, inequality among groups and group-based exclusion do not generate violence. But they can create fertile ground upon which grievances can build. In the absence of incentives to avoid violence or address grievances, group leaders may mobilize their cohort to violence. Emotions, collective memories, frustration over unmet expectations, and a narrative that rouses a group to violence can all play a role in this mobilization.

The chances of violence are higher if leaders in a group can both frame the inter-group inequality as unfair and assign blame to another actor, usually a different identity group or the state. Elites, as discussed later in this chapter, can play a significant role in collective mobilization by shaping narratives. In Indonesia, conflict escalated in one of three resource-rich provinces where elites engaged in “hard ideological work [...] to transform unfocused resentments about

natural resources into grievances that would mandate violence” (Aspinall 2007, 968). Prevention efforts need to pay special attention to perceptions of inequality and injustice (Nygard et al. 2017). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a framework through which various social and economic inequalities can be addressed, not only through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10, which is focused on inequalities, but also through other SDGs.

This chapter is organized around a comprehensive review of the multiple strands of research into the relationship between inequality and exclusion and the risk of violent conflict. It looks at how social groups coalesce—around identity, status, feelings of humiliation, and the perception they are being politically shortchanged, among others—and the conditions under which their grievances can be mobilized. The chapter also highlights the important roles the state may play and reviews evidence that reducing inequality and exclusion, particularly of women and young people, is fundamental to forging pathways to sustainable peace.

### Inequality and Violent Conflict

The link between inequality and violent conflict is one of the oldest issues in political economy. “At least since Aristotle, theorists have believed that political discontent and its consequences—protest, instability,

violence, revolution—depend not only on the absolute level of economic well-being, but also on the distribution of wealth” (Østby 2013, 4). Two dimensions of inequality are relevant here: inequality among individuals or households (vertical inequality) and inequality among groups (horizontal inequality) (Stewart 2002a). The evidence that horizontal inequality is linked to a higher risk of violent conflict is stronger than that for vertical inequality (Østby 2013). Nevertheless, although the relationship between inequality and conflict is not clear or direct, there is reason to believe that reducing inequality may help ease conflict between groups and thereby lower the risk of violence.

### Vertical Inequality

As noted above, scholars have long argued that economic inequality is fundamentally linked to violent conflict (Muller 1985). Lichbach (1989, 432) finds that “it often appears that the principal political contest and debate in a nation involves a polarization of social groups around distributional issues.” This view is reflected in conflict theory, which argues that conflict arises between the “haves” who wish to maintain the status quo distribution of resources and the “have-nots” who seek to challenge the existing system and its resource distribution. For decades, the notion that prosperous societies will be peaceful societies has underpinned development programming and spending.

Indeed, the gap between “haves” and “have-nots” remains at the center of much heated contemporary political and academic discussion on the growing income and wealth inequality in some developing and developed countries (Lichbach 1989; Piketty 2013; Justino 2017). The gap has widened to the point where the top 9 percent of the world’s population earns half of all global income, while the bottom half controls only about 7 percent of global income (Milanovic 2016).

Some income and wealth inequality is inevitable because people start out with different natural endowments of physical, social, and human capital and abilities. However, these differences do not explain the

differences in individuals’ access to power and opportunity or social exclusion (Stiglitz 2013; Krishnan et al. 2016). Rising income and wealth inequality seems to be due largely to these factors of unequal access and opportunity (Stewart 2002b). Persistent inequality driven by these factors could impede economic growth; it also may sometimes lead to social and political instability and violent conflict (Justino and Moore 2015).

Numerous studies have looked at the relationship between vertical inequality, such as individuals’ relative wealth or poverty, and conflict, with mixed findings (Lichbach 1989; Cramer 2003; Østby 2013; Nygard et al. 2017). As Cramer (2003) notes, links between vertical inequality and violent conflict are elusive. Various studies find that higher inequality increases the likelihood of conflict, decreases it, or has no impact at all (Russett 1964; Sigelman and Simpson 1977; Lichbach 1989; Bartusevičius 2014). Some studies have found a positive relationship between inequality in income (or land tenure) and conflict (Nagel 1976). Others argue for a positive relationship between income inequality and the likelihood of popular rebellion (Bartusevičius 2014) or the risk of violence, particularly under semi-repressive regimes (Schock 1996). In some studies, particular forms of inequality are found to matter—for example, household asset inequality that increased the propensity of civil strife in Uganda (Deininger 2003)—and vertical inequality is found to have a different impact on different conflict and violence types (Besançon 2005; Nepal, Bohara, and Gawande 2011). Recent cross-country studies find no significant relationship between income inequality measured by the Gini coefficient and violent conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004).

It should be noted, however, that cross-country studies that examine the effect of vertical inequality on the onset of violent conflict are constrained by major data limitations, both in the availability and reliability of vertical inequality data and in the way conflict onset is measured.<sup>1</sup> In addition, little empirical testing has been undertaken of the causal mechanisms that have been put forward by the theoretical and

qualitative literature on the relationship between vertical inequality and conflict.

## Horizontal Inequality

Horizontal inequalities are differences in access and opportunities across culturally defined (or constructed) groups based on identities such as ethnicity, region, and religion. They create fertile ground for grievances, especially when they accumulate across multiple realms, such as economic and political, and social (Østby 2008a; Justino 2017).<sup>2</sup>

The hypothesis that horizontal inequality makes countries more vulnerable to conflict derives from the idea that political, economic, and social inequalities are likely to create grievances among a relatively disadvantaged group whose members can mobilize along ethnic (or other identity-based) lines to cause violent conflict. Much research has been done on measurement and quantitative evidence related to this hypothesis.

Horizontal inequality as an explanatory factor for violent conflict rests on three points (Nygard et al. 2017). First, there is a positive relationship between horizontal inequality and the onset of violent conflict. Second, this positive relationship is due to the presence of group identity and of a subjective, collective sense of inequality that creates group grievances. Third, group grievances can lead to violent conflict when the group has the opportunity to collectively mobilize around its feeling of injustice (Gurr 1993; Østby 2013).

For horizontal inequality to spur collective action—which may or may not involve violence—objective inequality must be translated into an “inter-subjectively perceived grievance” (Nygard et al. 2017, 12); that is, the grievance is experienced collectively by the group. Gurr’s (1970) pioneering theory of relative deprivation builds a conceptual model to provide an understanding of the conditions under which individuals resort to violence. He argues that relative deprivation will lead to frustration and aggression that will motivate individuals to rebel. As this chapter discusses, this reasoning could arguably apply as well to social

groups, with relative deprivation defined as actors’ perceptions of discrepancy between what they think they are rightfully entitled to achieve and what they are actually capable of achieving.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, while most of the focus in this line of research to date has been on the impact of objective inequality among groups, some recent studies have tried to address *perceived* grievances as well.<sup>4</sup>

## Economic Inequality among Groups

Most of the cross-country literature that discusses horizontal inequality examines economic inequality that occurs along ethnic and religious lines. Ethnicity is broadly defined along ethnoreligious and ethnolinguistic groups (Østby, Nordås, and Rød 2009; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). Issues related to measuring and defining ethnicity, including questions related to endogeneity, are discussed throughout this chapter.

Scholars have tried to understand the relationship quantitatively by building summary indices of economic horizontal inequality and by measures of relative position. Cross-country studies that construct summary indices of economic horizontal inequality generally find a positive and statistically significant relationship between horizontal inequality and conflict (Østby 2008a, 2008b). These studies mostly use data from a range of countries, such as data from the Demographic and Health Survey, to measure the difference in asset ownership between each country’s two largest ethnic groups and to study its relationship with violent conflict (Østby 2008a, 2008b). Nepal, Bohara, and Gawande (2011) use village-level data to evaluate the relationship between intergroup inequalities and violence during the Maoist armed conflict in Nepal, which began in 1996 and has killed 10,000 people and displaced more than 200,000 people. They find that intergroup horizontal inequalities—measured according to religion, caste, and language—are associated with Maoist killings.

In a study measuring horizontal inequality, Alesina, Michalopoulos, and Papaioannou (2016) take a new approach. They combine satellite images of nighttime luminosity with

historical homelands of ethnolinguistic groups and find that ethnic inequality has a significant and negative association with socioeconomic development. Celiku and Kraay (2017) find that this measure of horizontal economic inequality is a good predictor of the outbreak of conflict.

