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Political life after ethnic war

Sarah Z. Daly*

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Abstract: In post-war elections a large number of citizens vote for political parties with deep roots in the violent organizations of the past. However, despite the prevalence of rebel, militia, and military successor parties, their success varies dramatically. This study explores the correlates of civil war belligerent party performance in contexts emerging from ethnic wars fought over government control and over territory. It seeks to understand how parties with coercive legacies seek votes and why, in turn, citizens go to the polls and elect these parties to political office following these different types of conflicts. The study embeds illustrative case studies of ethnic wars within an original cross-national database of founding post-war elections between 1970 and 2015.

Key words: post-war elections, ethnic war, case studies, cross-national data, violent organizations, parties

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1 Introduction

What explains political life after mass violence in ethnic war? What accounts for how voters cast their ballots in post-ethnic war elections? In the wake of ethnic conflict and the horrors of mass violence, societies are often left grappling with the daunting task of rebuilding their social and political fabric. The scars of such conflicts run deep, leaving communities divided. How do nations, torn apart by ethno-nationalist strife, chart a course towards political stability and reconciliation?

Elections in the aftermath of such conflicts are critical junctures that shape the course of a nation's recovery, reconciliation, and future. Understanding the factors that influence the behaviour of political actors and voters in these circumstances is essential for both scholars and policy makers seeking to promote peace, stability, and democratic governance in post-conflict societies.

Scholars of the political legacies of violence indicate how experiences of war and victimization may mobilize citizens and guide their vote choice for or against their perpetrators. However, we know less about how these patterns manifest specifically in contexts of ethnic conflict.

Scholarship on war's legacies in ethnic contexts suggests that, in the aftermath of ethnic violence, societies become defined by deep-seated ethnic cleavages and ethnic parties emerge as a consequence of ethno-nationalist sentiments and the need to protect the interests of particular ethnic groups. However, other scholars question the stylized way in which ethnic conflict is often portrayed and the assumption of a legacy of hardened identities; rather, they claim that institutions and interests can significantly shape identities and, in particular, guide whether war-ravaged populations vote on ethnic lines.

This study focuses on the first elections following ethnic war. I argue that the nature of the violent incompatibility between warring parties—whether government or territory—and the military outcomes of the war—victory, draw, or defeat—structure party and voter strategies and electoral performance in these elections. I demonstrate this theory by embedding illustrative case studies of ethnic wars within an original cross-national database of founding post-war elections covering 1970–2015.

2 Existing scholarship

A proliferating literature on the political effects of violence counters traditional accounts of war as solely fomenting death and destruction. Instead, drawing on theory of post-traumatic growth,¹ recent studies have found glimmers of hope amidst the tragic growth industry of civil wars (Blattman 2009). Out of their devastation, at times, emerge victimized populations more likely to engage civically and participate politically (Bellows and Miguel 2009; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017). These findings present an encouraging silver lining. However, while they establish that victimization may prompt civic

¹ See, for example, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004).

engagement and voting, they have tended to leave underexplored the question of for whom victimized populations vote.²

A few important exceptions tackle this key question. Focused on longer-term, intergenerational effects, scholars demonstrate that experiences of victimization drive individuals to vote against their perpetrators and for their perpetrators' adversaries (Balcells 2012; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Rozenas et al. 2017; Zhukov and Talibova 2018). This is consistent with expectations from psychology that posit that victims often feel the emotion of anger which sparks the action tendencies of revenge and punishment of the perpetrators (Elster 1999, 2004; Lerner and Tiedens 2006; Petersen and Daly 2010). Studying the immediate aftermath of war, Daly (2019, 2022a) instead finds that war outcomes influence whether victimized populations vote for or against parties that committed mass atrocities against the population.

Other scholars emphasize that not only the intensity but also the nature of the perpetrator and repertoires of violence can influence voting and preferences for punishment of victimizers (Kao and Revkin 2023; Levy 2022). Levy (2022) shows that voters in post-war elections may support perpetrator-candidates who violated less stringent norms, exhibited less agency, and maintained weaker ties to the victims. Kao and Revkin (2023) argue that the type of rebel collaboration rather than the rebel's social identity shapes attitudes towards revenge and forgiveness. However, significantly less is known about how conflict-created inter-group dynamics influence political participation, vote choice, and the manifestation of political legacies following ethnic as opposed to non-ethnic wars (Butt 2023; Hadzic et al. 2020).

2.1 Ethnicity, identity, and voting after conflict

One assumed war legacy maintained by an important body of literature is that violence solidifies ethnic group identities. While not all studies conclude that war inevitably leads to ethnic voting, many argue that protracted conflicts can create a sense of 'us versus them' antagonism among ethnic groups, making citizens more likely to vote along ethnic lines. Hadzic et al. (2020: 345), for example, argue that 'community-level experiences with war-time violence solidifies ethnic identities, fosters intra-ethnic cohesion and increases distrust toward non-co-ethnics, thereby making ethnic parties the most attractive channels of representation and contributing to the politicization of ethnicity'. It is therefore anticipated that exposure to violence intensifies the prominence and division of ethnic identities. Indeed, during times of ethnic war, the stark differences between ethnic groups are accentuated. This may compel individuals to adopt and solidify their ethnic identities as a means of protection and coping, with important implications post conflict.

Furthermore, amidst war-time ethnic violence, even individuals who were initially neutral may become compelled to align themselves with a particular group to gain advantages, seek security, or express moral outrage in response to the violence. As a result people may tend to retreat into their respective

² Related scholarship studies the organizational transformation of rebel groups into political parties (Manning 2008; Sindre 2016; Söderberg Kovacs 2007); their governance records (Liu 2022; Lyons 2016; Martin et al. 2021; Thaler 2018); and their influence on peace (Brancati and Snyder 2012; Daly 2022b; Matanock 2017), democracy (Fortna and Huang 2012; Hartzell and Hoddie 2015; Levitsky and Way 2012), and public goods provision (Daly 2021; Flores and Nooruddin 2012).

ethnic communities. This phenomenon can reinforce individuals' identification with their ethnic group while simultaneously diminishing trust and interpersonal interactions among members of previously peaceful ethnic groups.

The collective memory of these events, along with deliberate efforts to exploit this memory in the aftermath of the conflict, can further solidify ethnic cohesion and prolong the endurance of heightened ethnic identities. This, in turn, may strengthen individuals' preferences for policies that favour their own ethnic group, as demonstrated in studies by Bar-Tal (2003) and Hadzic et al. (2020). As further noted by Alexander and Christia (2011), individuals often link their personal wellbeing closely to the fortunes of their ethnic community, which significantly influences their policy decisions. Consequently, this dynamic can lead to an increase in ethnically driven mobilization and voting patterns, as ethnic representatives are perceived as the most effective conduits for political representation, with ethnic parties seen as credible advocates best able to serve the interests of their respective ethnic groups. In sum, one widely purported war legacy is hardened identities, leading to ethnic voting in war's aftermath.

