

Key terms + ideas

- ethnic group
- nation and nationalism
- ethnic entrepreneur
- ethnic security dilemma
- Hutu and Tutsi
- Paul Kagame

Key questions

Q: What is ethnicity and an ethnic group?

A: Ethnicity is a categorization based on a some sort of cultural trait, such as a language or religion. As Professor Levitsky discussed in class an ethnic group is a group of people who share a belief in common ancestry often imputed from these shared ethnic characteristics like language, religion, or race. Ethnic groups and ethnicity functions differently from other social affiliations because of a shared sense of ancestry.

Q: Where does ethnicity come from?

A: There are three types of explanations of where ethnicity comes from. Primordialists believe that ethnicity is innate; that ethnic identities are fixed, natural, and ancient. For primordialisists like Geertz, ethnic identities are passed down from ancestors to current generations without evolution. Meanwhile, another camp sees ethnic identities as constructed in two major ways. First, the instrumentalists argue that ethnic ties are rationally created as the most efficient way to secure the material benefits created by modernization (Bates 1983). The second group, or the social constructivists like Nagle, see ethnicity as emerging from the political construction of identities. For them, political institutions and competition shape the way people identify within their ethnic group.

Q: When is ethnicity salient or what spurs ethnic mobilization?

A: The literature offers two distinct answers on what sparks ethnic competition. In one camp, the primordialists argue that ethnicity is always salient, and therefore ethnic conflict is sparked by these existing differences between groups. For this group of scholars, ethnic conflict is related but can also run counter to economic incentives. In other words, ethnic conflict can also happen when it is irrational or economically-disadvantageous.

On the other hand, constructivists argue that ethnic mobilization or conflict is never irrational for at least one involved party. This set of explanations points to the role of economic and political competition for explaining the outbreak of ethnic mobilization. The instrumentalists observe that ethnic conflict appears when there is competition for scarce resources (Bates 1983) or the relative size of ethnic groups (Posner 2004). Meanwhile the social constructivists highlight that conflict occurs when political institutions or ethnic entrepreneurs make the divisions between groups or the identities themselves more salient.

Week's readings

- Varshney, "Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict," pp. 274-294.
- Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973), pp. 255-277.
- Nagel, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Re-Creating Ethnic Identity and Culture" pp. 152-176.
- Bates, "Modernization, Ethnic Competition, and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa," pp. 152-171.
- Posner, "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference" 529-545.
- Jardina, *White Identity Politics*; pp 21-24, 34-45, 260-77.
- Mamdani, "When Victims Become Killers" pp. 41-59; 73-75; 87-102; 185-218.

Review questions

Check your understanding of this week's material and key ideas with the following questions.

1. According to the authors this week, how is ethnic conflict solved or prevented?
2. What is situational ethnicity? Have you ever experienced it?
3. What are the goals of ethnic conflict? How do they vary across actors? How do politicians use ethnicity to further their agendas?
4. How does ethnicity, ethnic fractionalization and ethnic conflict affect industrialization and democratic stability?
5. Why does ethnic violence come in bursts? Why have we seen relative peace in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia since the "end" of their respective conflicts?
6. Is Bates' explanation for the construction of ethnicity in Africa consistent with modernization theory? Why not?