Self-Enforcing Power Sharing in Weak States

Philip Roessler and David Ohls

Abstract Power sharing, in which elites from rival societal groups agree to share control of the central government, is a key source of domestic peace, enabling states to escape devastating cycles of exclusion and civil war. Yet the conditions giving rise to inclusive governance are not well understood. In contrast to existing scholarship that emphasizes the importance of external third-party mediation or strong formal institutions, we point to the structural roots of power sharing in which political inclusion stems from the distribution of societal power and the balance of threat capabilities it produces. Only when both the ruling group and a given rival group possess strong mobilizational capabilities, such that each could credibly threaten to recapture state power if excluded from the central government, does self-enforcing power sharing emerge. A strong rival induces the ruler to commit to power sharing and to reluctantly accept coup risk over civil war risk. The ruling group's own threat capabilities, in turn, constrain rivals from trying to convert their share of power into absolute power. Supported by extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence with particular reference to weak states in sub-Saharan Africa, we shed light on the conditions under which the distribution of violence within a state underwrites a peaceful and productive equilibrium. In doing so, we rethink how scholars approach the study of civil war. Rather than conceiving of it in terms of effective resistance, we model civil war as a contest for state power shaped by groups' capabilities to project force in the capital.

Violent ethnic conflict has been one of the key causes of mass killing, economic underdevelopment, regional instability, and interstate conflict in the world since World War II.[1] Such conflicts are particularly concentrated in weak states that lack effective institutions to regulate the distribution of power and broadcast authority.[2] But not all weak states are plagued by ethnically based civil wars. In some, large-scale political violence has been averted or managed through power sharing in which rival groups agree to share control of the state.[3] Understanding the sources

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1. Gleditsch, Salehyan, and Schultz 2008; Gurr 2000; Harff 2003; Salehyan 2009.
2. Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hironaka 2005.
3. Horowitz 1985; Lijphart 1977; Rothchild 1997; Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009.

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of durable power sharing is important to address the scourge of civil war—the dominant mode of political violence in contemporary international affairs.

Existing research tends to focus on the importance of either formal institutions[4] or external third-party intervention.[5] While both factors can serve to reduce uncertainty, most power-sharing regimes since World War II have emerged without external intervention, and in most weak states informal institutions have greater influence than formal ones.[6]

In such quasi-anarchical environments in which societal groups cannot rely on strong institutions or external actors to enforce power sharing, the distribution of power is ultimately determined by the threat of force.[7] Rivals must be able to credibly threaten a rebellion that would oust the ruler should he reject or violate power sharing.[8] But herein lies a paradox: the threat of force is necessary to hold rulers accountable and sustain power sharing but, because it can also be abused by rivals to grab and monopolize power for themselves, the shadow of violence can incite the very exclusion it seeks to deter. When does the threat of force lead to a peaceful and productive equilibrium underwritten by power sharing and when does it merely reproduce the exclusion-conflict cycle? Addressing this question is critical to understanding the foundations of political order. We argue that the roots of peaceful power sharing lie in the distribution of societal power. In contrast to the international relations literature in which the study of the balance of power has been central to theories of conflict and cooperation under anarchy,[9] the link between threat capabilities and war has been largely undertheorized in the comparative politics literature.

We argue that the threat of force acts as a credible deterrent against exclusion when it is backed up by strong societal power in which a given rival group possesses the mobilizational potential to credibly threaten to recapture state power from its societal base *if it is excluded from the central government*—what we describe as a group's *threat capabilities*. Unless a group possesses strong threat capabilities, the ruler faces minimal constraints from excluding that group and appropriating its share of power for himself and his co-ethnics. However, for power sharing to be self-enforcing, the ruling group similarly must possess strong threat capabilities—otherwise a rival group will face few constraints from exploiting access to the central government to appropriate the ruling group's share of power.

In the absence of strong institutions to regulate self-enforcing power sharing, mutually strong threat capabilities transform the choices made in response to the coup/civil war trap that plagues weak, ethnically divided states.[10] Strong rivals commit to power sharing to avoid mutually costly civil wars, but in turn such arrangements open the

4. Lijphart 1977; Magaloni 2008; Norris 2008.
5. Hartzell and Hoddie 2007; Walter 2002.
6. Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Reno 1998.
7. North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009; Svolik 2012.
8. Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Boix and Svolik 2013; Svolik 2012.
9. Copeland 2000; Powell 1999.
10. On the coup/civil war trade-off in weak, ethnically divided states, see Roessler 2011, 2016.

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door to future coups d'état. Under such conditions, interethnic power sharing is more likely, and violent contestation for power—when it does occur—takes the form of coups that lead to a change in executive authority but do not significantly disrupt the relative distribution of political power.

We empirically test these theoretical expectations both qualitatively and quantitatively, focusing on sub-Saharan Africa from independence to 2013. We expect the distribution of societal power to have a particularly important effect on power sharing in postcolonial Africa given the "strong societies and weak states" political order that has emerged after decolonization.[11] Unable to rely on strong formal institutions to regulate society, political structure and societal peace hinges on a ruler's ability to strike alliances and share power with "Big Men" embedded in rival ethnic groups.

Quantitatively, we use data from the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) 2014 data set[12] and a compatible geo-referenced data set, GeoEPR,[13] to develop a parsimonious operationalization of threat capabilities derived from a group's ethnic geography—its location and size as a proportion of the population—with the expectation that the larger and the closer to the capital city a group is, the more likely its members can credibly threaten to take power if excluded from the central government. Statistical analysis of 233 politically relevant ethnic groups in forty sub-Saharan African countries demonstrates that ethnic power sharing is most likely when the ruling group and a nonruling group possess strong threat capabilities. Strikingly, this is the case despite an elevated risk of coups. In contrast, when the threat capabilities of either the ruler or the rival are weak, rulers are more likely to reject power sharing. This strategy is effective at coup-proofing the regime from ethnic rivals but at an increased risk of civil war.

Qualitatively, we employ a diverse case-selection approach to explore the dynamics of ethnopolitical bargaining, coups, and civil war across different distributions of societal power. The logic of self-enforcing power sharing accounts for the puzzling historical pattern seen in Ghana and Benin where ethnic rivals traded executive power via coups yet no one group sought to monopolize power and coup-proof their regimes using ethnopolitical exclusion. This stands in stark contrast to Sudan, Liberia, and South Africa where rulers and their co-ethnics chose policies of ethnopolitical exclusion to monopolize their hold on power, leading to civil war.

In this paper we advance existing knowledge on power sharing and on civil war in several important ways. First, we offer a novel theory of self-enforcing power sharing, explaining how rival groups in weak states can credibly commit to divide economic rents and political power in a quasi-anarchic environment. While there has been a substantial literature linking civil war to the inability of societal rivals

11. Migdal 1988.
12. Vogt et al. 2015.
13. Ibid.; Wucherpfennig et al. 2011.

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to commit to share power,[14] how groups in weak states overcome this challenge remains a key puzzle. Prior work either emphasizes exogenous policy solutions—external third-party mediation[15]—or attributes power sharing to formal institutions without accounting for why elites are willing to constrain their power in the first place.[16] We diverge from this and instead offer an internal, structural theory of power sharing that links it to the distribution of societal power and the balance of threat capabilities between ethnic rivals.

Second, we incorporate the study of civil war into a broader framework that considers the competing risks rulers face to their hold on power. Civil war studies, especially the study of ethnic-based conflict, continue to be dominated by a focus on grievances or opportunity structure,[17] often failing to consider how rulers assess competing threats and why they are unable to simply increase concessions in the face of an aggrieved population and weakened capacity to repress.[18] A bargaining framework is essential to address these questions.[19]

Third, this bargaining approach leads us to challenge the conventional view of civil war as a form of "effective resistance"[20] in which guerillas win by not losing.[21] We conceive of groups mounting peripheral insurgencies holed up in distant mountainous terrain as possessing low threat capabilities; they are tolerated exactly because they are weak. The fact that most theories of civil war draw from this stylized version of a guerilla army is problematic because it reveals a selection problem in the study of civil war—inferences are drawn disproportionately from observable (i.e., weak) insurgencies because those groups with the greatest potential to wage violent opposition are compensated to not do so.[22] Reconceptualizing civil war as a contest for state power, rather than as simply conflicts in which the opposition is able to avoid defeat at the hands of the government, shows that (in contrast to the conventional wisdom) strong threat capabilities underwrite peace, not conflict, because they constrain the ruler from reneging on power sharing. This represents a departure from some power-parity theories of interstate conflict that suggest equal capabilities worsen information asymmetries, thus increasing the risk of bargaining failure and war.[23] While parity may obscure who will triumph in war, the high mutual costs

14. Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Horowitz 1985; Posen 1993; Roessler 2011; Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009.