2.2 The institutional perspective

Other scholars argue, however, that whether ethnic voting occurs in general, or in particular after conflict, depends on institutions and interests. These shape which identity comes to the fore and whether citizens vote on ethnic lines. What is more, others challenge the very premise that violence necessarily hardens identities by questioning whether ethnic violence automatically follows a primordialist logic in practice.

The design of political institutions can have a profound impact on post-ethnic war politics. Institutions 'provide the context in which individuals interpret their self-interest and thereby define their policy preferences' (Steinmo 1989: 504). Power-sharing arrangements have been employed in various post-conflict societies to accommodate ethnic diversity and prevent renewed violence. Proportional representation institutions, its proponents argue, particularly when complemented with other elements of consociationalism (a grand coalition, segmental autonomy or federalism, and minority vetoes), can serve to dampen conflict in multi-ethnic states. These institutions fulfil multiple ethnic groups' security, political, and economic needs, and thereby enable them to look to the government rather than to (illegal) sub-groups for protection and public goods. By providing representation and thus a stake at the centre, power-sharing produces guarantees and credible commitments for all ethnic groups.

Critics of power-sharing, however, argue that it fails to alter the incentive structure of politicians to cooperate across the ethnic divide as politicians remain beholden only to those who voted them into office: co-ethnics. Accordingly, these institutions may only further freeze ethnic identities into sharply defined cleavages, encouraging individuals to vote along ethnic lines and preventing the fluid, malleable process from producing new cross-cutting cleavages, which are favourable to stability and peace after conflict (Barry 1975; Horowitz 1985).

Bosnia, for example, adopted a system of ethnic quotas after the war. These quotas may have increased the overall level of ethnic voting by priming voters to think of political life in ethnic terms and by incentivizing parties to ground their appeals in ethnic identity (thus increasing the supply of ethnic parties).

Accordingly, scholars, most prominently Horowitz (1985, 1990, 1993), advocate instead for integrative institutions to encourage cooperation and accommodation between rival groups and break down the salience of ethnicity (Kasfir 1979; Reilly 2001). The goal of such electoral engineering is to increase intra-group competition and inter-group bargaining and coalitions. For this purpose, Horowitz (1985, 1991) recommends preferential voting systems designed to induce vote-pooling across ethnic divides. This approach thus offers the potential for fluid identities, floating voters, shifting multi-ethnic alliances, and temporary majorities. In effect it provides the possibility for a non-ascriptive society and encourages the development of broad-based parties, thus shifting the focus of politics from ethnic issues to ones that concern all ethnic groups.³ In sum, by this account, whether ethnic violence leads to ethnic voting depends on the nature of the institutions.

2.3 The role of interests

Others argue that not only institutions but also other economic and social conditions structure identity decisions. Individuals have many identities—some ethnic, some non-ethnic—with which they can identify politically (Posner 2005; Wilkinson 2004). These scholars argue that individuals are likely to identify with ethnic ones post war for the same reason that they do so in normal politics—because these identities best serve their political and economic opportunities and self-interests: material resources, power, and physical security (Kasfir 1979). If class, religion, ideology, gender, or another identity better serves individuals' self-interests, these identities will come to the forefront in political decision-making.

Individuals often identify on ethnic rather than, say, class lines because ethnicity is particularly well suited to serving rational interests. For elites, ethnic appeals are effective political resources for such agendas as constituency building, mobilization, outbidding intra-group competitors, economic scape-goating, or undermining transitions. For the masses, particular ethnic identifications arise as the most efficient response to individual needs to extract desired patronage goods (jobs, markets, and land) from the state because they facilitate collective action and aggregation of interests (Bates 1974). For many voters living in multi-ethnic societies, both in post-conflict and in non-post-conflict environments, ethnic identity can serve as an important factor in determining voters' decisions during elections (Conroy-Krutz 2013; Ferree 2006, 2011).

Voters in diverse contexts have proven more likely to cast their votes for co-ethnic candidates than for candidates from other ethnicities (Adida 2015; Bratton and Kimenyi 2008; Ferree 2006; Heath et al. 2015; Horowitz 1985; Hutchings and Valentino 2004; Posner 2005). Particularly, in information-poor environments, co-ethnicity can act as a signal for responsiveness, shared preferences, competence, and likely public goods provision for in-group members (Brady and Sniderman 1985; Butt 2023; Ferree 2011). It can also create bias in the evaluation of parties' past performance (Burgess et al. 2015; Butler and Broockman 2011; Carlson 2015; Kramon and Posner 2011). Adida et al. (2017, for example, demonstrate that voters tend to reward competent leaders when they share the same

³ Bose (2002) argues that the alternative voting system can become manipulated and therefore backfire. He describes how, in Bosnia, it actually 'precipitated a much higher degree of consolidation of the ethnic Serb electorate behind the SDS, an "extremist" party... than might otherwise have been the case' (Bose 2002: 232).

ethnicity, while they penalize underperforming leaders when they belong to a different ethnic group. Aha (2019) corroborates this finding by showing that ethnic minority parties in Central Eastern Europe are less likely to face electoral consequences for economic shortcomings compared to their coalition partners due to the support of a steadfast ethnic voter base. If interests are best served by identifying on ethnic lines and choosing political representation on ethnic lines, voters will do so, according to this logic. However, such ethnic identification is not inevitable; accordingly, the effect of war-time violence on post-war politics will depend on voters' interests in war's aftermath.

2.4 Constructivist challenges

Finally, scholars question whether the violence, in fact, always follows a primordialist logic, as often assumed.⁴ If not, identities may not be frozen in violence's aftermath. In certain ethnic wars not all violence occurs along ethnic lines; rather, belligerents oftentimes commit violence against co-ethnics.⁵ As a result, in the aftermath of such violence, the belligerents, even if constituted as ethnic parties, may need to seek the votes of populations they previously victimized.

A constructivist view further shows that not all ethnic kin necessarily support their co-ethnic belligerent. Many prefer non-violence, object to the violence committed, or support non-combatant parties. Furthermore, a constructivist rendering suggests that people hold multiple identities and, thus, in peacetime following these wars cleavages deactivated during the wars may resurface, or new overarching identities may make their way to the fore.

A constructivist account further means that societies that have experienced violent struggles in which individuals of different ethnic groups have mobilized against each other are not necessarily polarized along ethnic lines. For example, Bakke et al. (2009) map dimensions of social distance among 4,000 survey respondents in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the North Caucasus region of Russia. They do not find patterns of clear attitudinal cleavages among members of different ethnic groups. Dyrstad (2012), also studying the Balkans, similarly finds that ethno-nationalism does not necessarily increase with ethnic civil war and that individual war-time exposure to violence is less important than expected in fomenting ethnic divides.

