Analysis of the influence of Group Coordination in religiously polarized countries on the incidence of ethnic civil war

Introduction

Over the course of the last century civil wars have been a plague to the developing world. When analyzing the data for civil conflicts, one can disproportionately find them in the poorest regions of the world such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia. Many different theories have been formulated to try and explain the incidence of civil violence. They include: econometric theory of war, rational choice theory, constructivism and two theories borrowed from International Relations – neorealism and neoliberalism. Furthermore there have been significant debates regarding civil war classifications that range from denoting them as ethnic/religious (identity) and revolutionary (non-identity), to plain refusal to subdivide them altogether. As noted by Sambanis, there is no consensus in the literature on the empirical applicability of these classifications, with critics claiming that such distinctions are either non-significant in explaining civil war outcome, or impossible to credibly identify. (Sambanis 2001) In my research however I will employ the distinction between ethnic and non-ethnic civil wars developed by Sambanis and advanced by Reynal-Querol, in order to focus on the specific type of conflict - ethnic civil war. Moreover I will combine different civil war approaches to propose a more developed explanation for its occurrence. Thus my goal is to supplement constructivist research that focuses on religious differences as the primary causes of ethnic civil war, with the theory of rational choice that
treats group coordination as rational behavior of individuals carefully estimating the benefits and costs of joining a social movement. The combination of theories will enable me to compare and contrast the two approaches that previously have only been tested individually. Moreover the case-study method that I will be using will allow me to carefully evaluate the performance of the respective theories, that would not have been possible in a large-N study, and establish a clear causal model for the occurrence of ethnic civil war. Thus my goal is not to test the validity of either theory, since a large-N study would have been necessary to accomplish that, but rather to use the combination of the two approaches to enhance their respective explanatory power and overcome any limitations that their individual use would present.

The question that I’m hoping to explain received the most attention in the constructivist literature that focuses on ethnic violence. It has been hotly debated and received its strongest backing in the “Clash of Civilizations” theory that argues that there are irreconcilable cultural differences that cause fear and violence between opposing groups. On the basis of that theory a large-N study was conducted by Reynal-Querol that found that countries with a high score on the religious polarization index had a very high probability of experiencing an ethnic civil war. She thus found a positive correlation between religious polarization and the incidence of ethnic civil war, however her reliance on the constructivist (primordialist) approach prevented her from developing a clear causal model that explained how religious polarization translated into ethnic violence. I propose to use the group coordination theory developed by Russell Hardin to supplement her findings and present a clear causal model of religious polarization’s influence on the incidence of ethnic civil war.
Literature Review

While there have been numerous civil war studies, Rynal-Querol’s work was significantly different from all of them. To my knowledge she was the only one to employ the polarization index to measure religious diversity and find a positive correlation between her measurements and the occurrence of ethnic civil war. Previous studies in the field also employed large-N regressions, however they used fractionalization indices to proxy for civil war occurrence. Their findings were contrary to Reynal-Querol’s, since they found that high ethnic or religious fractionalization in a country will actually decrease the probability of civil war occurrence. These studies that did not distinguish between ethnic and revolutionary civil wars and used fractionalization instead of polarization measures were such prominent works as *Greed and Grievance in Civil War* by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, and *Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War* by James D. Fearon and David Laitin.

In *Greed and Grievance in Civil War*, Collier and Hoeffler develop an econometric model that predicts the outbreak of civil conflict, based on the motive and opportunity of the insurgents. The motive for rebellion is grievance, or hardships and inequalities suffered by the rebels, and opportunity is circumstances that allow the rebels to actively sustain their resistance and benefit from it (greed). Furthermore both greed and grievance can be subdivided into related categories. Quantitative indicators of opportunity include: extortion of natural resources, donations from diasporas, subventions from hostile governments, and low cost of sustaining a rebellion that is a direct result of foregone income measured in: mean income per capita, male secondary schooling and the growth rate of the economy. Other indicators include weak government military capability and mountainous terrain that allow rebels to escape and defeat government forces. Objective measures of
grievance are ethnic or religious hatred, political repression, political exclusion and economic inequality. Collier and Hoeffler use the Singer and Small data set (1982, 1994) that covers 161 countries over the period of 1960-1999 and identifies 78 civil wars with no distinctions along the ethnic/revolutionary lines. After using logit regressions to predict the risk of outbreak of war, the authors found that a model that focuses on the opportunities for rebellion performs well, whereas the model focusing on the objective indicators of grievance adds little explanatory power. Thus one factor influencing the opportunity for rebellion is the availability of finance achieved through primary commodity extortion such as diamonds in Africa and cocaine in Colombia. A second factor influencing opportunity is the cost of rebellion, where as male education, per capita income and the growth rate of the GDP increase, the likelihood of civil war decreases. Finally dispersed large population and mountainous terrain increase the risk of conflict. Meanwhile the analysis done on the proxies for ethnic and religious grievances shows them to be insignificant as the causes of civil conflict. Moreover contrary to the popular belief societies that have increased religious diversity, are also less prone to civil conflict, than homogenous societies, since their diversity makes rebel cohesion more costly and increases the amount of resources that rebels have to spend in trying to gain support.

Fearon and Laitin in *Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War*, analyze why seemingly so many conflicts that can be traced to ethnic or religious grievances began with the end of the Cold War. They find that contrary to common opinion, the prevalence of civil wars in the 1990’s was not due to the end of the Cold War, but has already been reached prior to the break up of the Soviet Union and resulted from a steady gradual accumulation of civil conflicts that began immediately after World War II and now engulfed at least one in six
countries. Moreover the authors also find that a greater degree of ethnic or religious diversity by itself does not make a country more prone to civil war. Thus the main factors that determine the likelihood of civil wars in a given country are not ethnicity or religion, but rather the presence of conditions that favor insurgency, with insurgency defined as a technology of military conflict characterized by small lightly armed bands practicing guerilla warfare from rural base areas (Fearon 75). As shown in the authors’ empirical model those conditions are state weakness marked by poverty, large population and instability, with ethnic and religious diversity, economic inequality lack of democracy or civil liberties receiving insignificant scores as predictors for future conflicts. The authors attribute their findings to the relatively small number of guerilla fighters in modern civil war, since they are able to prolong the duration of the conflict for a long period of time the overall grievances of the population may not be reflected in grievance of the actual guerilla movement. Thus, consistent with the Collier and Hoeffler findings, Fearon and Laitin place increased emphasis on the conditions that allow for the evolution and sustainability of a small guerilla movement in its fight against the incumbent forces. The authors however disagree about the role of economic variables in their respective studies, as Fearon and Laitin find no impact for primary commodity exports and none for the levels of education. In both studies however ethnic and religious fractionalization is found to be insignificant as the cause and the determinant of civil war.

Contrary to the previous two authors Marta Reynal-Querol in Ethnicity, Political System and Civil War finds that religious divisions are more important than language divisions and natural resources in explaining ethnic civil conflicts. She builds her theory of religious polarization as the cause of ethnic civil war on the work of Samuel
Huntington. Huntington in *Clash of Civilizations* creates a model that attributes conflicts between nations not to ideological factors, but to cultural. Thus for him religion plays a very important role in world politics since it takes over the functions that were previously served by political ideologies and economic interests. According to his work, conflicts among civilizations are going to be based on religions, since differences among them are impossible to solve unlike any political or economic disagreements. Following Horowitz, who claims that most nations tend to be organized along ethnic lines, Reynal-Querol argues that religion is the most significant out of other social cleavages that can develop into ethnic conflict, because of its exclusivity, since a person can be both Russian and Israeli, but cannot practice both Judaism and Christianity (Reynal-Querol 2002). In her research, unlike Collier and Hoeffler, and Fearon and Laitin, Reynal-Querol makes a clear distinction between the types of conflicts that are included in her analysis. She uses State Failure dataset that explicitly distinguishes between ethnic and revolutionary civil wars, with ethnic war being defined as an episode of violent conflict between government and national, religious, or other communal minorities (ethnic challengers) in which challengers seek major changes in their status (Reynal-Querol 2002). To test her theory Reynal-Querol uses polarization instead of fragmentation indices, in order to better reflect the situation that leads to the point of maximum tension when there are two social groups with the same size. It differs from fragmentation indices used by both Collier and Fearon in that it captures to what extent it is the distribution of groups from a bimodal distribution, while fragmentation index increases monotonically with diversity. Moreover Reynal-Querol also disputes the significance of natural resources found in Collier and Hoeffler’s work, because when she analyses GDP per capita and level of education together, the proxy for natural resources produces insignificant
results. Thus Reynal-Querol’s argument that the main causes of ethnic civil wars are social and political characteristics, with religiously divided societies being more prone to intense conflict than countries where people have conflicting claims to resources based on interest groups or language divisions, is in direct support of Clash of Civilizations theory that is being disputed by both Collier and Hoeffler, and Fearon and Laitin. Since unlike Huntington, Reynal-Querol uses reliable data to support his hypothesis, her findings can counterbalance the empirical work done by previous authors.

Collier does apply the measure of polarization to his data on ethnic composition taken from the “Atlas Narodov Mira”, and while he does acknowledge that coefficients produced by fractionalization and polarization scores are different, he does not find either of them significant in his regression analysis. However his data on ethnic composition (ELF-Atlas Narodov Mira) is different form Reynal-Querol’s data, which comes from “L’état de religions dans le monde”(State of Religions in the World) that in turn is taken from World Christian Encyclopedia, and the Statesman’s Year Book of 1987. Moreover the 1964 Atlas Narodov Mira (from which the Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization Index, ELF that is used both by Collier and Hoeffler and Fearon and Laitin, is constructed), subdivides different peoples into different ethnic groups based on their ethnicity language or religion, while World Christian Encyclopedia measures the percentages that different religions constitute in various countries. Thus Collier and Hoeffler use ethnic divides in their polarization measures, while Reynal-Querol uses religious divisions. Consequently their conflicting findings can be attributed to different civil war classifications, and different data on county’s religious composition.
Fearon and Laitin face a similar problem in regard to Reynal-Querol’s research. They attempt to explain the recent prevalence of violent civil conflict around the world, and devote a piece of their research to the study of the role of ethnic and religious fractionalization. Their main data on civil wars comes from Correlates of War Project and Doyle and Sambanis data (2002), listing conflicts from the period 1945-1999. Like Collier and Hoeffler data it does not distinguish between different types of civil war. They attempt to disprove arguments about ethno-religious fractionalization’s influence on occurrence of civil wars by creating several general hypotheses that proponents of the aforementioned argument would adhere to. For example H1: Measures of country’s ethnic or religious diversity should be associated with higher risk of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003). To measure these concepts the authors use Ethnolinguistic Fractionalization Index, data from the CIA Fact Book, the number of distinct languages spoken by groups exceeding 1% of the country’s population and a measure of religious fractionalization analogous to the ELF that was constructed using data from CIA Fact Book and other sources. After conducting regression analyses on the data, the authors found that estimates for effect on ethnic and religious fractionalization are substantively and statistically insignificant. Moreover even when authors created a measure of “ethnic war”, where there was at least 5% ethnic minority, the results also appeared to be insignificant. Thus Fearon and Laitin’s data is also different from that of Reynal-Querol, moreover, their divergent findings can be chiefly attributed to the shortcomings of the ELF Index and their use of fractionalization instead of polarization scores.