Other cross-country studies focus on measures of the relative position an identity group holds within the wealth distribution in a geographic area (Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011, 2015; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). These studies allow the likelihood that each group will take part in conflict in a given area to be examined. One important advantage these studies have in comparison with the summary indices mentioned above is that they create the opportunity to disentangle the effect of relative deprivation from the effect of relative privilege. This is an important distinction that relies on different theoretical underpinnings for why certain groups would want to incite violent conflict. These studies find robust evidence of a positive relationship between relatively disadvantaged groups and violent conflict (Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013; Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann 2015). Deprivation is measured as the distance between the deprived group's estimated gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and the average GDP per capita of all groups. However, there is evidence that sometimes relatively privileged groups are the ones that initiate violence, a finding discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

### **Political Inequality among Groups**

Recent quantitative studies and qualitative analysis support a strong and positive link between political exclusion of certain groups and violent conflict, making political inclusion a particularly significant goal for prevention of violence (Jones, Elgin-Cossart, and Esberg 2012; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). This is a key message of this study and is discussed in greater detail in chapters 5 and 6. Political horizontal inequality can be broadly defined to include inequalities in the distribution and access to political opportunity and power among groups, including access to

the executive branch and the police and military. It also relates to the ability of individuals to participate in political processes. Theories of political horizontal inequality draw on literatures of ethnonationalism and self-determination, as well as on the idea that ethnic capture of the state provides politically excluded groups with motivation to challenge the state (Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013).

Early empirical investigations used data from the Minorities at Risk project, which considers indices of political discrimination among ethnic groups and political differentials measured by political status between groups. Results using the Minorities at Risk data set were mixed, in part because of the quality of the data (Gurr 1993).

More recent quantitative studies have used the Ethnic Power Relations data set, which includes measures of the exclusion of ethnic groups from executive power (Buhaug, Cederman, and Gleditsch 2014; Vogt et al. 2015).<sup>5</sup> Several of these studies find that group-level exclusion from the executive branch increases the risk that these groups will participate in conflict; an ethnic group's recent loss of power also increases that risk (Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013; Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann 2015). When aggregated to the country level, political inequality has been found to increase the risk of violent conflict (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). By disaggregating conflict types into territorial and governmental conflict, Buhaug, Cederman, and Gleditsch (2014) find that the presence of large groups that are discriminated against boosts the probability of governmental civil wars. They attribute this to the discrepancy between a group's demographic power and its political privileges.

### **Social Inequality among Groups**

While most of the quantitative literature on horizontal inequalities has focused on the economic and political dimensions, social inequality among groups is also important to any discussion of conflict risk.

Social inequality can be broadly defined to include inequalities in access to basic services, such as education, health care, and benefits related to educational and health outcomes, which could be monitored through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Education is particularly relevant, given that it is strongly connected to future economic activity and well-being and plays an important role in national identity and social cohesion. Although quantitative evidence on the social dimension of horizontal inequality is rather limited,<sup>6</sup> studies have sought to examine the association between social inequality and conflict (Omoeva and Buckner 2015).

Omoeva and Buckner (2015), for example, build a cross-country panel data set of educational attainment and find a robust relationship between higher levels of horizontal inequality in education among ethnic and religious groups and the likelihood of violent conflict. They find that a one standard deviation increase in horizontal inequality in educational attainment more than doubles the odds that a country will experience a conflict in the next five years; this relationship was statistically significant in the 2000s and was robust to multiple specifications while not being present in earlier decades (Omoeva and Buckner 2015). The authors hypothesize that in the 1970s and 1980s, high levels of education inequality were not perceived as a sufficient reason for grievances to build. It could also be that large differences between ethnic or religious groups in educational attainment signal higher levels of exclusion of specific groups (Omoeva and Buckner 2015). Social differences between ethnic groups can sometimes represent group discrimination. Education policies have been used to discriminate against minorities or other ethnic groups, as has been shown in postapartheid South Africa and Sri Lanka, for example (Gurr 2000; Stewart 2002b).

Using Demographic and Health Survey data on a set of developing countries, Østby (2008b) finds that for a country with low levels of horizontal social inequality (5th percentile), the probability of onset of civil conflict in any given year is 1.75 percent. This probability increases to 3.7 percent

when the level of horizontal social inequality rises to the 95th percentile. Horizontal social inequality is measured by the total years of education completed. Murshed and Gates (2005) find that horizontal inequalities were significant in explaining violent conflict in Nepal. Specifically, they find that higher life expectancy and educational attainment, the latter measured by average years of schooling, were associated with a lower risk of civil war. However, reverse causality can be a potential problem because conflict can sometimes increase horizontal social inequality. Box 4.1 elaborates on the issue of reverse causality.

A district-level study of Indonesia finds that horizontal inequality in child mortality rates was positively associated with ethnic-based communal violence (Mancini, Stewart, and Brown 2008). Other measures of horizontal inequality include civil service employment, unemployment, education, and poverty among farmers. The study finds these factors were also linked to the incidence of conflict, but that the effects were much less pronounced. In another analysis, Østby et al. (2011) find that in Indonesian districts with high population growth, horizontal inequality in infant mortality rates is related to violence.

### **Relatively Privileged Groups and Violent Conflict**

While there is robust evidence that high levels of horizontal inequality among the relatively deprived increase the likelihood of conflict, evidence on relatively privileged groups is mixed. Relatively privileged groups may initiate violence to preserve their power and their access to important resources (Stewart 2002a). A privileged group that produces wealth may develop a sense of injustice if it sees a redistribution of that wealth as an unfair benefit to another region or group. Asal et al. (2016) find that ethnic groups that face political exclusion and live in an area that produces oil wealth are more likely to experience violent conflict than groups that experience only exclusion. Economically privileged groups have more resources with which to sustain violent conflict, but their higher opportunity cost means they also have more to lose by participating



#### **BOX 4.1 The Challenge of Causality for Policy Action**

Studies of the relationship between inequality and violent conflict are subject to the issue of endogeneity, and specifically reverse causality, with implications for prevention policy. Greater inequality may increase the likelihood of violent conflict, and violent conflict may worsen inequality. Collier et al. (2003) call this “development in reverse,” where violent conflict may deepen the problems that led groups to take up arms in the first place. However, overall case study evidence is mixed on whether conflict indeed widens or reduces horizontal inequality. In fact, Bircan, Bruck, and Vothknecht (2017) find that conflict increases vertical inequality, but the impact is not permanent.

Fearon (2010) includes variables that measure the extent of the population that is excluded or discriminated against in regression analysis and argues that including such variables effectively results in the running of a “policy regression.” This means that a variable that is a direct policy choice is used as an independent variable in regression analysis, thus allowing the researcher to explore the effect of specific policy choices. Policy makers who anticipate that a particular group is likely to mobilize for violence can enact policies that reduce certain inequalities.

Endogeneity can lead to over- or underestimating the causal impact in a specific country with more exclusionary policies. Wucherpfennig, Hunziker, and Cederman (2016) argue that empirical analysis that does not correct for endogeneity will overestimate the effect of political exclusion on the risk of violent conflict. They suggest that governments then may strategically exclude conflict-prone ethnic groups or regions. If conflict-prone groups are included in a government, empirical analysis that does not correct for endogeneity will artificially underestimate this effect. A few studies have used an instrumental variables approach to correct for endogeneity, but this remains an area for further exploration and research. Improving the link between different types of horizontal inequality and higher risk of violent conflict would contribute to better informing prevention policies. However, drawing policy recommendations and entry points from associations between two different phenomena is challenging because evidence of an association is not enough to draw specific causal inference and policy entry points. Hence, policies that address the potential risks of violent conflict have to be context specific and informed by evidence that tries to go beyond simple association.

in violence (Nygard et al. 2017). There is also evidence that in the case of separatist movements, relatively privileged groups sometimes initiate violence (Brown 2010).

Whether relatively wealthier groups are more likely to participate in conflicts is debatable. Several authors find that this is the case by conducting studies comparing a group’s GDP per capita to the GDP per capita of all groups (Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch 2011; Cederman, Weidmann, and Bormann 2015), but other studies fail to find a significant relationship (Buhaug, Cederman, and Gleditsch 2014; Fjelde and Østby 2014). In their theoretical model of

conflict and economic change, Mitra and Ray (2014) show that increasing a specific group’s income lowers the chances of that group’s participating in violence. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that they also find that raising one group’s income may increase the chance that that same group will be the target of violence because other privileged groups would perceive that increase as losing their own comparative advantage.

As explored in more detail below, steep changes in the relative status of groups can foment new grievances that increase the risk of violence, even if the change reduces inequalities.

