Inhaltsverzeichnis

1. Introduction

Claims for regional self-determination[1] were issued in more than one third of civil wars after 1945 (Sambanis et al. 2014: 1831). Territorially concentrated ethnic groups reject the central state's influence in their affairs and demand more autonomy or even independence. Against this backdrop, ethnic-based federalism is considered an instrument to prevent or mitigate tensions (Cederman, Hug/ et al. 2015: 354). Granting regional autonomy is treated as handy compromise between the two clashing international norms of self-determination and territorial integrity (Anderson 2004: 89).

In this manner, the introduction of ethnic-based federalism was recommended for countries like South Sudan and Pakistan (Khan 2014; Mengie 2015: 463f). In Nepal, intra-state violence escalated in 2015 over the very question of introducing a system of ethnic-based federalism (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research 2016: 149). Still, other policy-makers are reluctant to grant ethnic groups autonomy rights because they fear that increased decentralization will lead to demands for secession and eventually conflict (Brancati 2006: 660).

The research in this field mirrors the policy-side's mixed feelings on the consequences of regional autonomy. It remains empirically and theoretically unclear whether regional autonomy indeed reduces conflict (Cederman, Hug/ et al. 2015: 355; Siroky et al. 2014: 4). Instead of accommodating claims of self-determination by lowering nationalist grievances, it might as well strengthen the group's identity and provide it with resources.

I argue that the unclear empirical results stem from the fact that autonomy was mainly treated as an isolated variable without taking its interaction with other conflict-related conditions into account – for example, lacking power-sharing at the central level, the prevalence of economic inequality, or the existence of trans-border ethnic kin (TEK). From this perspective of multifinality, the conflict increasing or decreasing effect of autonomy is not an either-or-question but depends on the circumstances in which it is introduced. Trying to show that autonomy indeed leads to more or less conflicts is therefore a misguided under-taking remaining inevitably fruitless.

This paper re-frames the former approaches to autonomy and conflict by shedding light at the very question: Under which circumstances does autonomy lead to the outbreak of secessionist

[1] In the following, I will use the term self-determination to refer to any kind of nationalist claim, either autonomy, secession or irredentism. This is often not clearly differentiated in the literature. My theoretical argument only refers to secessionist conflict.

conflict? To this end, I apply a crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA) to detect combinations of conditions that are related to the onset of secessionist conflict. Being able to take complex causality into account, QCA is more suitable than quantitative methods to do so.

My results underline the expected complexity of the phenomenon by revealing six different solution paths leading to secessionist conflict onset between autonomous groups and the central government. The paths indicate that in a situation of regional autonomy, political exclusion at the central level is only a sufficient motive to challenge the government if it occurs in combination with economic deprivation. In contrast, the presence of excluded TEK might motivate violent conflict even in the absence of these two »classic« conflict triggers. Being economically better off, seems to be a reason for conflict in situations that are already prone to conflict. Importantly, the use of autonomy as a reconciliation measure, i. e. autonomy rights being granted after conflict had occurred, does not seem to be a very successful strategy to prevent the re-emergence of violence.

2. State of Research

While the quest for self-determination is investigated by most sub-disciplines of political science, I will focus on sub-systemic approaches aiming at the explanation of intra-state wars.[2] Empirically, secessionist conflicts are fought along ethnic lines in 98% of the cases and the literature dealing with this type of conflict consequently can be seen as a subfield of the broader ethnic civil war literature.

»The golden threat« of this literature is the incentive-opportunity controversy arguing over the question whether civil wars are motivated by grievance or possible economic gain (Bara 2014: 697). The debate can be traced back to Horowitz (1985) and Gurr (1970, 1993, 2002) who as the first come up with group psychological explanations for ethnic conflict, building to feelings of dissatisfaction against the state. This was famously challenged in two large-n studies by Collier et al. (2004) and Fearon et al. (2003): instead of grievance the structural opportunities offered to potential rebels matter. Yet, these studies suffer major flaws – e. g. the use of very rough proxies and under-theorization – and were later opposed by scholars

[2] For an explanation of secessionist conflicts from an International Relations perspective look e. g. at Griffiths (2014) who explains the increase in secessionist conflicts with the loss of importance of territory and the bi-polarity of the international system during the Cold War.

building on the concept of horizontal inequalities brought forward by Stewart (2008).[3] In contrast to Gurr, they argue that neither the deprivation of individuals nor the ethnic diversity as such foster conflict but unequal power constellations between groups (Roessler 2011: 301). This would explain the lacking statistical nexus between individual measures of inequality and conflict in former studies and especially researchers around Cederman work on statistical corroboration of the horizontal inequality argument (i. e. Cederman et al. 2011; Cederman et al. 2010; Cederman/ Gleditsch/ et al. 2013). However, the concept of horizontal inequalities should not be understood as incompatible with opportunity arguments – in contrary, opportunity structures matter as a possibility to voice grievance.

Accordingly, the analytical differentiation of factors increasing incentives and opportunities for challenging the incumbent state is applied on self-determination conflicts. From the incentives perspective, secessionist groups want to escape from political and economic deprivation by constituting their own state. From the opportunity perspective, secessionist groups use their favourable conditions like regional concentration, remoteness, TEK, and eventually resources (Collier 2010: 1111; Cornell 2002: 245; Denny et al. 2014: 200).

Regional autonomy of a group is a factor cross-cutting these two perspectives since it argued to influence both. Authors who consider autonomy as a conflict mitigating factor argue that regional autonomy can reduce the perceived grievances significantly, lowering the incentive for conflict and recruitment possibilities (Bermeo 2002: 97f; Gurr 1994: 366). Further, decentralization leads to a more efficient allocation of resources, therefore lowering tensions between groups (Sambanis et al. 2014: 1832).

On the other hand, autonomy might increase conflict, firstly, by politicising and entrenching ethnic identity (Ghai 2000: 499). In this sense, Østby et al. (2009: 304) propose that the regional affiliation of a group only emerges through the establishment of regional parties and institutions. Secondly, it facilitates mobilization through material resources allocated to regional institutions and the emergence of legitimized leaders (Cederman, Hug/ et al. 2015: 358; Cornell 2002: 251; 254; Khan 2014: 91).

As mixed as the theoretical arguments are, are the empirical findings.[4] Anderson (2004: 110) and Siroky et al. (2014) found that groups with autonomy rights are more likely to seek

[3] Stewart's (2008) concept originally differentiates the dimensions of economic, political, social, and cultural inequalities but at least in the quantitative research on this concept the focus lies clearly on economic and political inequalities.

[4] The only point in which researcher agree seems to be that retracting former autonomy rights has a strong conflict increasing effect (c. f. Siroky et al. 2014: 26). However, this is beyond my research question since I

secession than those who never had. Also, Deiwiks et al. (2012) confirms a conflict-increasing effect of regional autonomy at least in federal states. In contrast, Cederman, Hug/ et al. (2015: 356; 363) diagnosed a conflict-decreasing effect, though this is limited to pre-conflict scenarios. Brancati (2006: 681) also argues in favour of a preventive effect of decentralization but only in the short run.

To explain these ambiguities and acknowledging that »autonomy is neither a sufficient nor a necessary factor« for conflict onset (Cornell 2002: 261), authors started to focus on interactions between autonomy and other conflict increasing or decreasing factors respectively. But to my knowledge, no comprehensive investigation of such factor configurations has been conducted. Instead, only single combinations have been scrutinized, for example, the interplay with regional parties by Brancati (2006), the combination with economic inequalities by Deiwiks et al. (2012) and the strategic environment by Walter (2006). This is where the present paper taps in: By conducting a QCA on a global data set of ethnic groups with autonomy rights, conflict risk increasing factor configurations shall be identified.

This is similar to the QCA Bara (2014) conducted in order to identify configurations of explanatory factors usually hold responsible for the outbreak of ethnic conflict. However, my endeavour is much more narrow in its theoretical focus on secessionist conflict and the role autonomy plays here. Otherwise, QCA was rarely applied in conflict studies so far though its overall application in political science increased in the last years (Rihoux et al. 2013: 177).[5] Most of the time QCA is combined with other large-n or case studies. Being beyond the scope of this paper, a follow-up process tracing should be considered later on (cf. Paragraph 6).