Though Reynal-Querol’s research is controversial in its novel use of polarization measures that challenge the current theories of economic causes of civil war, her
main problem lies in her inability to sufficiently develop her causal model to better explain how exactly religious polarization translates into ethnic violence. She develops her research as an empirical complement to the Clash of Civilizations theory:

“Following Huntington, we have to grant religions a fundamental role in world politics. In the modern world, religion is central and, in many situations the primary force that motivates and moves humans” (Reynal-Querol 2002).

However that assessment is based on the primordialist argument that assumes inherent animosity among different cultures and religions, and lacks scientific and historical substance. My goal is to substitute a plausible causal model taken from Russell Hardin’s One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict for the primordialist argument implied by Reynal-Querol. This is similar to the work of Nicholas Sambanis in his analysis of the landmark Collier and Hoeffler paper Greed and Grievance in Civil War. In Using Case Studies to Expand the Theory of Civil War, Sambanis tries to extend and modify Collier and Hoeffler’s model, by using a set of case studies that were designed to answer a set of questions central to the greed and grievance model. He selects cases based on model’s predictions and tries to identify causal mechanisms through which variables in Collier and Hoeffler’s model function. He especially emphasizes that since that model has been tested statistically, he is not testing the model using case studies, but rather:

“we use case studies to better understand the ways in which model fits different cases” (Sambanis 2003).

I will attempt to do the same, however unlike Sambanis who focuses on all the variables in the Collier and Hoeffler model, I will substitute Hardin’s theory of group coordination that is based on rational choice approach, for Reynal-Querol’s causal model, while leaving intact the rest of her finings. I will also try to show how the variables taken from One for All: the Logic of Group Conflict, interacted with religious polarization to influence or prevent
occurrence of ethnic civil war. The case study approach is especially relevant here since in-depth research is able to determine causality between two variables that are found to be correlated in a large-N study:

“The case study project has value added because we cannot understand the process through which war breaks out by simply looking at the results of large-N quantitative studies. In most cases quantitative studies present a correlation between X and Y that need not demonstrate causality. Moreover even if we identify a broad causal relationship between X and Y, we often cannot distinguish among several possible mechanisms that can describe that relationship” (Sambanis 2003).

Russell Hardin in One for All: The logic of Group Conflict presents us with a credible explanation for the occurrence of ethnic, religious or nationalistic divides that society may experience in at a given moment of time, and the process by which these divides translate into outright violence. His explanation is based on the theory of rational choice that presents humans as rational and calculating in their decisions, even if the outcomes of their choices may appear irrational and even foolish to an outsider. Hardin argues that any social movement is a form of group coordination, where individual will only participate if he believes it is in his interest to do so. Thus even fans of a local sports team who actively root for, or criticize the team, do so because it presents them with an opportunity to become a part of larger community and actively partake in the benefits that such community may offer, whether it may be more options for socializing or a sense of comfort from belonging. Conflict from group coordination however is bound to occur, because as Hardin notes even such benign phenomena of group coordination as religion, language and local community, is potentially political (Hardin 56). Since successful group coordination entails in it an increased welfare benefits for its members, two coordinating groups may come in conflict over such issues as positional and/or distributional goods that may include government...
offices and improved economic welfare. Such instances of group conflict are present in such diverse occurrences as Rwandan genocide and American politics, and are not necessarily bound to translate into full-scale violence (Hardin 151). However as evidenced by group power theory, coordination along ethnic or religious lines is strongest when the gains from coordinating improve because of outside occurrences such as sudden economic decline that leaves a country in ruins or a fall of political institutions that can credibly prevent group coordination (Hardin 35). A potential increase in group power is fairly easy to exploit by ambitious leaders who will use the existing societal divides such as ethnicity or religion in order to further their own personal ambitions and initiate conflict. Moreover Hardin notes that most occurrences of ethnic violence are essentially pre-emptive strikes that resort to attacks on opposing coordinating group in order to prevent a potential strike against themselves (Hardin 152). However the means by which conflicts emerge and translate into violence are still based on group coordination that is strongest in ethnic and religious conflicts when economic and political conditions deteriorate. Thus:

“Economic malaise elevates the significance of group conflicts by making individual prosperity more tightly dependent on group prosperity. And political disarray makes it easier for groups to seize control, or to mobilize against each other” (Hardin 179).

Causal Model

Building on the previous research of Reynal-Querol, and Russell Hardin, I propose that religious identification with a group is a form of coordination power. Coordination power is strongest when the payoffs from coordinating are greater than the payoffs from staying put. According to Hardin it can happen when economic situation deteriorates, or when means of preventing coordination are weak (failure of political institutions). Thus coordination on the basis of religion occurs when individuals feel that
they can improve their livelihood by coordinating together on the ideas and beliefs that they share, and by actively participating in the workings of their group. Going along with Reynal-Querol, religion is an indivisible entity and successful coordination of one group on the basis of religion automatically excludes those who do not adhere to the same set of religious beliefs. By excluding that group from possible coordination, a division in society is inadvertently formed by group #1. The excluded individuals have no choice but to cooperate together, unless they want to bear very high costs of going against coordinated group alone. Moreover Hardin states:

“The possibility of coordination of an ethnic group entails the possibility of inter-group conflict” (Hardin 151), since group coordination implies benefits for one group at the expense of the other. Hardin identifies three kinds of issues that are primarily responsible for conflict among coordinating groups. They are: positional goods such as public office, distributional goods such as income benefits, and interactions between the two (Hardin 57). Thus disagreements that emerge from conflicting groups will involve tangible issues such as access to benefits and possible control of the government, and not simply primordial hatreds as implied by Reynal-Querol.

As I explained previously, Reynal-Querol finds a strong correlation between religious polarization and the incidence of ethnic civil war. However as determined by Sambanis, correlation need not demonstrate causality. Reynal-Querol does indeed find that countries with a high score on the religious polarization index are more likely to experience an ethnic civil war. She adduces this phenomenon, as primary support for the primordialist arguments of Samuel Huntington, that rely primarily on the notion that religious and cultural differences are inherently conflictual and conflicts among civilizations can be expected simply because of past histories of the civilizations in question. Thus massacres in Bosnia were committed because Christian and Muslim civilizations simply cannot coexist together,
and not because Serbs could gain both political and economic benefits from displacing their Muslim neighbors with whom they had lived peacefully for the previous forty years. Russell Hardin dismisses the primordialist argument as “Lamarckian”, by credibly showing that group coordination along ethnic lines attains its strongest form only when individuals can increase their gains by joining a group effort. That in turn could happen only when a country experiences a severe economic shock where group coordination offers better economic future, that is realized by taking control over distributional goods. Or when weak political institutions cannot stop a particular group from realizing its coordination power in hopes of attaining positional goods such as public office and government posts, that could further improve a group’s welfare.

**Testable Hypothesis**

If we connect the findings of Reynal-Querol with the research done by Hardin, it would appear that while religious polarization was indeed present in most countries that experienced ethnic civil war, the mechanisms behind the actual conflict ran deeper than simple religious hatreds. I would argue that in order for ethnic civil war to occur in the first place, there has to be an occurrence of aforementioned events (negative economic shocks, political instability), that in turn would contribute to the formation of strong coordinating groups that would look to improve their welfare at each other’s expense. Thus even in religiously polarized countries, ethnic civil war should occur only if there were sufficient pre-requisites for group coordination. As coordination power on the basis of economic instability and political uncertainty increases, the chances of ethnic civil war occurrence should also increase. The statistical analysis done by Reynal-Querol merely shows that societal
cleavage that is easiest to exploit for group formation is religious differences, and while it is contrary to Hardin’s claim that:

“nationalist and ethnocentric identities seem especially suitable for warlike manipulation” (Hardin 151), I believe that the model of group formation should remain the same even if religion is substituted for ethnicity. My goal is thus to prove that while religious polarization is present in most (although not all) countries that experienced ethnic civil war, the actual mechanism that exploits religious identity occurs through group formation caused by either economic decline, crumbling of political institutions, or a combination of both.

Description of Data and Empirical Method

The two countries that I will be using in my case studies are taken from the ten highest scoring countries on the religious polarization index provided by Reynal-Querol in Why ethnic fractionalization? Polarization, Ethnic conflict and growth. According to the Doyle and Sambanis dataset, one of them - Nigeria experienced two ethnic civil wars, over the time period 1945-1999, and one did not - Madagascar. Nigeria had its first conflict from 1967-1970, when military coup and retaliatory massacres of Igbos in North, precipitated secessionist Biafra civil war by Igbos of Eastern region. The second Nigerian conflict occurred from 1980-1984, when a number of riots destabilized the Northern region. In Madagascar where ethnic civil war did not occur, I will focus on the time period from 1960-2002 in order to incorporate the recent events happening there. Even though both countries are located in Africa, geographic location should not matter for my research since Reynal-Querol used a dummy variable for regions in her regressions, and still found religious polarization measure significant. Since both countries scored high on the religious polarization index, it would allow me to use religious polarization as a control variable and instead focus my research on the two variables that I will be borrowing from Russell Hardin
negative economic shock, and failure of political institutions, that according to Hardin is caused by the dissolution of the central government. In order to measure sudden economic shocks, I will have to analyze the change in GDP per capita and overall GDP, prior to the start of the conflict as noted in the Doyle and Sambanis dataset. For Madagascar that did not experience ethnic civil war, I will analyze the changes in overall GDP and GDP per capita over the course of 42 years that I will be covering. GDP and GDP per capita data will be taken from the World Development Indicators published by the World Bank. The failure of political institutions to prevent group coordination is a harder variable to measure. I will employ historical accounts and analysis of each country’s news sources to determine the time periods when political destabilization occurred and then will proceed to determine if that destabilization contributed to the occurrence of ethnic civil war. Thus the dependent variable will be the occurrence of ethnic civil war, the control variable will be religious polarization, and independent variables will include negative economic shocks (GDP and GDP per capita) and failure of political institutions (historical analysis). For Nigeria I will attempt to determine causality by looking at the changes in independent variables prior to the incidence of ethnic civil war. For Madagascar I will analyze the independent variables from 1960 to 2001. Thus Nigeria that experienced ethnic civil wars should have had a negative economic shock, and/or failure of political institutions before the start of the conflicts – which would signify increased group coordination that facilitated violence. And Madagascar that did not experience ethnic civil war was unable to effectively utilize the coordination mechanism, since it either lacked factors that would intensify group power and lead to conflict, or had them somehow neutralized. Therefore analysis of the aforementioned factors will allow me to substitute a credible causal model of group coordination for the primordialist argument.
employed by the Reynal-Querol, and in fact show that occurrence of ethnic civil wars is
dependant on group coordination facilitated by negative economic shocks and failure of
political institutions, and not on primordial ethnic or religious hatreds acquired through
generations of conflict and suffering.