## The Multiple and Intersecting Dimensions of Exclusion

Inequality among groups is not a sufficient condition for collective action toward violence. A deep-rooted sense of exclusion and a perception of injustice seem to be present in many violent conflicts. These factors are key in grievance formation. Changes in status and political exclusion are especially potent. The perception of exclusion is also persuasive, even when it is at odds with a group's objective situation in relation to other groups'. Although exclusion and inequality based on gender and age are not linked to conflict risk in a direct way, the participation and inclusion of women and young people strengthen a country's capacity to manage and avert conflict (Paffenholz et al. 2017).

### The Importance of Political Exclusion in Conflict Risks

Some qualitative case studies and quantitative evidence suggest that political exclusion is very important in fostering between-group tensions that can lead to violence. Political exclusion provides leaders of deprived groups with an incentive to act to change the situation. Some have argued that political exclusion is more visible—and therefore groups can more easily assign blame, one of the steps considered essential in stirring grievances to violence—than economic disadvantage (Jones, Elgin-Cossart, and Esberg 2012; Vogt et al. 2015).

Data limitations regarding political exclusion, however, are even more severe than they are for economic exclusion. Some recent work tries to address the limitations. The latest Ethnic Power Relations data set compiles data for the period 1946–2013 that includes all “politically relevant ethnic groups”<sup>7</sup> in 141 countries and their access to power in the executive branch, including cabinet positions and control of the army (Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010).<sup>8</sup> The indicator for SDG target 16.7, which is being developed, will provide additional possibilities for measuring political inclusion.

Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) show that politically excluded groups experience conflict at a much higher frequency in comparison with included groups. They also show that the less included a group is politically, the more likely it is to fight the incumbent government. This effect is even more pronounced when groups have experienced a change of power.

The size of the politically incumbent group makes little to no difference to the probability of conflict. But size has a strong positive effect toward violence for excluded groups. This finding is interpreted as evidence that conflict is to a large extent driven by grievances, since one would expect the perceived injustice to increase with the size of the excluded population, rather than group size being regarded as simply a proxy for resource endowment (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). Other evidence suggests that excluded groups will be more likely to engage in collective violent action when they perceive the political system to be completely closed to their group, as opposed to when they believe they have minimum representation (Jost and Banaji 2004).

A group may well suffer exclusion in several dimensions at once, and the overlap of different types of exclusion can heighten the risk of violent conflict. Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) find that groups excluded both economically and politically will be more likely to participate in violent conflict than groups excluded in only one dimension. They conclude that the effect of economic horizontal inequality on violent conflict is conditional on political exclusion. In fact, economic horizontal inequalities can be compensated for by a politically inclusive society. Østby (2008a), in a study at the country level, finds a strong link between asset inequality and violent conflict, especially for countries with higher levels of political discrimination.

Different types of exclusion tend to reinforce each other. Political exclusion often leads to social and economic exclusion. As discussed in chapter 3, social exclusion is related to power relations and tends to involve discrimination against or exclusion

of groups from the regular activities of society. There are causal connections between educational access and income: lack of access to education, lack of education, or both, lead to fewer economic opportunities, which is correlated with low income. At the same time, the low income of certain groups leads to lower educational attainment, which creates a vicious cycle for relatively deprived groups. Exclusion in recognition of culture, especially related to language use, can also affect educational and economic opportunities and outcomes as a result. It also reinforces group identities.

Stewart (2009) suggests that conflict is less likely when a particular group that is relatively deprived in one dimension is privileged in another. In cases in which a group is economically or socially excluded (or both), but the group's elite holds power or participates in the government, the elite are less likely to organize or lead a rebellion. She cites the examples of Malaysia and Nigeria, suggesting that after their civil wars the group that was economically disadvantaged held a numerical majority and was also politically advantaged. Having political power reduces the elites' motives to rebel and gives them an opportunity to correct the inequalities faced by their group.

## Inclusion of Women and Gender Equality

The degree to which women are included in political, economic, and social life is a key factor influencing a society's propensity for conflict. Gender inequality is often a reflection of overall levels of exclusion in a society and its tendency to resort to violence as a means of resolving conflict (GIWPS and PRIO 2017; Tessler and Warriner 1997; Caprioli and Tumbore 2003; Caprioli 2005; Melander 2005; Caprioli et al. 2007; Hudson et al. 2009; O'Reilly 2015; UNSC 2015a; Crespo-Sancho 2017; Kelly 2017; Nygard et al. 2017).

Several large-sample, quantitative studies have explored the relationship between gender exclusion and violent conflict, finding that women's status relative to men's, especially their vulnerability to violence, is a significant predictor of the country's propensity

for violent conflict overall (Caprioli 2000; Caprioli and Boyer 2001; Caprioli and Tumbore 2003; Regan and Paskeviciute 2003; Hudson et al. 2012). In a global, longitudinal study relying on the WomanStats database,<sup>9</sup> which includes data from 175 countries (1960–2001), and using fertility rates and labor force participation as proxies for gender equality, Caprioli and Boyer (2001) find a significant and positive relationship between levels of gender inequality in a country and the likelihood of that country's being the first to use military force in disputes with other countries. Hudson et al. (2012), also relying on the WomanStats database, compares indicators of gender-based violence with macro-level indicators of peace and stability, as well as legislation protecting women's rights. They find that the higher the level of violence against women, the more likely a country may be not to comply with international norms and treaty agreements, and the less peacefully it will operate in the international system.

Changes in women's experiences can be viewed as early warning signs of social and political insecurity. These signs may include an increase in domestic violence, increased risk of gender-based violence outside the home, an increase in the number of female-headed households, a decrease in girls' attending school because of security concerns, and an increase in pregnancy terminations (Hudson et al. 2012). This finding underscores the importance of monitoring indicators of gender equality within broader systems to prevent violence.

Gender inclusion offers important potential for reducing the risk of violence. Caprioli (2005) finds that countries with 10 percent of women in the labor force compared with countries with 40 percent of women in the labor force are nearly 30 times more likely to experience internal conflict. She also finds that a 5 percent increase in females in the labor force is associated with a fivefold decrease in the probability that a state will use military force to resolve international conflict. Caprioli and Boyer (2005) find that states with higher levels of gender inequality (using labor force participation as a proxy) also tend to use more extreme forms of violence in conflict.



Mobilizing women's leadership and participation in peace processes and in conflict resolution has also been instrumental in shifting toward peaceful pathways in many countries (UN Women 2015) (see box 4.2). Some of these experiences are discussed further in chapter 6.

However, gender equality by itself is not a panacea or absolute bulwark against the risk of violent conflict. Even countries where women enjoy relatively solid access to the political, social, and economic spheres may be affected by violent conflict. Indeed, in one of the trends in contemporary violent conflict discussed in chapter 1, conflict has spread to middle-income countries with relatively developed institutions. Among these countries is the Syrian Arab Republic, where women, or at least urban women, had relatively wide educational and professional opportunities (UNICEF 2011).

Gender exclusion is maintained by social norms that prescribe certain roles for women and men. These norms affect not only the propensity for conflict, but the experience of conflict by women and men, as discussed in chapter 1.

In some cases, violent conflict can relax rigid gender norms, at least temporarily. Women may join armed groups, move into new livelihood opportunities, and take leadership roles as peacemakers. In many cases, however, the potential to take advantage of these roles is limited, especially in the postconflict period. In a study of six conflict and postconflict countries, Justino et al. (2012) find that although women increased their participation in new labor markets during conflict, and in some cases overall household welfare improved in economic terms, they earned less than male colleagues and often lost their jobs in the postconflict period. In addition, the increased participation in new jobs was not accompanied by any reduction in their household labor; on the contrary, these responsibilities tended to increase as women took over as heads of household while male partners and family members were recruited or abducted into armed groups. Once conflict ended, they faced pressure to return to more traditional roles, and were often tasked with caring for male relatives injured during conflict or orphaned children.

#### **BOX 4.2 Mobilizing Women's Leadership for Peacebuilding**

In October of 2000 the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. Recognizing women's important role in peace and the disproportionate effects of violence on women during conflict, Resolution 1325 urges states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions as well as in mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts (UN Women 2015). Empirical studies have documented the positive role women can play:

- Paffenholz (2015) establishes that meaningful participation of women in peace negotiations results in participants being more satisfied with the outcomes, and thus, agreements that tend to be longer lasting.

