

ETHNICITY AND VIOLENCE DURING DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS: EVIDENCE FROM SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper shows that ethnic diversity within the disenfranchised majority is a strong correlate of the incidence of violence during democratization. We study the relationship between ethnicity and conflict in South Africa during the fall of apartheid. Migration flows following the implementation and repeal of apartheid segregation laws induce cross-sectional and time variation in the ethnic composition of districts. Using Census data from the years before and after democratization, we compare the evolution of conflict across districts experiencing differential changes in ethnic composition. We find that ethnic polarization and inequality within the black majority correlate strongly and positively with the incidence of armed confrontations between black-dominated groups. Results suggest that during democratic transitions ethnic markers can become a salient technology to separate individuals into well-identified groups and mobilize them for political violence. (JEL: D74, J15, N47, N97, O15, P48, R23)

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