The goal of my analysis is to combine two divergent theories of political
science, and use the resulting hybrid to better explain occurrence of ethnic civil war. I will
attempt to substitute each model’s strength and weaknesses to better explain the causal
mechanism of the primordialist theory using the theory of rational choice, while still relying
on the large-N study that was done on the basis of constructivist approach. The case study
method that I will be using will allow me to clearly determine causality, something that
might not have been possible in a large-N study utilizing many different variables. However
the case study approach is constrained by the availability of historical information pertaining
to the conflict, and the inability to make broad assumptions based on the outcome of a few
cases. A solution to that particular problem would be to combine statistical research of a
large-N study with a careful analysis of a few specific cases. My goal is to accomplish
exactly that, although contrary to the previous studies that have followed a similar approach,
I will be keeping constant only one variable - religious polarization, and will be bringing in
variables that were not found in the original model. A significant flaw in my work is the lack
of cases and variables that I will be testing, however further on I hope to significantly expand
it to include more variables and cover a larger set of cases pertaining to the question of ethnic
civil war occurrence.
Case Study of Nigeria’s 1967-1970 Civil War

The history of Nigeria in the twentieth century is riddled with coups, calamities and contradictions. One of the largest nations on the African continent, with one out of four Africans claiming Nigerian citizenship, Nigeria has only experienced two brief periods of democratic rule since its independence in October of 1960. The autocratic military regimes that were in control of the country for almost forty years have squandered the natural resources that were predicted to turn the country into a kind of regional superpower that could rival South Africa. To illustrate this gross mismanagement of resources, the Nigerian GDP per capita shrunk from its high of $328 in 1977 to its present low of $253, causing Nigeria to descend to the bottom of UN’s “20 poorest countries in the world” list.

This economic and political decline, has precipitated a slew of conflicts labeled ethnic, tribal or religious by various authorities both Nigerian and European: “the inter-ethnic relationship among different tribes and tongues in Nigeria is not that of brotherhood as urged by the national anthem but that characterized by mutual suspicion and distrust” (Okafor 2).

While it is true that Nigeria is home to as many as twenty four different ethnic groups (Okafor 50), I would argue that the civil strife that has terrorized the nation should not be simply attributed to primordial ethnic hatreds. Rather it can be credibly analyzed using the group coordination mechanism to effectively show that the conflicts occurred over positional and distributional goods such as public office and economic welfare, and not over ethnic or religious divides. Furthermore their occurrence was precipitated by economic decline and/or collapse of political institutions, and thus can be pinpointed using historical accounts and economic statistics, something that the “ethnic hatreds” argument cannot accomplish. For my research I will focus on the two central conflicts that have been classified by Doyle and
Sambanis as “ethnic” civil wars. The first one is a Biafra war of 1967-70, and the second one is a collection of riots that have rocked the nation in the period of 1980-84. I will analyze these conflicts chronologically, and in the process attempt to establish the political and economic disturbances that could have led to the formation of competing groups that coordinated on the basis of religion and ethnicity to attain positional and distributional goods and in the process plunged the country into an ethnic civil war.

While the Biafra Civil War began after the Eastern part of Nigeria, the traditional Igbo homeland seceded from the federation on May 30, 1967, the roots of the conflict can be traced back to 1861 when the British consulate in Lagos was established paving the way for eventual conquest of Nigeria. Although the name Nigeria was officially adopted in 1897, as a territorial state it gradually evolved through the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 and the 1939 division of the Southern provinces into an Eastern and Western regions. According to Graf:

“the territory of present-day Nigeria was defined, not on the basis of its people’s shared historical, economic or social experiences but merely by the arbitrary amalgamation of a number of disparate ethno-cultural units which happened to occupy contiguous land areas that were then under British colonial administration” (Graf 7).

Furthermore, both Falola and Uzoigwe note that the main amalgamation and the subsequent territorial adjustments were made not for the purposes of unifying the country but essentially as a fiscal measure designed to ensure the financial support for the poor Northern region of the country at the expense of the more prosperous Southern region (Falola 68). With Nigeria already home to more than 200 ethnic groupings, the colonial interference by the British Empire only exacerbated the problem of uniting Nigeria into a single cohesive political entity. But since the underlying motive of colonialism was to ensure the effective and unchallenged exploitation of the colony to the benefit of British finance and industry, inter-
ethnic and inter-regional differences were actually perpetuated by the British in order to effectively maintain their policy of indirect rule and thus ensure the most effective exploitation of colonial resources.

Indirect rule was especially successful in the Northern region, where the British simply added another level of authority on top of a long established Hausa-Fulani Islamic caliphate. In the South, however, the policy proved less successful due to the lack of unifying entity such as the caliphate, among the diverse ethnic groups that inhabited the region. In order to preserve the Northern establishment that was so conductive to British policies the South and North were kept separated as much as possible. Christianity, Western-style education, use of English, new forms of administration and social organization all took root more rapidly in the South, while the North physically removed from European colonial centers and with its long Islamic tradition and governance was far more resistant to Western ways (Graf 10). This regional divide, essentially maintained by the British evolved to encompass the various ethnic groupings that inhabited the regions and was further exacerbated by the fact that the North remained largely Islamic, while the South adopted Christianity along with traditional animist religions. (Muslims - 50% of population, Christians – 40% and animist – 10% Falola 7).

Furthermore, it is important to note that pre-colonial inter-ethnic rivalry was virtually non-existent, and none of the many original Nigerian languages has a concept equivalent to the English tribalism. The causes of group coordination thus stemmed from regular and systematic resource competition among ethnic groups that first occurred within the colonial enclaves and urban areas due to the British policy that essentially forced the Southern region to support its Northern counterpart. This policy in turn caused antagonisms
between the northern Hausa-Fulani and southeastern Igbo ethnic groups that felt they were unduly exploited to maintain the northern Islamic regime. Thus even before Nigeria achieved independence, its political and economic future was already clouded by the regional divide that was largely forced on it for the benefit of colonizing power – Great Britain.

Moreover, British influence resonated in Nigerian politics even after the formal independence of 1960. The Nigerian constitution was based on colonial Richards (1946) and Lyttleton (1954) constitutions that have been described as:

“Products of the mental reservations by the British about treating Nigerians as one entity.” (Uzoigwe 14)

Furthermore, in 1951 Britain arbitrarily allocated more than 50% (174/312) of the seats in the House of Representatives to the North on the unsubstantiated basis that one-half of Nigeria’s population lived in this region. This ensured the domination of the post-colonial government by main Northern political party - NPC (Northern People’s Congress) that as Ekwe-Ekwe asserts:

“was enrapped in ethno-racial and religious exclusiveness bordering on apartheid.” (Ekwe-Ekwe 14)

However the North was also very receptive to colonial British rule and since Nigeria was a haven for British and other Western investments:

“Britain surely felt that it was in its own interest to decide which political party would exercise this hegemonic rule in the country’s future.” (Ekwe-Ekwe 23)

The other two major political parties – Action Group representing the Western region and National Council of Nigerian Citizens representing the East, feverishly sought to alter the representational ratio between the North and the South and thus change the revenue allocation formula that favored the Northern region in the main federal government situated in Lagos. The best way to achieve this was to contest the population figures of the country and the population ratio between the regions. This resulted in a violent census controversy
that lasted from 1962-1964. When the census results showed an almost 100% increase in the population of the Southern regions, the federal government comprising of NPC-NCNC coalition did not publish the results. Nwachuku notes that because of NPC’s political strength in the federal parliament the North was instrumental in the invalidation of the 1962 census that would have cost it its numerical population dominance. Adding to the problem of the census crisis was the fact that the creation in 1963 of a country’s fourth region – Mid-West, designed to weaken the popular support for the main Western Yoruba party – Action Group, effectively transformed the Western part of the country into a battleground for the former coalition partners NPC and NCNC, now going under the names of Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) respectively. With UPGA consisting primarily of Igbo nationals, unable to dislodge the Hausa-Fulani NNA in a 1964 national election that was badly tainted in favor of the dominant NNA, the 1965 elections to the Western Regional Assembly became a focal point for UPGA to reestablish its authority. Both Graf and Falola note that UPGA had the majority of the popular support in the Western region and NNA resorted to massive election malpractices to achieve electoral victory. With the UPGA defeat, the population took to the streets and situation degenerated into chaos – as federal government was unable or unwilling to restore order to the region. The chaos in the West had a profound impact on Nigerian politics as on January 16, 1965 the military coup overthrew the Northern political establishment heading the federal government in Lagos and ended the five-year period of the so-called democratic rule.

The events that led to the military coup represented a prime example of group coordination over positional and distributional goods. Thus Hausa-Fulani representatives from the Northern region having assumed the dominant role in the post-independence
government due to British interference were reluctant to give up their political influence that enabled them to allocate disproportionate amount of resources to their home base at the expense of the other regions. When the Eastern (Igbo) and the Western (Yoruba) regions attempted to change the mechanism of resource allocation politically, the politicians from Northern region coordinating on the basis of Hausa-Fulani ethnic identity and common Islamic heritage plunged the country into chaos that was stopped only with the overthrow of the central government by the armed forces.