- Women's inclusion in peace processes has a positive impact on the durability of peace agreements (O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz 2015).
- Stone (2015) shows that the inclusion of women as negotiators, mediators, signatories, and witnesses increases the probability of an agreement's lasting at least two years by 20 percent, and the probability of an agreement's lasting at least 15 years by 35 percent.
- Increasing the number of women at the negotiating table, although necessary and helpful, is not enough; rather, increasing the number of women with quality participation should be the target (Anderlini 2007; Paffenholz 2015).

Gender norms affect the experience of conflict for men as well. The perpetrators of violence are predominantly men, as are most members of violent extremist groups, gangs, militias, and armies. Even so, the vast majority of men do not perpetrate violence, young men are not inherently violent, men actively participate in peace building, and men are the primary direct victims of violent conflict (with more men dying on the battlefield) (Spiegel and Salama 2000; Reza, Mercy, and Obermeyer, Murray, and Gakidou 2008). All this suggests that masculinity is in large part a social construct, and that men create violent identities because of social, cultural, and political expectations and pressures placed upon them (Bannon and Correia 2006; Vess et al. 2013). A corollary explored below is that masculinity does not drive violence so much as do environments where men are unable to assert and fulfill other nonviolent masculine identities.

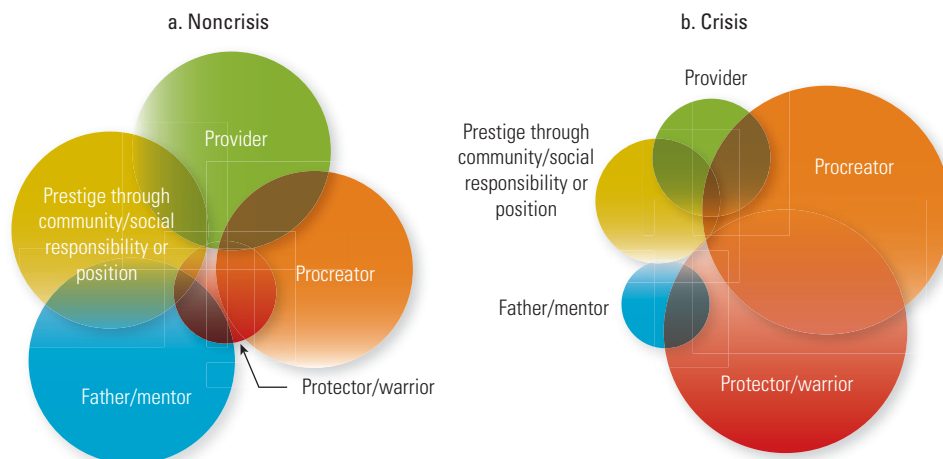
In a study of nine violence-affected countries UNDP (2011) identifies four common and interrelated roles associated with manhood. These “four Ps of manhood” follow:

- Provider for his family
- Procreator or father
- Prestige through being respected in the community, which also brings social status
- Protector of family and community.

Important differences in men’s abilities to assert these roles appear in a noncrisis setting as compared with a crisis setting (see figure 4.1). In a crisis setting, men are unable to assert their roles of provider and procreator and to acquire social standing. A demand for traditional, patriarchal masculinities that advocates for the use of violence can surge within young men who seek to reassert their threatened masculinity. Although men’s roles are challenged in conflict settings, not all men will develop violent behaviors.

Norms do not change quickly or easily. Indeed, although formal, institutional changes, such as legislation protecting women’s rights, can occur relatively quickly, norms require much more time to change, and tend to be more resistant to change (Petesch 2012). When they are in flux, those who step outside the older, more rigid norms into new roles—from women who leave their households or communities to study or work in the city, to men who take on more domestic responsibilities—face a heightened risk of violence if their communities persist in enforcing more traditional norms (Boudet et al. 2012). As discussed further in chapter 6, this entrenchment of norms underscores the importance of focusing not only on the objective of equality but also on the processes that lead there.

**FIGURE 4.1 Masculinities in Noncrisis and Crisis Settings**



Source: UNDP 2011.

## Youth Inclusion

Young people are productive workers, engaged citizens, and peace builders. The 2015 United Nations Security Council resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (SCR 2250) was groundbreaking on this score, recognizing the role of youth in the prevention of violence and the resolution of conflicts for the first time, and calling for increased representation of youth in decision-making at all levels (see box 4.3).<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, a growing field of study for researchers and policy makers alike is the relationship between youth and violence, particularly the role that youth exclusion may play in increasing a country's

risk of violent conflict, as well as the question of what drives a minority of young people to participate in violence. These questions are particularly salient in light of the global trends described in chapter 2, such as the historically high number of young people in the world today, the high levels of youth unemployment, and the growing transnational reach of violent extremist groups that actively recruit youth.

While many have hypothesized that a demographic “youth bulge” is a structural risk of conflict (Collier 2000; Urdal 2006), more recent, cross-country work finds that whether a large youth population constitutes a threat or, to the contrary, a “demographic

### BOX 4.3 Youth Aspirations and Exclusion

Half of the global population is age 24 years or younger (World Bank 2017a). Young people face a wide array of development challenges. They are often victims of multiple and interlocking forms of discrimination that can lead to an imbalance of power that excludes young people from being recognized socially as adults, undermining their needs and aspirations. Intergenerational inequality, and youth perceptions of lower status and fewer opportunities than their parents had at the same age, can also contribute to frustration (Ginges et al. 2007; Atran and Ginges 2012; Höhne 2013; Honwana 2013; Idris 2016; UNDP 2017b).

Youth exclusion is often highlighted as a key factor in violent conflict. Programs around the world have focused on increasing employment opportunities for youth, but they have had mixed results. Evidence shows that employment can, in some cases, contribute to protecting youth against mobilization to violence, but that the motivations for joining armed groups are not limited to economics. They often stem from frustration with the rigidity of intergenerational social structures (Ginges et al. 2007; Atran and Ginges 2012; Höhne 2013; Idris 2016), frustrated aspirations for social and economic mobility, discrimination, and unmet needs for recognition and respect

(Idris 2016; Devarajan and Ianchovichina 2017). Although it is true that the majority of fighters in all types of armed groups are young men, they only ever represent a minority of the youth population in any given country. At the same time, youth groups are important parts of civil society and are forces for effective prevention of violent conflict.

Empowering youth is essential for violence-prevention and peacebuilding efforts. In 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted its Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace, and Security, recognizing the important and positive contribution of young people in efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The Security Council called for active engagement of youth because they represent “a unique demographic dividend that can contribute to lasting peace and prosperity” if inclusive policies are put in place. These policies include, for example, those related to youth employment, vocational training, educational opportunities, and promoting youth entrepreneurship and meaningful participation in decision making. The Security Council highlighted that the disruption of young people's access to educational and economic opportunities has a dramatic impact on durable peace and reconciliation.

dividend” (UNSC 2015b), depends largely on the degree to which youth are included in economic, social, and political life (Paasonen and Paasonen and Urdal 2016). More micro-level analysis finds that economic, social, and political exclusion prevents young peoples’ transition into adulthood in countries at all income levels, and is often cited as a risk factor for joining armed groups (Ginges et al. 2007; Atran and Ginges 2012; Höhne 2013; Honwana 2013; Mercy Corps 2015; Idris 2016). Indeed, studies from various contexts show that youth’s motivations to join armed groups extend beyond more practical needs for employment or income to a broader frustration with the rigidity of intergenerational social structures, frustrated aspirations for social and economic mobility, discrimination, and unmet needs for recognition and respect (Ginges et al. 2007; Atran and Ginges 2012; Botha 2013; Höhne 2013; Mercy Corps 2015; Idris 2016, 40; Devarajan and Ianchovichina 2017). These motivations vary somewhat by gender; generally speaking, male youth are more likely to be motivated to join armed groups out of a need for economic or social mobility, whereas young women may join for protection, the chance for greater autonomy than allowed by mainstream society, to avenge the loss of a loved one, or perceptions of injustice and frustration (Bloom 2005, 2011; Brown 2014; Ladbury 2015). As noted earlier in this chapter, unequal access to education and the quality of education can become sources of frustration, feelings of injustice, and grievances that can all increase a society’s risk of violent conflict.

Barriers to meaningful and inclusive youth participation in governance are also important risk factors. The disenfranchisement of young people from formal political systems leaves them not only frustrated but also mistrustful of political systems and institutions (UNDP 2017a). In countries with more rigid, conservative power structures and social hierarchies, youth tend to express their dissatisfaction by blaming older generations, thus creating an intergenerational drift. In these settings, youth feel disempowered and frustrated and assert that they receive little attention from those in power, including teachers, elders, and politicians (Abbink 2005).

