

Rulers as Mass Murderers: Political Institutions and Human Insecurity

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Abstract:

Relatively little research has focused on how different institutional arrangements in political systems affect leaders' incentives to commit mass murder. Most studies analyzing genocide/politicide rely heavily on a dichotomous democracy-autocracy distinction, and implicitly assume that broad political participation is sufficient to ensure good public policy and benevolent political leaders. We address this deficiency by disaggregating political institutions into three dimensions: political participation, executive recruitment, and executive constraints. We argue that rulers are less likely to target civilians and cause human insecurity in political systems that effectively impose institutional limits on executive power. Using a random effects logit model, we test our hypotheses using Harff's (2003) dataset on politicides and genocides, 1955--2001. By disaggregating political institutions, our analysis demonstrates that it is not democratic rule alone that mitigates mass killing, but the constraints on executive power in particular. Indeed, the level of political participation increases the likelihood that civilians are targeted. The openness of executive recruitment seems not to be associated with the incidence of mass killing. We also find that autocracies, regardless of type, are generally more likely than any other regime to target their own people. Ethnic diversity, however, is not related to mass killings, not even in political systems with limitations on executive power.

I. Why do rulers target the ruled?

Mass killings orchestrated by rulers can be traced back to the beginnings of history. Even in the 20th century – an age of carpet bombing, blitzkrieg, and two atomic bomb attacks – the dominant threat to human security has not been the perpetrators of interstate war, but governments engaged in attacks on their own civilian population. Indeed, more people have died at the hands of their own state than those killed in either civil or international wars (Rummel, 2005).¹ The dreadful litany of cases of genocide and politicide in the second half of the Twentieth Century includes *inter alia*: Suharto's Indonesia 1965 (Dwyer and Santikarma, 2003); Stalin's Soviet Union 1937—1938 (Werth, 2003); Rios Montt's Guatemala 1981--1983 (Grandin, 2003); and Pol Pot's Kampuchea (Midlarsky, 2005).

The idea that the state is the dominant threat to its people appears to stand in stark contrast to Hobbes' view of human security as deriving from the social contract between ruler and the ruled. Hobbes' Leviathan has absolute political power because the individual transfers her rights to the sovereign after careful consideration of the economic and social consequences of the state of nature. Intermediary associations such as parties, ethnic or religious groups and parliaments – unless they are authorized by the sovereign power – are unlawful: they hamper the proper functioning of the state by claiming allegiance from the individual and thus manipulating her free reasoning (Boyd, 2001). Though Hobbes' gloomy view of pluralism seems to preclude the limitation of political power, the social contract recognizes that the key threat that would emerge once the establishment of a state settles the 'war of all against all' is the state itself. Therefore, the social contract contains important guarantees against acts of the Leviathan that may threaten human security. Hobbes

¹ Source: R. J. Rummel's personal website accessed at <http://www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/20TH.HTM>, on March 26, 2005.

recognizes that the individual has a ‘right to disobey’ if the Sovereign issues orders to the effect that one’s physical existence, economic survival, or individual freedom are threatened. According to Steinberger (2002), if the existence of the Leviathan contradicts the end that it was created for, the social contract is null; the state dissolves and the individual has the right to protect herself against those that no longer constitute a state. Thus Hobbes views human security as the backbone of state legitimacy and the exclusive goal of the central authority.

Cases where civilians are targeted by their own governments indicate that the deep-seated fears of early theorists are not misplaced. Rulers have all too often knowingly chosen policies that spawned economic and political crises and produced public ‘bads’ such as corruption, human rights abuses and human insecurity. Indeed, “government is potentially the key threat to any group, as governments are usually the actors that commit genocide. Whoever controls the government is protected from extermination, and those who are excluded from government are vulnerable to destruction” (Saideman, 2005: 6). It is worth asking why some rulers govern for the well-being of their society whereas others deliberately seek policies to destroy their people. When and why do rulers turn against civilians and formulate policies that cause the death of their people? These are the questions that we explore in this study.

To understand the origins of mass killings orchestrated by political leaders – Hobbes’ Leviathan – we focus on the ruler whose strategic objective is to stay in power, and who uses (in)security as a policy tool to solidify her domestic political standing. We argue that aggregate categories of democracy and autocracy by themselves are insufficient to explain why governments engage in mass murder. A more fruitful approach is to analyze how certain dimensions of political institutions affect the preferences of the rulers and their capacity to formulate and implement murderous policies.

We contend that there is few structural relationship between mass killing and broad categorizations of democratic and autocratic institutions. Autocratic institutions do not foreordain mass murder. Hence, a pure structural approach that dichotomizes regime type and standardizes rulers' preferences across categories cannot explain why regimes with some democratic features, such as illiberal democracies, fail to achieve liberal governance and sometimes turn violent (Zakaria, 1997).² When Milosevic lent military support to Serb militias that targeted Albanians (1998-1999), it was one ruler exploiting liberal institutions that gave him access to political power in order to produce illiberal policies. It illustrates how leaders manipulate and capitalize on nationalist sentiments in newly democratizing countries and target specific groups to sustain political support. A more refined and productive institutional approach should elaborate on different dimensions of political systems and their impact on the quality of governance.

In the pages that follow, we examine the institutional roots of mass killings. We focus on how different political systems affect rulers' policy choices. We argue that the way in which the political process is organized provides incentives for rulers to choose certain policies over others. Political institutions determine whether political leaders should pursue good politics or if they can survive politically with bad public policy. In order to develop our analytical framework, we apply work that has examined leaders' incentives to promote economic growth in different institutional settings (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 1999, 2002, 2003; Bueno de Mesquita and Root, 2000; North, 1990; Persson and Tabellini, 2003). We draw on these to understand variation in leaders' incentives to promote human security. We do not see a 'political system' as a dichotomous parameter or a one-dimensional continuum. Following Gates et al. (2005), we break political institutions into several dimensions including: institutional constraints on political power; the (s)election of the ruler; and the

² Following Gates et al. (2005), we refer to such "mixed" regimes which contain both democratic and autocratic elements, as institutionally inconsistent regimes.

extent of popular participation in the (s)election process. We also disaggregate autocracies into personalist, military and single-party regimes; thereby accounting for the variation in the basis of institutionalized authority across the different types of autocracies.