For a little over five months the military coup enjoyed national approval. Nwachuku notes that many Nigerians felt that the army unpolluted by the corruption of politicians would be better able to lead the country into progress and stability (Nwachuku 32). However, the North believed that the coup was motivated by the desire of Igbo officers to attain national domination. While the stated goals of the “January majors” and their immediate successor Aguiyi-Ironsi were:

“The abolition of the fractious regions and the creation of an incorporative political culture which no longer assigned ‘definitive’ roles and privileges targeted to constituent nationalities.” (Ekwe-Ekwe 53), the fact that none of the twenty seven key politicians and military personnel that were killed during the coup were an Igbo, gave the North ample cause for alarm. Thus regionalism and political wrangling did not abate. Aguiyi-Ironsi failed to convince the North that the coup was not sectarian and was confused as to how to treat the coup plotters (January Majors). The final straw was the promulgation of the Unification Decree on May 24, 1966, which was to end Nigeria as a federation and inaugurate a unitary republic. Immediately after the announcement there were numerous student demonstrations in Zaria in favor of Northern Secession. According to Falola, the students with great potential as new recruits to the middle class were threatened by the Unification Decree, which they thought would reduce
their employment opportunities and force them to compete on a national basis (Falola 118). The demonstrations then transformed into a wave of effectively organized and coordinated riots that targeted Igbo immigrants in the North for almost two months. They intensified after the overthrow and murder of Aguiyi-Ironsi on July 29th by Northern military officers, and culminated in September pogroms that took the lives of 50,000 – 80,000 Igbos living in the North. Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe notes that Igbos became a ready target for massacres because as a nationality they played a prominent part in the politics of Nigeria’s de-colonization from British rule to which the Northern leadership was largely opposed. For this leadership the Igbo role in the independence movement coupled with its more nationally oriented political drive were regarded as a threat to Northern political hegemony it exerted nationwide on behalf of British neo-colonialism (Ekwe-Ekwe 66-67). Thus, the riots that accompanied the counter-coup only replaced the fear of domination by the Igbo by fear of that of the Hausa-Fulani.

When Yakubu Gowon, a Lieutenant Colonel and the most senior officer in the North became head of state, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, the Igbo military governor of the former Eastern region refused to recognize his leadership. He believed that Gowon was anti-Igbo, and knew that more senior army leaders such as Brigadier Ogundipe – a Yoruba, were simply passed over in favor of a northerner. When a last-ditch meeting between Gowon and Ojukwu in Aburi, Ghana in January 1967 failed to produce any agreement, eastern region ceased paying federal taxes and took control over all federal utilities. The final step came on May 26, 1967 when Ojukwu declared Eastern Nigeria a free, sovereign and independent state by name of Republic of Biafra. Subsequently, on July 6,
1967 the Biafran civil war began that lasted two and a half years and claimed between 500,000 and one million Nigerian lives.

Falola notes that through propaganda, Biafra attracted a great deal of sympathy and relief. The strategy was to point to genocide and a possible attempt by the Islamic North to dominate the Christian East (Falola 124). This strategy appears to have been successful, as early accounts of the conflict such as de St. Jorre “A Brothers’ War” seem to emphasize the religious as well as the ethnic aspect of the struggle. However, upon closer examination it would appear that while ethnicity and religion were present in the conflict in terms of Christian and animist Igbo population seceding from Muslim Hausa-Fulani dominated federation, the real causes of the Biafran Civil war lay in the colonial legacy that ensured the regionalization of political process. That in turn enabled different ethnic groups that inhabited the aforementioned regions to coordinate together on the basis of their shared ethnic identity in order to have a better chance of attaining positional goods such as political power and distributional goods such as revenue allocation.

The discovery of oil reserves in the Eastern region further complicated the situation, since it was disproportionately used by the Hausa-Fulani NPC to support their northern constituents at the expense of the rest of the country. Even as early as 1964, the NCNC had complained bitterly about the flow of money from the South to the North and in crisis of 1967, this issue had become paramount to the extent that the East believed that it created the substantial part of country’s wealth. This assertion seemed unsubstantiated in 1967 when oil revenue only accounted for 13.7% of total revenue, however during the oil boom of the 1970’s oil had become the primary revenue source accounting to 81% of the total revenue in 1974. It also rose from 30.6% of the total exports in 1967 to 94% in 1976.
Given the aforementioned figures and the support that was pledged to Biafra by multi-national corporations seeking to exploit the lucrative oil deals resulting from its independence, there seems to be little doubt as to why Colonel Ojukwu chose to pursue the policy of secession, and why it was met with declaration of war by Colonel Gowon. The primacy of oil exports would also help explain the fact that while Nigerian GDP and GDP per capita plunged by 16% and 18% respectively in 1967, when oil production was frequently interrupted by sabotage and military offensives, in 1969 when the federal troops took control over most of Biafra, the Nigerian GDP and GDP per capita actually increased by 24% and 21% respectively, essentially surpassing their pre-war levels and helping to stabilize the war-ravaged nation.

Thus colonial policy promulgated by Great Britain created and enforced the politics of regionalization that in turn drew its support from the main ethnic groups populating the regions: Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. Because of a questionable census result, North became the region with the biggest number of seats in the House of Representatives, and was thus able to assume the control of the federal government, which in turn guaranteed it certain degree of freedom in allocating resources. Since it was dependent on the support of its primary ethnic group in order to remain in power, it allocated resources to benefit its electorate at the expense of the opposition parties. The situation became further complicated with the discovery of oil in the Eastern region, revenues from which went to the federal government, that according to Falola and Ekwe-Ekwe allocated them disproportionately and unfairly. In order to remain in power the federal government resorted to electoral fraud and intimidation and its actions culminated in a military coup, a regional upheaval and finally civil war. Thus, while the Biafran conflict and preceding Nigerian
politics involved a “healthy” dose of ethnic identification, it is important to note that the actual reason behind seemingly ethnic strife was control of political power and resources that under the system instituted by the British colonizers, could not have been attained without resorting to ethnic identity, something that in turn was artificially created by these same British sixty years earlier in order to perpetuate the exploitation known as divide and rule.

From the aforementioned facts we can conclude that in the years preceding the Biafran conflict ethnic identity served as a clear sign of group identification for the purposes of accruing benefits from control of the central government. Conflict moreover occurred when one group refused to cede its control over federal power and was toppled by a coup perceived to be an attempt by a rival coordinating group to gain political advantage. Situation was further mitigated by the discovery of an economic resources control of which was desired by competing coordinating groups. The fall of the elected government and subsequent military coups presented a political vacuum that removed potential political and social constraints from groups wishing to escalate the situation for the purposes of attaining political power and economic resources, the final results of which were the massacre of Igbo population across the Northern region and ultimately Biafra civil war.
Case Study of Nigeria’s 1980-1984 Civil War

While the Biafran Conflict was a clear case of colonial legacy creating political and economic instability that led to secession by one of the coordinating groups inside the Nigerian state, the 1980-84 riots presented a far more complicated matter. Sambanis classifies them as ethnic civil war that engaged federal government against a separatist Muslim sect. However, since the control of the federal government at the time was in the hands of Northern Muslim intelligentsia, the conflict can be more accurately classified as inter-religious, pitting different interpretations of Islam against one another. It began in the city of Kano in the late 1980 and continued to flare up throughout Northern Nigeria until 1985 under the name of its original leader Maitatsine.

The Maitatsine movement itself was formed in the 1970’s in Kano under the leadership of malam (ulama) Muhammad Marwa, whose Hausa nickname was Mai Tatsine – he who curses others (Hickey 252). Marwa, who had originally emigrated from the Cameroons, had settled in Kano in the 1960’s. In his sermons he rejected the usage of Western consumer goods, and condemned certain customs and traditions of the indigenous Hausa population. In addition he introduced a number of innovations to the practice of religion such as the reduction in the number of the obligatory prayers from five to three, and rejection of all sources of faith except the Koran. Because of his unusual teachings, he was regarded by the local religious scholars not only as an outsider but also as a heretic. During the late 1970’s, however, Marwa won an increasing number of followers among the migrants who streamed into Kano during the dry season in the hope of finding work in the economic center of the North (Loimeier 219). Moreover, Lubeck notes that Marwa attracted a large following not only from the migrants but from both elite and popular sectors of society and
that networks of communities loyal to him existed throughout the region. Thus by 1980 he established himself as a religious leader with a substantial income, a large following and the protection of armed guards (Lubeck 370).

The situation in Kano deteriorated in October 1980, when Marwa’s only son was killed in Sabon Gari and the first clashes with the security forces occurred. The governor of Kano state, Abubakar Rimi, set a deadline for Marwa and ordered him to leave his lodgings at the periphery of the old city of Kano. Marwa answered this ultimatum by mobilizing his followers throughout Northern Nigeria and on Friday December 19, 1980 attempted to occupy the central mosque in Kano. The ensuing conflict with the police forces continued for some days until the Nigerian army intervened and crushed the resistance of Maitatsine with tanks and heavy firepower. Apart from Marwa himself, about six thousand people were killed in battle between December 18th and 29th, while the material damage amounted to several million nairas (Loimeier 220).

Overall there are a number of different explanations that attempt to pinpoint the cause of Kano and later Maiduguri and Yola riots that although Marwa was killed in 1980, continued to be called Maitatsine. For example, Uwazie claims that “poor communication” between Marwa and Kano authorities in 1980 resulted in violence when Marwa interpreted a letter of eviction by governor Rimi to mean a declaration of war against his followers (Uwazie 30-31). The official enquiry into the 1980 Kano riots by Justice Aniagolu on the other hand found that the Kano disturbances were caused among other things by 1) Maitatsine and his disciples objectionable preaching, 2) Maitatsine’s nursed hatred against state authorities, 3) his hostile attitude to his neighbors and frequent public harassment of people, 4) his son’s death (Uwazie 102). Finally, Hickey notes the growing
discontent within the Nigerian Muslim community regarding the adoption of the new
constitution in 1979 that did not include Shari‘a within the country’s judicial system. That
discontent was extensively voiced by Abubakar Gummi – Grand Kadi of Northern Nigeria
that might have provided funds for the Maitatsine movement (Hickey 252, Kastfelt 89). It is
important to note that all of the preceding explanations assign fanatical characteristics to
Marwa and his followers, however according to Lubeck they all lack explanatory power
because they do not:

“show the relationship of the ideology of the movement with the social and material relations that gave rise to
it.” (Lubeck 371).