## **Recruitment of Youth by Violent Armed Groups**

In recent years, much attention has turned to recruitment of youth by violent groups, especially violent extremist groups. The research suggests that the motivations and experiences of people in violent extremist groups is similar to that for other types of armed groups. Empirical work on youth motivations, and on extremist groups’ recruiting strategies, is scarce—although increasing in some areas—because of several important limitations (World Bank 2015; UNDP 2017b). These constraints include, first, the difficulties of accessing members of clandestine groups, resulting in a bias toward people who have left such groups or who have been imprisoned for crimes committed while members (Barrett 2011; Atran and Stone 2015; Mercy Corps 2015; Stern and Berger 2015; ISS 2016). A strong bias toward male fighters contributes to a limited understanding of women’s involvement (Ladbury 2015) as well as of the various roles that people can play in these groups. Most studies tend to focus on one group in one setting, which has given rise to some rich case studies, but often offers little in the way of generalizability for orienting policy in other contexts or toward other groups (ISS 2016; Mercy Corps 2016; CeSID 2017; EIP 2017). A small number of studies have been able to interview members of extremist groups—the Islamic State, or ISIS, in particular—to offer a glimpse into the group’s internal organization (Atran and Stone 2015; Stern and Berger 2015; Weiss and Hassan 2015), and some journalist reports offer some detail on the profiles of recruits, particularly foreign fighters (Weaver 2015). However, many violent extremist groups, such as Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, do not keep formal records of their members. There is little information on members’ sociodemographic profiles or on the roles they play once recruited.

No single characteristic, identity, or motivation appears to draw individuals to become part of violent groups. In a study of violent extremism in six countries across Africa, including interviews with 718 people, of which 495 were former or current

self-identified members of extremist groups, UNDP (2017b) finds that certain vulnerabilities tended to be present in those who joined extremist groups, especially a lack of exposure to people of other religious and ethnic identities, low levels of literacy or quality of education, and a perceived lack of parental involvement during childhood. Grievances against the state were an important motivating factor; frustration with perceived corruption or lack of access to political representation was key. One of the most striking findings relates to grievances

against security actors: 78 percent of the sample reported low levels of trust in the police or military, and 71 percent said that the killing or arrest of a family member or friend prompted them to join an extremist group (UNDP 2017b).

Far from all members join armed groups voluntarily; groups also use violence and threats to coerce people to join. For extremist groups, coercion as a means of recruitment and payment for services become much more common when such a group controls territory (see box 4.4).

#### **BOX 4.4 A Multiplicity of Motivations Drives People to Join Violent Extremist Groups**

Individuals who join violent extremist groups do not fit a single profile or follow a single trajectory. A growing body of empirical research on violent extremism across different regions and groups finds that motivations are complex and context specific, and that coercion by armed groups plays a strong role as well.

##### **Motivations when individuals join voluntarily**

- *Perception of injustice at the hands of the state is suggested to be a strong motivation*, along with a sense of frustration with the state. These grievances toward the state may revolve around elite corruption and perceptions that the state is illegitimate. Members of social groups who feel marginalized or excluded experience such grievances most acutely. The narrative offered by some violent extremist groups of an egalitarian and moral order, marked by justice and fairness, may appear to be an attractive alternative.
- *Experience of violence, persecution, and repression from the state*, notably by its police and military forces against family members and friends, is a documented tipping point for individuals to voluntarily join violent extremist groups. In UNDP's (2017b) study, 71 percent of respondents cited the killing or arrest of a family member

or friend as the incident that motivated them to join an extremist group.

- *Desire for a sense of community, social belonging, and recognition* is a motivation, particularly when family members or friends already are members of a group. Alternatively, the group may fill a gap in social belonging, especially for individuals who report low parental involvement during their childhood, a lack of friends, and poor integration with peers and the community at large. Recruiters often appeal to this desire for social membership and social recognition by portraying the group as a fellowship.
- *Prospects for earning income and economic empowerment* are rarely the main reason for joining, but in some cases may motivate poor youth and educated middle-class youth with higher expectations of social mobility.
- The need for *physical protection* is cited as a motivating factor. In a conflict context that is dangerous and unstable, and notably when the presence of the state is weak, individuals may join an extremist group to protect themselves or their family, broader group, or property.
- Women or girls may seek other ways to *assert their identity and independence* as a result of gender-based inequality,

*(Box continued next page)*



#### **BOX 4.4 A Multiplicity of Motivations Drives People to Join Violent Extremist Groups** *(continued)*

discrimination in society, and domestic abuse, by assuming different roles in groups.

- *A sense of greater purpose* and sacrifice for a transcendental—religious, ethnic, or ideological—cause perceived to be under threat is a powerful motivator.
- *A lack of religious literacy* may increase the propensity to buy into religious extremist narratives. Whether attributable to a purely secular education, or no or low-quality education, a lack of religious literacy increases susceptibility to extremism more broadly, because an individual may not be equipped with a thorough understanding of religious tenets or critical thinking skills. In Africa, religious

education, that is, higher-than-average years of religious schooling, was found to be a source of resilience against recruitment for violent extremist causes.

#### **When individuals join involuntarily**

- Extremist groups use *physical coercion* such as torture, rape, and kidnapping.
- Such groups also use *threats* to kill, injure, and rape. Individuals may also feel that they or their family, friends, or community are threatened, for example, with starvation or other deprivation. As a militant group establishes social or territorial control over a community, community members may feel themselves trapped into joining or supporting a group.

*Sources:* McCauley and Moskaleiko 2008; Christmann 2012; Sjöberg and Wood 2015; Atran 2016; Devarajan et al. 2016; ISS 2016; Mercy Corps 2016; Sjöberg and Gentry 2016; UN Women 2016; World Bank Group IEG 2016; Bhatia and Ghanem 2017; UNDP 2017b.

### **Perceptions of Exclusion and Unfairness in Violent Conflict Risk**

Perceptions play a powerful role in creating feelings of exclusion and injustice that may be mobilized toward violence. Indeed, evidence suggests that *perceptions* of exclusion and inequality often matter more for their potential for mobilization than do measured inequality and exclusion (Gurr 1970). Studies that find a relationship between objective horizontal inequality and violent conflict assume that the relationship is mediated through perceptions (Østby 2008a; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013).<sup>11</sup> However, the correlation between objective and perceived horizontal inequality is not as high as might be expected (see box 4.5). Better data are needed to provide more conclusive evidence on perceptions and their importance in relation to objective inequality and exclusion measures.

Recent studies have shifted from measuring group-level grievances expressed by leaders to measuring individual-level perceptions assessed from survey questions. The shift reflects the view that objective inequality results in violent conflict only if a sufficient number of group members view the inequality as unjust and can cast blame on another group or on the state (Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013).

Most studies that use these various types of perception measures find a positive correlation between perceptions and behavior or attitudes that would favor violence. For example, respondents' perception that the government was treating their group unfairly was found to be associated with an increased rate of participation in demonstrations and also higher levels of support for violence. Hillesund (2015) finds that Palestinians were more likely to support violent over nonviolent actions when they assessed the political and human rights situation as poor (Kirwin and

#### **BOX 4.5 Measuring Collective Grievances through Perceptions**

One strand of the literature is built on survey questions about individuals' living conditions, which are aggregated into group- or regional-level measures and compared across groups, regions, or national averages (Must 2016; Rustad 2016). This approach has been criticized on a number of grounds. One argument is that individuals may view their own living conditions differently than do other members of their group. Another is that this measure does not account for group identification, which is key in comparing the aggrieved group and other groups. An additional criticism is that it is not clear which reference group to use as a comparison—the national average, the largest group in the country, or the largest group in the region. Rustad (2016) argues that the reference group should be the largest group in the region because people most likely compare themselves to groups that are near them geographically. She applies this in a study of perceived horizontal inequalities in the Niger Delta.

A second strand of the literature uses questions about perceived horizontal inequality<sup>a</sup> or groups' relative political influence in surveys, such as Afrobarometer (Miodownik and Nir 2016; Must 2016). This strand alleviates some of the issues regarding group

identification because the question specifically refers to the ethnic group to which respondents belong and with which they identify.