15. Hartzell and Hoddie 2007; Walter 2002.

16. Lijphart 1969; Magaloni 2008.

17. Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013; Collier, Hoeffler, and Rohner 2009; Gleditsch and Ruggeri 2010.

18. Fearon 2010.

19. For earlier applications of the bargaining approach to ethnic-based conflict, see Cetinyan 2002; Fearon 1995. See also the recent contributions by Francois, Rainer, and Trebbi 2015 and Wucherpfennig, Hunziker, and Cederman 2016, which posit that rulers are strategic in their use of power sharing and target groups with greater conflict potential.

20. Sambanis 2004.

21. Kissinger 1969.

22. This is a key insight that Cetinyan 2002 makes.

23. Reed 2003. On power parity and war, see also Kugler and Lemke 1996; Organski and Kugler 1980.

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of achieving such an outcome will be readily apparent. This will be particularly the case in the intrastate context, where decisive victory is unlikely to be achieved short of militarily vanquishing the opposing side. The shadow of total war thus pushes both sides to choose ethnic accommodation.

Fourth, this theoretical framework helps account for why large, weak states such as Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Chad, and Ethiopia are particularly prone to ethnic exclusion and civil war—a problem particularly acute in sub-Saharan Africa.[24] Big states tend to contain a greater number of distant groups with accordingly low threat capabilities that lack the ability to hold the ruler accountable for violating power sharing.

The Problem of Power Sharing in Weak States

Power sharing entails the joint participation of elites of two or more rival groups in a governing coalition in which both sides agree to parcel out the rents that come from control of the state and each refrains from using force to grab a larger share of power.[25] This implies two necessary conditions. First, the leader in power must choose to bring a given rival into the government. Rather than attempt to rule the country unilaterally, keep potential opposition at arm's length, and extract all of the rents accompanying dominant control of the state apparatus, the ruler must prefer accommodation and accept the costs and risk of giving rivals positions of some power. Second, the rival group, once invited to participate in the central government, must accept its share of power and refrain from leveraging its privileged position to attempt to overthrow the government to gain absolute power.

In accounting for power sharing, extant research tends to focus on the role of formal institutions and external third-party mediators. The institutional approach emphasizes the importance that formal rules, such as consociational arrangements,[26] and political organizations, such as parties and legislatures,[27] play in helping to regulate the distribution of power. Such institutions guarantee minorities representation in government, constrain rulers, and increase transparency, reducing fear and misperceptions about opponents' intentions. External approaches view third-party enforcers, which can both help to forge a political agreement and coerce or sanction rivals if they

24. Clapham 1996; Green 2012.

25. We primarily employ a dyadic framework to analyze ethno-political bargaining to capture the primacy of bilateral ties in weak states, given underlying institutional and structural conditions that enable leaders to use divide-and-rule policies and selective incentives to inhibit the emergence of reliable inter-ethnic coalitions. Acemoglu, Verdier, and Robinson, 2004; Arriola 2012. In the online appendix we relax this assumption and analyze alternative specifications that model cross-group and coalition dynamics to take into account the potential relevance of the broader strategic environment. Treisman 2004; Walter 2009. Consistent with our dyadic framework, we see no evidence that levels of extant power sharing or assuming stable coalitions alter the importance of the balance of threat capabilities.

26. Lijphart 1969, 1977; McGarry and O'Leary 1993.

27. Boix and Svolik 2013; Gandhi and Przeworski 2006; Magaloni 2008.

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renege on the political agreement, as necessary to overcome the commitment problem.[28] These represent important contributions to the study of peacemaking in ethnically divided states, but leave several puzzles unresolved. Empirically, most power-sharing regimes since World War II have emerged without external intervention, and in many weak states politics is defined by personalistic rule with limited formal institutionalization.[29]

In the absence of third-party intervention and strong institutions, what sustains power sharing? One of the few measures that groups can employ to hold each other accountable is the threat of violence.[30] However, the problem with violence as a tool of deterrence is it can also be used for offensive purposes—to not only protect one's share of power but to usurp the power of others.[31] Following from Hobbes, this represents the fundamental barrier to the emergence of political order.[32]

Analogous to the interstate security dilemma, the inability of rival factions to credibly commit not to use force to lock in a larger share of power is a key source of instability in weak states. In weak, ethnically divided states this commitment problem gives rise to a coup/civil war trade-off.[33] The lack of administrative capacity to broadcast power over their territory and citizens forces weak state rulers to strike alliances with rivals to extend the reach of the regime and prevent societal-based rebellion. But bringing one's rivals to the center of power is risky because it lowers the costs they face to seize power for themselves in a coup d'état.[34] When rulers are uncertain of their rivals' commitment to power sharing and fearful of losing sovereign authority they can employ ethnopolitical exclusion in a bid to consolidate their hold on power. Although this may lead to civil war, under certain circumstances rulers see armed rebellion from outside their government as a lesser threat than a coup from within. This model is consistent with the outbreak of a number of prominent civil wars such as the Biafran War, the Rwandan genocide, and successive civil wars in Afghanistan, as well as contemporary conflicts in South Sudan, Syria, and Iraq.[35]

28. Hartzell and Hoddie 2007; Walter 2002.

29. Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Jackson and Rosberg 1982. In sub-Saharan Africa, about 47 percent of nonruling groups are included in the central government. Yet in countries that have signed an externally brokered peace agreement in the previous year, the level of inclusion is around 27 percent. This suggests that external intervention targets countries with higher levels of ethno-political exclusion and that those countries that have avoided war through power sharing have been able to do so without intervention, despite the weakness of formal institutions. (Peace agreement data are from Högbladh 2012.)

30. Svolik 2012. Wantchekon notes that the "most important element of a constitution is that it depends for its enforcement … on sanctions and incentives internal to the political system." 2000, 344.

31. Jervis 1978.

32. Hobbes 1986 (1651).

33. Roessler 2011, 2016.

34. Coups and rebellions are distinguished by the organizational basis of the anti-regime technique. Coup conspirators leverage partial control of the state resources and materiel in their bid to capture political power, whereas rebels or insurgents lack such access and build a private military organization to challenge the central government and its military.

35. Hirsch and Smith 2014; Luckham 1971; Prunier 1995; Robinson 2012; Roessler 2013; Rubin 2002. South Sudan, Syria, and Iraq provide direct examples of rulers choosing to violate or reject power sharing

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Yet this outcome is not ubiquitous. In some weak states, ruling groups have consistently chosen power sharing—despite an elevated (and sometimes realized) risk of coup.[36] What accounts for whether rival groups choose, and are able to sustain, power sharing in the shadow of the coup d'état?

Threat Credibility and the Origins of Self-Enforcing Power Sharing

Balance of Power and Inclusive Governance

Political exclusion is an instrument for the consolidation of power. In denying rivals access to the central government and increasing the costs they face to seize power, exclusion is a means for rulers to strengthen short-term regime security[37] and maximize their control of rents. We would expect such a strategy, however, to be conditional on a rival's mobilizational potential.[38] The stronger a potentially excluded group's capacity to recapture state power from its societal base, the less appealing such a policy becomes. If pursuing ethnic dominance at the cost of civil war necessitates an expensive counterinsurgency campaign with no guarantee of success, the benefits of exclusion dissipate and may no longer outweigh the costs. Thus an outside group's societal power and threat capabilities—the coercive capacity it has independent of what it might gain from any role in government—represent the key levers it has to hold the ruler accountable if he attempts to reject or violate power sharing.