After all Marwa has been preaching in Kano since the 1960’s and was even expelled by emir
Sanusi in 1963. However, the disturbances only began in 1980 when due to inflation and
incompetence of the Shagari regime the price of millet – the basic foodstuff of Kano’s lower
classes increased by 600%. (Lubeck 381)

Thus, in order to correct his apparent ambiguity Lubeck attempts to analyze
the cause of the riots by focusing on gardawa – students of a malam who wander among
Muslim communities seeking alms and performing practical and spiritual tasks (Lubeck 371).
Since all sources agree that the primary basis of recruitment to the Maitatsine came from this
floating population within the Hausa and neighboring societies, the analysis of the changing
role of gardawa in Nigeria can therefore sufficiently explain the actual motives behind the
1980’s uprisings – in the words of Lubeck:

“how pre-capitalist institution with a pre-capitalist function and supported by essentially pre-capitalist
communities is modified and it turn reacts to capitalist development during the contemporary period.” (Lubeck
372).
According to Lubeck in the nineteenth century Kano, the tradition of families sending away their children to become gardawa was necessitated both by economic and ecological factors, as during the months after the harvest session children exerted a burden on the household. Therefore by becoming gardawa they not only received rudimentary Islamic education and financial support in the form of alms-giving, but also enabled their household to conserve its foodstuffs until the next harvest season, when gardawa generally returned to their families. In the nineteenth century, then, this particular tradition worked in harmony with the ecological constraints, the ideological goals and the economic needs of the pre-capitalist Muslim social formation. Lubeck also notes that during the colonial period the British policy of indirect rule actually facilitated the gardawa migrations by introducing some degree of industrialization to Northern cities while leaving intact the existing Islamic institutions. Thus before 1974-75, when the effects of the petroleum revenues accelerated capitalist growth and state centralization, gardawa continued to be included in the urban economy by participating in Kano’s industrial labor force as mobile unskilled laborers that performed variety of menial tasks such as dried-mud house repair and small handicrafts.

Gardawa’s fortunes, however, changed rapidly with the onset of the oil boom. With the growth of cities that received a disproportionate share of investment and amenities, a large number of gardawa ceased their migration practices and stayed on in the cities attracted by the promise of the increasing petroleum wealth. As they grew in number, they came to be labeled by urban dwellers as vagabonds and street urchins, and later redefined by the newly wealthy classes as “embarrassing, dangerous and immoral set of people.” (Lubeck 330). Their rapidly declining standard of living presented a stark contrast to the emerging class of northern “nouveau-riche” that directly benefited from state allocation of oil revenues.
in the form of government contracts. This increasing disparity between the classes is noted by the 1982 World Bank study that estimated between 52-67% of Kano’s residents remained at the absolute poverty level, while at the same time wealth inequalities allowed the number of Nigerian hajj pilgrims to exceed 100,000 per year (Lubeck 379). Thus, the aforementioned 600% increase in the price of millet coupled with state driven income inequalities assured gardawa that the villains undermining their existence were northern political elites. This discontent was effectively channeled by Marwa who not only cursed the extravagance, corruption and decadent consumption practices of the newly rich, but also instructed his followers to avoid modern consumption items altogether, thereby asserting the moral superiority of the material deprivation experienced by gardawa in the face of the mindless consumption by the wealthy and powerful classes (Lubeck 386).

Furthermore, Lubeck argues that the religious motives behind the uprisings, stated in the official investigatory report should not be overemphasized, since Marwa’s conception of self as Mahdi (returning prophet) is difficult to confirm as gardawa refuse to discuss their beliefs with police authorities. What is important, however, is Marwa’s ability to articulate the political and moral perspectives of the gardawa, and of inspiring them militantly to confront corrupt political elite protected by incompetent and brutal police force. This view is close echoed by Hickey, who compares Marwa’s message to that of Luther and Calvin, in his desire to:

“purify the practice of Islam by a wholehearted return to the revealed Word of God.” (Hickey 254)

To Hickey that would explain Marwa’s immense popularity among the poor since he:

“promised redemption and salvation to God’s righteous people.” (Hickey 253).

Given the aforementioned information it becomes difficult to discuss the Maitatsine rebellion as merely:
“Religious protest against the secular and religious establishment in the country.” (Uzoigwe 124)

In fact, even though the conflict was labeled inter-religious by Sambanis, and largely did not involve the Christian population of Kano, I believe that it was a prime example of group coordination at work. It enabled the underprivileged classes in Kano and surrounding cities to come together under a religious banner that espoused their poverty as a moral virtue, and thereby reaffirmed their position in society. Furthermore coordination only turned to violence after the economic situation in the Kano province of Nigeria experienced significant deterioration in December of 1980 due to the dramatic increase in the prices of basic foodstuffs, while Marwa’s message was heard in Kano as early as 1962 (Okafor 165). Thus, Marwa’s followers chose to enforce his message among the general population only after their livelihood took a turn for the worse, and coordination among themselves presented a better alternative to continuing inaction. Furthermore, this seemingly “religious” conflict had a clear economic and social undertones, and while even Lubeck would say that:

“It would be overstating the case to argue that the Yan Tatsine were a class based lumpen-proletarian movement plain and simple,” (Lubeck 386)

the timing of and the participation in the riots would point to economic deterioration as being the primary force behind its development. Moreover, if we take into account the argument that powerful religious figures in Kano such as Abubakar Gummi – Grand Kadi of Northern Nigeria funded the Maitatsine movement in order to express their displeasure with Shari’a being left out of 1979 Constitution (Hickey 282), then the riots assume a political connotation as well. In any case Maitatsine uprising should be looked upon not as an expression of fanatical and heretical religious zeal that threatens to impose itself on the moderate Muslim population, but rather a conscientious desire of a downtrodden minority to reaffirm it place in society.
Case Study of Madagascar

Africa’s largest island Madagascar marks the southwest corner of the vast Indian Ocean triangle, flanking the long coast of Mozambique. Its indigenous population is a blend of migrant people from south and southeast Asia with east Africans; subsequently Arabs, Europeans and others joined the mix. Despite this apparent heterogeneity, Paul Allen quotes Pascal Cahigneau as saying:

“The (Malagasy) society as a whole must be perceived above all in terms of geographic, linguistic and cultural homogeneity, a phenomenon which places the great island very much on the margin of black Africa”.

The eighteen population groups that emerged by the mid-sixteenth century were defined by their relation to their immediate surroundings, thus none of them was pure in distinction from any of the others. They all spoke a variation of one language, all retained combinations of African and Asian cultural characteristics and all founded their society on patrilinear clan loyalties, in short they were all Malagasy (Allen13).

Among the aforementioned sixteen groups the Merina are the largest, historically most prominent and most exhaustively studied. Occupying the central plateaus, they represent over one-fourth of the population, more than 3 million people today. Their prominence began in the late eighteenth century, when rulers such as Andrianampoinimerina molded political ideas of their neighbors into a centralized institution of kingship able to impose military and economic cohesion. Great Merina leaders Radama I and Ranavalona I extended their control over most of Madagascar by the middle of the nineteenth century. They were also able to stave off European domination of the island for as long as possible,
successfully playing off competing French and British interests in the area, and thus retaining at least formal independence until 1895.

Allen notes that the conquest of Madagascar in 1895-1896 evolved out of imperialist demands in France and nearby French dominated island of Reunion for Malagasy land, natural resources and trading concessions, while Brown adds that aggressive policy of the Third Republic was enacted to distract attention from France’s internal troubles. Whatever was the case, the 15,000 man French force easily disposed of Malagasy 50,000 strong army and subdued the sporadic resistance by August 6th 1896, when Madagascar and its dependent islands were declared a French colony. One of the first tasks undertaken by the colonial administration was to break the hold that Merina aristocracy had over the island. The French thus planned to reduce Merina government centered in the capital Antananarivo to just one among many tribal administrations answering to French governors in their respective territories, a policy strikingly similar to the indirect rule instituted in British parts of Africa. However even under this “politique des races”, Merina still enjoyed their previously privileged position in society, this time simply out of necessity, as at the time of colonization they were the only group able to provide the necessary number of literate civil servants needed by the colonial administration. Thus

“By practical necessity a single ethnic group retained the status of a conventionally favored colonial class.”(Allen57)

Furthermore one of the first inadvertent achievements of this colonial policy was to heal the long-standing rift between Merina nobility (andriana) and commoners (hova), who were now united against a common enemy - France.

Various authors note that Malagasy nationalism was essentially born out of Merina desires to recover their lost political, if not economic authority, and while after
generation of French rule, it became encompassed in more broad anti-colonial rhetoric, other prominent ethic groups generally referred to as cotiers (coastal) continued to see it as a return of Merina domination. This tension was further exacerbated by the fact that although Madagascar was evenly split between Christianity and traditional religions, most of the Merina adopted Protestantism (25%) spread by Anglican missionaries in the 1800’s, while cotiers instead chose to practice Catholicism (25%) of their French masters. As Maurice Bloch notes regarding Merina Protestantism:

“It was both accepted and resented. The resentment did not often surface, but by the end of the 1960’s and early 1970’s it began to emerge more openly” (Bloch 164).

These divisions in turn were exploited by the French authorities, who saw their position in the eyes of the Malagasy people decline after each European world war. Thus in 1946, to counter the anti-colonial movement of a newly formed Democratic Movement for Malagasy Renewal (MDRM), the French introduced The Party of the Disinherited (PADESM). Appealing to tribal and case bitterness against Merina and their aristocracy, PADESM nevertheless failed to attract a large following, since contrary to the MDRM it lacked a clear program of de-colonization and national revival.

Unable to defeat the threat to colonization politically the French banned the MDRM for allegedly instigating the failed 1947 insurrection where at least 89,000 Malagasy perished, and suspended all political activity. This action represented a clear microcosm of the French colonial policy that aimed to maintain control over Madagascar by fostering ethnic divides that were largely a product of “politique des races”. After all the 1947 rebellion originated on the east coast and clearly transcended ethnic lines with the bulk of its participants consisting of poor farmers impoverished by French colonial policy and not Merina intellectuals that founded the MDRM. Furthermore Brown notes that even though
MDRM actively campaigned for Malagasy independence, its leadership desired to achieve it through political and not violent means, clearly realizing the futility of armed struggle against the French empire. The rebellion itself was not a political move by the opposition, but rather a spontaneous overflow of popular unrest and might have been “helped” along by the French authorities in order to destabilize the real political threat represented by the MDRM.

After the removal of MDRM, PADESM was unable to capitalize on the shutdown of its major adversary and simply disappeared until 1956, when it returned to popular politics as the Social Democratic Party (PSD). It was led by Philibert Tsiranana, a moderate Tsimihety (cotier) schoolteacher who nevertheless believed that anti-French nationalism would result in Merina domination and communism. For him continued French influence remained preferable to either alternative. On the opposite flank Congress Party for the Independence of Madagascar (AKFM) was consolidated to demand unconditional independence from French rule. AKFM was profoundly Marxist, but by appealing to nationalist rhetoric it was able to reconcile its diverse constituents that encompassed all layers of Malagasy society. The PSD however was by far the largest, most comprehensive and most diverse party (Allen 50), and that enabled it to elect Tsiranana president in 1959, as well as produce a 77% vote for Union with France in 1958. The union, however, proved short lived as France promptly dissolved its overseas community, instead following “amiable de-colonization” policy with Madagascar, granting it formal independence on June 26, 1960.

