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## *Getting the Balance Right: A Mixed Methods Approach to the Study of Post-Civil War Democratization*

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**Jai Kwan Jung**  
Cornell University  
*jkj3@cornell.edu*

Bridging the quantitative-qualitative divide in civil war studies is imperative if we are to improve our understanding of the dynamics of intrastate violence leading up to all-out civil wars. Nicholas Sambanis (2004) pinpointed a list of shortcomings in the quantitative literature on civil wars—measurement error, unit heterogeneity, model misspecification, and unclear specification of causal mechanisms—and called for combining statistical and case study work to address these limitations. Sambanis and Paul Collier (2005) then edited two volumes that identified the causal logic and limitations of the Collier-Hoeffler model of civil war onset and the quantitative methods on which it is based, and expanded it through 16 case studies. In a similar vein, Fearon and Laitin (2005) are conducting a "random narrative" project that essentially combines their statistical model on civil war onset with 25 randomly selected country studies.

This work indicates that multi-method approaches are being taken seriously in civil war research. Yet one commonality of their use of mixed methods is that the in-depth case studies or narratives are typically employed to detect limitations in the statistical models or to improve the original models with new insights. This is certainly one way of triangulating multiple methods to understand better the complicated process of conflict escalation across space and time—but not the only one possible. In this essay, I thus advocate another way of using mixed methods for a different research purpose—identifying and measuring a proposed mechanism.<sup>1</sup> Describing why and how I have combined a large-N analysis with paired case com-

parison in my ongoing research on post-civil war democratization, I call for getting the balance right between quantitative and qualitative techniques—so as to maximize the analytic advantages of each.

### **Post-Conflict Democratization**

My interest in democracy building in post-civil war countries began with the realization that there was a striking imbalance between substantial international efforts at democracy promotion in such settings and the paucity of systematic comparative research on the issue. The quantitative literature in civil war studies has paid little attention to asking under what conditions post-civil war democracy is more likely to emerge and survive. Even in the democratization literature, the question of how democratic governance can be established in war-torn societies is "either wholly neglected or seriously under-theorized" (Bermeo 2003: 159).

Intrigued by these analytic gaps, I started my research by asking what caused the success or failure of democracy building in countries emerging from deadly internal conflicts since the end of World War II. Moreover, I was puzzled that power-sharing arrangements are widely considered the most effective institutional tool for establishing peace and democracy in post-civil war countries, even though they often work against that prospect—the case of post-2003 Iraq comes immediately to mind.

To answer these questions, I began with a theoretical insight drawn from the work of Doyle and Sambanis (2000) and Wantchekon (2004): Peaceful resolution of violent conflicts (or negotiated settlement of civil wars) and a high degree of international commitment to peacekeeping operations should be essential conditions for building a sustainable peace and democracy in post-civil war societies. However, I quickly learned—through a careful examination of the case study work—that negotiated settlement has not necessarily led to durable peace and stable democratic regimes in post-civil war countries. Moreover, strong international involvement in conflict resolution and peace building processes has often produced adverse outcomes, such as repeated peace failure in Lebanon and an extremely delayed process of establishing a functioning central government in Bosnia-Herzegovina. My research question thus became more specific and nuanced: Why does peaceful resolution of civil wars sometimes lead to establishing a stable democratic government, while at other times it does not, despite similar degrees of international commitment?

### **Differing Time Horizons**

I argue there is a trade-off between the short-term interest in ending violence as quickly as possible and the long-term goal of post-civil war democratization, and that this trade-off revolves around the issue of power sharing. The short-term interest in making a peace by signing a peace agreement and the long-term goal of democracy promotion do not always coincide in civil war situations, but in fact often conflict, depending upon the time horizons held by key political actors involved in the transition from war to peace. My proposed mechanism in post-conflict political processes is as follows.