2.5 Theoretical contribution: violent incompatibility and war outcomes

In this paper, I add two new dimensions to the debate on the political legacies of ethnic war: the nature of the violent incompatibility and military outcomes. I propose that whether the combatants contest government or territory and how the war ends—whether in government victory, rebel victory, or a draw—shape how parties run and how voters cast their ballots and with what electoral

⁴ On primordialism, see, for example, Burleigh (2014), and Kaplan (1994). On constructivism, see Abdelal et al. (2009), Chandra (2001, 2012), Posner (2004), and Waters (1999). On the institutional approach to ethnicity, see Laitin (1986).

⁵ See Bakke et al. (2012), Christia (2012), Fjelde and Nilsson (2012), Kalyvas (2008), McLaughlin and Pearlman (2012), Rudloff and Findley (2016), and Staniland (2012).

consequences. The key mechanism in the paper's theory is whether the geography of the electorates becomes unitary or bifurcated, which influences whether the sides of the conflict will compete in the same elections, and whether they will compete for the same voters. I argue that conflict incompatibility and war outcomes guide the fluidity of voter allegiances after armed conflict, influence the overlap in belligerents' electorates, and shape whether belligerent successor parties are strategically compelled to seek votes from victimized populations. The nature of the incompatibility and military outcome also guide whether direct victims and conflict-affected citizens might vote for violent perpetrators. As such, I argue that war victors may win victimized citizens' votes after rebellions fought over government control by running as restrained Leviathans (Daly 2022a). In territorial rebellions this pattern may also manifest, but co-ethnic voters of the losing belligerent tend not to cross the ethnic belligerent divide to reward non-co-ethnic war-winners with their ballots; instead they cast their votes for non-belligerent parties. In turn, incompatibilities and war outcomes determine post-war electoral performance of belligerent and non-belligerent parties across different types of wars.

I first define the key terms. I then walk through the different scenarios, highlighting a variety of cases to illustrate the paper's logic. Finally, I extract several observable implications which I test with cross-national data.

3 Key definitions

To define ethnic war, I adopt the classification of Cederman et al. (2010): wars are categorized as ethnic if they seek ethnic aims, predominantly recruit fighters among their leaders' own ethnic group, and forge alliances on the basis of ethnic affiliation.

I define war outcomes along a spectrum ranging from outright government victory (rebel defeat) to outright rebel victory (government defeat). In the middle are indecisive outcomes in which neither side wins the war outright, which I classify into two outcomes on the continuum. In the left-hand middle category, the war ends with the government winning the war, although the rebels' organization remains viable. I call this outcome 'relative government victory'. In the right-hand middle category are belligerents who end war at a draw or a 'mutually hurting stalemate'. These middle two categories might terminate in either (1) negotiated settlements that conclude the military behaviour of the parties through negotiated surrender (in cases of military asymmetry) or robust peace agreement (in cases of a draw), or (2) sustained ceasefires, truces, armistices, or some other mode of freezing that results in a cessation of hostilities and termination of military operations, but does 'not deal with the incompatibility' so as to resolve the underlying conflict (Daly 2022a: 23).

I define wars in which the incompatibility concerns the government as war over the 'type of political system, the replacement of the central government, or the change of its composition', following Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) coding. In contrast, in territorial rebellions, the *casus belli* concerns 'the status of a specified territory ... e.g., secession or autonomy' (Davies et al. 2024; Gleditsch et al. 2002). These tend to be fought by ethnically concentrated minorities against majority ethnic groups. They seek territory in which they can practice the right to self-determination and self-governance.

The paper focuses on democratic elections after war. It adopts Schumpeter's minimalist characterization of democracy: 'The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle

for the people's vote' (Schumpeter 1976: 260). Under this definition, countries in which there is 'free competition for a free vote' are designated as democratic. I therefore exclude contexts in which no elections were held after war. I also exclude cases of elections in one-party states (Schumpeter 1976: 271). While it is clear that electoral choice-less choices are made under conditions of autocracy, sham democracy, and extreme repression, I aim to explain why there are voluntary votes for belligerent parties, even in democratic elections with viable competition. Electoral intimidation, fraud, and coercion can no doubt account for some of the abundant votes for tormentors, but this paper's emphasis is not on these votes.

I define the *founding elections* as the first legislative, presidential, and regional elections following the termination of armed struggle. The paper is about electoral performance. I follow Lupu (2015) and define the outcome—*electoral success*—as receiving a plurality of the vote, winning the first round, or attracting no less than one-third of the winning vote share. The cross-national analysis explores performance in lower-house legislative elections, which take place in all political systems, and which present lower barriers to participation.

I adopt Sartori's definition of a political party as 'any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing, through elections (free or non-free), candidates for public office' (Sartori 1976: 56). I assume that there are two types of parties after war: belligerent parties and non-belligerent parties. Belligerent or civil war successor parties are the post-war parties representing the ideological and organizational characteristics of the war-time armed organizations. A *government belligerent successor party* is defined as a political party, group, or organization that possessed authoritative control over the state's coercive apparatus during the conflict. In some cases the government belligerent party is one that was active through the era of the conflict. In other cases it is a post-war party that formally adopts the name, programme, or mantle of the government's armed forces, or the party whose platform and membership are most closely associated with the government belligerent's side.

The *rebel* is defined as the armed opposition organization. A *rebel successor party* is the political party formed by or around the rebel belligerent. It may be a previously existing party that represented the rebels during the conflict. If no conflict-era rebel party existed, the rebel belligerent successor is the party that formally adopts the name, programme, or mantle of the rebels, or is the party whose platform or membership is most closely associated with the rebels.

Non-belligerent parties are conflict-era parties or organizations that did not have a coercive apparatus and did not participate in the armed conflict, or they are new parties that emerged after the war and whose platforms and memberships do not represent the war-time armies. Such non-belligerent parties may be, for example, non-ethnic parties, where the conflict pitted violent ethno-nationalist parties against each other. They may be parties espousing peaceful self-determination in contexts of violent secessionism. They may represent opposition to authoritarian or democratic regimes in wars with rebel movements aimed at state takeover. They may have served in governing coalitions but lacked control of the coercive apparatus. They may be a new governing party that ended the war's brutalities and ushered in peace and that now, as electoral incumbents, seek re-election in founding post-war contests. Their defining feature is that they did not take part in the war as belligerents and do not have blood on their hands. An empirical tendency is that they frequently are more moderate than belligerents, whose social bases were forged in the polarizing, radical-rewarding, and outbidding environment of war (Daly 2022a).