Our model of mass killings also accounts for certain characteristics of a society that might affect leaders' incentives to target civilians.³ Societal cleavages, mainly ethnic divisions, may provide incentives to rulers to politicize ethnic issues for the pursuit of political power. Hence, one should expect the political leadership in ethnically divided societies to be more prone to target civilian groups: the ruler can use the state as an instrument to control and suppress an ethnic segment in order to mobilize the broader public.

Interestingly, this may also happen in democracies. Elections may increase the competitiveness of gaining access to political power, but will not in themselves safeguard the civil and political liberties of the individual. On the contrary, electoral competition may create incentives to "play the ethnic card", which can be rewarded with electoral success in fractionalized societies. In this respect, mass political participation and competition between political elites for power are not guarantees against bad public policy. Mobilizing or capitalizing on societal sentiments may not only occur in ethnically divided societies, but in all systems that encourage political competition but do not sufficiently monitor the ways incumbents use their power. We believe that good institutional designs that impose certain limits on leaders' access to political power can mitigate the effects of ethnic fractionalization on policymaking. Therefore, we offer an institutional analysis of human security, adopting a more nuanced conceptualization of the institutional environment than those offered so far by the literature.

We analyze data on mass killings provided by Harff (2003). The empirical analysis includes 37 country-year cases of genocides and politicides between 1955 and 2001. The data

³ For example, rulers in economically integrated societies may be less willing to cause domestic violence and increase political risks to traders and investors. Also, membership in international institutions may create outside pressure on rulers for good governance.

on political institutions comes from Gates et al. (2005) – a study of the institutional matrix along several dimensions. We use Geddes' (1999) data to disaggregate autocratic regimes. In the sections that follow, we begin with a brief review of previous research that illustrates theoretical weaknesses in the existing literature. In the third section, we offer an institutional analysis of mass killings that fills important gaps in the literature, and formulate testable hypotheses. Then, we account for our research design and present an empirical analysis. Finally, we discuss how our approach contributes to the understanding of leaders' incentives to target civilian populations.

II. Strategic versus Structural Explanations

Scholars commonly assume that regime type determines the quality of governance: autocracies produce poor policies and democracies facilitate good policies. A similar dichotomy can be found in the literature on mass killings. In a recent work, Harff (2003) shows that autocratic polities are three and a half times more likely than full or partial democracies to experience mass killings for political and ethnic reasons.⁴ In Harff's framework, limitations on the power of political authorities, and leaders' access to power through competitive elections involving mass political participation are characteristics of democracies that decrease the likelihood of a geno/politicide. Valentino et al. (2004) follow a similar approach with a three-category polity type and find that full democracies are 28% as likely as full autocracies to engage in mass killings.⁵ Similarly, Rummel (1995) argues that unlimited access to political power and the absence of effective veto players in policymaking allow the political leadership to stay in power in spite of – or because of – the insecurity of its citizens. Using factor analysis, Rummel analyzes the death toll in all types of mass killings by

⁴ Harff uses the Polity 0-10 point democracy-minus-autocracy scale. Full democracies are polities that have a score of 7 to 10; partial democracies, 1 to 7; and the rest is coded as autocracies.

⁵ Valentino et al. (2004) uses the +10/-10 Polity democracy-autocracy scale. The three categories in this study are; full democracies (+7 or higher); midrange polity (between +6 and -6); and, full autocracies (-7 or lower).

governments between 1900 and 1987, and observes that institutions affect leaders' choice of deadly policies:

“...as the regime types vary from democratic to somewhat democratic to authoritarian to somewhat authoritarian to somewhat totalitarian to totalitarian, there should be a virtual logarithmic increase in the number of people a regime kills” (1995: 6).

Rummel examines a broad array of institutional characteristics. Using factor analysis, he constructs continuous indices that measure the penetration of regimes into individuals' private sphere, and institutional constraints on the exercise of political power. Yet, recent research has largely focused on dichotomous or trichotomous categories rather than expanding on Rummel's rigorous analysis of political institutions.⁶ Explanations relying on di/trichotomous indices of regime type are inadequate for two reasons. First, the dichotomous democracy-autocracy scale or the trichotomous scale that accounts for mixed and pure regime types, introduce an arbitrary cut point that does violence to the presumably continuous institutional incentives for good or bad governance.⁷ Second, it is not institutions per se that lead to repressive policies – there is not a direct causal link between institutions and good or bad public policies. Rather, the question is how rulers define their interests and preferences within different institutional environments. Hence, there is a tripartite relationship between political institutions, the ruler's preferences, and poor or failed policies – including mass killings with the ruler as the key political actor. We see the institutional matrix as a continuous scale and multidimensional and therefore, examine mass killings for ethnic and political reasons from a disaggregated institutional approach.⁸

⁶ Also see Eck and Hultman (2005) for a similar structural approach to the relationship between regime type and death by the ruler.

⁷ For instance, rulers do not wait for fully autocratic environments to engage in poor governance. In this respect, 6 on a 10-point scale which scholars identify as the cut point for democracy/autocracy presents an arbitrary choice and does not seem to be theoretically plausible to understand the incremental shifts in leaders' incentives to govern for in/security.

⁸ Rummel's (1995) factor analysis in many ways allows for a similar continuous multidimensional analysis.

Whether rulers govern through fear or welfare depends on the incentives that arise from particular institutional arrangements (Gates et al. 2005). In particular, institutional restrictions on leaders' access to political power raise the costs of repressive policies that target civil rights and liberties. However, when authority becomes concentrated, the number of actors that can challenge policies due to their divergent preferences and political support base falls, which also decreases the costs of bad public policies. With this in mind, executive decision-making constraints constitute the key institutional dimension shaping rulers' incentives. Effective limitation points to the presence of accountability groups in the system, which substantially increase friction in policymaking. Multiple political actors are unlikely to reach a consensus in formulating and implementing policies with human costs. In such an institutional environment, liberal governance leads to cooperation with other groups, expands societal consent and increases the legitimacy of the ruler. Repression triggers, on the other hand, nurtures the relative strength of opponents and the power of rival ideologies, thereby eventually increasing the costs of policymaking (Drake and McCubbins, 1998). Therefore, we think that in an institutional environment which limits executive political power, the benefits of good governance outweigh those of intimidation, repression and use of force. In the following section, we will develop our analytical framework and derive testable hypotheses.