The ruler's commitment to power sharing, however, is not just a function of another group's threat capabilities but also of his own group's societal power. Unless the rival faces the same constraints as the ruling group, such that it too would face a strategically costly civil war if it tried to monopolize power after a coup, there is little preventing it from exploiting access to the central government to appropriate the ruling group's share of power. Thus, for power sharing to be self-enforcing, such that neither group has incentives to exclude the other, the costs of reneging on power sharing must constrain not just the incumbent, but constrain *in expectation* any actor that may seize power in the future. Only when both sides see little strategic benefit to choosing exclusion will each reluctantly accept power sharing. Thus, balances of power are necessary to discourage either side

with an important rival social group as a means to protect their own hold on power, at the price of large-scale political violence.

36. Roessler 2011 offers evidence that power sharing increases coup risk among included groups.

37. Exclusion from the central government does not wholly negate the possibility of orchestrating a coup—one could try to execute a coup remotely by allying with those in the military or key strategic points within the government. But it does make it much more difficult by increasing the coordination costs anti-regime elements face.

38. Cetinyan 2002; Francois, Rainer, and Trebbi 2015; Wucherpfennig, Hunziker, and Cederman 2016.

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from attempting to seize total control as well as to reassure both sides that the other is unlikely to do so. While parity can exacerbate information asymmetries and uncertainty about who would ultimately prevail in war,[39] in an intrastate context in which neither side can retreat to its sovereign territory, politically eliminating or neutralizing one's rival is unlikely to be achieved short of complete military conquest. The readily apparent mutual costs of such a total war will encourage ethnic accommodation.

The presence of mutually strong civil war capabilities—and the shadow of total war—does not *resolve* (initially, at least) the commitment problem at the heart of the coup/civil war trap. Without agreed-upon rules or institutions regulating the distribution and transfer of sovereign power, elites embedded in each group are still vying to control the executive (and gain the international recognition and rents that come with it), and anticipate their rivals have the same intentions. This can lead to political instability and increase coup risk.[40] Under such conditions, however, rival groups reluctantly choose to attempt power sharing and may trade executive authority via coups—which do not significantly alter the relative distribution of power—rather than accept the high mutual costs associated with a war for exclusive control of the state.

This is a striking and counterintuitive implication of the theory: mutually strong threat capabilities induce rulers to accept coup risk over civil war risk. Why would authoritarian rulers adopt a strategy that brings about such high individual political risks? This seemingly goes against a number of seminal studies on political survival that suggest the opposite: authoritarian rulers, in an effort to secure their political and physical survival, have few qualms about using exclusion and other strategies that may be in their personal interest but bring about devastating costs for their citizens and the state, such as economic crises, international conflict, civil war, and state collapse.[41]

To account for this, it is important to distinguish between the interests of the ruler and interests of the ruling group in which the ruler is embedded (and upon whose support the ruler depends to stay in power).[42] While rulers may prefer to use exclusion to substitute coup risk for civil war risk to protect their personal hold on power, under conditions of mutually strong threat capabilities this offers little political or strategic advantage for the ruling group as a whole, whose relative share of power is secured by its societal power but also constrained by the strength of its rival. Consequently, in the face of a devastating civil war—the costs of which would be borne by the group's members—the ruling group is unlikely to support the ruler's rejection of power sharing in a bid to consolidate his personal hold on power.

39. Reed 2003.
40. Harkness 2014; Horowitz 1985.
41. Bates 2008; Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Chiozza and Goemans 2011; Reno 1998; Roessler 2011.
42. North, Wallis, and Weingast 2009.

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However, the same does not hold for weak groups that lack the capabilities to reclaim power once displaced from the central government. For these groups, the ruler's and the group's interests are better aligned. A coup from their stronger rivals threatens not only the individual ruler's position but also the group's relative share of power since it lacks the strength to deter the new ruling group from monopolizing power. Under these conditions, both the ruler and the ruling group favor exclusion and are more willing to accept the costs that come along with it.

Rethinking Civil War

In conceiving of civil war as an instrument of deterrence and lever of political accountability, we diverge from existing scholarship on the subject. Most studies equate civil war with insurgency, which Fearon and Laitin define as "a technology of military conflict characterized by small, lightly armed bands practicing guerrilla warfare from rural base areas."[43] The success of an insurgency is often measured based on a group's ability to effectively resist the government—that is, inflict at least a minimal level of costs while avoiding defeat.[44] As Henry Kissinger famously quipped, "the guerrilla wins if he does not lose."[45] Equating civil war with armed insurgency has led scholars to focus on those conditions that "render insurgency more feasible and attractive"[46] and make it hard for the government to effectively defeat the insurgents. Such factors include distance from the capital, sanctuary in neighboring countries, mountainous terrain, and ethnic group concentration.[47]

We instead conceive of civil war as a contest for state power between the central government and an organized, armed opposition movement. Rebellion is the lever a given rival employs, or threatens to employ, to gain a share of power and rents. A group's civil war capability, then, is its potential capacity to contest for control of state power in a dynamic and uncertain bargaining environment. This approach suggests a different conception of capabilities than is conventionally used in the civil war literature. We expect groups located in remote, mountainous areas far from the capital to pose a weaker, not stronger, civil war threat. Although these factors make it difficult for the government to project power over such groups, they also inhibit the use of force in the opposite direction, constraining the group's ability to challenge the center. In contrast, we expect large groups, located closer to the capital, with control over valuable resources and economic markets, to have the greatest capacity to credibly threaten to seize control of the central government and thus lock in a share of power.

43. Fearon and Laitin 2003, 75.
44. Sambanis 2004.
45. Kissinger 1969, 214.
46. Fearon and Laitin 2003, 75.
47. Buhaug, Cederman, and Rød 2008; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Salehyan 2009; Weidmann 2009.

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Balance of Threat Capabilities and Power Sharing: Hypotheses

We argue that strong threat capabilities produce durable (though sometimes fluid) power sharing in which rivals prefer inclusion—even when it risks trading power via coups—to engaging in mutually costly civil wars for absolute power. This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1: When both the ruling group and rival group have strong threat capabilities, the rival is included in the central government, reducing civil war risk but increasing coup risk.

When groups have asymmetric threat capabilities, however, self-enforcing power sharing is significantly less likely. While both sides may wish to divide rents and avoid costly conflict, the power differential undermines any agreement.

Most obviously, a weak group bargaining with a strong ruling group lacks the threat capabilities to hold the ruler accountable if it violates the terms of a deal. The stronger group's inability to credibly commit itself to not exploit its greater bargaining leverage induces the weaker group to stay on a war footing or face political irrelevance. This increases the likelihood of protracted conflict.[48]

Additionally, because the weak group's low civil war capabilities render them unlikely to be able to reclaim power if they lose access to the central government, they are more likely to approach political bargaining as a one-shot game and adopt extreme policies (e.g., coup attempts followed by consolidating power in a repressive ethnocracy) to hold on to power at all costs. This further drives a strong group toward exclusion because it sees the marginal costs of a relatively less-threatening civil war as being significantly lower than the marginal costs of a coup. This leads to our second hypothesis:

H2: When the ruling group's threat capabilities are high and the rival group's are low, the rival is excluded from the central government, reducing coup risk but increasing the risk of civil war.

Similar dynamics lead a weak ruling group to universally reject power sharing with either a strong or a weak competitor. Again, the breakdown of power sharing arises from the weak group's limited threat capabilities and thus their political vulnerability. When bargaining with another weak group, neither side possesses the mobilizational potential to hold the other to account if they renege on power sharing. Consequently, both have strong incentives to eliminate the other from state power before they themselves are eliminated, leading to ethnic exclusion and civil war. This leads to our third hypothesis.

48. Fearon 1995; Walter 2002.

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H3: When the ruling group's threat capabilities are low and the rival group's are also low, the rival is excluded from the central government, reducing coup risk but increasing the risk of civil war.

When the competing group is strong, a weak ruling group faces a more acute dilemma. Power sharing puts the stronger rival in a position to usurp power in a coup, likely leading to the permanent exclusion of the weak group. But employing exclusion to prevent such an outcome provokes a strategically costly civil war. Both are bad outcomes, but losing power through civil war is seen as more uncertain than in a coup in which its rival already controls a significant share of the state. This leads to our fourth hypothesis.

H4: When the ruling group's threat capabilities are low and the rival group's are high, the rival is excluded from the central government, reducing coup risk but increasing the risk of civil war.

Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical predictions and how they align with H1–H4.