Following Chandra (2004), I define an ethnic party as ‘a party that overtly represents itself as a champion of the cause of one particular ethnic category or set of categories to the exclusion of others, and that makes such a representation central to its strategy of mobilizing voters’ (Chandra 2004: 3).

4 War type and electoral outcomes

This section examines how different war types and outcomes shape electoral dynamics in post-conflict societies. I first analyse wars fought over government control, then wars over territory, illustrating each with case studies that demonstrate the mechanisms at work. The key distinction is whether electorates remain unitary (in government-focused conflicts) or become bifurcated (in territorial conflicts), and how this affects political strategies and voter behaviour, depending on the war outcomes.

4.1 Wars fought over government control

Following wars fought over government, irrespective of the war outcome, the electorate remains unitary. This means that the rebel and government belligerent parties usually contest the *same* elections and face a *common, national* constituency. They may be able to win votes only from their co-ethnic, hardcore supporters but, usually, there exists a larger pool of co-optable or swing voters that they need to attract in order to gain electoral victory. This constituency may be carved up ethnically, but the allegiances usually vary from hardcore to co-optable. The voters that remain in play, potentially willing to cross the ethnic divide with their ballots, create incentives for belligerents to seek the votes of the ethnicities that they ignored or even victimized during the war. I argue that, following draws—such as those in Burundi, Angola, and Mozambique—the belligerent parties will be likely to share the vote across the ethnic demography and the parties’ success at convincing swing voters determines whether the vote is shared evenly or unevenly.

In cases of rebel victory—such as those in Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, and Liberia—and cases of government victory—such as those in Uganda and Sierra Leone—the electorate is similarly unitary. Given that the population will live under one government, to build legitimacy, prevent future conflict, and perform well against non-belligerent parties (which may have a good case to make with voters: arguing for their clean human rights records, and warning that belligerent parties will revictimize in the future), winning belligerents have incentives to reach across ethnic lines to seek the votes of those that they either ignored or victimized. I peruse various global contexts to illustrate this dynamic, peeking at the cases of Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Mozambique, and Iraq.

In Rwanda, the internecine violence included rebel Tutsi brutality against Hutus and extremist Hutu genocide against Tutsis, but also an extremist Hutu genocide against moderate co-ethnic Hutus who did not side with the radical Hutu belligerent. The rebel Tutsi-RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) won the war. Victorious, hegemonic, and with an incontestable hold on political power, it could have embraced its violent past, offered security only to co-ethnics, and sought the votes only of co-ethnics, even though the Tutsis were a minority in Rwanda. Instead, in the campaign for the 2003 elections, the RPF sought to win the support of security, moderate, and victimized Hutu voters. It strategized to spin the war-time atrocities as one-sided, committed *only* by the extremist Hutu genocidaires (Brehm and Fox 2017). At the same time, it opted to mitigate its own violence as justified by its provision of security and peace. This worked; the RPF became ‘credited by many Rwandans—Hutu and Tutsi

alike—with having ended the 1994 genocide’ (Meierhenrich 2006: 631). The RPF sought to translate its military success into a reputation for competence on future protection not only for Tutsis but also for Hutus. Lyons (2016: 176) writes of how, on the one hand, ‘the defeat of genocidal forces by the Rwandan Patriotic Front provided RPF substantial initial endowments of legitimacy’, while, on the other hand, its own past record of victimization against Hutus meant that ‘the perceived ethnic character of the RPF raised doubts among some [swing Hutus] about the nature of their new protectors’. To sell itself as a prospective restrained sovereign for the whole Rwandan population, including its former adversary ethnic group and victims (IHS Global Insight 2003), the RPF decided to play the constructivist card and stretch its constituency from just Tutsis to an overarching Rwandan identity. To do so, it promoted a ‘powerful’ brand of Rwandan ‘civic nationalism’, constructing and elevating a new identity of ‘national unity’ based on territory to supplant the war-time cleavage of ethnicity (Kalinaki 2003), a process rendered easier by the ruling party’s ability to ban discussions of ethnicity.⁶ The RPF also allowed a moderate Hutu to assume the post of interim president. Meanwhile, the RPF undermined perceptions of its opponents’ competence on security by claiming that they were prospective re-victims, likely to incite ethnic tensions and violence again. RPF commander and later president Paul Kagame explained that the people ‘wanted security first of all. Even people who didn’t know the RPF program in detail saw us as the party that would guarantee that [security]’ (Kinzer 2008: 229). As a result, albeit in only minimally democratic, post-war elections, the Tutsi-RPF gained the vast majority of its large number of votes from swing Hutus, who fuelled its electoral landslide.⁷

In other post-ethnic war contexts in which warring parties had fought and recruited along ethnic lines for ethnic aims, it appears that security and swing voters surprisingly also existed. Belligerent parties similarly sought to persuade voters of their ability to consolidate peace in order to capture these votes across ethnic lines. Depending on their war outcome, they succeeded.

In Burundi, for instance, the Hutu-dominated CNDD-FDD (The National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy) ‘presented the party as the guardian against any possible threat to the [population’s] security’. It sought to ‘guarantee the security of the country’s institutions in service to the *whole* Burundian nation’, not just that of the majority Hutus (The Canadian Press 2003), by establishing a ‘truly national army’ with equal participation by Tutsis and Hutus (Nindorera 2012: 15). For a sustainable end to the war, Burundi’s Hutus therefore voted nearly unanimously against their ethnic interests for quotas that would grant Tutsis—constituting only 15% of the population—half of the upper house of Congress and 40% of the lower house. In the 2005 elections, despite its past use of violence, Hutu belligerent successor party CNDD-FDD drew Hutu voters away from the non-belligerent FRODEBU (Front for Democracy in Burundi) party, and it also seems to have drawn some Tutsi voters—victims of that violence—to its side.⁸ According to a voter in Bujumbura, ‘For me this election means voting peace in the country’ (Niyoyita 2005).

In Liberia, convicted war criminal Charles Taylor’s NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia) ‘generated such brutality’, taking the lives of one-tenth and displacing one-third of the pre-war

⁶ Nation may, in public expression, have supplanted ethnicity but, given incentives to falsify public beliefs, this may not have trickled down into people’s lives and personal preferences (Kuran 1991).

⁷ Hutus constituted approximately 83% of Rwanda’s population (The Economist 2003).