3. Theoretical Assumptions on the Interaction Effects of Autonomy Rights

In order to answer the question under which circumstances autonomy leads to secessionist conflict, it is necessary to consider interactions between autonomy and those conditions that are usually identified as contributing to secessionist conflict. Autonomy is not meant to be cause of conflict on its own and accordingly I do not (and cannot) provide one stringent argument how autonomy leads to conflict. Instead, I proceed as follows to point possible

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focus on the effects of currently granted autonomy and I do not consider this current of the literature in the following.

[5] For examples of the application of QCA in conflict studies look at Ansorg (2013), Bretthauer (2014), Pinfari (2011), among others.

interaction effects out: I shortly present a causal mechanism how horizontal inequality of ethnic groups leads to secessionist conflict onset. Subsequently, I elaborate eight conditions influencing this mechanism by altering motives and opportunities of the actors. For each condition, I discuss how it interacts with autonomy. Though I will present the conditions separately due to reasons of clarity it should be kept in mind that also the conditions interact with each other. As it is discussed in more detail in Paragraph 4, using the explanatory nature of QCA provides me with the opportunity to detect such more complex interactions.

3.1. A Basic Mechanism of Secessionist Conflict

My understanding of intra-state conflict builds mainly on the concept of Horizontal Inequalities (HI) by Stewart (2008). According to this approach, the occurrence of ethnic conflict can be traced back to structural inequalities between groups, manifesting themselves politically, culturally, economically, and/or socially (Stewart 2008: 3). But to be able to explain the connection between the two structural concepts of inequality and conflict outbreak at the macro level, it is necessary to take the processes at the micro level involving the individual agents into account.[6] The following link is proposed for intra-state conflicts: the inequality between groups leads to the group member's dissatisfaction with the status-quo and subsequently to its organization and the challenge of the incumbent state in a collective action. Hence, conflict will occur when actors have sufficient incentive and opportunity (Bara 2014: 697).

Secessionist conflict can be considered a subtype of intra-state conflict which is distinguished by its conflict issue, i. e. the group's demand for independence. Secession is defined as the effort to withdraw oneself from the political and constitutional authority of the state in order to achieve statehood for a delimited part of the state's territory (de Villiers 2012: 82). Accordingly, it is inherent to the concept that the group is living regionally concentrated.[7] Secession is not per definition violent but it often turns so, if the state wants to prevent a group from seceding.

[6] Such an analytical model is known as the Coleman/Esser bathtub: The macro level is the social structure which contains institutions and processes related to the society as a whole. The micro level lies vertical to the macro level and comprehends the behaivour of individual actors (Esser 1993: 102).

[7] This is because the group aims to detach a delimited part of the territory in order to establish an independent state. If a group is not regionally concentrated but dispersed throughout the state's territory it would need to strive for central power in order to be able to improve the situation of all members.

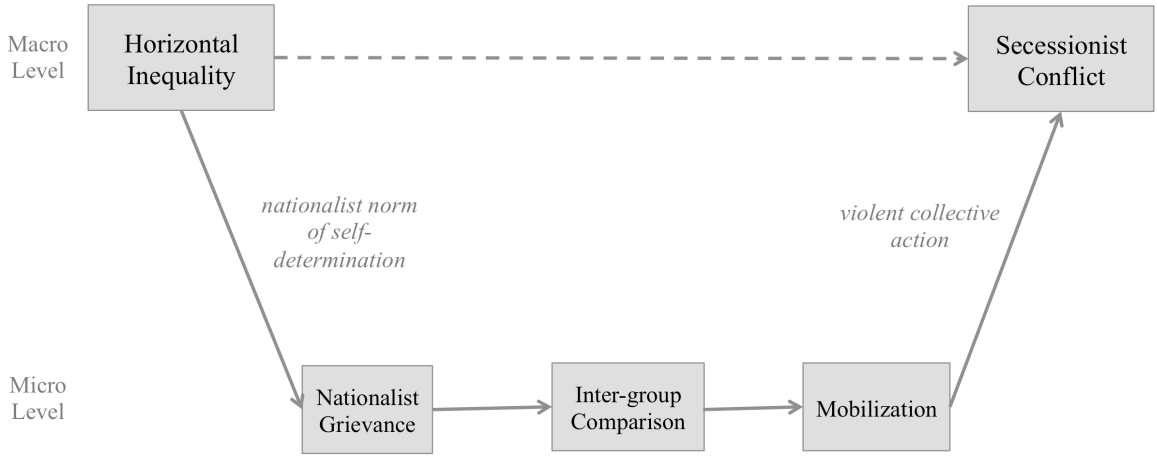

Figure 1: Causal Mechanism between HI and Secessionist Conflict (own figure)

The conflict mechanism briefly sketched out before can be adapted to secessionist conflicts (cf. Figure 1). This yields that the demand for secession can mostly be traced back to nationalist grievances: Such grievances appear when group members apply the nationalist norm of self-determination on their situation.[8] This norm requires that the unit of government and the nation are congruent which means that a national group is able to deal with its own affairs without external inference (Khan 2014: 92). This is not only limited to political self-determination but can also be understood as the possibility to control economic assets. The evaluation of the norm entails the comparison with other groups and mostly leads to an identification of the state representatives as the protectors of the allegedly unjust order (Cederman et al. 2010: 96; Cederman/ Gleditsch/ et al. 2013: 40f.).[9] Given their ethnic distinctiveness and regional concentration, a way to reach self-determination is secession, especially if less radical means within existing order are exhausted (Cederman et al. 2010: 96).

To be able to reach its demand the group's elite needs to mobilize its members by using existing social networks and categorical identification. This is not a purely cognitive process but draws much on emotional attachment of the group members (Cederman/ Gleditsch/ et al.

[8] In order to do so, the groups need to have minimal group identification and consciousness of their ethnic identity. Though I appreciate that deprivation itself can be a reason for a strong ethnic identity, ethnicity needs to be a relevant category before in order to become a medium through which power and public goods can be accessed (Khan 2014: 91).

[9] The reference to nationalist grievances does not exclude that deprivation also might motivate individuals to strive for their own power or economic gain using the argumentation based nationalist grievance to hide their intentions (Mengie 2015: 473). These two motivations – »true« nationalist grievances and personal enrichment – are not mutually exclusive from my point of view but take place on different analytical levels (group and individual).

2013: 45). The mobilization is then translated into collective action, eventually including violence if no improvements are reached or if the state reacts with harsh repressions. This leads to further radicalization and mobilization and potentially to armed conflict (Cederman/ Gleditsch/ et al. 2013: 49f.).

To sum up, violent secessionist conflict occurs when a group perceives a situation as contradicting its right on self-determination and when it is able to organize itself to take collective action.

3.2. Conditions favouring Secession Conflict and their Interaction with Autonomy

The outlined mechanism can be influenced in several ways by conditions that alter the incentives and opportunities of secessionist groups. The effect of the conditions can be increased or mitigated when they coincide with autonomy rights. Political regional Autonomy means that an administrative unit receives authority over substantial policy fields regarding the respective region while being subject to the overall legal order of the central state at the same time (Anderson 2004: 91; Siroky et al. 2014: 4). Eight of such conditions are elaborated in the following. In line with the complexity of the phenomenon in question and the explanatory nature of QCA, I do not formulate concrete hypotheses but solely indicate whether a condition is expected to be present or absent *in combination with autonomy rights* to produce the outcome (cf. Table 1).

Condition 1: Political Exclusion

Political exclusion refers to a specific type of horizontal inequality, i. e. the unequal sharing of power at the central state level. This means a group is not represented in the government while it is subjected to the government's policies at the same time. This should lead to grievances among the excluded group because it is not able to determine its own fate.