	Strong Rival	**Weak Rival**
Strong Ruling Group	**H1: Power sharing and societal peace (despite high coup risk)** *Power sharing*: Yes *Coup risk*: High *Civil war risk*: Low	**H2: War-prone ethnocracies** *Power sharing*: No *Coup risk*: Low *Civil war risk*: High
Weak Ruling Group	**H4: Repressive minority rule (or unstable power sharing)** *Power sharing*: No *Coup risk*: Low *Civil war risk*: High	**H3: Unstable, violent, exclusionary regimes** *Power sharing*: No *Coup risk*: Low *Civil war risk*: High

FIGURE 1. *Threat capabilities, self-enforcing power sharing, and coup and civil war risk*

Quantitative Empirical Evidence

To assess the threat-capabilities theory of power sharing, we focus our analysis on the subset of states in sub-Saharan Africa. While we expect the argument to apply to all

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weak states with strong, spatially concentrated societal groups, sub-Saharan Africa provides a set of comparable states that meet these criteria, with consistent societal data on access to state power[49] as well as the ethnicity of those groups launching rebellions and executing coups.[50]

There are two primary reasons we would expect the theory to be particularly relevant to African states. First, the "strong societies and weak states" problem is a defining characteristic of the political order that emerged after decolonization.[51] Unable to rely on strong state structures to broadcast power, rulers have needed to strike power-sharing deals with ethnic rivals.[52] Second, politics in postindependence Africa has centered almost completely on control of the central government. The decision by African heads of states at the founding of the Organization of African Unity in the early 1960s to accept the inviolability of colonial state borders has contributed to strong norms and institutions against state partition, reducing the viability of exit as a policy response to marginalization or discrimination compared to other regions in the world.[53] Consequently, even the most peripheral groups have had to target control of the central government as a means of addressing their material grievances.[54]

To test our main hypotheses, we estimate models of interethnic power sharing, coups, and civil war using the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) 2014 data set of ethnic groups in forty African states from 1946 to 2013.[55] The EPR data set draws from a survey of country experts to provide information on the inclusion or exclusion of politically relevant ethnic groups in central governments across countries in which ethnicity is politically salient. Because it does not restrict its analysis to only cabinet posts but also to representation within the executive and the military (depending on its de facto power in a given country), it captures well the actual power structure. Since the theory is about the interaction between the ruling group and a given rival group, the unit of analysis is a given incumbent group/nonincumbent group dyad-year, with models including all politically relevant ethnic groups in relation to the ruling group. Ruling groups are those identified as being politically dominant, or having the most politically powerful status (generally, though not always, this corresponds to the ethnic group of the executive).[56]

49. Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009.
50. Roessler 2011.
51. Englebert 2002; Herbst 2000; Migdal 1988.
52. Rothchild 1986, 1997.
53. Englebert and Hummel 2005.
54. An increase in support for secession by revisionist neighboring states would change the bargaining dynamics by strengthening the power of peripheral groups, though potentially at the cost of increasing risk of interstate war as seen between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977 and 1978.
55. Vogt et al. 2015. We use EPR 2014 available at <https://icr.ethz.ch/data/epr/>. Alternative models showing similar results with EPR 3.0 are provided in the online appendix. Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009.
56. When there are multiple senior partners in government, we code whichever group controls the executive as the ruling group. For a list of ruling and nonruling groups by country-year, see the online appendix.

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Because we are interested in whether particular binary outcomes do or do not occur, we use a logistic regression specification with standard errors clustered by country to account for nonindependence of ongoing political relationships within states. To account for temporal dependence within outcomes, each model includes the cubic polynomial of the dependent variable to approximate the hazard.[57]

Variables

There are three dependent variables of interest. The first, ethnic power sharing, is operationalized using a measure of whether a given nonruling group was included in a governing coalition in that year. The dichotomous variable, ETHNIC POWER SHARING, takes a value of 1 if the nonruling group was included in government (coded as monopoly, dominant, senior partner, or junior partner) and a 0 if it was not (coded as regional autonomy, separatist, powerless, or discriminated).[58]

The second dependent variable, successful coup, identifies whether members of a given group were key conspirators in a successful coup attempt that year.[59] The dichotomous variable, SUCCESSFUL COUP, takes a value of 1 if there was at least one successful coup and 0 if there was not.

The third dependent variable, group rebellion, identifies whether members of a given ethnic group initiated a major armed rebellion or insurgency against the central government in a given year.[60] The dichotomous variable, GROUP REBELLION, takes a value of 1 if members of the group launched a rebellion in a given year and 0 if not.

To proxy threat capabilities, we develop a measure based on two factors that determine a group's mobilizational potential to threaten the central government. First, the larger the size of a group, the more popular power it can wield and the larger the rebellion or uprising it can mobilize.[61] To measure this, we use the group's proportion of the state's total population—GROUP SIZE.[62] Second, the more proximate a group is to the center of power, the lower the mobilizational costs necessary to seize

57. Carter and Signorino 2010.

58. We model ethnic power sharing as an incidence variable (that is, we do not drop ongoing years of inclusion) to capture the dynamic and continuous nature of political bargaining.

59. Coup data from Roessler 2011, updated through 2013.

60. This measure captures the year a significant number of members of a given group became involved in a civil war with a minimum of 1,000 battlefield deaths. Roessler 2011. We have updated the data through 2013. We also estimated models using measures of low-level group rebellion onset from ACD2EPR 2014 in Vogt et al. 2015, with substantively similar results.

61. However, one barrier to mobilization that larger groups face more acutely than smaller ones is stronger collective action problems. Although not an insignificant obstacle, we nonetheless expect that (all else equal) representing a larger share of the population increases, rather than decreases, a group's capacity to take control of the central government. In other words, the benefits of a broad societal base outweigh the greater difficulties of coordination. To the degree this assumption is incorrect, it should introduce bias against our expected findings, and thus does not undermine the interpretation of the results.

62. Vogt et al. 2015.

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control of the state apparatus. To measure this, we calculate the CENTROID DISTANCE in kilometers between the capital city and the centroid of the ethnic group's homeland.[63] These variables are normalized[64] and the distance data are reversed so larger groups and closer groups have higher values. We then take the arithmetic mean of the distance and size variables to create a continuous THREAT CAPABILITIES variable that ranges from 0.03 (least threatening) to 0.97 (most threatening).[65] The variable RULER THREAT CAPABILITIES measures the capabilities of the ruling group for a given year using the same approach.

Using this coding of rival and ruling group threat capabilities, we construct our key independent variable—the BALANCE OF THREAT CAPABILITIES between the ruling group and a given competitor. For ease of interpretation, and because we do not expect the joint effect to necessarily be continuous,[66] the balance-of-threat-capabilities measure is captured through four interaction dummy variables (following Figure 1) based on whether the ruling group and a given rival have threat capabilities scores above or below the median for all groups in sub-Saharan Africa.[67] Not surprisingly, LH dyads are least common, while HH and HL dyads (where the ruling group is strong) are most common, as reported in Figure 2.

To evaluate the effect of these various configurations of balance of threat capabilities on power sharing, coups, and civil war, we estimate specifications containing

63. Results are nearly identical when using the minimum distance between the capital and the group's territory, as shown in the online appendix. For the geocoded EPR groups, see Vogt et al. 2015; Wucherpfennig, Hunziker, and Cederman 2011. One dimension missing from this variable that warrants further analysis is how overlapping ethnic homelands and ethnic homogeneity may affect mobilizational capabilities.

64. Because size is measured as a group's proportion of a given country's total population, it is essentially already normalized. Distance is normalized by an absolute distance for all groups in the sample (the furthest distance between any group's centroid and a capital city, which happens to be the Makonde-Yao in Mozambique and Maputo). As we explain, we normalize distance the same for all groups across the continent to reflect the absolute nature of projecting power across space. In the online appendix, we rerun the results using distance normalized at the country level (the distance between the capital and the furthest group in a given country). The results are generally similar, though slightly weaker across most models.

65. The median value of THREAT CAPABILITIES across all ethnic groups in our data set is 0.48. The median values of GROUP SIZE and CENTROID DISTANCE are 0.1 and 348, respectively.

66. What matters in expectation is not only the relative threat capabilities of the ruler and potential competitor but, when threat capabilities are asymmetric, which has the stronger threat capabilities. A pure continuous interaction term does not allow us to unpack this categorical effect. In addition, it would inaccurately label asymmetric dyads with one exceptionally strong side as having mutually high threat capabilities.