⁸ CNDD-FDD won approximately 60% of the vote, FRODEBU 22%, and the Tutsi-dominated UPRONA 7.21% (International Foundation for Electoral Systems 2005).

population of 2.5 million (The Carter Center 1997). This violence was originally 'systematic and ethnically motivated', later becoming 'arbitrary' in nature (Gerdes 2015: 448). To appeal to the broad electorate in the founding post-war election of 1997, including ethnic groups he had terrorized, Taylor attempted to project the image of a patriot and nationalist, described in one banner as 'Father of the Liberian Revolution'.⁹ In trying to frame himself as all things to all men, he claimed Gola and Americo-Liberian ancestry, changed his middle name from Macarthur to Ghankay and, with elections looming, added another name, Jarkpana. Additionally, in late 1996, Taylor became a born-again Christian.¹⁰ He attracted votes across ethnic lines, albeit in an environment with a great deal of fear of coercion.

In Mozambique, the ideological war ended in stalemate, but with the governing party Frelimo enjoying the upper hand militarily. Frelimo cast blame on its rebel rival Renamo, sought to spin its own violence as justified, and emphasized its commitment to stability. Joaquim Chissano's 'party's programme aimed to create harmony among all Mozambican tribes by consolidating national unity' and centring on 'national reconciliation'. Chissano donned 'both the clothes of a Catholic priest and a Muslim religious leader' to cast a net over a broad constituency. Frelimo further sought to offset its past wrongs by pointing to its successes in achieving peace. Chissano expressed: 'Frelimo's mistakes had the weight of a feather while its achievements weighed far more than all the world's elephants'.¹¹ Frelimo's tactics proved successful; the party won 53% of the presidential vote in the founding post-war elections, even seemingly some cross-ethnic votes.¹²

Facing Frelimo and also non-coercive parties' message that 'Renamo only knew how to rule by weapons',¹³ Renamo displayed its commitment to the system and peaceful governance, arguing that it was the 'father of democracy'¹⁴ and the 'champion of democracy'. 'Other parties do not know what they are saying when they claim Renamo's hands are soiled with blood',¹⁵ Afonso Dhlakama, Renamo's presidential candidate, declared. 'I have saved the nation'.¹⁶ The party sought to expand its appeal to a broad electorate and signal restraint, offering posts to all tribes in an eventual Renamo government.¹⁷ Renamo secured 33.7% of the vote in the founding election, again with some votes across tribal lines.¹⁸

⁹ *West Africa*, 4 August 1997, quoted in Harris (1999).

¹⁰ *Africa Confidential*, 20 June 1997, quoted in Harris (1999).

¹¹ Radio Mozambique, Maputo, 9 October 1994, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'The Election Campaigns'

¹² It won 44% of the legislative vote.

¹³ Maximo Dias, presidential candidate for the Mozambican Nationalist Movement – Mozambican Social Democratic Party (Monamo-PMSD), Radio Mozambique, Maputo, 9 October 1994, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'The Election Campaigns', 12 October 1994.

¹⁴ Deutsche Presse-Agentur (1994).

¹⁵ TVM television, Maputo, 1800 GMT, 10 October 1994, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'The Election Campaigns', 12 October 1994.

¹⁶ Deutsche Presse-Agentur (1994).

¹⁷ TVM television, Maputo, 1800 GMT, 10 October 1994, cited in BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 'The Election Campaigns', 12 October 1994.

¹⁸ It won 37.7% of the legislative vote.

An additional example can be found in Iraq's 2018 elections. Despite fomenting a decade of sectarian conflict against Sunnis, Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's political list Sa'iroun (Moving Forward) and the Da'wa Shia sectarian party appealed across ethnic belligerent lines to Sunni voters. To do so, it ran on its effective fight against and victory over ISIS and on rebuilding war-torn social services (Jalabi and Georgy 2018). To render credible the party's political transformation from a protector of only Shias to a leader of all Iraqis, including Sunnis, Sadr established an unlikely alliance with communists and secular Iraqis, a costly move, to demonstrate to the public his formal renunciation of sectarian politics and his adoption instead of an overarching Iraqi civic nationalism (Al-Marashi 2018). Large numbers of Sunnis crossed ethnic lines and voted for this party. It received almost 30% of its votes from Sunnis and won the 2018 elections (Coker 2018; Kaltenthaler 2018).

4.2 Wars fought over territory

The situation is different following wars fought over territory. In these contexts electorates may become segregated or bifurcated, and swing voters may not cross ethnic belligerent lines with their ballots. Instead, for co-ethnics of war-losing armed groups, non-combatant parties constitute viable alternatives for voters, particularly compared to the war-losing parties or to crossing the ethnic divide to vote for the non-co-ethnic war winner. On the winning belligerent party side, co-ethnic non-belligerent parties who lack a history of war-time coercion still push the belligerent successors to reckon with their violent past and to make plausible promises that they will not revictimize in the future. In these cases how the war ends may influence whether voters choose a belligerent or instead a non-belligerent party. In other words, voters are likely to flock to a war winner (if co-ethnic), but to a non-belligerent party if their ethnic belligerent loses the war. Undecided voters seem to rarely cross ethnic lines in the founding elections following wars over territory, but they still swing between belligerent and non-belligerent (co-ethnic or multi-ethnic) parties; war outcomes matter to this decision.

I touch on several cases that illustrate this dynamic. The 1995 election in Croatia was called 'after Operation Storm, obviously with the intention of exploiting the military gains, ... [and] the advent of peace in 1995' (Matic and Ramet 2007: 47), and 'to capitalize politically on the Croatian Army's victories in retaking occupied territory' (CSE 1995: 1).¹⁹

Following the military defeat of Serb separatism in Croatia, many Serbs did not cross over belligerent (ethnic) lines to vote for the ethno-nationalist, Croat government belligerent successor party Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) (i.e. they did not augment the victor's vote share), yet they still voted *against* the vanquished (co-ethnic) Serb belligerent successor, reducing its share of the vote. These Serb voters instead 'supported non-ethnic parties, especially the SDP and the HSLs' (Social Democratic Party of Croatia [Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske] and Croatian Social Liberal Party [Hrvatska socijalno-liberalna stranka]), deeming these non-belligerent parties better able to secure the country's political future. 'It would be wrong to assume that members of the Serb ... communities uniformly support[ed] the political parties that claim[ed] to speak in their name' (CSCE 1995; instead,

¹⁹ The May invasion saw the HDZ's popularity increasing from about 32% to about 40% in newspaper polling. The August invasion saw a further jump in HDZ popularity, for the first time topping 50% through August and the first half of September. The HDZ used this opportunity to call early elections (Gagnon 2004: 170).

war outcomes—their ethnic side's military loss—guided whether they voted *against* their co-ethnic combatant parties and rather *for* non-combatant ones.

At the same time the war winner Croat-HDZ sought to appeal beyond its radical core supporters to undecided and opposition co-ethnic Croat voters who were more closely aligned politically with moderate, non-belligerent parties. Because these non-belligerent parties could raise 'human rights concerns related to [HDZ's] Operation Storm'—the ethnic cleansing that resulted in the death of 200,000 Serbs—HDZ opted to spin its violent past as justified and brandish its Leviathan credentials to appeal to these voters.²⁰ It did not, however, seek non-Croat votes; these were successfully pursued by non-belligerent Serb parties or multi-ethnic parties.