III. Institutional Configuration and the Strategy of Political Survival

We start this section with the basic assumption that there is no natural harmony between the interests of the ruler and the ruled: political institutions tend to benefit one side

or the other (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2001).⁹ Rulers in certain institutional designs can only stay in power if they promote the common good, that is, the political system works for the benefit of the ruled. In others, rulers have the incentive to engage in policies that produce private goods for themselves and their support base: the system works to solve the friction between the ruler and the ruled to the benefit of the ruler. Therefore, we focus our attention on the ruler, government or the leader of the state. This theoretical framework aims to understand the link between different dimensions of the institutional configuration, certain characteristics of a society and the strategic decisions that the rulers make to survive politically.

Executive Constraints. Rulers behave according to which institutional environment they make decisions within. Institutions provide incentives to choose certain policies over others. The quality of governance that the leader needs to achieve to stay in office is closely related to the political rules that define the limits to political power. Unlimited access to political power leads to strong incentives to maintain the uncontested power structure and govern through repression rather than for liberty. In systems where the rulers' hold on power is absolute and the risk of being ousted from office by a political opposition is low, rulers may target certain groups in the populace to politicize ethnic or political divisions and mobilize the broader public for the continuity of their political rule. Such policies can be used to suppress regime challengers and deny any form of liberty to political opponents. Repressive policies can also be intended to divert mass attention away from the policy performance of the regime and to group divisions.

Political system affects preferences in governance by structuring leaders' reliance on their constituents' and other political actors' support. Rulers' limited access to political power through the presence of accountability groups works as an institutional check; a safety valve,

⁹ Following much of the literature, we make a second assumption. We assume that the goal of the leader is political survival (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003).

against the formulation of repressive policies. In cases where institutions fail to empower a number of political actors in the policymaking process with the authority to block the action of the ruler, bad public policy including mass killings are more likely to occur. Most effective institutional arrangements require that there are multiple agents in the system, which are situated against each other with divergent preferences and check one another's political ambitions. In this framework, policymaking requires the consent of a qualified number of agents whose power originates from an institutionalized framework (preferably constitutionally mandated) rather than from the mercy of the ruler or the ruling group.

Policies aimed at hurting some groups of citizens are more likely to be vetoed and never reach the implementation phase in multiple-agent systems. Consensus and cooperation are harder to achieve in group decision-making, especially if the policies for which consensus is sought – such as mass killings, are likely to give way to situations with grave social, economic and international consequences.¹⁰ The institutional requirement of collective action forces cooperation on agents, leads to friction in policymaking and increases costs of negotiation, particularly for policies with adverse effects. Even though targeting civilian groups may remain an attractive option in order to eliminate opposition and divert public attention, the transaction costs of seeking the consent of other political actors deter the ruler from doing so¹¹. Accountability groups constrain the ability of the executives to engage in repressive policies also because they compel leaders to share information with other groups involved in the policymaking process, and provide effective public policy through transparent and formal procedures. Information-sharing and diversity of information sources make it

¹⁰As one of the important international consequences of state-sponsored murders, political actors would try to avoid military intervention that third-party states would undertake to stop the killing, which would substantially increase the costs of targeting civilians. Hence, empirical evidence shows that decisive international action can manage mass killings. For instance, Krain (2005) shows that perpetrators of geno/politocides are more likely to yield to international pressure in the face of outside interventions that either assist the targeted group or challenge the perpetrators.

¹¹ See Valentino (2004) for a thorough examination of the strategic logic behind mass killings that aims at eliminating opposition groups and the techniques with which these deadly policies are implemented.

harder to impose narratives that stigmatize specific groups in society. The information effects of group policymaking limit rulers' ability to create myths about ethnicity and political beliefs, and diminish the benefits of mass killings to political survival.

In this respect, leaders' incentives to promote the common good or the common 'bad' are determined in large part by constraints on executive decision making. Executive constraints appear to be equally critical in democracies and autocracies. In order to achieve consolidated democratic governance without the risk of a rise in populist nationalism, institutional limitations of political power must coexist with mass political participation so that leaders do not exploit societal divisions in order to mobilize political support in elections (Gates et al., 2005). This institutional configuration discourages the ruler from undermining the workings of the system because it is a self-enforcing institutional arrangement without loopholes that can be exploited to produce illiberal policies. Burton, Gunther, and Higley's (1992) work on unconsolidated democratic regimes, and Zakaria's (1997) influential argument on the de facto deviation of democracy from constitutional liberalism, lead us to feature the role of executive constraints as the critical dimension that serves to prevent rulers from abusing their authority and targeting civilians. This view is extended by Weingast (1997) who demonstrates that unconsolidated democracies in divided societies are particularly prone to violence and politics of intimidation.

This discussion on the primacy of institutional constraints to human security leads us to our primary hypothesis with regard to geno/politicide:

$H_{\text{EXECUTIVE CONSTRAINTS}}$: *Greater constraints on the executive lead to a lower probability that rulers choose to commit mass killings.*

Autocracies. Limitations on executive authority are not only critical to the consolidation of democratic governance but they can also serve to prevent mass atrocities in autocracies. Though not as effective as constitutional arrangements, de facto limitations of political power can deter rulers from targeting certain groups in society. For instance, Peceny et al. (2002) argue that personalist regimes are the least constrained type of autocracies as opposed to military and single-party regimes. According to Peceny et al.; “The strategies pursued by dictators to stay in power, ..., render military institutions ... incapable of doing much more than repressing unarmed civilians” (p.19). The survival of a personalist regime depends heavily on the virtuosity of the ruler to eliminate, and divide any group and its supporters that can pose a danger to the regime. Therefore, splits within the governing elite are less likely to occur in one-man regimes, which prevents the formation of (de facto) accountability groups through causing human insecurity for supposed or potential opposition groups.