Finally, a third strand of the literature focuses on answers to survey questions about how frequently individual group members feel their group is treated unfairly by the government (Kirwin and Cho 2009; Miodownik and Nir 2016). This approach is more comprehensive because the question, in principle, covers various dimensions of injustice.<sup>b</sup> However, the pertinent question also forces the respondent to evaluate the situation as fair or unfair and also to assign blame for the situation to the government, while in many cases the situation is more complex than that. The second strand of literature tries to capture perceptions of inequality, whereas this third strand captures the level of collective grievance of certain ethnic groups. Indicators to measure Sustainable Development Goal targets 16.6 and 16.7 are being developed along the third strand (proportion of population, by sex, age, disability, and population group, who believe decision making is inclusive and responsive; and proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services, respectively).

a. One such question from Afrobarometer is "Think about the condition of [respondent's ethnic group]. Are their economic conditions worse, the same as, or better than other groups in this country?"

b. The question from the Afrobarometer third round is "How often are [respondent's ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government?"

Cho 2009; Miodownik and Nir 2016). Cross-country studies find support for the idea that perceptions affect people's willingness to engage in conflict. Using all the measures described in box 4.5 as well as data from Afrobarometer and the World Values Survey, Must (2016) finds that perceptions of political inequality and unfair treatment by the government also motivate people toward violence. Devarajan and Ianchovichina (2017) find that the Arab Spring uprisings can be explained in part by subjective feelings of a decline in life

satisfaction, driven by perceived declining living standards related to a shortage of formal sector jobs, corruption, and dissatisfaction with the quality of public services.

Not all empirical results point to the same conclusion, however. Miodownik and Nir (2016) construct a measure of horizontal inequality from survey questions in the third and fourth Afrobarometer<sup>12</sup> rounds that asked respondents whether they considered their ethnic group's economic and political condition to be worse,

the same, or better than that of other groups in their country. The authors find the following:

- Perceptions of group political deprivation were associated with a lower risk of participation in demonstrations among African individuals, along with lower support for violence.
- Perceptions of group economic deprivation had no discernable effect. A study across four states in Nigeria (Rustad 2016) finds evidence that individuals who rated their conditions as poor were more likely to express support for violence in their attitudes. However, the findings were different when aggregated to the group level: belonging to a district or ethnic group where the average score of self-reported conditions was much poorer than that in the richest or largest group was associated with lower support for violence. This finding could be evidence that members of relatively privileged groups are more likely to support violence.

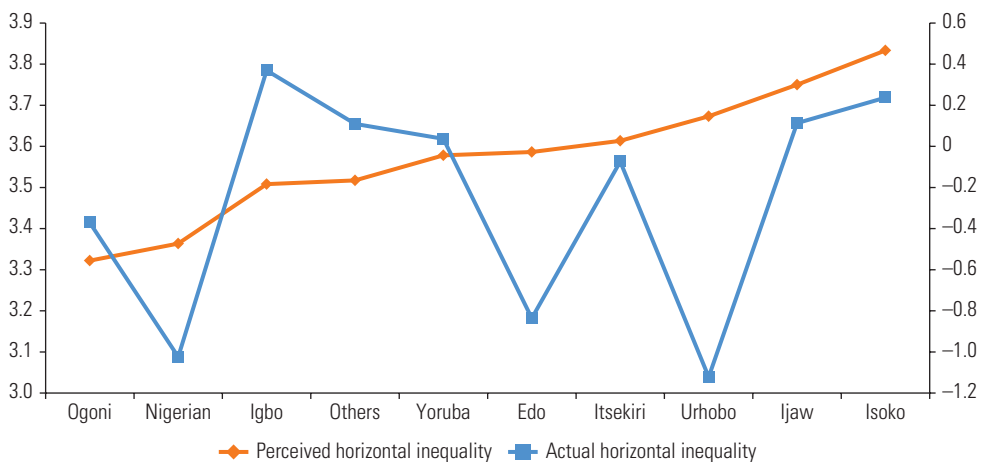
There is more evidence of a robust relationship between perceptions and violent conflict when perceptions are couched as unfair government treatment rather than in

direct or aggregate measures of perceived material inequality.

### The Gap between Objective and Perceived Inequalities

As discussed earlier, perceptions are crucial in explaining the effect of inequality and exclusion on conflict. However, in the absence of data, it is commonly assumed that perceptions of inequality will likely correspond to objective measures of inequality (Stewart 2002a; Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013). Studies therefore have focused on the relationship of the objective inequality to violent conflict—with mixed conclusions. Some find support for the argument that there is a correspondence (Gurr 1993; Holmqvist 2012); yet other studies find instead that often perceptions do not correspond to the objective reality (Langer and Smedts 2013). In a survey that includes Nigeria and Ghana, Langer and Ukiwo (2008) find a discrepancy between objective actual conditions and group members' perceptions of access to political power and education. Rustad's (2016) study in the Niger Delta also finds little overlap between the objective and perceived income levels of different ethnic groups (see figure 4.2).<sup>13</sup>

**FIGURE 4.2** Perceived and Objective Horizontal Inequality of Ethnic Groups in Nigeria



Source: Rustad 2016.

## Exclusion, Identity, Grievances, and Mobilization to Violence

Violent conflict is not the inevitable outcome in a society or state in which there is horizontal inequality among groups, exclusion, and perceived exclusion. Many social groups may feel excluded or may objectively suffer from exclusion; inequality is present in most, if not all, countries. But only in very few countries will these circumstances lead first to group-based grievances and then to violent conflict. Despite the relatively little in-depth research around these transformations, this section explores evidence that has emerged on the progression from exclusion to grievance, and then from grievance to violent conflict.

Exclusion based on identity is at the heart of many conflicts. It is generally recognized that identity is fungible, neither static nor exclusive (Woolcock 2014). Different identities tend to become salient at different times and in different circumstances, and thus are context specific in their importance to mobilization to violent conflict (see box 4.6). For example, castes became politically salient in India only after the British began conducting national censuses, which required respondents to be placed into fixed demographic categories that were determined by the British themselves (Dirks 2001; Woolcock 2014). Similarly, Posner (2007) documents how leaders in Zambia and Kenya emphasized national-level ethnic cleavages to incite violence.

### BOX 4.6 Identity and Mobilization to Violence: The Demographics and the Dynamics of Difference

Many studies on the association of horizontal inequality with violent conflict use social factors such as ethnicity, religion, and language as group identifiers. For example, contrary to prevailing belief, recent evidence suggests that conflict may be more likely within linguistic dyads than within religious ones. Moreover, Bormann, Cederman, and Vogt (2015) find no support for the thesis that Muslim groups are particularly conflict prone. Social identity, however, is not a static demographic characteristic. Individuals have multiple, overlapping forms and sources of identity that only become politically salient under particular conditions. For example, Kingston, Jamaica, is essentially monoethnic from a demographic perspective, is vibrantly democratic, and does not have unduly high economic inequality. Yet it is one of the most violent cities in the world. Why? Because political leaders are able to mobilize politically salient (but statistically unobservable) forms of social identity to protect their space and expand their markets (Duncan-Waite and Woolcock 2008).

Rather than looking at *demographics of difference*, some social scientists

are increasingly studying what might be called the *dynamics of difference*—the conditions under which particular aspects of people’s identities can be mobilized for large-scale collective action, whether for constructive or harmful purposes (Weber 1976; Mamdani 1996; Marx 1998; Baiocchi 2010). Needless to say, this juxtaposition—between the demographics and the dynamics of difference—is perhaps overly simplified (indeed, students of ethnicity seem to revel in creating ever-finer distinctions when locating themselves in the theoretical landscape), but for present purposes it is a fruitful one for elucidating the key differences between most economists and many other social scientists studying ethnicity and violence.

For example, careful micro-level studies of the conditions under which ethnicity can or cannot be mobilized for the purposes of violence (Varshney 2002; Posner 2004) suggest, as McGovern (2011, 350) notes, “that participants in violent politics are operating according to rational and irrational choice models at once. Such ‘irrational choice’ models must account for the presence and significance of actors’ desires for respect, honor, adulation, and revenge.”

The existence of diverse identity groups does not, by itself, move people to collective action. Nor does the prevalence of inequalities across those groups. There are plenty of examples of diverse societies with distributional differences on various dimensions that do not create frustration and that are accepted by people.

The process of grievance formation around inequalities appears to be the link between the existence of those inequalities and whether they generate some kind of collective action. Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) explore this process, arguing that inequalities have to be politicized to become grievances. They identify three necessary steps for this politicization of grievances: First, there must be well-defined and separate identifiable groups in society.<sup>14</sup> Second, a group must be able to compare itself and its status to other groups, either by objective measures or perceptions. Finally, groups must frame the intergroup inequality as unfair and assign blame to another group.