Croat victor HDZ's propaganda asserted that, 'We are forced to listen to the "theory" of common guilt, of two "sides in war"', and claimed that it was actually a 'Homeland War' of 'heroic defense' against one-sided terrorism. HDZ scapegoated all the 'murderous and destructive components' of the war on the Serbs.

A war of words took place through magazines, journals, newspapers, and books, as well as on television, the radio, and the internet. All modern means of communication were actively subordinated to the goals of ethnic nationalist leaders in Serbia and Croatia, seeking to promote revised images of their respective histories ... Images of Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian Moslem, and Kosovar Albanian genocides and 'holocausts' frequently appeared in the popular media, and the reader, listener, or internet surfer was berated with a continuous stream of material, all seemingly arguing the same thing: 'we are the victims first and foremost—our war is legitimate because we are fighting against annihilation'. (MacDonald 2003: 2).

The emphasis in the HDZ's discourse in this period was on the threats to innocent Croats and the bombing by Serb paramilitary groups of Croatian cities and cultural monuments (Gagnon 2004: 152).

The HDZ's own violence, although targeted disproportionately against non-co-ethnics, assumed atrocious forms and broadly impacted Croats too. It justified its violence with the boast that it had achieved war termination, the 'final defeat of the enemy'. HDZ 'succeeded in defending the territorial integrity of Croatia, and in this regard could legitimately claim to have led Croatia to victory in "the Homeland War"'. In the election campaign itself, the HDZ 'portrayed itself as bearing the sole responsibility for ... winning the war' and as capable of maintaining domestic security (Ramet and Goldstein 1990: 281).

HDZ campaign posters showed 'a newborn baby in the muscular arms of a Croatian bodybuilding champion' labelled, 'in the arms of a safe future' (Swain 1995).²¹ It 'hoped to capitalize on the success

²⁰ These observations are based on fieldwork conducted in Croatia and Bosnia, June–July 2019. Most quotations in this paragraph, unless otherwise noted, come from the museum exhibition, 'Dubrovnik during the Homeland War, 1991–1995', Empire's Fort, Dubrovnik. The exhibit includes over 500 original photographs, documents, and objects from the war.

²¹ Adoption of non-equilibrium electoral strategies seems to have engendered election results off the regression line in wars over autonomy. In Kosovo, for example, the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) carried the prestige 'of having led [and won] the war of liberation against Serbia', but nonetheless lost to non-belligerent LDK

in retaking the Krajina region in the campaign rather than have any genuine policy debates about the future course of the country', focusing narrowly on issues of peace and security (CSCE 1995: 15). 'The focus of the election was predominantly on the feeling of relief among Croatian citizens that the conflict was effectively behind them' (CSCE 1992: 16). The opposition parties were obliged to play along, focusing their campaigns on similar themes. (CSCE 1992: 16). Polling prior to the October 1995 elections confirmed the consistency of opinion: when asked to identify the top three problems in Croatia, 66.9% listed social justice and security, 48.6% listed lower unemployment; 44.5% listed ensuring individual rights and freedoms (Gagnon 2004: 170–1).

The HDZ's war win and electoral strategy earned it the support of many Croat swing and security voters, but not of non-Serb voters who moved away from their co-ethnic belligerent parties to non-combatant parties. According to Kasapović (1997: 273–4), the military politics—particularly the war outcome—directly influenced the civil politics in general: 'the content and the course of electoral campaigns, the electoral prospects of the ruling party and the opposition, the electoral preferences of the voters and the electoral results. In this way, the military politics indirectly influenced the parliamentary party system and the type of government in general'.

At the same time, rather than ethnic mistrust, 'those who called for respecting basic human rights of everyone who lived in Croatia regardless of nationality, or the right to cultural autonomy in Croatia, also remained high, at about 83 percent' (Gagnon 2004: 170–1,). Therefore, while HDZ won its hardcore ethnic supporters and some swing and security co-ethnics, a significant minority voted for non-belligerent and multi-ethnic parties in the founding post-war elections, defying a pure ethnic voting model.

Moving across the world, in Sri Lanka, after the LTTE's (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) military defeat, Tamils did not cross ethnic lines and choose to vote for the war-winning Sinhalese belligerent successor party. Instead they cast their votes for non-belligerent, co-ethnic Tamil TNA (Tamil National Alliance) (however, no successor party to the belligerent Tamil emerged to contest the elections). Sinhalese swing and security voters, meanwhile, did shift disproportionately to the Sinhalese government combatant party, the United People's Freedom Alliance, which had been indiscriminately violent (mostly against Tamils), and thus rewarded the government's military victory and security provision despite its ethnic violence.

In wars over territory that end not in government victory (like those in Croatia and Sri Lanka) but instead in a draw, belligerent successor parties become likely to share the vote, squeezing out non-belligerent parties. In this sense we would expect voting to occur along ethnic lines. In Bosnia, for example, under stalemate, in the 1996 Parliamentary and Presidential Elections, while 49 political parties participated, the belligerent Party of Democratic Action (Bosniak), Serb Democratic Party, and the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina dominated the elections. These three parties reflected the continuation of belligerent ethnic politics in post-war Bosnia. In fact one could say that the elections boil down to what Benjamin Reilly calls 'ethnic-style census-voting' (Reilly 2006: 815). The election in Bosnia was not about the economy, education or unemployment. While the consociational institutions also have been blamed for having 'a centrifugal effect and promoting ethnic parties as the building blocks of the system' (Touquet 2011:455), stalemate made the belligerent

(Democratic League of Kosovo [Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës]) in the founding elections because KLA's successor (PDK) failed to moderate, stretch its constituency, or signal restraint (International Crisis Group 2001).

parties equally competent on peace and security, with convergent strategies to compete in the elections, and with little reason to reach across ethnic lines. Thus ‘the elections resemble an ethnic census and those politicians playing the ethnic card perform best’ (Du Pont 2000: 302).²² Non-belligerent parties, including the United List, a joint ticket grouping five multi-ethnic opposition parties that spanned the political spectrum from liberal, Western-trained intellectuals to former communists, proved relatively uncompetitive, as did the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia, consisting of 65% Bosniaks, 20% Serbs, and 15% Croats (Vuletić 2007).