Single-party and military regimes also rely on the loyalty of their members for political survival. However, one-party regimes need to mobilize masses to stay in power. In line with our argument on inconsistent democracies, this may give incentives to the ruling elite to exploit or mobilize political and ethnic divisions, thus increasing the likelihood of societal hatred and hostility. Though single-party regimes might resemble multiple-agent frameworks where party members can check each other’s political ambitions, the goal of staying in power as a party may override the incentives to oppose and curb the formation of factions within the party, and lead to a consensus for policies that exploit ethnic/political cleavages for political survival. Also, autocratic institutions, unfamiliarity of the masses with multi-party elections, and entrenched political alignments among the public in durable single-party regimes, prevent the competitiveness of a second party, further decreasing the benefits of opposition to the party leadership.

Military regimes are not answerable to a large winning coalition but the ruler has to satisfy members of the military elite to deter counter-coups. This type of regime needs to sustain cohesion within their small winning coalition. Defection might lead to a counter-coup and the loss of political power. For instance, Peceny et al. (2002) argues that “military regimes face somewhat more constraints because decisions need to be approved by a portion of the officer corps” (p. 17). Contrary to the low benefits of opposition in one-party regimes, if a member of the ruling elite succeeds in swaying the loyalty of the military to her side, political power can easily change hands. Such a system exhibits a winner-takes-all structure, whereby the benefits of a successful coup are so great that dissent is attractive and worth bearing the risk of losing (i.e. imprisonment, torture, execution, etc). This strategic interaction between the officers and the leader (or the ruling cadre) can take on the qualities of a multiple-agent environment. Members of the military elite can function as *de facto* accountability groups whose consent the ruler regularly seeks in order to avoid dissent. In this respect, military regimes are autocracies in which multiple agents have to agree to a policy, unlike single-party regimes in which opposition has no political benefits, and one-man regimes where potential opposition groups are already assimilated.

$H_{\text{MILITARY REGIMES}}$: *In military regimes, rulers are less likely to choose to commit mass killings.*

$H_{\text{SINGLE-PARTY REGIMES}}$: *In single-party regimes, rulers are more likely to choose to commit mass killings.*

$H_{\text{PERSONALIST REGIMES}}$: *In personalist regimes, rulers are more likely to choose to commit mass killings.*

Political Participation and Executive Recruitment. To understand whether the ruler is motivated to serve the people's interests rather than her narrow constituents for political survival, the extent of mass participation in the (s)election of the executive is another important dimension of the institutional matrix. A small winning coalition would mean that purchasing political loyalty of particular groups would be sufficient to stay in power. In this case, rulers might have the incentive to engage in mass killings to suppress political opponents and maintain the privileged access of these key groups to public resources. In systems with democratic overtones, masses participate in the electoral process, and leaders have to satisfy a qualified majority with successful economic and political policies rather than through coercion and repression.

Nonetheless, even in political systems where leaders are answerable to a large group of people and face the threat of removal from office by public choice, there is no guarantee of the protection of a small minority without some form of institutional checks on executive powers. Populist politicians may rely on genocidal activities to curry favor from the majority and mobilize electoral support. Thus we see that mass political participation will lead an autocrat to engage in repression to rally electoral support. Similarly, an illiberal democracy with high levels of political participation but without executive constraints is also prone to abuses of political power. Therefore, political participation is a dimension of the institutional matrix that would encourage illiberal governance.

$H_{\text{POLITICAL PARTICIPATION}}$: *The higher the level of mass political participation is, the higher the probability that the ruler will choose to commit mass killings.*

We expect to find no relationship between the competitiveness of executive selection and the incidence of mass killings. Though the system might allow individuals to freely

compete for the executive position, this does not serve as a guarantee for good governance once the competition is over. Without institutional checks on executive decision-making, there is no guarantee against elites once elected of using the government to target their competitors using state power.

H_{EXECUTIVE RECRUITMENT}: *The openness of executive (s)election is not related to the probability that the ruler will choose to commit mass killings.*

Ethnic Polarization. In ethnically divided and polarized societies, ethnicity is often the most immediate societal cleavage along which political actors can mobilize support. This point is lucidly put by Gunther and Diamond (2001) in their examination of the political dispositions of ethnically oriented parties: “The electoral logic of the ethnic party is to harden and mobilize its ethnic base with exclusive, often polarizing appeals to ethnic group opportunity and threat... The ethnic party’s particularistic, exclusivist, and often polarizing public appeals makes its overall contribution to the society divisive and even disintegrative” (p.23-4). Snyder (2000) argues that political elites foster nationalism to achieve popular support among their supporters, particularly in newly democratized environments. In fact, Snyder convincingly claims that nationalism (which is the root of genocide) is not strong in pre-democratic societies and only develops with democratization as political competitors seek electoral support to access office through exploitation of popular sentiments.

The targeting of particular populations on mostly ethnic dimensions occurs in autocracies as well as in democracies when populist rulers are relatively unconstrained. We expect to see that leaders in ethnically polarized societies are more likely to target civilians, all else being equal. As suggested by Reilly (2003), “...it is often easier to mobilize support by appealing to ethnic allegiances rather than issues of class or ideology, aspiring politicians have a strong incentive to mobilize support along ethnic lines” (p. 3). As such, ethnicity is a

ready and easy-to-exploit societal cleavage: it provides incentives to profit politically from ethnic divisions, and to divert public attention from the overall bad performance of an administration. Also, the organization of daily politics along ethnic lines pushes the locus of political competition towards the extremes as rival parties or opposition groups respond in kind and a process of ‘outbidding’ takes hold (Rabushka and Shepsle, 1972). Therefore, in an ethnically-charged political environment, we expect to see that there would be greater incentives among political actors to politicize identity issues which lead to increasing ethnic tensions and, in some cases, the outbreak of ethnic conflict and/or deliberate killing of civilians by government authorities.