With independence accords assigning France special prerogatives, Madagascar followed a rigorously pro-western, anticommunist course. Furthermore, French interests controlled major enterprises, production, import and export. Brown notes that even ten years after independence there was a growing perception that behind the façade of
Malagasy government the French were still running the country (Brown 307). Thus, Madagascar became:

“Classic example of a neo-colonial regime in which an elite, selected and prepared by the departing colonial power, moves into government position, exchanging its protection of the interests of the former colonial power for that power’s protection of its own position.” (Covell 29)

Tsiranana and the PSD ruled as virtual dictators, but it was a benign dictatorship. There was freedom of political association, freedom of expression and freedom of press; there were also no political prisoners. Even the division between Merina and cotiers became subdued due to continuing prominence of Merina in senior official and diplomatic posts. Allen notes however, one flaw in the PSD construction of the Malagasy state – its enormous reliance on charisma and pragmatism of Philibert Tsiranana. An assiduous student of Malagasy language and culture the president managed to keep his sprawling party intact by carefully listening to disparate voices, astutely sizing up strengths and defects in his collaborators, and steering problems away from ideological analysis. Thus:

“The Malagasy state was unified so long as the president functioned.”(Allen 53).

And therefore any change in the presidency would shatter the delicate PSD coalition composed of many diverse and seemingly uncompromisable elements.

That change occurred in 1970, when Tsiranana suffered a massive stroke and was forced to temporarily resign, effectively making vice-president Andre Resampa head of state. Resampa in turn immediately began to consolidate his position with complete reorganization of PSD. His efforts arose considerable opposition among Tsiranana’s followers whose position inside the government became compromised by the actions of the energetic and non-conciliatory new leader. Miraculously Tsiranana survived his stroke bout, and although the illness affected his mental balance, he nevertheless seemed determined to
regain his presidency. Using a pretext of American and Chinese sponsored espionage, Tsiranana removed the popular Resampa from power and attempted to reestablish himself as a leader for life. However, by then it was clear that the PSD had exhausted its political credit, since in 1972 massive demonstrations and pogroms rocked the capital Antananarivo. The slogan of the uprising was “Malgachization”, originally meant as a demand for education in the national language, its meaning quickly expanded to include the ouster of the French and the regime they had installed (Covell 46). With Tsiranana unable to maintain control of the situation, General Ramanantsoa intervened in the proceedings using troops to prevent secret police from firing on crowds. On May 18th, 1972 he obtained full powers from Tsiranana to eradicate the threat of anarchy stalking the regime, and on November 7th, gaining 96.4% of the vote in the October referendum, he effectively replaced Tsiranana as a head of state.

The year 1972 marked the end of the Malagasy First Republic, and radically changed the future course of the island’s history. Brown argues that this upheaval was brought about by the extreme reliance of Malagasy politicians on their former French masters that ultimately angered the populace whose aspirations for independence were shattered with PSD’s neo-colonial policy. Allen meanwhile attributes the fall of the republic to Tsiranana’s ill health and his quick dismissal of populist Resampa, who wanted to curtail Malagasy reliance on France and apartheid South Africa. However both of these authors generally skip over the fact that at the time of uprisings Malagasy GDP and GDP per capita have decreased for the first time in seven years. Thus during the peaceful decade of the 1960’s Madagascar experienced a stable average GDP growth of over 3%, with the high of almost 7% coming in 1968. Furthermore Malagasy GDP per capita grew at over 4% in 1968,
and has generally increased, albeit slightly during the 1960’s. The year of uprising however brought about decrease in GDP per capita of almost 16 dollars from $408 in 1971 to $392 in 1972. This decline could be attributed to riots that paralyzed the capital for a large portion of 1972, and would then justify the unwillingness of Brown and Allen to mention it as one of the causes of the unrest. However it could also be one of the primary causes of the riots, since under the international core-periphery relationship existing in the world during the twentieth century, Madagascar was firmly relegated to peripheral status. It lacked natural resources and heavy industry to supply finished manufactured goods, and instead remained firmly dependent on raw agricultural output of rice, coffee and vanilla. Thus any natural disasters such as prolonged droughts at home, or a significant change in price of exports on the world market, would destabilize the Malagasy economy, and that is exactly what happened in the early 1970 (Brown 313), when anthrax and droughts devastated the southern regions, and led to peasant uprisings that combined with student protests against French “domination” to essentially overthrow the Tsiranana regime. Therefore the 1972 popular revolution was brought about by a combination of diverse factors, not the least of which was economic decline caused by severe droughts and exacerbated by Malagasy position as a quintessential French neo-colony that severely limited its development path and forced it to rely on agricultural products as its main exports. It is also important to note that at the time of the 1972 revolution, economic decline and the destabilization of political institutions did not lead to increased group coordination along ethnic or religious lines and ultimately ethnic civil war, as all protesters irrespective of ethnicity or religion were overwhelmingly in favor of removal of Tsiranana regime. Timely interference by Ramanantsoa prevented the massacre of the protesters and helped bring about peaceful transition of power, but it contrary
to the events of 1975, the army did not act as a barrier to the spread of ethnic conflict, since the division between Merina and *cotiers* was not exploited for political advantage by the Tsiranana regime.

The economic decline did not abate with the General Ramanantsoa coming to power, as during his interregnum GDP per capita fell on average by 3% a year. The referendum of 1972 granted him full powers to govern for five years in order to implement a structural transformation and return at least some semblance of democratic participation to the people. His policies on broad terms were: “Malgachization” of the administration, the economy and education to complete the independence only partially achieved in 1960. But he was essentially a professional soldier with no political ambitions and after upheavals of the previous two years he saw his main role as providing a period of peace. That, however, was not easily achievable when economy continued to slump and urban unemployment remained a significant problem. Furthermore, Brown notes that the *cotiers* while accepting Ramanantsoa because of his professional reputation and lack of political ambitions, were acutely aware of the loss of *cotier* power at the center and concerned at the replacement of French advisors by Merina officials. (Brown 321)

Thus, one of the only government acts generally popular with the Malagasy population at that time was the dismantling of the French special position inside the country. Lieutenant-Commander Didier Ratsiraka, a Betsimisaraka (*cotier*) from a coastal town of Toamasina was responsible for overseeing these arrangements and he soon gained substantial popularity by reversing Tsiranana’s earlier pro-western policies, establishing relations with USSR and other communist nations, and removing Madagascar from the Franc zone in 1973. By conducting a successful and very popular foreign policy and at the same time distancing
himself from domestic disturbances and economic calamities, Ratsiraka emerged as a powerful voice in the new government. Thus, when Ramanantsoa’s successor to the interregnum, colonel Ratsimandrava was gunned down by rebel military personnel loyal to the old PSD in 1975, Ratsiraka emerged as the likeliest successor.

Both Allen and Brown note that the murder of colonel Ratsimandrava, was one of the very few times in Malagasy history when exploited ethnic grievances seemed ready to plunge the island into an ethnic civil war. After all Ratsimandrava was a Merina officer, who was poised to succeed General Ramanantsoa, another Merina, who in turn removed from power (albeit legally) a cotier president that for a better part of ten years enjoyed true popular support. Furthermore Tsiranana did not completely leave the political arena, but instead acted from the shadows, denouncing the new government as a return of the Merina “domination”, at every opportunity. He was also able to consolidate his former security forces into a private army based in the barracks just inside the capital, that refused to obey “Merina Technocratic Lobby”(Allen 72), and instead waited for the right opportunity to restore the First Republic. The matters were worsened by the inability of the Ramanantsoa government to improve the failing economy that was further hurt by the 1973 oil crisis, and the exodus of French capital that was not sufficiently replaced by homegrown investors. It was a clear case of group coordination at work with Tsiranana, rallying his supporters along “ethnic” (to an extent that the Merina/cotier division can be classified as ethnic) lines in order to return his lost positional good – public office, something that he has avoided doing in 1972. The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that political institutions crumbled less than three years ago, with Tsiranana essentially abdicating in favor of Ramanantsoa due to popular protests, and economic decline in full force with GDP per capita falling as low as
$364 in 1975 from its high of $407 in 1971. The country was ripe for an explosion, and when three cotier members of the renegade forces assassinated Ratsimandrava, Madagascar seemed to be on the brink of the ethnic civil war. It was saved by the fact that just like three years earlier the army refused to allow the country to descent into chaos. The military directorate that included both Merina and cotier officers declared martial law and the combined Merina/cotier army stormed the renegade barracks and apprehended Ratsimandrava’s killers. After four months of deliberation Didier Ratsiraka was chosen as a middle-ground candidate, whose views were popular with the Merina middle class, but whose coastal origins appeased the remaining disgruntled cotiers. On June 26, 1975, the fifteenth anniversary of independence Ratsiraka was named the Interim Chief of Staff in the military government, and as Allen notes:


Ratsiraka’s intentions were clear from the outset. The country was renamed the Democratic Republic of Madagascar and major industries and banks were nationalized. Regime party – AREMA (Vanguard of the Malagasy Revolution) was promptly created to support Ratsiraka and while other political entities were allowed in the broad coalition of left- wing parties (FNDR), AREMA was the strongest. The high point of Ratsiraka’s power and authority came in 1977. He had successfully installed the political and economic framework for his socialist revolution, and overwhelming dominance of the AREMA provided him with essentially one party state. Brown notes that Ratsiraka stood apart from the other Malagasy leaders in that he alone had been able to assemble a broad national coalition running from the mass of the coastal and rural people to the intellectuals and businesses circles of the capital. (Brown 334) He now set about the task of economic recovery through investment plan that envisaged over a twenty-year period the doubling of
GDP via the establishment of heavy industry and export of manufacture goods. This ambiguous program was to be financed by investment and borrowing from abroad under the slogan “All-out Investment."

The 1980’s however were marked by both economic and political crises that contributed to the increasing abandonment of the socialist path. The “All-out Investment” further damaged the economy, led to the accumulation of an imposing debt and a recourse to the IMF. In turn the liberalization policies undertaken as the result of IMF agreements led to the modifications of government control of the economy and trade, while the need to maintain good relations with western donors, led to the rapprochement with France, that remained Madagascar’s largest creditor and most important trading partner. In 1982 presidential elections Ratsiraka faced a split in his own party and barely managed to gain 50% of the vote in the capital (although he took 80% of the total vote), against his rival Monja Jaona, an ardent populist and a leader of the MONIMA party that could trace its roots back to the 1947 uprising. Jaona denounced elections as fraudulent, and was promptly jailed though subsequently released. In 1987 opposition within FNDR appeared to be further increasing as three parties announced the formation of Democratic Alliance of Madagascar and demanded resignation of the current government and the holding of new presidential elections. However, in 1989 Alliance fielded three separate candidates and Ratsiraka was reelected with 62% of the vote, which as Brown notes represented an essential rejection of Ratsiraka’s policies by the intellectuals and business people in major towns given the almost certain pro-incumbent vote in the countryside (Brown 344).