But the exclusion might be less relevant when the group enjoys autonomy rights at the same time. This builds on the assumption that regional autonomy already suffice to accommodate the grievances of potentially secessionist groups and to alter its cost-benefit-calculation when assessing the risk of challenging the government (Cederman, Hug/ et al. 2015: 356; Siroky et al. 2014: 3). This is valid especially for small groups that would have a hard stand as independent states anyway (Bara 2014: appendix 3). This goes with the limitation that the granted rights need to be substantial to have indeed a grievance-reducing effect (Anderson

2004: 110). Consequently, the presence or absence of political exclusion should not matter for conflict outbreak among autonomous group.

But the accommodating effect can be doubted due to the fear of future domination: Without political inclusion at the centre the groups are subject to the permanent worry that the central state might take the granted rights back (Cederman et al. 2010: 110). Additionally, the experience of quasi-statehood in the region increases the longing for complete independence while the salience of the central state for the group decreases as long as no participation is enabled (Anderson 2004: 98). Considering this, there is no further incentive to maintain the integrity of the state whose authority is considered illegitimate (Bara 2014: 698; Cederman, Hug/ et al. 2015: 358). It follows, that the presence of political exclusion should be a crucial part of an explanation for secessionist conflict of autonomous groups.

Besides that, secessionist groups might have such a strong demand for their independent statehood that it simply does not matter for them whether they are politically included or not. In this understanding, it is not the political exclusion that causes grievances and therefore motivates conflict but the simple fact that the group does not want to share power on its territory (Brancati 2006). Again, conflict among groups with autonomy is then independent from the presence or absence of political exclusion.

Condition 2: Economic Inequality

Horizontal economic inequality refers to a situation in which a group is wealthier or poorer than other groups within the same country. The conflict-increasing effect of horizontal economic inequality is assumed to be bidirectional, i. e. it does not matter whether a situation favours or disfavours a group (Deiwiks et al. 2012: 289).[10]

For groups suffering economic disadvantages secession becomes an attractive option because they perceive the central state as not able or willing to provide sufficient public goods. As in the case of political exclusion, the salience of the state is low (Anderson 2004: 98). Grievances are especially strong if a peripheral, relatively autonomous region is economically exploited by the central state (Deiwiks et al. 2012: 292).

[10] When the economic status of secessionist groups is discussed, this often goes along with arguments on the presence of resources on the disputed territory. If the resources are exploited by the central government without giving (as sufficient perceived) shares to the group, this will cause further grievances and probably increase secessionist demands (Østby et al. 2009: 305). If the group is controlling the resources this equally provides incentive to gain independence in order to prevent redistribution of the gains. Furthermore resources can be used to finance the self-determination movement (Collier et al. 2002). Though I would have liked to consider these effects in a separate variable, I was not able to obtain the necessary data for the present analysis.

In case that a group is better off than the rest of the country it might consider secession as a possibility to withdraw itself from re-distribution. Again, autonomy should enhance such considerations if the granted rights generated strong feelings of self-reliance beforehand (Deiwiks et al. 2012: 294). Then, the readiness to accept regional transfers is low and the group wishes to re-draw the borders in order to establish its own tax regime (Collier et al. 2002: 38). Moreover, seeking independence is a more realistic endeavour for rich groups, especially when former autonomy provided necessary institutions and administrative structures (Anderson 2004: 96).

Hence, regional autonomy cannot lower the grievances caused by economic inequality but is even increasing them. Economic inequality should remain a relevant condition for conflict outbreak, also among autonomous groups. Nonetheless, the two discussed dimensions of inequality should also be considered in their combined effect (Deiwiks et al. 2012: 294). It seems reasonable that autonomy is able to mitigate feelings of deprivation as long as the group is only suffering in one dimension.[11] Here, QCA is helpful to identify the combinations.

Condition 3: Loss of Political Power at the Centre

Closely connected with the condition of political exclusion is the devolution of political power sharing arrangements at the centre leading to the exclusion of a formerly included group. This is considered a strong incentive for conflict due to negative sentiments and the wish to regain the former power (Bara 2014: 698; Cederman et al. 2010: 104).

But as it was argued above, the political participation at the central level is for autonomous groups not as important as for others and having lost power should not a have a strong effect on conflict onset. On the other hand, substantial power loss might mark a crucial turning point beyond which it is not worth remaining part of the central state anymore. In a way, the loss of central power is a more dynamic variant of the political exclusion variable building on a similar causal reasoning.

Condition 4: Autonomy as Reconciliation Measure

The capacity of autonomy as a tool to mitigate political grievances might furthermore dependent on the timing of its introduction. Autonomy is supposed to be appeasing only at the early stage of tensions, when the groups have more modest objectives and are ready to compromise (Cederman, Hug/ et al. 2015). As soon as the actors perceive self-determination

[11] For example, when a group is fighting for more political participation economic disadvantages can be easily instrumentalized for further mobilization (Østby et al. 2009: 305). Or, political exclusion might be tolerated only if it comes in tandem with autonomy rights and an economic inequality in favour of a group.

as a zero-sum-game – which is probably the case after deadly conflict – negotiating the degree of self-determination is nearly impossible (Babbitt 2002: 160; 165). Often rebel groups splinter because those not satisfied with a power-sharing compromise offered during/after conflict continue to challenge the central government violently (Cederman et al. 2010: 109). Nonetheless is autonomy commonly introduced as a reconciliation measure after conflict (Cornell 2002: 254; Khan 2014: 80). The introduction of autonomy after conflict outbreak should then be a condition whose presence contributes to conflict outbreak.

Condition 5: Medium Number of Ethnic groups

The number of other ethnic groups – and therefore potentially other rebel groups – is influencing the strategic considerations of groups wondering to engage in violent conflict. The basic idea is that state governments tolerate secessionist movements less and hesitate more to make concessions if there are numerous other groups that might challenge the government as well. This is because the governments fear that doing so motivates the other groups to try the same (Walter 2006: 110f.). Knowing this, potential rebel groups anticipate the state's reaction by taking the number of other groups into account. Consequently, they will be less likely to challenge the state if there are many other groups (ibd.). Yet, the relation between the number of groups and the likelihood of secessionist conflict is not linear but u-shaped (Fearon et al. 2003).

I assume this argument functions similar for groups already enjoying autonomy rights who consider demanding more concessions from the central state. Since the absence of a medium number of other groups should contribute to conflict outbreak, its presence might be able to compensate other conflict-increasing conditions.

Condition 6: Excluded Transborder Ethnic Kin

The presence of TEK – the presence of the own ethnic group across the country's border – is not considered increasing the conflict risk per se but in dependence with the TEK's political status. If the TEK is included, firstly, it might function like an exist option for the group because they can simply migrate to the neighbouring state (Walter 2006: 123). Secondly, strong TEK can have a deterrent effect on the government: Fearing the TEK's intervention, it refrains from disadvantaging the ethnic group or repressing it violently (Cederman, Gleditsch/ et al. 2013: 403).

But if the TEK is politically excluded the exit option is eliminated of migration and an intervention does not have to be feared. Instead, the experienced grievances and demands for secession or irredentism respectively might be circulated and mutually enhanced between the

group and its TEK (Saideman et al. 2000: 1136). This mechanism should hold even more in the context of regional autonomy in which the autonomous region can function as a platform and sanctuary for the region. Therefore, I consider the presence of excluded TEK as an important factor in explaining conflict onset for autonomous groups.

Condition 7: Sudden Regime Instability

Sudden regime instability refers to the abrupt transition of a political regime between autocratic, democratic, and anocratic systems, irrespective of the direction of change. This is understood as a sign of state instability and weakness which rebel groups can use as an opportunity to grab central power or secede (Fearon et al. 2003: 81; Walter 2006: 118).

For autonomous groups, sudden system instability should be an especially strong trigger to attempt to secede violently. Firstly, they might be not be affected by the central state's instability because they have their own administrative structures, media, legislature, and even police forces (Brancati 2006: 659). To avoid a spill-over of the instability on its own system, the group might take the opportunity to gain full independence. Secondly, the instability leads to high insecurity for the autonomous group because it cannot be sure that the succeeding regime will show the same commitment to preserve its autonomy rights and has to fear future domination (Walter 2006: 111). Consequently, the presence of state instability and autonomy should contribute to conflict onset.