H₁ETHNIC POLARIZATION: The greater the ethnic polarization is, the higher the probability that the ruler will choose to commit mass killings.

Based on our former discussion about illiberal democracies and leaders’ incentives to play the ethnic card to mobilize their support base in these institutional environments, we also formulate a hypothesis about the interactive effect of ethnic polarization and institutional limitations on executive power: less constrained leaders in ethnically divided societies would be more likely to produce policies that jeopardize the survival of opposition groups;

H₂ETHNIC POLARIZATION: In ethnically polarized societies, the lower the degree of executive constraints is, the higher the probability that the ruler will choose to commit mass killings.

IV. Empirical Analysis: Limits of Political Power and Human Security

Dependent Variable and Estimator Choice

We test our hypotheses on cases of mass killings targeting groups due to their ethnic backgrounds or political beliefs, identified by Harff (2003).¹² In this dataset, there are 37 governments that have committed geno/politicide and 570 country years of mass killings in the time period 1955-2001. The definition of a geno/politicide comes from Harff:

“Genocides and politicides are *the promotion, execution, and/or implied consent of sustained policies by governing elites or their agents – or, in the case of civil war, either of the contending authorities – that are intended to destroy, in whole or part, a communal, political, or politicized ethnic group*” (italics original) (Harff, 2003: 58).

The dataset is designed as a cross-sectional time-series and the unit of analysis is the country year. We create a dichotomous response variable marking whether a mass killing has occurred in a country-year. We use a random effects longitudinal logit regression to estimate the relationship between dimensions of political institutions and mass killings. This type of logit analysis is especially suitable for cross-sectional time-series datasets. The random effects approach allows us to account for the fact that we have multiple observations for each country; this is important, given that the underlying probability of observing a geno-/politicide varies by countries so that for the same values of the institutional variables, the unobserved heterogeneity problem leads to different probabilities of mass killings across units. In using a random effects model, we avoid imposing a correlation structure on the serial observations for each country: we assume that unobserved heterogeneity is a random variable and there is no relationship between the unit effects and the independent variables in the analysis.

Independent Variables

¹² These data can be accessed at the State Failure Task Project website <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/genocide/>.

Our political institutions data on executive constraints, openness of executive recruitment, and political participation come from Gates et al. (2005). In this dataset, countries with a population over 500,000 are observed in consecutive time periods from 1800 to 2000 on three dimensions. Using the Polity IV and Vanhanen datasets¹³, Gates et al. create three variables “describing systems along three authority dimensions” (p.11). *Executive constraints* is the Polity IV dataset variable “decision constraints on the chief executive” and is a categorical variable ranging from 1 to 7 (Monty and Jagers, 2000). *Executive recruitment* measures the competitiveness of the (s)election of the executive. It is a categorical variable ranging from 1 to 4, that distinguishes between competitive selection, concentrated selection (e.g., forceful seizures of power, ascription and designation), and dual systems where rulers that are (s)elected through concentrated and competitive processes coexist. Finally, the *political participation* variable is created using Vanhanen’s data on electoral participation, and competition and measures “the extent to which an election has a decisive impact on the selection of the executive” (p. 14). It is a continuous variable that ranges between 0 and 4.23 in our sample. We explicitly adopt Vanhanen’s objective coding of political participation to escape an inherent problem in Polity’s indicator of political participation. If any violence occurs during an election, Polity regards it as factional, and the regime is relegated to the middle ranges. Anyone wanting to study intrastate violence would then have violence on both sides of the equation. Vanhanen’s coding allows us to avoid this problem.

Another key independent variable in our analysis is ethnic fractionalization. The data is taken from Collier and Hoeffler (2004). We hypothesized that cultural diversity will provide ready-to-exploit societal cleavages to the rulers to mobilize masses and divert attention from the policy performance of the regime. Using data on ethnic composition, Collier and Hoeffler create a continuous scale ranging from 0 to 93 where higher values

¹³ Version 1.0 of the Vanhanen data accompanied an article in Journal of Peace Research (37-2, March 2000). The current version of the dataset is Version 2.0 (http://www.prio.no/page/Project_detail/Replication_Datasets/9649/42472.html).

indicate high ethno-linguistic fractionalization. For the interaction variable, we first inverted the scale of executive constraints so that high values would point to less constrained leaders - and then multiplied this variable by fractionalization. Therefore, the highest values on the interactive effect indicate the least constrained leaders in ethnically-charged societies.

In line with our theoretical discussion, we also disaggregate autocratic regimes in order to more accurately examine leaders' incentives to kill their subjects within different types of autocracies. To determine regime type, we use Geddes' (1999) data which include information on all authoritarian regimes for the period 1946-1996. Geddes classifies autocracies as either single-party, military, personalist or hybrid types. To test for the possibility that rulers in military regimes might be less prone to mass killings given the *de facto* limitations on executive power, we rely on the trichotomized autocracy scale. Following Geddes, we include military and military-personalist regimes in the 'military regimes' category, one-man regimes in the 'personalist regime' category, and single-party, single-party hybrids and regimes showing certain characteristics of all three categories (triple-hybrids) in the 'single-party regime' category.¹⁴ We use dummy variables for each category of autocracy.

We also include three control variables in the analysis. First, Harff (2003) has shown that economic integration into the world economy substantially reduces the incentives to commit mass crimes. Therefore, we include trade openness in the models and adopt the data from Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003).¹⁵ Second, Harff also argues that states which are members of international organizations fear the repercussions of human rights abuses and repression, and are therefore less likely to engage in violence against civilians. We include a

¹⁴ For a detailed description of these categories, see Geddes (1999) and Peceny et al. (2002). In a nutshell, "In military regimes, a group of officers decides who will rule and exercises some influence on policy. In single-party regimes, access to political office and control over policy are dominated by one party, though other parties may legally exist and compete in elections. Personalist regimes differ from both military and single-party in that access to office and the fruits of office depend much more on the discretion of an individual leader" (Geddes, 1999: 7).