67. We use the continent median of threat capabilities to construct these quad categories rather than a country median to reflect the fact that power projection is a function of both absolute and relational attributes. Whereas size is relational (because any group's size of the population is inversely related to other groups in the country), the logistics of overcoming distance are more absolute (a group's ability to project power in the capital across a fixed distance is not affected by the distance other groups must traverse). Using a common cut point for distance allows for the possibility that in some countries, especially large ones, most or all groups have low threat capabilities while in others, especially small countries, most or all groups have high threat capabilities. Whereas this points to country size as an important determinant of threat capabilities, we show in the online appendix that the results are robust to controlling for country area or precolonial population density and trade—two factors that Green 2012 finds account for the size and shape of African states.

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	Strong Rival	Weak Rival
Strong Ruling Group	HIGH-HIGH (HH) THREAT CAPABILITIES *N*= 2,655 *Proportion of dyads:* 36%	HIGH-LOW (HL) THREAT CAPABILITIES *N*= 3,115 *Proportion of dyads:* 42%
Weak Ruling Group	LOW-HIGH (LH) THREAT CAPABILITIES *N*= 630 *Proportion of dyads:* 8%	LOW-LOW (LL) THREAT CAPABILITIES *N*= 1,054 *Proportion of dyads:* 14%

FIGURE 2. *Distribution of ruling group/rival group dyads by balance of threat capabilities across sub-Saharan Africa, independence to 2013*

a number of control variables that account for alternative explanations of these outcomes:[68]

- GDP PER CAPITA: income-level and state capacity; (lagged) natural log of GDP per capita in that state-year.[69]
- LOG COUNTRY POPULATION: population size; (lagged) natural log of the total population of the state.[70]
- NUMBER OF ETHNIC GROUPS: country's ethnic diversity; number of politically relevant ethnic groups at independence.[71]
- INSTITUTIONALIZED REGIME: institutionalization of political power and the stabilizing effects of party rule; dummy measure of whether a given country is governed by a constitutionally based regime (single-party, multiparty, or full democracy) versus military government.[72]
- FORMER FRENCH COLONY: France's proactive and interventionist foreign policies in their former colonies;[73] dummy measure of a whether a given country was a former French colony.
- COLD WAR: increase in externally brokered power-sharing governments in Africa since the end of the Cold War; dummy measure of whether the year is after 1990.

68. Unless specified, variables come from the EPR 2014 data set.
69. Feenstra, Inklaar, and Timmer 2015.
70. Ibid.
71. In the online appendix we also test for the effect of a country's variation in elevation and land quality, which Michalopoulos 2012 finds is an important determinant of social fractionalization.
72. Magaloni 2008; Magaloni, Chu, and Min 2013.
73. Clapham 1996.

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- PASTCOUP: a dummy variable indicating if members of a given group had launched a successful coup in the past;[74]
- PASTCONFLICT: a dummy variable indicating if members of a given group had launched a large-scale rebellion in the past;
- ONGOING REBELLION: ongoing civil wars; whether there is an ongoing rebellion in the country in the previous year.[75]
- YEAR: time trends; the year.

Results

The statistical results provide strong support for our central argument that mutually strong threat capabilities promote power sharing. The models estimate the likelihood that members of a given *nonruling group* are: included in the central government (Table 1); lead conspirators in a successful coup (Table 2); or significant participants in initiating or joining an armed rebellion (Table 3). Since HH dyads are of primary theoretical interest, we estimate models isolating this type (with all others combined as the reference category) as well as models including all other types individually (with HH omitted as the reference category).[76]

As Table 1 shows, our first hypothesis is broadly supported. HH dyads are significantly more likely to feature interethnic power sharing (models EP-1, EP-3, and EP-5). In contrast, HL and LL dyads are statistically significantly less likely to lead to inclusion when compared to HH dyads (models EP-2, EP-4, and EP-6). Consistent with the theorized bargaining dynamics, this suggests a group's inability to credibly threaten the center reduces horizontal accountability and an equitable distribution of power. Only two other variables are found to have a robust effect on power sharing: INSTITUTIONALIZED REGIME and the YEAR. The former suggests that institutionalized regimes can support power sharing even under conditions of unfavorable ethnic geography, whereas the latter suggests that more governments have become more amenable to power-sharing regimes over time. Both of these dynamics require further analysis to disentangle how weak states can escape adverse societal balances of power. The origins of institutionalized regimes, especially under disadvantageous power configurations, remain poorly understood.

The second part of the argument posits that while mutually strong threat capabilities produce self-enforcing power sharing, they merely shift, rather than resolve, the coup/

74. McGowan 2003.
75. Roessler 2011 updated through 2013.
76. Because we are interested in the balance of threat capabilities and the influence this has on the strategic relationships, rather than the individual threat capabilities of specific groups themselves, we do not include the separate, continuous-threat-capabilities variables in the specification. Including these individual capabilities scores for both ruling and rival groups in robustness models does not affect the statistical or substantive results for our variables of interest. Models including HL, LH, and LL indicators with HH as the omitted reference category provide results that are mathematically equivalent to, and easier to interpret than, an interaction specification including the HH category and separate indicators for high threat capability status of ruling and rival groups.

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TABLE 1. *Balance of threat capabilities and the likelihood of ethnic power sharing*

	EP-1	*EP-2*	*EP-3*	*EP-4*	*EP-5*	*EP-6*
HH THREAT CAPABILITIES	1.22***		0.62***		0.62***	
	(0.35)		(0.21)		(0.22)	
HL THREAT CAPABILITIES		−1.44***		−0.70***		−0.67**
		(0.46)		(0.26)		(0.26)
LH THREAT CAPABILITIES		−0.26		−0.02		−0.11
		(0.45)		(0.34)		(0.35)
LL THREAT CAPABILITIES		−1.18***		−0.78***		−0.94***
		(0.40)		(0.27)		(0.30)
LOG GDP PER CAPITA					0.22	0.23
					(0.14)	(0.14)
LOG COUNTRY POPULATION					0.06	0.08
					(0.08)	(0.08)
NUMBER OF ETHNIC GROUPS					0.03	0.04
					(0.05)	(0.05)
INSTITUTIONALIZED REGIME					0.80***	0.77***
					(0.27)	(0.28)
FORMER FRENCH COLONY					0.63*	0.59*
					(0.33)	(0.32)
COLD WAR					−0.48	−0.46
					(0.37)	(0.38)
YEAR					0.04***	0.04***
					(0.01)	(0.01)
t			−2.10***	−2.09***	−1.85***	−1.84***
			(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.14)
t^2			0.10***	0.10***	0.09***	0.08***
			(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
t^3			−0.00***	−0.00***	−0.00***	−0.00***
			(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
constant	−0.56	0.65	4.44	5.05	−83.20	−83.86
	(0.34)	(0.23)	(0.37)	(0.34)	(24.79)	(25.07)
N	7404	7404	7404	7404	7127	7127
states	40	40	40	40	38	38
pseudo r^2	0.06	0.07	0.76	0.76	0.77	0.78

Notes: This table reports logistic regression estimates. The sample includes all politically relevant nonruling group-years in forty countries in Sub-Saharan Africa from independence (or 1946 for older states) through 2013. The dependent variable is whether the group's representatives were represented in the central government at the Junior Partner level or above (EPR 2014). THREAT CAPABILITIES independent variables (HH, HL, LH, LL) indicate whether the ruling group and the given nonruling group, respectively, are above (high) or below (low) the median threat capabilities for the full sample. Cubic polynomials of time since last power sharing (t, t^2, t^3) are included to account for temporal dependence. Standard errors are clustered by country and statistical significance is denoted by $*p < .10$; $**p < .05$; $***p < .01$.