Condition 8: High Risk of Conflict Outbreak

In addition to the conditions elaborated so far, there are much more factors identified in the literature as increasing a group's or country's risk to engage in civil war. To avoid an inflation of the QCA with conditions of very similar effects and because I do not consider these factors to behave special for autonomous groups, I aggregated four of the most discussed risk factors to one comprehensive condition (cf. Figure 2).

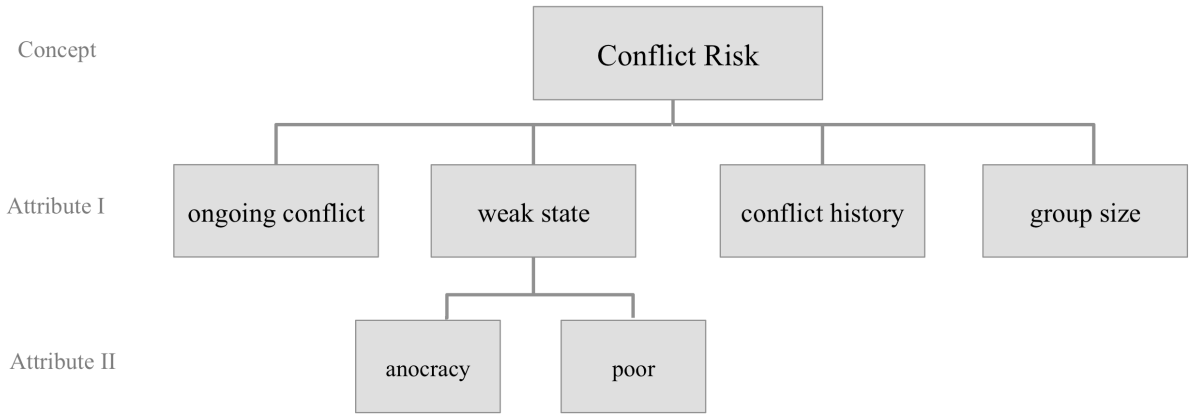

Figure 2: Concept Tree Conflict Risk (own figure)

Firstly, a weak central state motivates potential rebels because they see a greater chance to succeed and are able to mobilize and recruit soldiers without interference from the centre. Additionally, weak states are more prone to conflict spill-overs from neighbouring countries (Bara 2014: 698; 703). Two factors contributing to state capacity are emphasized here: On the one hand, the regime type, on the other hand the country's wealth. Regarding the regime type, anocracies are considered especially weak. Being neither a full democracy nor a full autocracy, such regimes are neither able to incorporate nor to repress divagating interests, making violent regime challenge a viable possibility to enforce particular interests (Walter 2006: 123). Regarding the country's wealth, poor countries are considered prone to conflict because the state has lower repression capacities and is not able to solve up-suing conflicts through the re-distribution of goods (Brancati 2006: 669; Cederman et al. 2010: 103). Also, group members might have more incentives to join rebel organization when the state is not able to provide income possibilities and education (Collier et al. 2004: 569).

Secondly, a group's conflict risk is increased if there is a conflict on-going in the same country.[12] Firstly, potential rebel groups might feel encouraged to challenge the state violently if obviously another group is able to do so. Also, weapons might be more easily available and cooperation between various non-state actors can ensue. Furthermore, the state is more ready to use violent means to repress a group's demand because it does not tolerate any risk of further conflict. But its capacity to do so might be reduced due to its involvement in the already on-going conflict. Last but not least, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) might contribute to the spread of conflict (Bohnet et al. 2016).

[12] Though geographical clustering of intra-state conflict is an established finding, still little is known about the mechanisms of spatial diffusion within state's borders (Buhaug et al. 2008: 216).

Thirdly, a group is much more likely to engage in conflict if it already has a history of violent conflict. This is due to the conflict parties' increased grievance and longing for revenge (Bara 2014: 698). Additionally, the past conflict constituted a breach of trust that renders the re-escalation of tensions likely. Besides these psychological factors, also the capacity of non-state with conflict history groups is higher, especially if they were not fully disarmed (Cederman, Hug/ et al. 2015: 356).

Fourthly, a very small group size of non-state actors should *lower* the conflict risk. Such groups have, on the one hand, less opportunities to aim at secession because independence is nearly not possible due to natural limits of feasibility (Sambanis et al. 2014: 1834). On the other hand, they lack the capacity to challenge the government even if they liked to. They cannot accumulate enough resources as well as supporters and face difficulties to recruit member for their armed forces. This is especially valid for ethnic conflicts in which the pool of potential recruits is limited by ethnic belonging (Bara 2014: 698; Cederman, Gleditsch/ et al. 2013: 396).

The mentioned factors are aggregated to one »risk factor« and its presence is supposed to contribute to conflict outbreak.[13] Though a risk is not enough to trigger conflict, it probably does so in combination with the other factors mentioned before.

In this paragraph, it was theoretically elaborated for eight conditions how they contribute to secessionist conflict outbreak and how their effect is influenced by regional autonomy. Yet, from a theoretical perspective it remains largely unclear how these different conditions interact among themselves. In the following paragraph, I elaborate why QCA is the most suitable method to gain insights on possible interactions.

[13] See Paragraph 4.4. for the aggregation rules applied.

Condition	*General Effect on Mechanism*	*Effect for Autonomous Groups*	*Contribution to Onset (QCA)*
Political Exclusion	Increase of incentive by causing grievances	Increase of incentive by rendering the state irrelevant OR Irrelevant due to compensation by autonomy rights	Presence or Absence
Economic Inequality	Increase of incentive by causing grievances and opportunity for favoured groups	Increase of incentive by causing strong sentiments against redistribution	Presence
Loss of Power	Increase of incentive by causing grievances	Increase of incentive by rendering the state irrelevant OR Irrelevant due to autonomy rights	Presence or Absence
Autonomy as Reconciliation Measure	–	No decrease because groups are not ready to compromise	Presence
Medium Number	Decrease of incentive by lowering chances of success	Decrease of incentive by lowering chances of success	Absence
Excluded TEK	Increase of incentive by mutual enhancement	Increase of incentive and opportunity by regional collaboration	Presence
Sudden System Instability	Increase of opportunity because of state weakness	Increase of opportunity because of state weakness AND Increase of incentive to avoid domination and instability	Presence
Conflict Risk	Increase of incentive and/or opportunity	Increase of incentive and/or opportunity	Presence

Tab. 1 Hypothesized Effect of the Conditions on Secessionist Conflict Onset

4. Method, Case Selection, and Operationalization

As elaborated in Paragraph 3, my theoretical assumptions build on complex causality. This means I assume that the effect of autonomy depends on its context, i. e. its combination with other conditions, and that there exist various possible combinations of conditions equally leading to conflict outbreak. Since QCA is able to detect complex causality I apply a crisp-set QCA (csQCA) on a dataset of autonomous groups and conflict onsets in order to gain insights for my research question. Doing so, I firstly want to test my theoretical assumptions on the conditions' contribution to conflict onset in combination with autonomy. Secondly, I want to identify conflict prone *configurations* of these conditions. The latter is possible due to the explanatory nature of QCA, i. e. its capacity to detect combinations unknown before (Schneider et al. 2012: 295; 297).

In the following paragraph, I explain the methodical assumptions behind QCA and how it is applied as a technique to analyse data. Subsequently, I justify my case selection and outline the operationalization and calibration of my conditions.

4.1. QCA as a Method to Detect Complex Causality

QCA is often promoted as the middle ground between quantitative and qualitative research (Grofman et al. 2009: 662). While it is qualitative in being outcome-oriented and re-specifying its concepts and theoretical models in a back-and-forth between data and theory, it is quantitative in its capacity to deal with a large amount of cases by classifying them into kinds (Schneider et al. 2009: 387).