The wider literature on social movements includes some similar discussion of grievance formation. For example, a feeling of injustice and assignment of blame have been identified as necessary to the transformation of inequality and exclusion into grievance (Tarrow 2011). However, group perceptions may differ in different contexts, and what one group perceives as just at one time may be perceived as unjust by the same group at a different time.<sup>15</sup>

The severity of polarization among groups in a society also influences how or whether inequalities and perceived exclusion translate into grievances, and then into violent conflict. Scholars generally agree that ethnic polarization is a strong predictor of violent conflict (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2012; Bader and Ianchovichina 2017). Some studies suggest a strong relationship between polarization and the risk of genocide (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2008). Horowitz (2000) argues that more homogeneous societies tend to be less violent than highly heterogeneous societies, and that more conflicts occur in societies in which a large ethnic minority faces an ethnic majority. Similarly, Easterly, Ritzen, and Woolcock (2006) find that the polarization

of two large groups of similar size—for example, when a large minority is in conflict with a large majority—presents the highest likelihood of violent conflict.

Exclusion and grievances can result in collective mobilization; however, collective mobilization does not always result in violence. Some movements take a nonviolent approach, using tactics such as boycotts, marches, sit-ins, strikes, and silent vigils. Societies in which people feel the system is just and responsive to their grievances are societies most likely to be able to peacefully express grievances. In turn, social movements that do not use violence tend to be more successful. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) find that nonviolent movements with political aims are twice as successful, on average, in achieving their objectives than those that use violence, and pave the way to more durable and internally peaceful societies.

What, then, are the factors that influence whether collective mobilization involves violence? Justino (2017, 3) argues that “whether social mobilization motivated by inequalities may turn violent is ultimately conditional on how people, individually or in groups, perceive themselves in relation to others in society” (see figure 4.3). She distinguishes four types of collective mobilization ranging from peaceful to violent:

- *Peaceful social mobilization* is a feature of democratic settings in which citizens and groups express their grievances and demands through peaceful means, including legal demonstrations, petition signing, and contacting government officials.<sup>16</sup>
- *Covert social resistance* tends to take place in settings of weak democratic institutions in which power rests mainly in the hands of strong elites and less privileged groups are excluded. Mobilization tends to be informal or less organized and reflects some sort of agreement among less privileged groups at the bottom of the distribution to resist the power of elites.
- *Fragmented social mobilization* occurs when social agreements are not possible.
- *Violent social mobilization* occurs when different groups engage in violent action to resolve disputes with other groups or with the state.



**FIGURE 4.3 A Typology of Social Mobilization**

		Within-group coordination	
		High	Low
Between-group relations	Cooperation	Peaceful social mobilization	Convert social resistance
	Antagonism	Violent social mobilization	Fragmented social mobilization

Source: Justino 2017.

Most often, collective mobilization driven by grievances is channeled toward conflict with the state rather than against another group or groups (Stewart 2002a). This occurs especially if the state is seen as “captured” for the economic benefit or interest of a specific socioeconomic group, or when the state is seen as acting solely to protect its own interests. Cederman, Wimmer, and Min (2010) suggest conflict with the government is more likely when the following three conditions prevail:

1. *A group or its representatives are excluded from executive power, especially after a loss of power.* The recent loss of power or prestige of excluded groups produces feelings of anger and resentment and increases the impulse to fight to change the situation. Call (2012) finds that perceived exclusionary behavior after internal armed conflicts correlates highly with conflict recurrence. Ghatak (2016) finds that exclusion of small numbers of people from state power likely results in domestic terrorism; civil war is highly likely when the number of politically excluded groups increases. Cederman, Wimmer, and Min (2010) find that the likelihood of violent conflict decreases when social or cultural group leaders gain access to state power.
2. *The group can mobilize large numbers of people.* Mobilization and violent contestation require both motivation and organizational capacity (Gurr 2000). Larger groups not only enjoy more legitimacy but also can draw on their networks for

recruitment and resources to sustain their cause (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Cederman, Buhaug, and Rød 2009). For example, Posner (2004) finds that the main reason Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi stems from the different size of each group relative to each country’s national political arena. In Malawi, he notes, Chewas and Tumbukas are large groups, and thus serve as viable bases for political coalition building. In Zambia, both groups are relatively small compared with the country as a whole, thus making it more difficult and less useful to mobilize for political support.

3. *The group has experienced violent conflict in the past.* Historical memories of past conflicts influence the likelihood of current conflict. They enable group members to see violence as a possibility, in that they have already experienced violence. Narratives of past conflicts also play an important role in the likelihood of present conflict. Having a group history that narrates a one-sided story and that perpetuates past violent experiences through oral histories, public rituals, or in official textbooks can create structures and identities that can be reactivated for violent purposes.

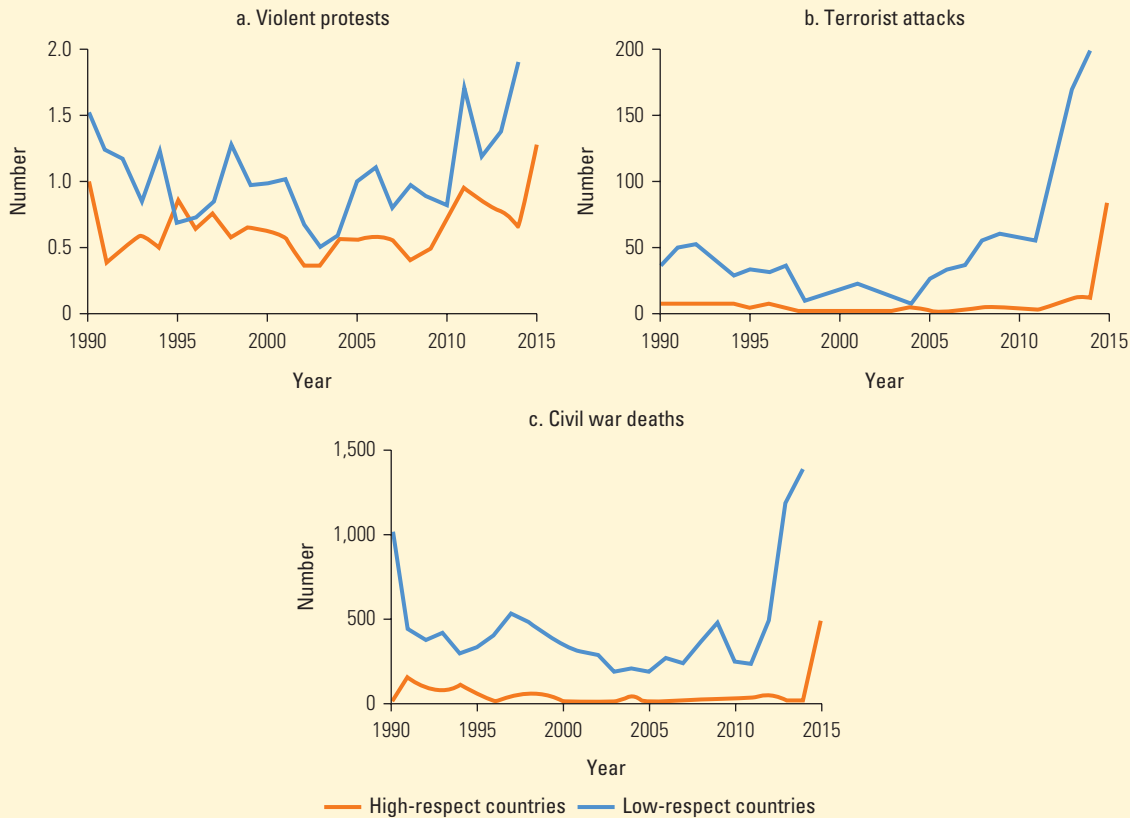
The way the state relates to different groups in society greatly determines how and whether grievances form against it (box 4.7). The literature has long examined the relationship between abuse by the state and popular dissent, and it is quite clear on how

### BOX 4.7 State Violence and Conflict Risk

An analysis developed for this study (Cingranelli et al. 2017) considers how torture, disappearance, political imprisonment, and extrajudicial killing contributed to the risks of onset and escalation (or de-escalation) of three types of violent conflict within states: violent protests, domestic terrorism, and civil war. This

analysis, based on samples of nearly 150 nation-states during the period 1990–2015, shows that countries with fewer violations of physical integrity rights witnessed, on average, 37 percent fewer violent protests, 79 percent fewer terrorist attacks, and 86 percent fewer civil war deaths (see figure B4.7.1).