Finally, at times, territorial wars end in rebel victory: successful secession. In this (rarer) set of cases, the electorate becomes not singular but *bifurcated*. In such cases the rebels’ co-ethnics significantly bolster the rebel victors’ electoral fates (for example, Fretilin in Timor Leste and South West Africa People’s Organisation in Namibia), while co-ethnics of the government belligerent appear, on average, less likely to cast their ballots for rebel successors to that belligerent and vote instead for non-belligerent parties (such as Namibia’s Democratic Turnhalle Alliance). In such contexts the voters only swing so far (and not across ethnic lines) and belligerent parties do not face a shared and unitary electorate after mass violence is violated but must contend with segregated and multiple electorates across new international borders.

5 Cross-national analysis

Building on this theoretical framework, I test two key hypotheses using original, cross-national data:

H1: War victors (both rebel and government) will receive higher vote shares than losers across both ethnic and non-ethnic wars, as victory enhances perceived competence on security.

H2: Belligerent successor parties will perform worse following territorial conflicts than in those fought over government control, as territorial conflicts create bifurcated electorates with less voter crossover.

The logic underlying these hypotheses derives from the unitary versus divided electorate mechanism. In conflicts fought over state takeover, unified electorates create incentives for belligerents to appeal across ethnic lines, potentially winning votes from groups they previously victimized. In territorial conflicts, bifurcated electorates mean voters more rarely cross ethnic divides, limiting belligerents’ ability to expand support beyond core constituencies.

To evaluate these implications, I analyse cross-national data on belligerent successor party performance. I use the Civil War Successor Party dataset, which traces successor parties of all belligerents—rebels and government—that transitioned from civil conflict between 1970 and 2015. It determines the founding elections following the termination of their armed struggles and records the legislative vote share of the successor parties. This results in a dataset of 205 civil war belligerents across 57 different states (Daly 2021).

²² The ethnic rallying call is clear when one sees that ‘the election itself was effectively presented as ... an opportunity for the people of Republika Srpska to demonstrate their faith in the SDS, its leaders and in particular the indicted war criminal Radovan Karadzic’ (International Crisis Group 1996).

The primary outcome of interest is the legislative vote share of belligerent successor parties in the first post-conflict elections. This variable captures the extent of electoral support for parties with roots in war-time armed organizations. Following the classification of Cederman et al. (2010), conflicts are coded as ethnic if they seek ethnic aims, predominantly recruit fighters from leaders' ethnic group, and forge alliances on ethnic affiliation. Using the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) coding, I distinguish between conflicts fought over government control and those fought over territory (secession or autonomy).

To capture war outcome, I employ data from the UCDP dataset on conflict termination and create an ordinal variable with the UCDP outcome variable which ranges from 0 (government victory) to 3 (rebel victory). 'No activity' (a rebellion that petered out) assumes a value of 1, and conflicts that ended in 'peace agreements/ceasefire' I coded as 2 (Daly 2022a).

I control for several confounders. One, *war-time violence*: the cost of war in human lives is found to influence stable termination likelihood (Mason et al. 2011; Walter 2004). I use a relative atrocities index capturing whether belligerents used severe civilian abuse forms—'massacres; scorched earth campaigns; cleansing of a particular ethnic or religious group; or deliberate bombing and shelling of civilian targets'—or instead made 'deliberate efforts to avoid attacking civilian targets' (Stanton 2016: 67). Two, I control for *veto players*. Cunningham (2006) demonstrates that more veto players make bargaining more challenging and wars longer. I use his count of such veto players in war. Three, I control for *development levels*. Economic development is posited to aid post-war democratization (Fortna and Huang 2012), while higher development correlates with sustainable peace (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Walter 2004). I include in the analyses the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) indicators for logged gross domestic product per capita (*e_migdppln*). Four, I control for *democracy scores* as democratic rights may further help prevent war recurrence (Walter 2004). Specifically, I include the V-Dem clean election index (*v2xel_frefair*) (Lindberg et al. 2014). Five, I control for *power-sharing* as formal power-sharing arrangements may facilitate conflict termination by enabling internal guarantees of the peace terms. I use the Peace Agreement Dataset's *shagov* variable (Högbladh 2011), indicating the presence of such power-sharing provisions.²³ Finally, I include a variable, *UN intervention*, derived from Brancati and Snyder (2012),²⁴ because intervention may provide external guarantees to ease the commitment problem, enabling the actors to end their armed struggles (Fortna 2008; Gilligan and Sergenti 2008; Howard 2008; Walter 2002). Intervention is also posited to render elections and successor parties more likely, because belligerents' participation in politics has become part of the UN's peacebuilding recipe (United Nations Peacebuilding Commission 2009).

5.1 War outcomes and post-war politics

As the dependent variable, this research uses the valid vote share of a successor party. My main specifications use ordinary least squares. A number of countries in the dataset have experienced

²³ For missing cases, I use data on political power sharing from Hartzell and Hoddie (2015) and the Power-Sharing Event Dataset (Ottmann and Vüllers 2015).

²⁴ The variable captures whether and how the UN intervened, through mediation, observation, peacekeeping, or enforcement.

multiple civil wars. I account for the non-independence of these observations within countries by presenting robust standard errors clustered on the country unit.

As displayed in Figure 1, the cross-national data reveal a robust positive relationship between favourable war outcomes and electoral performance following ethnic conflicts. Notably, this correlation is nearly indistinguishable from the pattern observed in non-ethnic conflicts. This finding supports the theoretical expectation that war outcomes significantly shape electoral performance regardless of conflict's ethnic character. Victorious parties—whether in ethnic or non-ethnic conflicts—successfully leverage their military success to build electoral support, often by casting themselves as competent security providers. The similar patterns across ethnic and non-ethnic conflicts suggest that the security competence mechanism operates consistently across different conflict contexts.

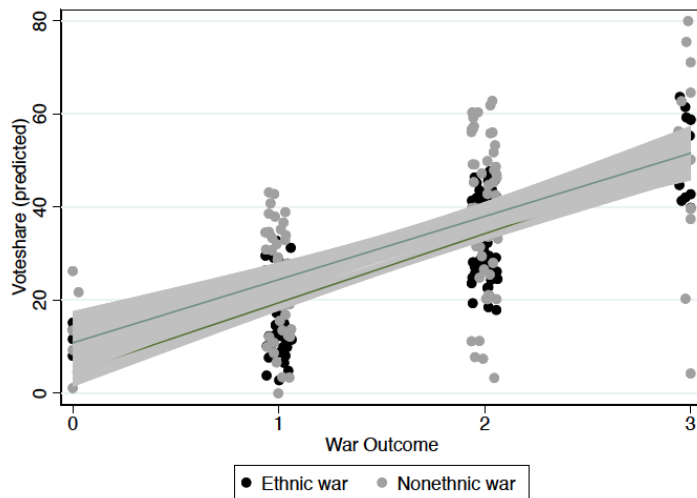
5.2 War incompatibility and electoral performance

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between war outcomes and vote share across conflicts fought over government control versus territory. The results demonstrate that, while the positive relationship between favourable war outcomes and electoral performance holds in both conflict types, important differences emerge in the magnitude of support. The lower average performance of belligerent parties in territorial conflicts supports the hypothesis that bifurcated electorates in these contexts limit belligerents' ability to expand beyond their core ethnic constituencies. This finding aligns with the illustrative case studies presented earlier showing that voters in territorial conflicts rarely cross ethnic belligerent lines with their ballots. Instead, co-ethnics of losing belligerents tend to support non-belligerent parties rather than crossing over to support non-co-ethnic winners.