The biggest advantage of QCA is that it is able to account for complex causality. Complex causality means that not single conditions are hold responsible for an outcome but various condition configurations. This makes QCA more suitable than statistical methods to handle the complexity of the social world (Schneider et al. 2009: 396).[14] More precisely, complex causality acknowledges the possibilities of equi- and multifinality and an asymmetric relationship between condition and outcome (Grofman et al. 2009: 663).

Equifinality means that an outcome can be caused by various configurations of conditions, which are not mutually exclusive (Schneider et al. 2009: 389). This fits my assumption that

[14] Quantitative, variable-oriented methods strive to detect one variable with the biggest explanatory power (unifinality), mainly independent from its interaction with other factors and assuming an additive effect of the variables (Schneider et al. 2012: 86). This is problematic because it assumes that a condition unfolds its effect without being affected by its own context (Ansorg 2013: 102).

conflict outbreak is caused by more than one specific combination of conditions (Schneider et al. 2012: 86). Multifinality refers to the phenomenon that the direction of a condition's effect depends on the presence or absence of other conditions (Bara 2014: 699). This is essential part of my theoretical argument since I assume that autonomy leads to conflict depending on its circumstances, i. e. the combination with other conditions. Asymmetric causality means that an outcome explanation can not simply be reversed to explain the absence of the outcome (Schneider et al. 2012: 81).

QCA is able to account for complex causality because it builds on the logic of set theory. According to set theory, cases are members in sets and the relation between the sets can explain social phenomena. The membership in certain sets is identified as necessary or sufficient to produce an outcome by applying Boolean logic minimization on the empirically occurring combinations of set-memberships (Schneider et al. 2012: 3).[15] This implies a deterministic understanding of causality.

Though offering many advantages, QCA also faces limits I need to address. Firstly, applying a deterministic concept of causality is a strong assumption not able to capture the tentative effects of some conditions: Deterministic, law-like relationships are rare in the empirical world. To enable a less deterministic view, consistency thresholds are introduced allowing the deviation of a limited amount of cases from the identified condition-outcome relationship (Schneider et al. 2009: 391). Such conditions are considered quasi-sufficient or -necessary respectively (cf. Paragraph 4.2).

Secondly, the limited diversity of real world phenomena leads to logical remainders. This means that there are empty set configurations because there are no empirical cases showing this specific combination of conditions (Grofman et al. 2009: 664). This can only be compensated by theoretical, counterfactual assumptions the researcher makes on the missing evidence. Thirdly, the use of QCA implies the loss of information through the classification of the cases into sets. This is especially problematic for csQCA because it only accounts for differences in kind but not for differences of degree (Schneider et al. 2012: 27).

Having said that, QCA remains the most suitable methods to investigate my research question. Though variable-oriented and case studies also have their advantages, they cannot offer what QCA does: the chance to investigate complex causal relationships while having at the same time a high external validity by considering a large number of cases.

[15] Necessary conditions are considered super-sets of the outcome while sufficient conditions (or sufficient configurations) are sub-sets of the outcome (Schneider et al. 2009: 386).

4.2. Crisp-Set QCA as Data Analysis Technique

The outlined logic of QCA is applied as a technique of data analysis in mainly three variants: crisp-set, fuzzy-set, and multi-value QCA. The csQCA builds on dichotomous set-membership of cases, i. e. a case is either considered as having a condition or not (Grofman et al. 2009: 663). Accordingly, the data has a binary structure.[16] I have chosen csQCA because my outcome is binary in nature and multi-value QCA faces intensified problems with logical remainders (Schneider et al. 2009: 392).

To conduct the QCA, cases need to be assigned to truth table rows. A truth table displays all possible combinations of conditions with each row representing one combination. Through assigning the empirical cases, truth table rows are determined as leading to the outcome or not. By using software, these primitive expressions of combinations are logically minimized through a Quine-McCluskey algorithm until the »most simple, valid expression« is obtained (Bara 2014: 699).

This is the solution formula of the QCA which consists of configurations of conditions connected by the logical OR. Thus, each of these configurations is on its own sufficient to produce the outcome. If a condition appears in all configurations it can be considered necessary. Since logical remainders are quite common the software offers three variants of the solution formula: a conservative, an intermediary and a parsimonious solution. The conservative treats the remainders as if the outcome is absent, while the parsimonious treats them as »Don't Cares». The intermediary solution is based on the researchers theoretical assumptions whether the presence or absence of a condition should contribute to the presence of the outcome, so called easy counterfactuals (Ragin 2008: 48f.).[17]

To assess the explanatory power of the solution formula, two parameters of fit were developed: consistency and coverage. Consistency indicates the degree to which a configuration of conditions can be considered sufficient and is based on the ratio between cases with a specific condition configuration and the outcome and those with the configuration and absence of outcome (Ragin 2008). The parameter of coverage shows how many cases are explained by the solution formula or – in the case of unique coverage – by its

[16] In contrast, fuzzy-sets allow differences in degree for conditions and outcomes of cases. Multi-value QCA can be considered a middle way since it allows such graduation for conditions but not for the outcome which has to be binary (Schneider et al. 2009: 392).

[17] This is why the conservative solution is a subset of the intermediary solution which again is a subset of the most parsimonious solution (Ragin 2008: 51f.).

parts respectively. It helps to estimate the empirical significance of a solution (Bara 2014: 701).

4.3. Case Selection

Having defined my outcome and conditions, I need to decide on the cases to fill my truth table rows. Therefore, it is necessary to define the population and case units. The definition of the population is driven by the researcher's theoretical interest because through its boundaries automatically scope conditions – characteristics that all cases of a population are assumed to share – are introduced. Scope conditions define the circumstances under which a causal relationship is supposed to hold.

My population is defined as all ethnic groups that enjoy substantial autonomy rights. Since I want to investigate under which circumstances autonomy rights for ethnic groups lead to secessionist conflict outbreak, this is a scope condition all groups have to share.[18] Furthermore, groups holding undivided power at the central level are excluded because they can per definition not rebel against themselves (Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. 2015: 811).[19]

As my basic population of ethnic groups functions the compilation of groups in the Ethnic Power Relation (EPR) Dataset provided by Vogt et al. (2015). Ethnicity is here understood as »a subjectively experienced sense of commonality based on a belief in common ancestry and shared culture (Weber 1976)«. Markers that are used as indicators for shared ancestry and culture can be a common language, similar phenotype, or religion (Vogt et al. 2015: 1329). My scope conditions can be implemented by reducing the data set to those groups that are coded has having regional autonomy (»regaut«) and whose power status is neither monopoly nor dominance (»status_pwrrank«).

But groups are not suitable as case units because they are too static to capture the dynamic nature of the outcome conflict outbreak. Consequently, my case units of interest are ethnic groups with autonomy rights during a particular period of time, mostly compromising five years (cf. Appendix). I therefore collapse group-years from 1946 to 2009[20] provided by the

[18] I decided to exclude cases of self-exclusion from my population. Self-exclusion means that a group enjoys autonomy because it established a power monopoly in its territory without the consent of the state (Vogt 2014). I excluded them because I assume that very different dynamics and causal mechanism drive these cases and therefore obscure my empirical analysis.

[19] It turned out that there is no group that has autonomy rights while it holds power at the central level (at least if the definitions of the Ethnic Power Relation dataset are applied). In that sense, this condition is empirically redundant.

[20] EPR data is available until 2013 but since data on economic inequality is only available until 2009, I restrict my population to this period.

EPR dataset into periods to, firstly, not unnecessarily inflate my data with non-events and, secondly, to take the incubation time of my conditions into account (Bara 2014: 700).

But even with the introduction of periods the ratio between events and non-events remains very unbalanced. This is problematic because non-events provide little information while consuming resources for coding of the conditions (King et al. 2001: 139). Therefore, I follow the advice of King et al. (2001: 142) to use choice-based sampling. This means that all cases that show the outcome and a random-sample of cases without the outcome are selected. I choose a sample size of 260 (28 events, 232 non-events).[21]

In the up-coming paragraph, I outline the indicators by which these case units – ethnic groups with autonomy rights during a five-year period – are assigned to their respective sets according to the absence and presence of the conditions.