The short-term versus long-term inconsistency in designing post-conflict institutions arises when civil war adversaries have reached a mutually destructive stalemate and entered into peace negotiations. To resolve the stalemate, power sharing is often proposed by international mediators to provide a security guarantee and a strong incentive for warring parties to initiate negotiations, sign a bargain for peace, and implement peace settlement terms. Seemingly indivisible stakes become divisible, to some extent, by balancing the distribution of political powers among warring parties. Therefore, power sharing should contribute to negotiated settlement of civil wars through institutionally guaranteeing the security of warring groups.

However, power sharing, by virtue of its institutional nature, builds wartime cleavages into post-war political structures. It also provides a strong incentive structure under which former warring parties perpetuate those wartime cleavages into post-conflict politics. In turn, this frequently leads to deadlocks in governmental institutions and hinders the development of state capacity necessary for democracy promotion in post-civil war countries. War-induced cleavages are also likely to be deeply entrenched in post-war electoral politics, as power-sharing institutions provide a powerful incentive for former warring parties to garner political support primarily from their own constituencies. Moreover, such institutionalized wartime cleavages help maintain ordinary citizens' support for former warring parties and lower their confidence in central governmental institutions.

The result is a vicious circle—from post-conflict elections deeply entrenched by wartime cleavages to dysfunctional governmental institutions to low levels of public confidence in those central institutions and the public's consistent support for former warring parties. This vicious circle—initiated by power-sharing agreements—delays the establishment of democratic governance in post-conflict societies.

### **Testing the Theory**

The long causal chain in my theoretical approach—nine steps—stems from the fact that conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction are as complicated as the escalation process from low-level to high-level violence in civil wars. Thus, the critical issue for my research was how this causal story could be investigated empirically. My overarching strategy was, first, to extract a set of hypotheses amenable to testing by large-N analysis, and then—second—to select two “best” cases, one positive and the other negative, to illuminate the short-term/long-term trade-off by process-tracing post-conflict political events.

The main rationale of a preliminary large-N analysis was to discover the conditions under which a democratic government is more likely to emerge and be sustained in war-torn societies, and to estimate the causal effects of power-sharing arrangements on post-civil war democratization. For the quantitative part of my research, I sorted out testable and non-testable hypotheses. By testable, I mean that hypothesized variables should be measurable by reasonable indicators without suffering large measurement errors. That is, my main crite-

riterion for testable hypotheses was to avoid using proxy variables too far removed from what I sought to measure. For instance, in my analysis, the time horizons of key actors during peace negotiations are theoretically important for establishing post-civil war democracy, as they influence the type of political institutions created as a result of the peace deal. But it is neither feasible nor ideal to measure quantitatively the time horizons of political actors. They should rather be assessed qualitatively in the actual context of the transition from war to peace.

Put specifically, statistical methods cannot take full account of the mechanism at work in the trade-off between short-term peacemaking and long-term democracy building. This is true even though I employ the most process-oriented estimation technique in the quantitative analysis toolkit—event history modeling—to investigate the success or failure of post-civil war democratization and to estimate the effects of power-sharing agreements on democracy promotion during post-conflict peace processes.<sup>2</sup> Thus, event history analysis must be combined with case studies to illuminate the entire trade-off mechanism. As one of the observable implications in the above causal story is that the trade-off mechanism comes into play if power sharing is imposed by international actors with short-term rationality (i.e., ending civil wars as quickly as possible), I selected two cases, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Mozambique, in which such a triggering event was present and absent, respectively, during peace negotiations. Pairing these two cases also enabled me to assess whether the divergent paths toward post-civil war democracy in Bosnia and Mozambique can be attributed to their distinctive institutional designs arranged during the negotiation process.

In this sense, my case selection strategy may sound close to a “model-testing small-N analysis” following a large-N study, in Lieberman's (2005) nested analysis framework for multi-method approaches. Yet the purpose of the paired comparison of Bosnia and Mozambique is not simply to confirm empirical findings of my large-N analysis (see also Nome, this Symposium). It also allows me to identify and measure the short-term/long-term trade-off dynamic during civil war resolution and post-war reconstruction processes, while illustrating the path-dependent nature of power-sharing arrangements that reinforce the status quo of the initial institutional set-up.