During the decade of the 1980’s, Malagasy GDP per capita decreased by almost 23%, falling from $344 in 1980 to $276 in 1990. There were sporadic but violent
riots in the capital and the countryside that included the Antananarivo student riots of 1981 that coincided with 10% decrease in overall Malagasy GDP and 12% decrease in per capita GDP; the 1985 Kung-fu riots that pitted bands of vigilantes against the army and the paramilitary troops, and the 1986-87 pogroms directed against Indian and Pakistani shopkeepers that destabilized the coastal towns. However numerous acts of violence largely followed the pattern of class uprising and did not involve sectarian or religious strife. In fact the Protestant and Catholic Churches at the time presented a united front against Ratsiraka’s policies and actively argued for political liberalization and economic reform. Furthermore though he was weakened by the popular protests and disputes in AREMA, Ratsiraka still maintained a firm grip on power and unless the army switched sides to the opposition, he was unlikely to be removed.

In the beginning of the 1990’s Ratsiraka continued his efforts to hold on to power by a mixture of concessions and consolidations. He abolished the censorship of the media and removed the requirement that parties must belong to the FNDR in order to have a legal existence. However, the emergence of multi-party politics did not satisfy the opposition that began demanding both an end to the regime itself and the departure of Ratsiraka. It also consolidated under the label Forces Vives (Active Forces) to counter the Ratsiraka’s loyal MMSM. In June 1991 Forces Vives demanded a national conference on democratization and threatened a general strike if their demands were not met. They were backed by student protests in the capital. At the end of June Forces Vives announced the formation of a provisional government and declared a general strike. This strike, joined in the capital and other major centers, continued for two weeks and was revived sporadically thereafter. In July Ratsiraka’s government announced a state of emergency and arrested
several opposition leaders. In response to the arrests Forces Vives organized a large but peaceful protest march on the president’s residence where Ratsiraka’s bodyguards fired into the crowd killing 100 protesters and wounding many more. As in 1972 this action led both the armed forces and the French to withdraw their support from the regime. Following an ultimatum from the army an interim agreement was signed on October 31, 1991 by Ratsiraka and opposition parties, providing for the suspension of the constitution and the creation of the transitional government, which was to remain in office for 18 months pending the adoption of new constitution and the holding of elections.

The year 1991 saw the protests of the 1980’s finally culminate in a true revolutionary movement. The united opposition parties presented a credible alternative to the Ratsiraka regime, and their coordinated strikes and protests undoubtedly had an effect on his decision to create a transitional government. However it was the army that played a crucial role in preventing further violence from escalating into all-out civil war between Ratsiraka and opposition supporters. In a situation eerily similar to the 1972 and 1975, the army stepped in to restore order and steer the warring sides back to the recourse of diplomacy. Furthermore unlike similar events in other African countries, the army actually stepped back from politics after playing the role of the mediator between the government and the opposition. It is also important to note that contrary to the 1975 Merina/cotier crisis, the revolution of 1991 was waged strictly along political and not ethic lines, and thus group coordination between the supporters of the incumbent regime and the opposition was limited to political programs and did not evolve to separate the regime supporters and protesters along the lines of their ethnic or religious affiliation. Thus timely army interference and its refusal to carry out suppression of the peaceful demonstrations led to the defeat of
Ratsiraka’s policies and initiated the first steps toward democratic reform. It was seemingly complete on February 10, 1993 when Ratsiraka was defeated in the elections and Albert Zafy; one of the leaders of the Forces Vives became president of the Third Republic gaining 67% of the popular vote.

However, contrary to the eighteen year Ratsiraka reign, Zafy managed to stay in power for only three years, as he was promptly impeached on July 26, 1996 on numerous charges of violation the constitution. His presidency tried to deal with Madagascar’s financial crisis by bringing in outside private investors and not relying on the World Bank and the IMF. However, this program of “parallel financing” alienated many of his cabined members and caused a split in the parliament that favored more stringent structural adjustment policies proposed by the Bretton Woods institutions. When the economic performance failed to improve, strikes and protests again rocked the capital. After Zafy pushed through an amendment to the constitution stating that he and not the national assembly would appoint a prime minister, he was promptly accused of creating a one party dictatorship. Opposition predominant in the national Assembly voted for his impeachment and on the same day Zafy resigned. Apparently unfazed by this political assassination, he promptly pledged to run in the presidential elections scheduled for November 1996.

The elections marked by abysmal voter turnout of 48% brought back Didier Ratsiraka with 51% of the votes cast. He aimed to give his party AREMA a new look, mainly by pushing ahead with its policy of radical decentralization that was conceived as early as 1992. Randeianja notes that this policy was largely supported by “old guard” of the second republic, who saw it as an effective way of holding on to power (Randeianja 312). While Allen argues that the creation of states was largely driven by ethnic dissent and was
designed to undermine stability of the new democratic republic (Allen 113). Both authors agree that this policy was poorly planned and executed and generally destabilized, instead of strengthening Malagasy polity. Able to push through his federal reform Ratsiraka decided to seek another term in office. But contrary to previous elections where opposition was fragmented and disjoined, in 2001 they were all united behind Marc Ravalomanana, the businessman mayor of Antananarivo – a Merina highlander whose modern populist appeal was a polar opposite to the aging and conservative Ratsiraka. Official elections results left Ravalomanana just short of the 50% needed for an outright victory in the first round stirring suspicions of vote rigging. Alleging that he in fact surpassed the 50% barrier, Ravalomanana mobilized a massive campaign of peaceful protests. Endorsed by church leaders, he had himself proclaimed president on February 22, 2002 and seized control of central administration, while politically neutral armed forces stood aside. Ratsiraka, however, refused to accept defeat and established an alternative government in his home city of Toamasina mounting a blockade of the capital. In April 2002 High Constitutional Court declared Ravalomanana outright winner of the first round with 51% of the vote. Ratsiraka refused to recognize the results from his power base and continued the blockade until armed forces asserted the authority of the new government by taking control over the renegade provinces. Surprisingly very few lives were lost in the power struggle as Ratsiraka’s supporters proved unwilling to continue their resistance in face of military pressure. With his power base falling apart, Didier Ratsiraka fled to France thereby ending the standoff and allowing new president to consolidate his power.

The presidential elections of 2001 and the subsequent standoff proved to be a classic example of group coordination on the basis of ethnicity over lost positional goods
such as public office, in the face of political collapse represented by uncertain election results, that nevertheless did not transform into all-out ethnic civil war. Ratsiraka refused to accept the decision of the High Constitutional Court and mobilized his supporters on the basis of ethnic affiliation, closely following the steps taken by the former president Tsiranana in 1975. The incumbent thus argued that unlawful seizure of power by Marc Ravalomanana represented a return of Merina “domination”, and he as a cotier would not allow that to take place. As quoted in the BBC news article from May 14, 2002:

“The former president's [Didier Ratsiraka] supporters were using this ethnic problem between the highlanders and the coastal people to get more votes. It's mainly the politicians who are trying to separate the people.”

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1987383.stm)

Furthermore this resort to the exploitation of ethnic grievances has been largely confined to Ratsiraka’s camp, as Ravalomanana desperately tried to project himself as someone who is representative of the whole of Madagascar, and is not pursuing the interests of a particular ethnic group. After establishing the blockade of the capital, Ratsiraka began to hire unemployed young men, and form them into paramilitary outfits that terrorized Merina citizens in coastal provinces that were under Ratsiraka’s control. The tensions were splitting the country as Toamasina and Mahajanga refused to accept the Ravalomanana government, and only the continuous neutrality of the military stopped the violence from escalating into an outright ethnic civil war between the capital and the renegade provinces. The role of the military in the electoral dispute and political stand off closely paralleled its role in the 1972, 1975 and the 1991 crises, when it refused to interfere on the side of the warring politicians, and instead chose to serve as a mediator preventing conflict from escalating into full-scale violence. Thus in 2002 it waited to make its decision until the High Constitutional Court formally declared Marc Ravalomanana president of Madagascar, and then chose to enforce
his authority by force only when it became clear that Ratsiraka’s actions were pushing the country into chaos. The army therefore acted as a stabilizer in a political vacuum and thereby prevented Ratsiraka’s forces from exploiting group coordination to divide Madagascar along ethnic lines for the betterment of political actors fighting over clear positional and distributional goods.

Over the course of modern Malagasy history there have been four separate instances of political and economic destabilization that nevertheless did not degenerate into an ethnic civil war. Furthermore in two of the instances there has been active group coordination on the basis of ethnicity that while resulting in some casualties did not transcend into an all-out ethnic conflict. Thus in 1972, mass demonstrations and protests led to the fall of the ruling government of Philibert Tsiranana. The riots were partially caused by the sharp drop in the GDP per capita resulting from the prolonged droughts in the southern regions and the ensuing shortage of agricultural goods that were Madagascar’s primary exports. However they were also grounded in the neo-colonial relationship between France and Madagascar, with France exercising enormous role in the operation of its former colony even after formal Malagasy independence. The protesters were urging the ruling government to end the unfair symbiosis, and were generally united in their desire to achieve full and unconditional independence from France. Moreover they were not coordinating along ethnic or religious lines as the demands to end France’s control were echoed by the Protestant Merina middle-class of the Antananarivo, as well as the Catholic cotiers of Toamasina that only 12 years earlier welcomed French instead of Merina domination. The military’s refusal to fire on the demonstrators led to the peaceful and democratic removal of Tsiranana’s government and installed General Ramanantsoa’s interregnum that was in turn disrupted in
1975, when renegade security forces of the deposed Tsiranana murdered Ramanantsoa’s successor colonel Ratsimandrava, in a blatant attempt to instigate ethnic violence between Merina and cotier ethnic groups and return power to Philibert Tsiranana. Thus the 1975 assassination of a Merina presidential candidate, spurred on by Tsiranana’s speeches regarding the loss of cotier power in the capital, was the first step to ethnic civil war on the basis of group coordination along ethnic lines caused by the loss of positional goods such as public office, and an ethnic conflict was mostly averted by the army’s decision to remain loyal to the popularly elected government and suppress the isolated rebellion of Tsiranana’s security forces, thereby curtailing military capability of the former president. For the next sixteen years Madagascar was under the dictatorship of Didier Ratsiraka that allowed little room for political dialogue, and devastated the country’s economy decreasing its GDP per capita by over 23%. Popular protests that started in the 1980’s finally reached their apex in 1991, when similarly to 1972 uprising, opposition led crowds converged on the presidential palace demanding regime change. However, there was little ethnic group coordination, as cotier protesters were standing alongside their Merina counter-parts in calling for democratic opening. Large-scale violence and possibly revolutionary civil war were averted when the military again refused to physically disperse the crowds and essentially backed their demands, rendering Ratsiraka powerless and paving way for democratic elections of 1993. The final political destabilization occurred in 2002, when a power vacuum was created due to the disputed elections of 2001. This incident closely paralleled the 1975 episode, and almost caused ethnic group coordination to turn into an ethnic civil war, with President Ratsiraka calling for a united cotier uprising against “Merina agent” Marc Ravalomanana. This was perhaps the closest Madagascar came to the explosion of ethnic violence as the stand off
between the capital and the renegade provinces continued for over 5 months, and was only resolved when the previously neutral army decided to back the constitutionally confirmed Ravalomanana, sending Ratsiraka fleeing into French exile.