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TABLE 2. *Balance of threat capabilities and the likelihood of successful coup*

	SC-1	*SC-2*	*SC-3*	*SC-4*	*SC-5*	*SC-6*
HH THREAT CAPABILITIES	1.77***		1.59***		1.15*	
	(0.59)		(0.59)		(0.63)	
HL THREAT CAPABILITIES		−2.84***		−2.73***		−2.28**
		(0.82)		(0.83)		(0.91)
LH THREAT CAPABILITIES		−0.32		−0.13		−0.33
		(0.60)		(0.59)		(0.63)
LL THREAT CAPABILITIES		−1.76***		−1.33**		−0.89
		(0.68)		(0.53)		(0.67)
LOG GDP PER CAPITA					−0.40	−0.50
					(0.34)	(0.35)
LOG COUNTRY POPULATION					−0.14	−0.16
					(0.20)	(0.19)
NUMBER OF ETHNIC GROUPS					−0.14	−0.09
					(0.10)	(0.10)
INSTITUTIONALIZED REGIME					0.71	0.70*
					(0.43)	(0.42)
FORMER FRENCH COLONY					0.29	0.21
					(0.39)	(0.40)
COLD WAR					−0.01	−0.00
					(0.85)	(0.87)
YEAR					−0.05*	−0.05*
					(0.03)	(0.03)
PAST COUP					1.48***	1.29**
					(0.51)	(0.52)
t			−0.28***	−0.29***	−0.22**	−0.23**
			(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)
t^2			0.01**	0.01**	0.01***	0.01***
			(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)
t^3			−0.00**	−0.00**	−0.00**	−0.00***
			(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
constant	−6.27	−4.50	4.49	−2.87	103.35	104.20**
	(0.53)	(0.26)	(0.72)	(0.41)	(59.46)	(58.91)
N	7415	7415	7415	7415	7137	7137
states	40	40	40	40	38	38
pseudo r^2	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.11	0.13	0.14

Notes: This table reports logistic regression estimates. The sample includes all politically relevant nonruling group-years in forty countries in Sub-Saharan Africa from independence (or 1946 for older states) through 2013. The dependent variable is whether the group carried out a successful coup. THREAT CAPABILITIES independent variables (HH, HL, LH, LL) indicate whether the ruling group and the given nonruling group, respectively, are above (high) or below (low) the median threat capabilities for the full sample. Cubic polynomials of time since last successful coup (t, t^2, t^3) are included to account for temporal dependence. Standard errors are clustered by country and statistical significance is denoted by *p <.10; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

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TABLE 3. *Balance of threat capabilities and the likelihood of civil war onset*

	CW-1	*CW-2*	*CW-3*	*CW-4*	*CW-5*	*CW-6*
HH THREAT CAPABILITIES	−0.88**		−0.88**		−0.77**	
	(0.43)		(0.43)		(0.39)	
HL THREAT CAPABILITIES		0.73		0.70		0.53
		(0.54)		(0.54)		(0.44)
LH THREAT CAPABILITIES		1.05**		1.11**		1.07**
		(0.50)		(0.49)		(0.47)
LL THREAT CAPABILITIES		1.16**		1.20***		1.12**
		(0.45)		(0.43)		(0.51)
LOG GDP PER CAPITA					−0.65***	−0.68***
					(0.21)	(0.19)
LOG COUNTRY POPULATION					0.04	0.01
					(0.17)	(0.17)
NUMBER OF ETHNIC GROUPS					−0.06	−0.04
					(0.09)	(0.11)
INSTITUTIONALIZED REGIME					−0.25	−0.17
					(0.45)	(0.40)
FORMER FRENCH COLONY					−0.05	−0.13
					(0.54)	(0.54)
COLD WAR					−0.96	−0.95
					(0.83)	(0.82)
YEAR					0.04	0.04
					(0.03)	(0.03)
ONGOING REBELLION					0.35	0.35
					(0.73)	(0.68)
PAST CONFLICT					−0.32	−0.33
					(0.61)	(0.61)
t			−0.06	−0.07	−0.10	−0.10
			(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
t^2			0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
t^3			−0.00	−0.00	−0.00	−0.00
			(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
constant	−4.51	−5.39	−4.10	−4.97	−83.00	−77.27
	(0.25)	(0.38)	(0.46)	(0.68)	(53.71)	(55.44)
N	7422	7422	7422	7422	7144	7144
states	40	40	40	40	38	38
pseudo r^2	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.06

Notes: This table reports logistic regression estimates. The sample includes all politically relevant nonruling group-years in forty countries in Sub-Saharan Africa from independence (or 1946 for older states) through 2013. The dependent variable is whether the group initiated a major armed rebellion or insurgency against the central government. THREAT CAPABILITIES independent variables (HH, HL, LH, LL) indicate whether the ruling group and the given nonruling group, respectively, are above (high) or below (low) the median threat capabilities for the full sample. Cubic polynomials of time since last rebellion onset (t, t^2, t^3) are included to account for temporal dependence. Standard errors are clustered by country and statistical significance is denoted by $*p < .10$; $**p < .05$; $***p < .01$.

civil war trap that plagues weak, ethnically divided states. Strong rivals commit to power sharing even as it opens the door to future coups d'état. Relative to the prospects of a mutually costly civil war if any side was to try to rule unilaterally, trading power via coups is a preferable outcome. The ruling group knows that should a rival successfully seize control over the executive office, it will nonetheless be unlikely to risk civil war and will be forced to restore power sharing in the future, resulting in a marginal rather than absolute shift in rents from power. Table 2 shows that, consistent with this expectation, we find that successful coups are statistically significantly more likely in ethnic dyads characterized by mutually high threat capabilities (models SC-1, SC-3, and SC-5), particularly compared to HL dyads (models SC-2, SC-4, and SC-6).[77]

The final set of models tests the effect of the balance of threat capabilities on civil war risk. We expect the inverse of the results from the coup models: as strong rivals share power and accept coup risk, they reduce the likelihood either side will choose to militarily challenge the state from outside of the central government. Thus, we expect armed rebellion to be more likely in dyads in which at least one bargaining partner is weak because rulers see exclusion as a means to increase the costs their rivals face to displacing them from power. As Table 3 shows, the results support this expectation. The balance-of-threat-capabilities variables are generally statistically significant and have the (expected) opposite signs: HH dyads are negatively associated, and other dyads positively associated, with the onset of rebellion.[78]

The findings are substantively important as well. Figure 3 reports predicted probabilities of ETHNIC POWER SHARING, SUCCESSFUL COUP, and GROUP REBELLION (from Models EP-6, SC-6, and CW-6) using the Clarify statistical software and keeping all control variables at representative levels.[79] The substantive results align closely with the expectations presented in Figure 1. For dyads in which the ruling group and a given rival possess threat capabilities above the median of all groups in the sample, the likelihood of the rival group being included in the central government is approximately 63 percent, compared to 35 to 40 percent in HL and LH dyads. Meanwhile, coup risk in HH dyads is six-fold higher than in HL dyads and twice as high as in LL dyads, and civil war risk in HH dyads is lower than other types by one half to two thirds. The substantive results also illustrate the strategic

77. Coups are very infrequent in LL dyads as well, consistent with our theoretical expectations. The only coup in an LL dyad was the assassination of Laurent-Désiré Kabila in 2001. Given the low number of LL dyads, however, this result tends to be more sensitive to model specification choices than HL dyads.

78. The slightly less robust statistical significance in the civil war models may be a result of a non-monotonic effect of mobilizational capabilities on actual civil wars. Up to a point, greater ability to launch a civil war presumably makes a rival group more likely to do so, but beyond that threshold (we theorize) they are threatening enough to be included, and thus their likelihood drops.

79. King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000. These predicted probabilities are generated setting all control variables to their mean values and omitting the cubic polynomial variables from these calculations because their extreme right skew leads to distorted (unrealistically low) predicted probabilities of all outcomes when included. The relationship of interest is consistent regardless of values chosen for other variables: HH dyads are more likely to feature power sharing and coups, and less likely to feature civil war onset.

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	Strong Rival	Weak Rival
Strong Ruling Group	**H1:** P(POWER SHARING): 62.9% P(SUCCESSFUL COUP): 0.6% P(REBELLION): 0.4%	**H2:** P(POWER SHARING): 35.3% P(SUCCESSFUL COUP): 0.1% P(REBELLION): 0.7%
Weak Ruling Group	**H4:** P(POWER SHARING): 55.8% P(SUCCESSFUL COUP): 0.4% P(REBELLION): 1.1%	**H3:** P(POWER SHARING): 39.9% P(SUCCESSFUL COUP): 0.3% P(REBELLION): 1.2%

FIGURE 3. *Predicted probabilities of power sharing, coups, and armed rebellion*

challenges that arise in LH dyads: weak ruling groups bargaining with stronger groups face both elevated coup and civil war risk.