These findings enhance our understanding of post-conflict electoral dynamics by demonstrating that, beyond ethnic identities, strategic considerations stemming from war outcomes and conflict incompatibilities significantly shape political behaviour. While ethnicity remains important, particularly in territorial conflicts, voters respond to security considerations and make strategic choices based on war's aftermath.

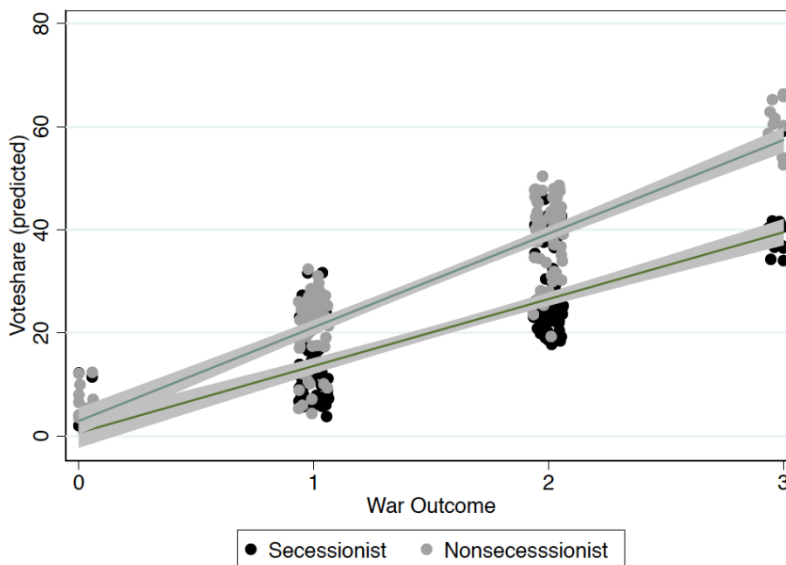
Furthermore, the data reveal that belligerent parties' electoral strategies—whether to seek votes across ethnic lines or focus on core constituencies—may be shaped by structural factors emerging from the conflict itself. This helps explain variation in ethnic voting patterns across post-conflict contexts without resorting to primordial explanations of ethnic identity.

Figure 1: War outcomes and vote shares in founding elections following ethnic and non-ethnic conflicts



Source: author's compilation.

Figure 2: War outcomes and vote shares in founding elections following wars fought over territory (secessionist) and government (non-secessionist)



Note: the war outcome variable is reversed for government belligerents such that *war outcome* ranges from defeat (0) to victory (3) for all observations.

Source: author's compilation.

6 Conclusion

This paper has examined the complex dynamics of political life after ethnic wars, focusing on how societies navigate toward stability and reconciliation through post-war elections. While previous research has illuminated the effects of violence on civic engagement and political participation, this

study addresses a crucial knowledge gap regarding who victimized populations vote for and why, particularly in the immediate aftermath of ethnic conflicts.

The central argument advanced here is that two factors—the nature of the violent incompatibility (government control versus territory) and military outcomes (victory, defeat, or stalemate)—fundamentally shape post-war electoral dynamics. In government-focused conflicts, the electorate remains unitary, creating incentives for winning belligerents to reach across ethnic lines and appeal to voters they previously victimized. In territorial conflicts, electorates become bifurcated, with voters rarely crossing ethnic divides; instead, they choose between co-ethnic belligerent and non-belligerent parties based on the war outcomes.

The cross-national evidence strongly supports these theoretical expectations. War outcomes consistently predict electoral performance, with victors receiving significantly higher vote shares than losers across both ethnic and non-ethnic conflicts. However, belligerent successor parties perform worse following territorial conflicts than government-control conflicts, confirming the importance of the unitary versus bifurcated electorate mechanism. The illustrative case studies further demonstrate how these mechanisms operate in diverse post-conflict settings.

These findings significantly advance our understanding of post-conflict politics in several ways. First, they challenge primordial views of ethnic identity by demonstrating that violence does not inevitably harden ethnic divisions. Instead, institutional settings and strategic considerations stemming from conflict outcomes can facilitate cross-ethnic voting under certain conditions.

Second, this research offers a synthesis of institutional and interest-based explanations of ethnic politics. The findings acknowledge that formal institutions (like electoral systems) matter but demonstrate that another factor is also strongly important: the legacies of conflict itself. Specifically, whether a war was fought over government control or territory creates distinct patterns of voter accessibility and incentives for parties. These conflict-produced structures help explain when voters prioritize security and economic interests over ethnic identity, and when ethnic voting remains entrenched despite institutional design efforts to discourage it.

Third, the chapter reveals an important but underappreciated mechanism in post-conflict democratization: the relationship between military performance and perceived governance competence. War victors transform battlefield success into electoral advantage by positioning themselves as capable security providers, a dynamic that operates consistently across different conflict types (Daly 2022a).

Several promising areas for future research emerge from this study. First, additional work should explore parties' political strategies for reckoning with violent pasts and positioning to secure countries' futures across different contexts. This requires more fine-grained disaggregated data on individual preferences and behaviour, particularly examining how citizens of different ethnicities vote and how victims and non-victims vote.

Second, longitudinal studies tracking voting patterns and political engagement over extended periods would reveal whether initial post-war behaviours persist or evolve over time, shedding light on the durability of war's political legacies.

Third, research should investigate how inter-group relations are affected by post-war political developments. Do certain electoral outcomes exacerbate inter-group tensions, or can they improve relations between previously conflicting ethnic groups?

Fourth, future work should examine the role of international actors and interventions in post-ethnic war politics. How do foreign aid, peacekeeping missions, and diplomatic efforts impact political stability and reconciliation trajectories?

Fifth, given the importance of narrative control in the case studies, further research should analyse media and information dissemination in post-conflict electoral processes, examining how narratives about the violent past influence voter choices and political outcomes.

The study of political life after ethnic war remains vital for understanding democratic development in divided societies. By highlighting how conflict incompatibility and war outcomes structure electoral dynamics, this research contributes to both scholarly debates and practical efforts to promote peace, stability, and meaningful reconciliation in the aftermath of devastating ethnic violence.

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