¹⁵ Trade openness is measured as the ratio of exports plus imports to the GDP. Bueno de Mesquita et al. use the Penn World Tables to create the openness index.

binary independent variable in the analysis to control for international organization membership, using data from Harff (2003). Third, we include the natural logarithm of the total population of a country from the Penn World Tables (Heston, et al, 2002) because our political institutions data are collected for countries with a population over 500,000. The population variable should control for possible threshold effects.

Results

Table I presents the random effects logit estimation of the relationship between political institutions, cultural diversity and geno/politicides. Model I examines the link between three core dimensions of the institutional matrix from Gates et al. (2005) and mass killings, along with control variables measuring population size, and economic and political openness. In model II we add ethno-linguistic fractionalization and its interaction with executive constraints. Model III includes types of authoritarian regimes adopted from Geddes (1999), three dimensions of political institutions, and control variables.

Table I about here

In model I, the executive constraints variable is negative and highly significant, indicating that limits to political power effectively reduces the incidence of death by government. This finding is robust across all three models, suggesting that mass killings may become a tool for political survival in polities that do not limit the decision-making power of the executive. A closer look at the distribution of mass killings on executive constraints shows that in most regimes where geno/politicides have occurred, institutional checks on political power are substantially limited (Figure I). The distribution of mass killings is so skewed towards regimes in which rulers are relatively unconstrained in their decision-making, that it provides ample support for our argument.¹⁶

¹⁶ Of 570 observations, 91 cases represent transitional periods according to Polity IV and therefore, are not included in this classification. If we take the mid-point of the executive constraints (4) as an arbitrary cut point

Interestingly, there are 69 observations where a geno/politicide took place even though there were substantial limits on executive authority. The fact that constrained leaders at times have resorted to violence in order to achieve their political goals runs counter to our expectations. One possible explanation for this is that Polity IV codes constitutional as well as non-constitutional accountability groups as limitations on executive authority. For instance, the authority of a legislative originates from the constitution whereas the authority of a council of nobles or military officers is not a constitutional practice in the sense that it might depend on tradition and inter-elite bargaining. To illustrate with cases from our dataset, Chile, Indonesia and Pakistan were consistently autocratic states according to Geddes (1999) in the geno/politicide episode, whereas Polity has assigned relatively high executive constraints scores to these countries for the same periods. Non-constitutional limits to political power, however, may at times be ineffective at safeguarding collective decision making because there can be no basic law securing the rights and autonomy of the accountability groups.

Figure I about here

In sum, both model I and figure I provide support for our theoretical expectations: unconstrained executives are more likely to commit mass killings. We conclude that in polities where policymaking requires the consensus of multiple agents, rulers' access to political power is limited through the presence of accountability groups. Constitutional limits to power seem to increase transaction costs and diminish the utility of violent policies with

to classify regimes into high-low categories with respect to limits on political power, there are 410 cases that fall within the low category (including those regimes that score 4 on the scale), and 69 regimes that are in the high category.

The countries and times periods in the high category are;

Regimes with a '7' executive constraints score; El Salvador 1984-92, Uganda 1966, Sudan 1956-89, Pakistan 1973-76, Burma 1961-62, and Philippines 1987-98.

Regimes scoring 6; Guatemala 1996.

Regimes scoring 5; Chile 1973, Argentina 1973-76, Burundi 1963, Sri Lanka 1983-98, Philippines 1969, and Indonesia 1956-59.

the burden of negotiations as rulers seek a bargaining space within a multiple-agent framework. Limited power also breaks information monopolies because political actors with constitutional authorities are independent from the will (or mercy) of the ruler. The institutional autonomy from the head of the state protects the right to disagree and prevents against the state's being used as a propaganda apparatus to mobilize masses (Snyder, 1991).

Our expectations with regard to political participation are confirmed in all three models: mass enfranchisement seems to increase the likelihood of mass killings. Broad political participation may be a source of trouble rather than a buffer against rulers. The finding suggests a plausible explanation of the ostensibly paradoxical observation that mass killings occur in illiberal democracies. Extensive mass participation in executive (s)election does not serve as a guarantee of human security. On the contrary, it encourages leaders to seek popular support, jockey for political advantage, and suppress their challengers through all available means. In such cases, electoral support may justify turning divisive campaign promises into actual policy, abusing the privileges of office, and using the state as a repressive machine that targets small minorities.

The third dimension of the institutional matrix, competitiveness of executive recruitment, does not appear to be significantly related to mass killings. This result suggests that openness of office neither works as a safety valve against abuses of political power nor particularly encourages rulers to cause human insecurity. This is in line with our theoretical expectations. Increasing competition may lead elites to develop strategies to defeat their rivals which can be moved to the extremes with deliberate killings of supposed members of the opposition. However, political institutions condition the impact of competition on the strategies with which political elites choose to settle accounts with their rivals. In this respect, the adverse effects of competition for political power on human security are mitigated

through the political participation and executive constraints dimensions of the institutional matrix.

The economic and political openness variables appear to be unrelated to mass killings. The dissociation between economic integration and geno/politicide is surprising given our expectations that rulers have an incentive to avoid domestic violence and political instability that would increase risks to traders and investors. We attribute this null finding to the mixed relationship between socio-political instability and trade openness. On the one hand, a ruler in a closed society may seek to solidify her domestic standing by resorting to violence knowing that international pressure would be inconsequential to her political survival. A ruler, on the other hand, may seek to improve external economic relations and attract foreign trade and is therefore less likely to weaken the economic and social fabric of the society through illiberal policies. We think that it is these competing relationships that explain the null effect of trade openness on the incidence of mass killings. With regard to the effect of international organization membership, its non-significance confirms Harff's conclusion.

In model II, we have included ethno-linguistic fractionalization and its interaction with political constraints in the analysis. The individual impact of ethnic diversity is significant and positive, suggesting that rulers are more likely to exploit identity issues and engage in mass killings in ethnically mobilized societies. This finding fits previous research and our expectations. We believe that in all polity types, rulers have to mobilize support among masses for the solidification of their rule. Even in personalist regimes, leaders are better off if they can back their rule with mass support. Therefore, mass mobilization is critical to the survival of a regime regardless of the characteristics of political institutions. In this respect, identity issues may provide clear-cut and easy-to-exploit societal sentiments for greedy politicians. The exploitation of latent communal cleavages may sometimes escalate

communal unrest to the level of human insecurity.¹⁷ The interaction variable, however, is not associated with mass killings. Cultural pluralism does not by itself indicate the breakdown of trust and cooperation, communal conflict and ethnic exclusion.