Summary

Overall the quantitative evidence offers strong support for a threat-capabilities theory of power sharing,[80] which brings a new perspective to old debates on balance of power, bargaining, and war. In contrast to economic theories that predict rulers should prefer to share power with small, weak groups to maximize their control of rents,[81] or power-parity theories that predict an equal distribution of power increases the risk of war as a result of greater uncertainty about who will ultimately win,[82] we find that

80. The empirical results hold when subjected to a number of robustness tests and sensitivity analyses (see online appendix) including: alternative construction of threat-capabilities measure (employing geometric mean and using a group's minimum distance to capital city); controlling for cross-group or coalition effects (i.e., the effect of other groups being included or excluded in the central government); employing alternative measures of ethnic geography (using Fearon's 2003 data set on ethnic diversity, combined with ethnic geographic data taken from Ethnologue maps) to ensure the results are not an artifact of EPR's identification of group boundaries; limiting the analysis to only those ethnic configurations that exist at the end of colonial rule to mitigate endogeneity concerns about the effects of postcolonial political bargaining on ethnic configurations; controlling for determinants of country shape and size and social fractionalization; controlling for colonial type and transnational ethnic kin; controlling for cross-cutting nonethnic social cleavages between groups; and using all coup attempts instead of successful coups in coup models.

81. Bates 1983.

82. Reed 2003.

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strong rivals—as measured by their capabilities to project power in the capital city—are significantly more likely to share power. Notably, this holds despite the fact that power sharing also brings an elevated coup risk.

In contrast, when a rival is weak and unable to credibly hold the ruler to account for reneging on power sharing, exclusion results. This significantly lowers coup risk, though at the cost of a higher risk of civil war, especially when the ruling group is weak. Rulers seem to calculate that the strategic benefits of ethnopolitical exclusion outweigh the strategic costs, and are willing to tolerate the potential threat of an armed rebellion. For weak ruling groups bargaining with strong groups, they are between a rock and a hard place—both power sharing and exclusion are dangerous because they leave the government vulnerable to coups and strong civil wars, respectively. The empirical record suggests weak groups employ a mix of strategies—some favor exclusion and others inclusion—each of which has high costs. Consequently, these dyads experience both high coup risk (nearly on par with HH dyads) but also high civil war risk (on par with LL dyads).

Qualitative Empirical Evidence

The quantitative evidence suggests systematic support for the effect of the balance of societal power on ethnopolitical bargaining. To further substantiate our four hypotheses, we now turn to qualitative evidence. Figure 4 identifies representative regime types consistent with our four hypotheses. To explore the full range of predictions, we employ a diverse case-selection method—drawing on typical cases from each

	Strong Rival	Weak Rival
Strong Ruling Group	**H1: Power sharing and societal peace (despite high coup risk)** Examples: Benin (1965–1968; 1991–1996) Ghana (1957–present) Kenya (1963–present)	**H2: War-prone ethnocracies** Examples: Ethiopia (before 1991) Mali (1960–present) Sudan (1956–present)
Weak Ruling Group	**H4: Repressive minority rule (or unstable power sharing)** Examples: Guinea-Bissau (1974–1980) South Africa (before 1994) Ethiopia (after 1991)	**H3: Unstable, violent, exclusionary regimes** Examples: Zaire/DRC (1960–present) Chad (1980–present) Liberia (1980–1998)

FIGURE 4. *Balance of threat capabilities and power sharing in Africa*

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quadrant.[83] While these cases do not in themselves constitute a definitive test, they are able to illustrate the theorized causal mechanisms in action.

H1: High-High (HH) Threat Capabilities—Ghana and Benin

In countries where multiple groups with strong threat capabilities dominate politics, we expect consistent, if uneasy, power sharing. Although any one group may prefer to dominate the central government, its ability to do so is constrained by the strategic costs and benefits of exclusion. Ghana and Benin represent two cases in which the main axis of political competition has been between strong ethnic groups (based on their size and proximity to the capital). Both countries are relatively small in area (below the median for Africa) and are divided between four relatively large ethnic or ethno-regional blocs,[84] giving each substantial societal power and making it challenging for any one group to rule alone.

In both cases control of the state and its associated rents largely played out between elites embedded in these rival groups who mobilized their co-ethnics in a bid to maximize their power vis-à-vis their rivals. Despite the existence of formal party structures, this dynamic often played out through informal or personalist channels.[85] The high-stakes contest between ethno-regional rivals for control of state power made politics in Benin and Ghana similar in kind to many other weak states. The difference lay in their rulers' inability to employ ethnopolitical exclusion as a means to lock in state power, thus creating vulnerability to coups d'état from ethnic rivals. In fact, both countries experienced five successful interethnic coups (in which at least some of the conspirators hailed from a different ethnic group than the head of state) in the first decades after independence.

This is not to suggest that some rulers did not try to structure their regimes along ethnic lines in a bid to consolidate power. But when they did, consistent with our theory, we see evidence that such a policy provoked popular mobilization from a strong rival which, raising the specter of civil war, reversed ethnic exclusion. A paradigmatic example of this is found in Benin in the first few years after independence. Benin's inaugural president, Hubert Maga, hailed from the Northern group[86] and formed an unstable alliance with various leaders from the south. As these alliances frayed because of political conflicts between rival ethnic elites, Maga moved to consolidate his hold on power by promoting "northerners in

83. Seawright and Gerring 2008.

84. In Benin, the EPR data set identifies the key groups as: Northern (15 percent of population), Southwestern (15 percent), Southeastern (18.5 percent), and South/Central (33 percent of population). In Ghana, the four largest groups are Ewe (13 percent of population), Asante (Akan) (15 percent), Northern Groups (23.5 percent), and Other Akans (34.5 percent). A fifth group, the Ga-Adangbe (8 percent), is also politically relevant.

85. Chazan 1982; Decalo 1995; Ronen 1975; Smock and Smock 1975.

86. In Benin, the Northern group's threat capabilities score falls just below the Africa median (0.465 vs 0.476); it is relatively large in size (66th percentile for Africa) but relatively far from the capital (36th percentile for Africa).

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large numbers … throughout the entire governmental system, and the gendarmerie, in particular, was packed with Baribas who often regarded themselves as Maga's private militia."[87] But in the face of what were perceived as discriminatory practices combined with austerity measures in the public sector, southerners, led by the trade unions, launched a general strike and paralyzed the country's largest cities along the southern coast of the country, Porto Novo (the official capital) and Cotonou (the seat of government).

As the conflict intensified, "Colonel Christopher Soglo, Chief of Staff of the Army [a Fon from South/Central group], announced that the armed forces were taking over power *in order to avert civil war*."[88] Soglo's coup not only prevented civil war but upheld an inclusive equilibrium. Though Maga's Northern group was politically marginalized, they were never fully purged from the military. Overall power sharing endured, but given the weakness of political institutions, irregular competition for executive authority continued. Over the next decade there would be another five coups, including three that involved military officers from the Northern group who exploited their continued presence in the military to stay in the political game. While trading power via coups can lead to instability and uncertainty, these cases illustrate how the societal strength of rivals may force ruling groups to accept such an outcome over civil war.[89]

H2: High-Low (HL) Threat Capabilities—Sudan

For strong groups bargaining with weak groups, the strategic problems arising from consolidating power through ethnopolitical exclusion are less acute. Once their rivals are excluded they pose little threat to the regime's hold on power, except through remote armed rebellions. Sudan is the archetypical example of this pathway to ethnopolitical exclusion and civil war. After independence the Sudanese state was dominated by those primarily from three riverine Arab tribes (Shaygiyya, Ja'alin, and Danagla) who "inherited" the state from British colonial rule. Situated in the Nile River Valley just above the capital, Khartoum, and collectively making up some 15 percent of the population (and scored as having high threat capabilities), these groups have dominated power in Sudan. Helping to consolidate their hold on power has been an alliance with other Arab tribes located in the heart of the state in Kordofan and Al-Gezira State (also scored as having high threat capabilities), historically the country's two dominant economic zones of production. Sudan's "Arab"-dominated regimes left little room for smaller non-Arab ethnic groups located in Darfur and South Sudan (including the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Nuba, Fur, and

87. Decalo 1973, 458.
88. Emphasis added. Matthews 1966, 152.
89. Given this inefficiency, we might expect mutually strong rivals to attempt to institutionalize the rotation of power rather than continue with the coup trap. This is precisely what has happened in Benin and Ghana as the countries have emerged as two of Africa's most enduring democracies.