4.4. Operationalization of the Outcome and the Conditions for csQCA

In the following, the outcome and the conditions introduced in Paragraph 3 are operationalized and, if needed, a threshold for the calibration of the cases is determined. Since csQCA only knows differences in kind but no differences in degree all variables need to be coded binary (Bara 2014: 699). The coding of conditions as present or absent equals the assignment of the variables to their sets and is called calibration (Jäckle 2015: 195). If a condition is not already binary in nature, a threshold to decide on presence/absence of a condition needs to be determined. This should be done by a mutual re-cognition of empirical evidence and theoretical knowledge (Ragin 2000: 160).[22] A conscious determination of the cut-off point is very important because it has strong effects on the results and their robustness (Schneider et al. 2009: 398; 2012: 25).

Coding the Outcome: Secessionist Conflict

To determine whether there was an onset of secessionist conflict for a group, the data Geographical Research On War Unified Platform (GrowUp) was used (Girardin et al. 2015).

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[21] This is significantly smaller than the sample size used by Bara (2014) but corresponds to an also much smaller number of events. QCA does not require the obligation of a certain sample size. Originally QCA was promoted as a method for a medium number of cases but this is not a requirement. It only has to be assured that the number of conditions is in balance with the number of cases (Rihoux et al. 2013: 178f.; 184).

[22] This means, that, on the one hand, the threshold should not be purely determined by mathematical calculations based on the empirical distribution e. g. by taking the median as the cut-off point. This would have the consequence that the threshold changes if cases are dropped or added – which contradicts qualitative nature of QCA and its assumption that the cases are very distinct in their kind (Bretthauer 2014: 598; Schneider et al. 2012: 33). On the other hand, the nature of the data should not be ignored since for example bimodality in the data structure can hint towards the desired difference in kind (Jäckle 2015: 196).

The platform provides group-wise coded data on ethnic conflict which combines the groups listed in the EPR data with the Armed Conflict Data of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (Bormann et al. 2016: 28). According to UCDP, conflict is defined as »a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year« (Themnér 2016: 1). Since I am only interested in the onset of secessionist conflicts I firstly only included conflicts in which the incompatibility concerned territory and secondly dropped all on-going conflict years. This equals the variable »onset_do_terr_flag» in the GrowUp dataset (Bormann et al. 2016: 50). Since the variable is coded binary in the dataset there is no need to set a cut-off point for the calibration.

Coding the Conditions

The first condition **Political Exclusion** is measured by the respective binary variable of the EPR data, »status_excl«, obtained through GrowUP (Girardin et al. 2015). According to their definition, access to national power is narrowed down to the group representatives' access to effective executive power at the central level. Excluded groups are either powerless or discriminated (Bormann et al. 2016: 36).[23]

To determine whether a group is **economically unequal**, multiple data sources are used hierarchically. If available I used the replication data of Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. (2015). For groups where this data is missing I referred to the data of the Minority at Risk (MAR) project (Minorities at Risk Project 2009). If the group is not listed there I coded it based on a qualitative assessment (cf. Appendix).

The data compiled by Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. (2015) has the big advantage that it builds on a triangulation of inequality data to gain a comprehensive picture of the group's situation. Firstly, they combined grid-cell data on the economic activity by Nordhaus (2006) with the settlement area of the group to estimate its economic performance. This was in a second step complemented with the degree of night light emission in the settlement area and, thirdly, with survey data on household assets.[24]

[23] Or self-excluded but as elaborated above, I do not take this case into account anyway.

[24] For the detailed technical explanation look at Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. (2015: 981f.). The three sources are weighted individually for the groups according to the assumed quality of the data in that area. For example, light emissions are a more suitable tool for poor countries which lack valid data for the Nordhaus (2006) data set while at the same time, light emission provide little information for rich countries because they lack differentiation (Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. 2015: 810).

I used the variables »low1_overlap« and »high1_overlap« to differentiate whether a group is worse or better off than the country average. Since the variables are not binary but provide a ratio between the group and the country average, I need to determine a threshold for assigning membership in the set of economic inequality. Ideally, the threshold would be theoretically justified but this difficult because the perception of inequality is highly subjective and varies accordingly (Figueroa 2015: 153). Also, there does not exist an official »inequality line« as it was established for poverty by the United Nations (Krozer 2016: 106). The existing quantitative papers on economic inequality cannot be taken as example because they do not need to dichotomize their variable.[25] Furthermore, the empirical distribution of the variable does not indicate any bimodality but is steadily decreasing.

Considering this problem and the importance of cut-off points for the validity of the results, I decided to code two variants for economic inequality to be able to control the robustness of my results.[26] The first version of the inequality condition applied a comparatively high threshold of 1.5 and 1.35 respectively, building on the assumption that violent conflict is related with high costs for the challengers so there needs to be a substantial inequality to become relevant for conflict.[27] For the control version, I apply a symmetrical threshold of 1.2, which is chosen arbitrarily based on the intention that it should include around half of the groups.

However, the triangulation data faces two problems: it is mostly invariant in time and for many groups the triangulated data is not available at all or only for some periods (Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. 2015: 2 (appx.)). The first problem is tolerable because it can be empirically and theoretically reasoned that structural inequalities between groups are stable over time (Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. 2015: 9 (Appx.); Deiwiks et al. 2012: 294). Accordingly, I decided to assign missing group-periods the same values as in the given period. Though this is a strong assumption, it preferable to assign conservative zeros.

Nonetheless there are groups that are not covered at all. In these cases, the variable »ECDIFXX» indicating economic inequality in the MAR dataset is taken. This is an

[25] Accordingly, their statements remain vague: Deiwiks et al. (2012: 294) talks about a »wealth level far above or below the country average«, Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. (2015: 807) about »relatively poor, relatively wealthy« groups, and Østby et al. (2009: 303) states that groups need to be able to notice that they are unequal.

[26] According to Skaaning (2011: 394), changing the threshold for calibration is one way to conduct robustness checks in QCA.

[27] The median value of inequality for groups that face inequality in their disfavour is around 1.26. The histogram revealed a gap between the values 1.47 and from 1.65, so I decided to set the threshold at 1.5. I repeated this assessment for the variable that indicates inequality in favour of a group and determined the threshold at 1.35 based on the median at 1.19 and a gap in the distribution between 1.33 and 1.4.

aggregated measure for economic differences in six dimensions (e. g. income, property etc.) which is coded from -2, advantaged, to 4, extreme differentials, whereas 0 indicates no socially significant differences (Davenport 2009: 30f.). For the first version of inequality condition, I code -1 to 1 as no inequality, for the second version I code anything but 0 as unequal. Groups that are not covered by both of the sources where calibrated qualitatively (cf. Appendix).

Being related to the political exclusion of a group, the information on **loss of power at the central level** can also be obtained from the GrowUP data (Girardin et al. 2015). The variable »down-graded1« indicates binarily whether a group slid down in the status categories of the EPR dataset the year before (Bormann et al. 2016: 38).

I coded manually, whether autonomy was provided after the first conflict outbreak as a **reconciliation measure** (»appease«). This was possible by building on two variables included in the GrowUp data indicating whether a group was upgraded to its current autonomy status after 1946 and whether the group has a history of armed conflict (»upgraded_regaut_hist«, »warhist«). Groups that were granted autonomy when they had already been engaged in violent conflict are coded 1, while all others are coded 0.[28]

The **number of ethnic groups** in the country inhabited by the group in question is provided by the EPR/GrowUp data.[29] The absolute number needs to be dichotomized in manner that considers the curvilinear relationship (cf. Paragraph 3.2.). Like in the case of economic inequality, concrete thresholds for few or many groups are difficult to derive from the literature. Walter (2006: 111) denominates three groups as few and 14 as many but also states that even the groups themselves do not know the cut-off point at which the government stops to make concessions. Taking the empirical frequency distribution with dips between six and eight groups as well as a gap between 20 and 31 into account, I classify seven to 30 groups as a medium numbers and coded the respective cases as one.