### **Conclusion**

Using mixed methods has been particularly relevant for my research on post-civil war democratization in two respects. First, the decision to use multiple methods flowed from my research questions; it was a puzzle before method (see also Symposium 2007: 9-10). Those questions could not be fully addressed without a careful examination of the complicated political processes during post-conflict periods, which is what qualitative case studies can do better than any other method. Second, a single method alone could not illuminate the short-term/long-term trade-off in which I was interested. Therefore, combining event history analysis and paired comparison of the two post-civil war countries was necessary to identify and measure the mechanisms that I theorized to be at work.

For sure, this essay describes just one way of mixing different methods for a particular research purpose. However, it “gets the balance right” as qualitative methods are no longer simply an auxiliary to a model (re-) specification exercise. The challenge now for students of civil war is to develop additional ways of combining multiple methods, with the goal being to connect rigorous empirical investigations of patterns of violence with the mechanisms underlying them.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Of no less than 24 different and contested definitions of mechanisms (Mahoney 2001: 579-80), mine follows McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 24). They conceptualize mechanisms as “a delimited class of events that alter relations among specified sets of elements in identical or closely similar ways over a variety of situations.” For an excellent discussion on how to measure mechanisms, see McAdam et al. (2008).

<sup>2</sup> In event history analysis, the dependent variable is measured by the timing of a certain political event. Unlike conventional regression approaches, event history modeling thus considers “not only if something happens, but also when something happens” (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004: 1).

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## *Getting the Pathway Case off the Drawing Board*

**Martin Austvoll Nome**

University of Oslo and Centre for the Study of Civil War, International Peace Research Institute, Oslo  
*m.a.nome@stv.uio.no*

Put yourself in my place. I have been raised and socialized in the large-N research programme on civil war. My MA thesis was on third-party interventions in civil conflicts, where I found that interventions are more likely when the intervening state is home to an ethnic group whose kin is involved in the conflict. This confirms existing quantitative research. The time comes when I am to specify a research question for my PhD. An appropriate puzzle is not far off. What are the *mechanisms* connecting third-party military interventions in “ethnic” civil wars with transnational ethnic affinities? Then I learn that the way to develop theory with mechanisms rather than variables is to do process tracing, typically of a single case. The trouble is that I have a data matrix full of interventions from which to choose, and no clear guidance on where to begin.

Along comes nested analysis. I learn that cases can be selected according to their position in a population, having described that population using large-N analysis (Lieberman 2005; Gerring and Seawright 2007). The regression line describes the population and the residual positions the case. I seize the moment, I go for the pathway case selection technique (Gerring and Seawright 2007: 122-31), and two conference panels and one *QM* symposium later (Symposium 2007), I realize that the road from drawing board to satisfactory application is not so straightforward after all. There is a need to explain how the pathway case works, and to anticipate some lessons from its use.

I do two things in this essay. First, I emphasize the value added of the pathway case in terms of its mode of theory building, and show why it is different from the most-likely case or the typical case, to which it has been compared. This is a defence of Gerring and Seawright (2007) of sorts, but also an argument for its potential contribution to the research programme on civil war, as it offers explanation in terms of causal mechanisms as a complement to the growing body of generalizations. Second, I address four issues that arise when applying the pathway case selection technique. I discuss model specification, the role of measurement validity, the indeterminacy of case selection, and generalization. Not unscathed by the treatment, the pathway case re-emerges as less than ideal, but as a research design well worth applying.

### **The Pathway Case**

Why a pathway case research design? The co-variation between transnational ethnic affinities and interventions in civil conflicts is known (Davis and Moore 1997; Saideman 2002; Nome 2007). One can think of a number of stories that make