Finally, model III disaggregates autocratic regimes and thus expands the analysis of the relationship between polity type and mass killings. In section III, we have argued that in single-party regimes, the low probability of electoral success of a second party and the desire to stay in office and reap its benefits, may discourage party members from dissenting. These characteristics effectively reduce single-party regimes to a one-man framework and eliminate *de facto* accountability groups in the form of political factions within party. In this respect, single-party regimes share similar institutional characteristics with personalist regimes given the low negotiation costs in policymaking and the ease of holding back information from the public. We have also claimed that military regimes are less likely to reach a consensus on repressive policies, which would substantially decrease the likelihood of geno/politicides. The results of the analysis show that consistently autocratic regimes are more likely than institutionally inconsistent regimes and democracies to commit mass atrocities. Interestingly, the effect of a military regime on mass killings is positive and significant, which runs counter to our theoretical expectations. The explanation may be that institutional checks on executive authority alone may be insufficient. What may be more relevant is the connection between the institution checking executive authority and the general citizenry.

Another way to illustrate the importance of consistently autocratic regimes is to examine the overlap between the geno/politicide episodes and the periods in which a country has experienced a Geddes-type regime. Table II does just that, and presents strong support for our findings in model III: there is nearly a perfect match between autocratic periods and the

¹⁷ See Rabushka and Shepsle (1972) for their influential argument that in ethnically divided societies, the formation of one ethnic party triggers the formation of others and mobilization of masses along ethnic lines. However, the “intense and non-negotiable” character of ethnicity reduces the value of bargaining with other parties and leads to democratic breakdowns by eliminating competitive politics (p.72).

incidence of mass killings. In the majority of occurrences, rulers have made decisions to target their subjects within autocratic environments. Contrary to our theoretical expectations, military regimes appear to be no less likely than other autocratic forms to generate human tragedies. Interestingly, in the cases of Burundi, Indonesia, Iraq, Rwanda, Sudan and Uganda, the change in the characteristics of the autocratic regime did not make these rulers less likely to target civilians. The consistently positive effects of different autocracy types suggest that de facto limitations on political power do not constrain rulers from targeting civilians. This is fundamental to the logic of our argument on institutional design – executive constraints in particular – and also Zakaria’s (1997) strong emphasis on constitutional liberalism as the guarantor of good governance: *constitutionally designed constraints* on political power rather than *unstructured negotiation and competition* between political elites are the factors that give rulers incentives to respect human rights.

Table II around here

VI. Discussion: Rules, Rulers, and the Ruled

Our research examined the relationship between political institutions, ethno-linguistic fractionalization and the incidence of mass killings in all countries from 1955 to 2001 using Harff’s (2003) data. We found strong evidence suggesting that death by government is directly associated with the lack of institutional limits on executive power. Regimes with substantial constraints on executive decision-making were less likely to engage in mass atrocities. The non-significant effect of the openness of competition for office, and the significant positive association between political participation and mass killings, further suggests that institutional limitations on executive power are central to understanding why leaders may or may not provide human security. This was confirmed when autocratic regimes were disaggregated into single-party, personalist and military regimes. All autocratic polity

types were more likely than inconsistent regimes and democracies to commit mass atrocities, despite possibilities for inter-elite bargaining within autocracies and the restraints on policymaking that certain autocratic designs provide. Finally, we observed that ethnic-linguistic diversity is not associated with mass killings in regimes which impose group decision-making. Overall, the strong negative impact of executive constraints on mass killings suggested that rulers have an incentive to pursue good governance as a political survival strategy if the polity type effectively limits rulers' access to power through constitutionally designed accountability groups.

Political elites are much more likely to resort to coercion as a tool to forestall threats to the regime or to solidify their domestic standing in systems where the ruler cannot credibly commit herself to protect a variety of citizen rights, including the right to live and prosper. The same conclusion also explains the origins of human tragedies in ethnically divided societies. Killings are primarily observed in countries lacking constitutional checks on the political power of the sovereign. In these systems, governance rests in the hands of small groups that avoid internal dissent, or make concessions to a dominant actor in order to retain power. Such systems suffer from the absence of autonomous political actors with authority to monitor the quality of governance. Inadequate monitoring affects not only the decision making but also the policy implementation process. Hence, there are stronger incentives to escalate killings where the absence of opposition reduces the political costs of formulating and implementing coercive policies.

How to create incentives for rulers to govern for human security is an important policy question. Our analysis has aimed to suggest some answers. The theoretical and empirical analysis in the present study has indicated a close link between rulers' incentives to target civilians and the institutional environment in which their actions are embedded. One

lesson that may be drawn from this exercise is that constitutional practices that limit leaders' access to political power tend to ensure that they govern for the security of their citizens.

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Table I. Random Effects Logit Analysis: Dependent Variable, Geno-/Politicides

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Cofactor Name			
Executive Constraints	-.755 (.234)***	-.918 (.288)***	-.718 (.248)***
Openness of Recruitment	-.353 (.410)	.142 (.438)	.253 (.541)
Political Participation	.765 (.280)***	.917 (.301)***	.911 (.314)***
Log Population	1.733 (.293)***	1.440 (.289)***	1.730 (.336)***
Economic Openness	-.018 (.014)	-.030 (.017)*	-.018 (.016)
International Organization Membership	-.081 (.075)	-.023 (.081)	-.121 (.082)
Ethno-linguistic Fractionalization (ELF)		.060 (.018)***	
ELF and Unconstrained Leaders		-.001 (.003)	
Single-party Regime			2.345 (1.258)*
Military Regime			2.176 (.912)**
Personalist Regime			2.438 (.961)**
Constant	-19.029 (3.211)***	-20.586 (3.750)***	-22.609 (3.906)***
Scale Parameter	.877 (.030)	.857 (.042)	.889 (.031)
N	856	780	856

Note: 1) Robust standard errors are reported for all logit models. 2) Two tailed hypothesis tests; * = p<.10; ** = p<.05; *** = p<.001.