The indicator for the presence of politically **excluded TEK** stems from the Transborder Ethnic Kin 2014 dataset which is part of the EPR data. It is a binary variable indicating

[28] The condition is limited in its explanatory power in the sense that it traces the assignment of autonomy rights and conflict outbreak only back up to 1946 and can not account for similar historic constellations before.

[29] Only relevant groups are taken into account Following the definition applied in the EPR dataset, an ethnic group is politically relevant »if either at least one significant political actor claims to represent the interests of that group in the national political arena or if group members are systematically and intentionally discriminated against in the domain of public politics« (Vogt 2014: 3).

whether at least one of the group's TEK that is currently excluded from access to central executive power (Bormann et al. 2016: 59).

In order to determine whether a **sudden transition** of a country's political system took place I refer to the data of the Polity IV project (Marshall et al. 2011). The Polity IV project's variable »polity« scores countries on a continuum from strongly autocratic (-10) to strongly democratic (10). Furthermore, it accounts for foreign occupation, anarchy, and regime transition (Marshall et al. 2016: 16). Following Bara (2014: 2 (appx.)), I code the condition as present if there occurred a change of at least three points on the polity scale during a coding period or if one of three extraordinary regime type is given.

A **high risk of conflict outbreak** in a group-period is measured by aggregating the five different risk factors (cf. Figure 2). The first attribute – low state capacity – consists of the two sub-attributes wealth and anocracy. As indicator for the regime type once more the polity variable of the Polity IV project is taken into account. Anocracies are such regimes that score between -5 and 5 on the polity scale (Centre for Systematic Peace 2016). Furthermore, the three extraordinary regime types are coded as 1 since they can also be considered instable. The wealth of a country is determined by the average GDP per capita (data taken from Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. (2015)). A country is considered poor if it belongs to the poorest 20% of all countries included in the dataset.

The second attribute, an on-going conflict within the same country, is operationalized by the variable »c_incidence_flagl» included in the replication data of Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. (2015). The indicator for the group's conflict history, the third attribute, is a binary group-level variable taken from GrowUp. The group size as tiny, if a groups constitutes one per cent or less of the country's population and has an absolute population of less than one million people (Bara 2014: 701). The data on the population size of the groups was taken from Cederman/ Weidmann/ et al. (2015) replication data.

These attributes are connected through qualified family resemblance. Family resemblance means that the single attributes are not necessary to consider a group at high risk of conflict outbreak but that a defined minimum of any of the attributes needs to be met. Hence, the single risk attributes are substitutable (Goertz 2006: 39; 45). Nonetheless, I assume that the attributes have varying importance for the overall risk and therefore assign a priori weights to them (ibd. 46). The wealth and regime type value one point each, an on-going conflict values two and a history of violent conflict three points. Being a tiny group should radically reduce the conflict risk and is therefore assigned a value of -3.

Adding the points yields a risk score between -3 and 7 points which needs to be transformed to a binary condition. In order to do so, I set a threshold of three points. This has the consequence that a group with conflict history is nearly always coded as having a high risk. This is in line with empirical findings that past conflicts have a highly increasing effect on conflict outbreak (Cederman et al. 2010: 97). The structural factors wealth and regime type increase the risk but I consider it unlikely that they alone are sufficient to significantly contribute to conflict outbreak. Having assigned the attribute tiny a conflict risk *reducing* power of three points is based on my assumption that a very small group size can balance a lot of risk but not negate it.

Based on the coding outlined above the group-periods are assigned to truth table rows and analysed for necessary and sufficient conditions by using the described csQCA.

5. Conducting the QCA and Interpreting the Results

The formerly described case selection and operationalization of my conditions yields a data set of 260 group-periods with nine coded conditions and the outcome.[30] This raw data is used to conduct the csQCA with the truth table algorithm of the software fs/QCA 2.5 (Ragin et al. 2006). I conduct the QCA twice applying the different versions of the economic inequality condition. »QCA I« refers to the high inequality threshold, »QCA II« to the version with the lower threshold. I shortly explain how I conduct the analysis and subsequently interpret my results.

5.1. Conducting the csQCA for Necessary and Sufficient Conditions

The analysis of necessary conditions is implemented for the single conditions. A consistency threshold of 0.95 is applied to allow quasi-necessary conditions. This means, that conditions are considered necessary if they occur for at least 95% of the events (Bara 2014: 701).

In a first step to analyse sufficiency, the raw data is assigned to the truth table rows. I set frequency threshold of 1 which means that all empirically appearing combinations are taken into account, even if they are only covered by one case. Furthermore, I define the consistency

[30] There are nine conditions because I coded economic inequality in favour of a group separately from inequality in disfavour of a group.

at 0.7, meaning that at least 70% of cases with a specific combination of conditions also need to show the outcome to be considered quasi-sufficient (cf. Bara 2014: 699).[31]

Secondly, I decided on which tied prime implicants (PI) to keep for the analysis. PIs cover several primitive expressions by applying of the most basic minimization rule: rows that differ in only one variable but show the same outcome are combined. Often there are more PI than would be need to cover all primitive expression (Ragin 2008: 40f.). For QCA I it turns out that there are four PIs covering the same primitive expression. I drop the two PI that combines the absence of a medium number of other groups with the presence of autonomy as appeasement.[32] For QCA II, seven PIs covering together two primitive expressions are revealed. Again I dropped the same PIs as for QCA I but additionally a PI entailing the absence both inequality variables.[33] Afterwards, I defined easy counterfactuals for the intermediary solution by defining which condition should contribute to the outcome by its presence, absence or both (cf. Table 1).

5.2. Results and Interpretation

The analysis for necessary conditions revealed that the absence of loss of power is the only condition exceeding the threshold of 0.95 (consistency value of 1.0). Here, a critical assessment is required whether the absence of the condition indeed has theoretical significance or is simply resulting from the fact that the loss of power is a very rare phenomenon: only in four of the 260 cases the condition is present and, in turn, in nearly all cases the absence is given. But it remains noteworthy that none of the four groups is engaged in conflict, also not during a later period. Considering the relevance that is usually ascribed to this condition, this can be interpreted as support for the theoretical hunch that for groups with regional autonomy the loss of central power is comparatively of less importance.

The analysis for sufficiency results in six different intermediary solution paths that lead to autonomy conflict onset with a high consistency (0.94) and an overall coverage of 57% (QCA II) and 50% (QCA I) respectively.[34] The configurations in the solution term for QCA I and QCA II do not differ substantially besides the improvement in the coverage for QCA II.

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[31] This is slightly lower than recommended e. g. by Ragin (2008: 46) but it is tolerable due to the large number of cases (Bara 2014: 701).

[32] I do so due to my theoretical assumption that the number of groups should be of little relevance for a group that has a history of violent conflict. This is because the group does not need to rely on this proxy for the state's negotiation behaviour but can build on its own experiences.

[33] This decision is based on my theoretical assumption that economic inequality matters for conflict outbreak and the absence of any inequality should not be an explicit requirement.

[34] As long as not further specified I refer to the intermediary solution in the following explanations.

Therefore, the results can be considered relatively robust, that is to say independent from setting the inequality thresholds. Due to the better coverage, I will continue my further analysis and interpretations on the basis of QCA II (cf. Table 2).[35]

According to the solution paths, some conditions are required in their absence but this does not make much sense theoretically (this concerns the absence of power loss, risk, and sudden instability) and I do not refer to the absence of these conditions during my interpretation.[36] I look explicitly at the three paths with coverage of around 10% to 20% and subsequently consider the three paths with that only cover around 3% each.