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Zaghawa, all scored as having low threat capabilities). De facto policies of ethnopolitical exclusion helped to consolidate the riverine Arabs' hold on power, though at the cost of multiple civil wars.[90] Yet given the size of the country and the fractionalization of society—that the rebels sought to overcome but never successfully did—the insurgents were unable to mount a credible threat to the government's hold on the capital. Instead, the conflicts burned on the periphery with the costs disproportionately borne by the excluded groups—leading one Sudan observer to characterize them as a "perfect war" for the ruling elite.[91] Only through heavy international pressure, third-party intervention between the central government, and southern-based rebel groups and the rare case of state partition did Sudan's longest running war finally end with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 and secession for South Sudan in 2011.

H3: Low-Low (LL) Threat Capabilities—Liberia

The Liberia case illustrates the pattern in which elites embedded in two weak groups far from the capital are unable to maintain power sharing, leading to ethnic exclusion and civil war. In 1980 a group of noncommissioned officers, led by Samuel Doe, seized power in a coup, upending the country's power structure that had been dominated by the Americo-Liberians for the previous 153 years. Doe's political position was much weaker than that of riverine Arabs in Sudan. Coming from a relatively small ethnic group in the hinterland (the Krahn tribe located primarily in Grand Gedeh County, scored as having weak threat capabilities), Doe's political base was relatively narrow. This increased his vulnerability while weakening his group's capabilities to come back to power if it lost hold of it. However, Doe rose to power backed by individuals from other small ethnic groups in the hinterland, particularly the Gio tribe located in Nimba County (also scored as having weak threat capabilities) and led by his high-school friend, Thomas Quiwonkpa. Both sides thus had a lot to lose from infighting. But each also recognized that their small power base made them vulnerable. When a power struggle arose between the two shortly after coming to power, Doe felt he could not afford to allow Quiwonkpa to remain head of the army and purged him.

Fearing for his life, Quiwonkpa fled the capital. Bitter that the man he put in power betrayed him, Quiwonkpa sought to organize support from his co-ethnics and other allies to try to forcibly reclaim power. In 1985, Quiwonkpa launched an attack on the Liberian government from Sierra Leone. Though Quiwonkpa reached the capital with his small force of some two dozen men, they lacked the capabilities and local support to overthrow Doe.[92] After Quiwonkpa's failed bid to oust him from power, Doe continued to reject power sharing with Quiwonkpa's co-ethnics while increasing his reliance on repression to regulate the excluded group. This

90. Johnson 2011.
91. Martin 2002.
92. Ellis 1999.

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provoked a civil war in 1989 when Quiwonkpa's lieutenants launched a rebellion to continue the revolutionary struggle started by their patron.[93]

H4: Low-High (LH) Threat Capabilities—Guinea–Bissau and South Africa

Guinea–Bissau, like Liberia before the overthrow of Americo-Liberian rule, was dominated by a non-indigenous minority. In Guinea–Bissau, the inaugural government was controlled politically by Cape Verdeans (numbering only in the thousands) who had been brought in from the islands during the colonial period to work in the bureaucracy.[94] Enjoying the modernizing effects of participating in the colonial state, the Cape Verdeans would play a leadership role in the anticolonial movement (PAIGC) and the inaugural government. Although the government was led by the Cape Verdeans, the military, especially the lower ranks, was dominated by individuals from the Balanta, the largest ethnic group in Guinea–Bissau, making up some 30 percent of the population (scored as having high threat capabilities). The Balanta resented their subordinate political status.[95] In 1980 the Balanta-dominated military backed a coup that dismantled Cape Verdian rule.

The Guinea–Bissau case reveals one of the fundamental dilemmas confronting minority-rule regimes. Reluctant to open the door for their stronger rivals in a way that might initiate a permanent shift in the distribution of power, rulers favor exclusion. But exclusion foments resistance and necessitates repression to counter the greater civil war capabilities of the majority. The problem for the minority group is that they often lack the human resources to effectively countermobilize and may have little choice but to employ members of the rival majority group to run the coercive apparatus. Without strong organizational control over the military, this can be the minority group's undoing, as the Cape Verdeans experienced (the same fate befell the Americo-Liberians in 1980).

The Afrikaners in South Africa chose an alternate approach. Benefiting from a much larger size (roughly 10 percent of the population), though still a significant minority (and still scored as having low threat capabilities relative to other groups in Africa), they institutionalized segregation through Apartheid, including in the military, to consolidate their hold on power.[96] This effectively blocked any internal risk posed by "nonwhites," even as they had to rely more and more on black South Africans in the military in the 1970s.[97] Ultimately, this provoked societal resistance that crossed the threshold of civil war in the 1980s.[98]

93. Ibid.
94. Forrest 1992.
95. Forrest 1987.
96. Beinart 2001.
97. Ibid.; Horowitz 1991.
98. Wood 2000.

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Both Guinea–Bissau and South Africa reveal the acute strategic dilemma that minorities face in attempting to rule over larger groups. Trying to partially accommodate their ethnic rivals can lead to a coup d'état, but excluding them can provoke civil war.

Conclusion

A large and growing literature points to the pacifying effects of power sharing.[99] Yet the conditions giving rise to inclusive governance are not well understood. In this paper we have advanced a theory to account for credible power sharing in weak states in the absence of strong political institutions or external guarantors. Counterintuitively, we argue that ethnic power sharing is a positive function of the civil war capabilities of both the ruling and rival groups—that is, their mobilizational potential to forcibly seize power when they are excluded from the central government. When mutually strong, both prefer to accept the risk of coups to the risk of civil wars and neither is willing to systematically exclude the other from government. Continuous, if fluid, power sharing emerges. Extensive quantitative and qualitative evidence supports our theoretical argument and provides novel empirical insights into the outcome of the coup/civil war trap across postcolonial Africa. This paper is one of the first to offer an integrated and concise theory to account for how the distribution of societal power leads to durable power sharing in weak states. In doing so, it also unpacks the strategic relationship between coups and civil war. Coups are significantly more likely from groups that can credibly demand inclusion with the threat of a strong civil war.

We also point to several avenues for future research. One important question is if the exclusion-civil war equilibrium is partially determined by a country's ethnic geography, what then is the way out? Are these countries not doomed to further cycles of ethnopolitical exclusion and devastating civil war? Overcoming the hurdle posed by highly uneven balances of power is paramount for effective peacemaking and longer-term political resolution. In this, perhaps outside actors can have a role: by acting as a guarantor of status for groups that have insufficient threat capabilities of their own, international intervention may be able to reduce incentives for the sort of exclusion through coups and purges that lead to civil war.

Another related avenue of research is the interplay between societal power and political institutionalization.[100] To what degree has a societal balance of power helped to undergird democracy in some countries, such as Benin and Ghana? Can political institutionalization foster interethnic power sharing even under conditions of unfavorable ethnic geography? The empirical results are suggestive of this

99. Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug 2013; Cederman, Wimmer, and Min 2010; Horowitz 1985; Lijphart 1969; Rothchild 1997; Wimmer 2013; Wimmer, Cederman, and Min 2009; Wucherpfennig, Hunziker, and Cederman 2016.

100. Moe 2005.

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possibility but much more rigorous research is warranted on this front and the antecedent question of how party rule emerges in the first place, especially in countries with strong power imbalances.

A final avenue for future investigation is to analyze how potential secession affects the strategic dynamics and increases peripheral groups' bargaining power vis-à-vis the ruling group. Throughout postindependence Africa the regional system has strongly discouraged secession in an attempt to reduce the risk of interstate war. However, this has eliminated a powerful source of leverage for peripheral groups—the threat of exit—and contributed to their political marginalization.[101] Opening the door to secession is, of course, no panacea because it can substitute one source of instability for another—as seen between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977 and 1978. How to resolve this conundrum—increasing the bargaining power of weak groups while maintaining regional stability—remains a major theoretical question and policy challenge but is critical to understanding and ending the exclusion-conflict cycle in large, weak states.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000073>.

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101. Hirschman 1970.

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