Figure I. Genocides/Politicides and Limits to Political Power

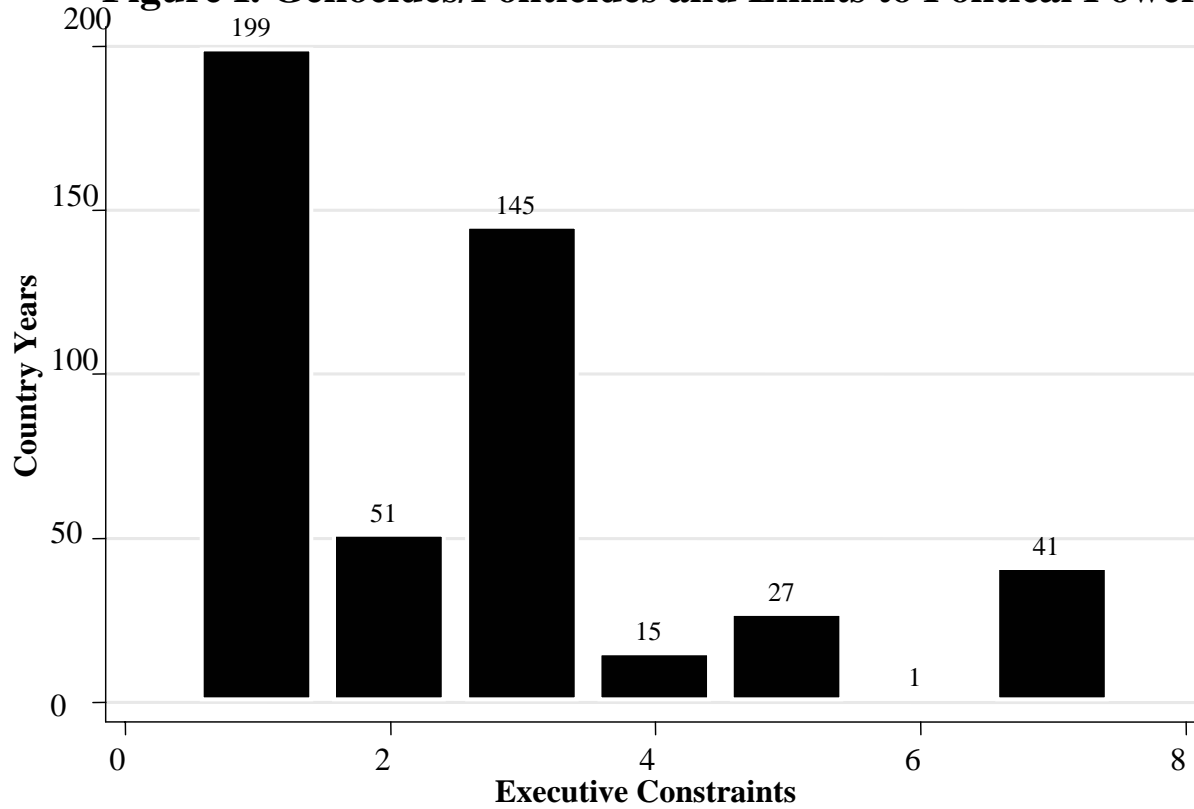


Table II. Autocracies and Genocides/Politicides

Country	Genocide/Politicide Episode	Autocracy Type	Regime Duration
Afghanistan	1978-92	Personalist	1973-78
		Single-party	1979-93
Algeria	1962	–	
Angola	1975-94, 1998-2002	Single-party	1976-
Argentina	1976-80	Military	1976-83
Bosnia	1992-95	–	
Burma	1978	Triple-hybrid*	1962-88
Burundi	1965-73, 1988, 1993-94	Military/Single-party	1966-87
		Military	1987-93
Cambodia	1975-79	Single-party	1975-79
Chile	1973-76	Military/Personalist	1973-89
China	1959, 1966-75	Single-party	1949-
Congo (Kinshasa)	1964-65, 1977-79	Personalist	1965-97
El Salvador	1980-89	Military/Single-party	1948-84
Equatorial Guinea	1969-79	–	
Ethiopia	1976-79	Military/personalist	1974-91
Guatemala	1978-90	Military	1970-85
Indonesia	1965-66, 1975-92	Personalist	1949-65
		Triple-hybrid	1967-
Iran	1981-92	–	
Iraq	1963-75, 1988-91	Personalist	1963-68
		Single-party/Personalist	1968-79
		Personalist	1979-
Pakistan	1971, 1973-77	Personalist	1971-77
Philippines	1972-76	Personalist	1972-86
Rwanda	1963-64, 1994	Single-party	1962-73
		Military	1994-
Yugoslavia (Serbia)	1998-99	–	
Somalia	1988-91	Personalist	1969-90
South Vietnam	1965-75	–	
Sri Lanka	1989-90	–	
Sudan	1956-72, 1983-	Military	1958-64
		Personalist	1969-85
		Military	1989-
Syria	1981-82	Triple-hybrid	1963-
Uganda	1972-79, 1980-86	Personalist	1971-79
		Personalist	1986-

Note: The data on genocide/politicide episodes come from Harff (2003:60) and include all available cases. The autocracy data are adopted from Geddes (1999). Column III and IV report only the polity periods that overlap with a genocide/politicide period. In this respect, most countries have longer autocratic experiences which are not included in Table I because Harff does not report any mass killing cases for these periods. Iran, Equatorial Guinea, and Sri Lanka are not in Geddes' dataset. Though South Vietnam had a personalist regime between 1955 and 1963, the politicicide targeting supposed supporters of Viet Cong has not taken place before the personal rule was over. Also, Geddes classifies Yugoslavia as a single-party regime between 1945 and 1989 which again does not match with the timing of the ethnic cleansing of Muslims and is, therefore, not included in the table.

* Triple-hybrid refers to polity types which contain characteristics of all three autocracy types.