From the aforementioned summary of the four key moments in Malagasy history, it would appear that political and economic destabilization did indeed cause social unrest. However ethnic civil war on the basis of group coordination along ethnic lines was certain to occur only when political leaders lost their positional goods and attempted to regain them by promoting radical viewpoints involving ethnic identity. Thus in 1975 and in 2002, Tsiranana and Ratsiraka tried to attain popular support by resorting to mutually exclusive factors of Merina and co-tier ethnicity. Meanwhile in 1972 and 1991, when the leaders of the uprisings did not actively campaign along ethnic lines, group coordination was limited to social and political factors, such as the unity of poor Malagasy farmers in the face of corrupt and inefficient government. Furthermore in all four occurrences, civil conflict was avoided due to timely actions of the armed forces that unlike many of their African counterparts attempted to maintain neutrality in the political sphere and generally followed the wishes of the Malagasy citizens and democratic governments instead of dictatorial and unpopular regimes. Thus in the case of Madagascar it would be possible to conclude that ethic civil war was ready to erupt on two separate occasions. Its near-occurrence was caused by group coordination along ethnic lines that was primarily instigated by the deposed political leaders seeking to fill a power vacuum created by the failure of political institutions. And its prevention was largely in part due to the actions of the armed forces that kept Madagascar united throughout the twentieth and twenty-first century and hopefully continue to do the same for as long as the Malagasy state exists.
Conclusion and Summary of Findings

The stated goal of my analysis was to combine constructivist and rational choice theories of political science, and to use the resulting hybrid to better explain occurrences of ethnic civil war. I substituted each model’s strengths and weaknesses to formulate the causal mechanism behind the large-N study that was done on the basis of primordialist theory of ethnic conflict, using the theory that employed group coordination principles. The case study method that I used allowed me to determine causality, something that a large-N study utilizing many different variables could not clearly accomplish. Furthermore for my case studies I used two countries taken from the ten highest scoring countries on the religious polarization index provided by Reynal-Querol in Why ethnic fractionalization? Polarization, Ethnic conflict and growth. One of those countries – Nigeria experienced two ethnic civil wars according to Doyle and Sambanis’s Peacebuilding dataset used by Reynal-Querol in selecting the ten countries, while the other – Madagascar did not. I attempted to explain why ethnic civil war occurred in religiously polarized Nigeria, and did not occur in similarly religiously polarized Madagascar using the theory of group coordination that maintains that conflict between divergent social groups over access to positional and distributional goods turns to violence when a country either experiences a severe economic shock where group coordination offers better economic future, or when collapse of political institutions cannot stop a particular group from realizing its coordination power, or a combination of both factors. In order to properly utilize the aforementioned theory I employed the variables of economic and political collapse formulated by Russell Hardin in One for All: The logic of Group Conflict and represented by GDP, GDP per capita, historical accounts and news sources, while keeping the variable of religious polarization.
taken from Reynal-Querol’s *Ethnicity, Political System and Civil War*, and represented by the aforementioned list from which the countries were chosen, constant. That allowed me to determine if the variables of economic and political collapse and corollary the mechanism of group coordination were in fact the driving force behind the occurrence of ethnic civil war in two religiously polarized countries, thereby complementing a large –N study with a credible casual model. Moreover I would like to emphasize that I was not proving either theory correct or erroneous, since it would require a large-N study of its own, but rather using the theories in combination to enhance their respective performances. The brief summary of my findings is presented below.

From the analysis of Nigerian conflict of 1967-1970, it would appear that group coordination due to the failure of political institutions was in fact responsible for the occurrence of ethnic civil war. Thus Nigeria experienced group coordination over positional and distributional goods such as public office and access to resources ever since its independence in 1960. Furthermore due to the colonial legacy that effectively regionalized the country on the basis of ethnic identity to foster colonial rule, the divergent groups coordinated on the basis of regional ethnic divides. However group coordination only turned to ethnic violence when the central government dominated by one coordinating group falsified its census results in order to prevent a rival coordinating group from gaining political power. That in turn led to the destabilization of political institutions creating a power vacuum that was further mitigated by successive military coups forged on the basis of ethnic identity. Their occurrence culminated in declaration of independence by the Republic of Biafra and the ensuing ethnic civil war of 1967-1970. Thus failure of political institutions, brought about by a combination of colonial legacy and military involvement, led to the
transition from peaceful ethnic group coordination to ethnic civil war. On the other hand economic decline played an uncertain role in accelerating the conflict, since even though Nigerian GDP and GDP per capita decreased by 4% and 7% respectively in 1966, and by 16% and 18% in 1967, their decline also could have been caused by the political destabilization in effect creating a situation of uncertain causality. Moreover the question of oil attributed by many authors to be the deciding factor in Biafra’s decision to secede from the federation also remains unresolved, as oil while presenting a prime example of distribitional good, nevertheless falls outside of category of economic destabilization since in 1967 it formed only 14% of the total revenue. Thus on the basis of aforementioned evidence I am only able to conclude that political destabilization due to collapse of central authority was responsible for ethnic group coordination transforming into ethnic civil war, while the role of economic decline in this particular conflict remains uncertain.

On the other hand it would appear that the Nigerian ethnic civil war of 1980-1984, was in fact due to the economic decline that allowed the forces of Maitatsine coordinating on the basis of their shared religious beliefs to escalate the situation in Kano and destabilize the northern part of Nigeria for the better part of four years. Thus group coordination among Maitatsine followers on the basis of their puritanical religious beliefs occurred ever since Maitatsine established himself in Kano in 1962. However their religious disagreements with the rest of Kano’s population manifested themselves in violent conflict only in the late 1980, when prices of basic foodstuffs increased by as much as 600%, making them unavailable to most of Maitatsine’s followers who comprised the lowest strata of Nigerian society. Thus even though overall Nigerian GDP and GDP per capita actually increased by 4% and 1% respectively in 1980, dramatic increase in Kano’s food prices was
sufficient to cause economic destabilization in that particular region of Nigeria. Moreover since Maitatsine rebellion was in effect a collection of riots that spread throughout Northern Nigeria over the course of four years, and not a coordinated ethnic civil war in its purest form, I believe that regional economic factors such as increase in food price are more conducive to their explanation than national measurements of GDP and GDP per capita that may mask regional problems due to their inclusivity. Furthermore it is unclear if political destabilization played a significant role in Maitatsine rebellion, since even though 1980 marked first year of democratic rule in Nigeria after 13 years of military dictatorships, Maitatsine was rebelling against corrupt regional governor of Kano and not against central authority. Thus even though some aforementioned authors argue that rebellion was precipitated by Northern elites that were voicing their discontent over the governmental refusal to adopt Shari‘a as a basis of Nigerian law, there is no sufficient evidence to conclude that they funded Maitatsine movement, and therefore I am unable to conclude that political destabilization due to governmental change was the reason behind the rebellion.

Contrary to Nigeria, the case study of Madagascar presented me with a religiously polarized country that nevertheless did not experience an ethnic civil war in the period from 1960-2002. To determine what factors prevented the development of ethnic conflict, I proceeded to analyze Madagascar’s history for instances of group coordination on the basis of ethnicity and religion and then used historical accounts and economic indicators such as GDP and GDP per capita, in order to determine periods of economic decline and political destabilization that could have transformed peaceful ethnic or religious group coordination into an ethnic civil war. Summarily Madagascar experienced four periods of political destabilization that in three instances were brought about by economic decline.
However ethnic group coordination only manifested itself on two occasions, namely in 1975 and in 2002. Thus in 1975, economic and political destabilization almost culminated in occurrence of ethnic civil war due to increased group coordination on the basis of ethnicity that was in turn inflamed by political actors striving to regain their lost positional and distributional goods. Moreover ethnic conflict was only averted due to the actions of the Malagasy military that refused to partake in machinations of ethnic group coordination and instead chose to separate the warring sides and restore political stability. The similar situation, only due to political vacuum created by contested elections, occurred in 2002 when again ethnic group coordination edged on by political leaders almost descended into ethnic violence, and was only stopped by the armed forces that chose to back the constitutionally confirmed president that pledged to promote ethnic unity and brotherhood. Thus it would appear that ethnic civil war in Madagascar between Merina and cotier coordinating ethnic groups was ready to occur on two separate instances, brought about in 1975 by economic decline and political destabilization and in 2002 only by political destabilization. However it did not occur in either instance mainly due to the actions of the armed forces that did not participate in ethnic group coordination and instead presented a stabilizing force in the resulting political vacuum. Furthermore in the specific case of Madagascar it would appear that political elites were responsible for promoting and supporting ethnic group coordination in order to create a stable power base that could be used to regain lost positional and distributional goods. However due to the lack of tangible proof, besides accounts of several authors, I am unable to conclude that they were in fact single-handedly responsible for ethnic group coordination, leaving the question of the role of the elites in fostering ethnic divides for another study.
Thus on the basis of three case studies in two religiously polarized countries I am able to present a casual mechanism for the occurrence of ethnic civil war that develops as follows: in a religiously polarized country ethnic civil war occurs when group coordination attains its strongest form due to economic decline or political destabilization that allows individuals to credibly increase their gains by coordinating together on the basis of shared identity. Furthermore such identity can be manifested in either ethnic or religious terms, or in a combination of both. However shared identity by itself is not sufficient to cause ethnic conflict as the mechanism that fosters its occurrence depends on economic or political shocks that push individuals to participate in a group effort that increases their gains as opposed to them staying put. The occurrence of the aforementioned mechanism in all of the cases that I have explored in effect shows that the theory of rational choice can be substituted for the causal model of constructivist approach that treats ethnic civil war as something primordial and inexplicable, conclusively supplementing a large-N study with a credible casual mechanism.
General Bibliography


Nigeria Bibliography


**Madagascar Bibliography**