FIGURE B4.7.1 Risks to Onset and Escalation of Violent Conflict



Source: Cingranelli et al. 2017.

government abuse increases both the scope and intensity of the population's grievances and the risk of onset and escalation of violent conflict. Goodwin (2001) concludes that government abuse creates the belief among the population that armed revolt against an unjust and abusive regime is the only alternative. Thoms and Ron (2007) show that violations of physical integrity by state actors are associated with the

escalation of existing political conflicts. Work by Mason and Krane (1989) and by Kalyvas and Kocher (2007) shows how indiscriminate state violence against civilian populations generates grievances and pushes civilians into violence. Cederman et al. (2017) find evidence that the state-led civilian victimization of particular ethnic groups increases the likelihood that the group becomes involved in ethnic civil war.

Furthermore, studies by Piazza (2017) and Bakker, Hill, and Moore (2016) note that as state actors engage in higher levels of violent coercion and physical repression against the population, the risk of terrorist violence directed against the state and its population increases steeply.

### **The Role of Emotions in Mobilizing Groups**

People come together in social groups for a kaleidoscope of subjective and objective reasons. They may share feelings, history, narratives of pain, frustrations, or identities that motivate them to collective action in different ways, at different times, and in the face of different situations. A body of scholarly literature argues that these reasons may contribute, alone or in combination with inequality and exclusion, to the mobilization of groups to violent action. Understanding how emotions, among other causes, play a role in the production of violent conflict can also provide policy makers with an understanding of how emotions can also play a role in the creation of more peaceful societies.

Emotions are intertwined with grievances, both triggering and sustaining collective violence (Horowitz 2001; Petersen 2002; Sargsyan 2017). Fear, for instance, can bond people into a group that mobilizes for violence, as when an attack or shock from outside results in a collective response to the perceived threat. Petersen (2002) suggests that fear, rage, hatred, and resentment all play a role in ethnic violence, but that different emotions result in different outcomes. He argues that resentment over loss of political power or a decline in status is especially potent, while violent experiences result in fear and anger, and prejudice and stigma bring about contempt and hatred. For example, Serbs' change in status in Kosovo resulted in feelings of resentment that fueled repression against Kosovo-Albanians.<sup>17</sup>

Collective memory, too, plays into the mobilization of group grievances (Durkheim, Pocock, and Peristiany 1953; Le Goff 1992). As Ross (2007) argues, interpretations of events are as important as the events themselves, and in conflict situations,

collective memories can trigger emotional and violent reactions. For example, during the conflict in Chechnya in the 1990s, Chechen leaders evoked collective memories of past wars and mass deportations, recalling feelings of humiliation to justify a violent struggle for self-determination (Campana 2009).

Collective feelings of humiliation and injustice, as indicated in the Chechen case, can be especially potent motivating factors. Khosrokhavar (2017) suggests that collective mobilization is more likely when feelings of injustice are coupled with resentment.

Unmet expectations and thwarted aspirations can be a source of frustration that drives mobilization to violence. As discussed in chapter 2 and earlier in this chapter, limited access to employment and livelihood opportunities can affect the rites of passage to adulthood, including marriage and starting families, and leaves many young people feeling frustrated, uncertain, and angry (Kraetsch 2008). Some authors suggest that radicalism can emerge among the highly educated young people that go through these experiences (Al-Azmeh 2006). However, these same frustrations can lead some, including young people, to become activists and peace builders.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Power of Elites and Narratives**

Elites and leaders play a critical role in mobilizing grievances and shaping narratives that may steer groups toward, or away from, violent action. Elite theories of conflict suggest that collective violence is not a result of spontaneous eruptions of anger, but rather, in some cases, that elites plan and organize violence with the objective of increasing group cohesion and maintaining a loyal support base (Demmers 2016). Fearon and Laitin (2000, 853) argue that “elites foment ethnic violence to build support [and that] this process has the effect of constructing more antagonistic identities, which favors more violence.” When elites feel threatened, often because of “past oppression,” they tend to organize and defend themselves, giving rise to internal security stresses (World Bank 2011). Horowitz (2000) suggests that elites may initiate conflict along ethnic lines to

deepen ethnic divisions—thus increasing polarization—to strengthen their position in society and to exploit power. Failing to act can also be an elite tactic: in some cases, elites decide not to act or not to implement certain beneficial policies because doing so would challenge the status quo (World Bank 2017b).

Elites exert strong influence on collective mobilization through the narratives they create around their group's experiences. Narratives are stories that represent “the ways in which we construct disparate facts in our own worlds and weave them together cognitively in order to make sense of our reality” (Patterson and Monroe 1998, 315). They appeal to emotions, and an especially charismatic leader can invest the narrative with great power. Elites and other actors can use narratives to build social cohesion, as described in chapter 6. A narrative around inclusion, such as around the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, could avert mobilization to violence when there is risk of conflict.

Elites also may use narratives to manipulate perceptions and memories to mobilize individuals toward collective violence. Shesterinina (2016), for example, finds that a narrative can lead civilians to fight and others to freeze or flee, and that the response depends upon how local elites translate national threats and on how populations perceive such narratives.

Collective experiences of injustice or violence and coercive measures by the state that are perceived as targeting certain groups only reinforce the power of narratives and harden group boundaries. Media, both private and government controlled, play a large role today in shaping narratives that can either reduce or inflame grievances (Sargsyan 2017), a role that is more salient than ever with the rapid growth of information and communication technology, as discussed in chapter 2.

## Conclusion

Horizontal inequalities and exclusion are important factors in modern violent conflict, although in and of themselves they are not sufficient to mobilize groups to violence. The available research does not

provide evidence of a straightforward path between the two. Nevertheless, this study argues that inequality and exclusion—even merely the *perception* of exclusion—can evolve into group-based grievances.

Whether collective mobilization becomes violent depends on a variety of factors, but is greatly influenced by whether aggrieved groups perceive themselves to have viable, peaceful alternatives for expressing grievances. Risks are heightened if leaders are able to hook into grievances and assign blame to another group. Oftentimes emotions are called upon in narratives that incite violence.

Very often the state is perceived to be the source of grievance, and becomes the target of collective mobilization. An aggrieved group may see the state as acting in its own interest or as controlled by a group that is using the state for its exclusive benefit. The state also may be incapable of dealing with intergroup grievances or, in the worst-case scenario, may aggravate these tensions through abuses or discriminatory behavior toward specific groups. Addressing exclusion and horizontal inequality is therefore important as a prevention strategy. Chapter 5 now turns to key spaces where exclusion is felt most acutely, and where grievances tend to concentrate.

## Notes

1. Chapter 1 of this report assesses the limitations and challenges of measuring violent conflict.
2. On education, see UNICEF (2015). On infant mortality (for Indonesia only), see Østby et al. (2011); Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013).
3. See the section “Perceptions of Exclusion and Unfairness in Violent Conflict Risk” in this chapter for more discussion.
4. This is addressed in the “The Multiple and Intersecting Dimensions of Exclusion” section.
5. See, for example, <https://icr.ethz.ch/data/epr/>.
6. Most quantitative studies use education as a proxy for inequality generally and do not distinguish between the impacts of economic and social inequalities. It is difficult in this case to assess the importance solely of social inequalities.

7. “Politically relevant groups” are defined as those that are active in national politics or discriminated against by the government. They comprise a subset of all groups observed, and are potentially subject to bias because, for example, excluded groups that are not active are not represented in the data.
8. The data set produces 32,567 “group-years.”
9. WomanStats (n.d.).
10. The United Nations uses the range of 15–24 years of age for statistical reasons when discussing youth, and recognizes national and regional definitions of youth. However, SCR 2250 uses 18–29 years to avoid overlap with resolutions on children in armed conflict.
11. The assumption is that objective inequality leads to perceived deprivation, which increases the likelihood to take part in conflict.
12. Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in more than 35 countries in Africa.
13. Objective horizontal inequality is measured as a composite wealth index of a survey respondent’s ownership of items.
14. As Stewart (2000) notes, the presence of horizontal inequalities already, to a certain extent, assumes the existence of well-defined groups
15. Marc et al. (2012) discuss different criteria for assessing fairness.
16. Nonviolent movements use tactics such as marches, consumer boycotts, sit-ins, labor strikes, and silent vigils. Examples of nonviolent movements in history include the U.S. civil rights movement and the Yellow Revolution in the Philippines.
17. All references to Kosovo shall be understood in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244.
18. For most, feelings of frustration do not lead to violence.

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