	Solution/ configuration consistency	*Solution coverage*	*Configuration raw coverage*[+]
Model: coninequ_low * coninqeu_high * status_excl * downgraded1 * appease * tek * other_groups *risk * sud_instab → onset			
	frequency cut-off: 1 / consistency cut-off: 0.7		
Model parameters	0.94	0.57	
coninequ_low*status_excl*~downgraded1*appease *~tek*~sud_instab	1		0.214
~status_excl*~downgraded1*appease*tek *~other_groups	1		0.142
coninequ_low*~status_excl*~downgraded1*~tek *~risk*~sud_instab	0.75		0.107
coninequ_high*~status_excl*~downgraded1*tek *risk	1		0.357
coninequ_high*~status_excl*~downgraded1 *appease*risk	1		0.357
status_excl*~downgraded1*tek*other_groups *sud_instab	1		0.357

[+]The raw and the unique coverage are the same for all solution paths.

Tab. 2 QCA solution (intermediate)

[35] Following the example of Bara (2014), I considered to exclude conditions to reach a more parsimonious solution, i. e. one with less paths, and still acceptable parameter values. I tried to drop sudden instability or conflict risk respectively because their presence contributed only in one or two paths with a very low raw coverage to the outcome. Doing so indeed reduced the number of path to three (without risk) and four (without sudden instability) but the overall coverage of the solution was reduced to 39%. Compared to the 57% achieved before this means a loss of around 30% of my explanatory power and I consider this unacceptable. Consequently, I keep all conditions and interpret the six different paths in the following.

[36] As discussed, the absence of loss of power is a necessary condition potentially due to little empirical coverage of the variable. Though it is interesting that risk and sudden instability are rarely related to conflict, their absence is considered to have little causal power. That a group or country is not instable or at risk is therefore not understood as a meaningful condition but more likely to be accounted to empirical artefacts: their inclusion can be traced back to one or two deviant cases not having seen a conflict outbreak – as I assume not because they had a stable political system but because of omitted conditions or idiosyncratic features.

Path 1: The Classic (Raw Coverage 21%)

low inequality * political exclusion * appeasement * ~ excluded TEK

I denominated this path »the Classic« because it combines the two grievance factors that the literature identified as inciting intra-state conflict. If a group is poorer than the country average and excluded from power conflict outbreak is likely. Having received autonomy rights after challenging the government violently the first time could not prevent the re-emergence of violence.

Interestingly, this is the only path that includes the presence of political exclusion as a condition.[37] This can be interpreted as a hint that political exclusion indeed does not play such an important role for autonomous group, eventually because they do not develop strong grievances due to their autonomy rights. But if it appears in combination with a weak economic situation a tipping point is reached beyond which political exclusion is not tolerated anymore. Nonetheless, it has to be kept in mind that the temporal order cannot be concluded from the path. It is equally possible, that the groups have already been excluded from power when they did not have autonomy rights and developed negative sentiments against the state during this time. The autonomy gained later could not mitigate the build up grievances sufficiently.

Less clear is how the absence of excluded TEK can be interpreted here. Does excluded TEK has a conflict preventing effect? One possibility is that »exit option« effect of TEK that was described in Paragraph 3.3. is still holding for excluded TEK, maybe because not the political but economic situation is better there. But due to the coding rules the absence of excluded TEK can also mean that the group has included TEK which might supply the group with resources and thereby incite fighting. Looking at the cases reveals that the absence of excluded TEK was introduced to the path because of two inconsistent periods of the Mizos in North-East India who did not engage in conflict. Hence, the role of TEK might be less relevant than expected and non-events have to be traced back to a particularity of the Mizos.

Path 2: Never enough (Raw Coverage 14%)

~ political exclusion * appeasement * excluded TEK * ~ medium number of groups

This path points towards a theoretical argument that was brought forward in the context of political exclusion (cf. Paragraph 3.3.): Nationalist grievances can not be mitigated by any compromise despite of full independence because the groups render everything else

[37] Besides Path 6 that is only covering one case, the Wa in Myanmar 1993.

insufficient – simply because they do not want to accept *any* external influence in their affairs. I conclude this from the fact that the groups covered by this path seem to be in a comparatively comfortable situation: they are not excluded from central power, enjoy autonomy rights, and do not suffer economic inequalities – but nonetheless they engage in conflict.

Excluded TEK as part of the configuration is corroborating my argument because this can explain why the group is not satisfied with it situation: it still wants to unify with its, potentially suffering, TEK.[38] That it is worth to continue fighting – autonomy again does not seem to have appeasing effect – might result from the strategic considerations based on the number of other groups in the country. Having said that, the external validity of the path has to be questioned because three of the four conflict onsets covered by this path are accounted to the Basques in Spain (cf. Table 3).

Path 3: Fighting Deprivation (Raw Coverage 10%)

low inequality * ~ political exclusion * ~ excluded TEK

The groups covered by this path are politically included at the central level but economically worth off than the rest of the county. In combination with the absence of excluded TEK this seems sufficient reason to challenge the government. I interpret this as a sign that the effect of political inclusion at the central level as well as additionally granted autonomy rights should not be overestimated in their appeasing effects as long as a group remains economically deprived. But beyond this, it is striking that the *absence* of political exclusion is supposed to have a causal effect here. This is different from just considering political inclusion irrelevant: political inclusion is relevant and an important condition for conflict onset but in the opposite direction theoretically assumed.[39] Maybe the included groups are frustrated because they are formally included at the central level but cannot push for an improvement of their economic situation. On the other hand, excluded and economically deprived groups might be too weak to be able to challenge the government. In that sense, political inclusion would constitute an opportunity factor providing the groups with a possibility to rebel against their economic deprivation.

[38] The coding of conflict over territory according to UCDP does not differentiate whether a conflict arises over secession or irredentism.

[39] Absence of political exclusion was also part of Path 2 but there it is considered less relevant because when all the other conditions are fulfilled there is simply empirically no group that is politically excluded. This is different for Path 3: meeting the other conditions of the path, there are groups that face political exclusion and did not engage in conflict.

Here again arises the problem that the absence of excluded TEK can equally point to the absence of TEK or to the presence of included TEK. Having included TEK might explain why a group is not satisfied with its inclusion at the central level: it wants to unify with its TEK.

Path 4–6 (Raw Coverage 3.5% each)

Path 4: high inequality * ~ political exclusion * excluded TEK * high risk

Path 5: high inequality * ~ political exclusion * appeasement * high risk

Path 6: political exclusion * excluded TEK * medium number of groups * sudden instability

The three paths listed above only cover one case each and might be doomed irrelevant. But the empirical and the theoretical significance of a configuration of conditions should not be equated because combinations with a low coverage can still provide important theoretical insights (Schneider et al. 2009: 401). Thus, I discuss them as well.

Interestingly, Path 4 and 5 are the only ones that cover groups that are economically better off than the rest off the country. Also, both groups are politically included at the central level and conflict broke out in a situation of high conflict risk. This matches the theoretical argument that economically advantaged, autonomous groups strive for a re-drawing of borders in order to establish their own tax regime. That they do not do so when they are politically excluded might be explained with a harsh suppression of the group. A high conflict risk probably led to an escalation of piling-up tensions.

Still, this alone is not enough: in one case excluded TEK seemed to have had an influence, maybe by diffusing tensions or inciting the demand for unification; in the other case, autonomy was used for reconciliation so autonomy rights seem once more affectless in preventing a re-onset of conflict. This might be because autonomy rights are not exempting the group from the obligation to participate in re-distribution of goods and therefore their dissatisfaction is not lowered.

The case covered by path 6 appears again more like a classical model of intra-state conflict: the group is excluded from power, has excluded TEK, and faces the opportunity of regime instability to challenge the state. Only the presence of a medium number of groups does not match the theoretical expectations but this can be explained as follows: the presence of a medium number of other groups should influence the long-term strategic considerations of the

group in disfavour of conflict but the combination with sudden regime instability as a short-term opportunity might have out-weighted the former considerations.

	Onsets explained by the configuration	*Deviant Cases (no onset)*
Path 1	Bodos in India (2007–2009)	
»The Classic»	Indigenous Tripuri in India (1991–1992)	
	Naga in India (1988–1992)	
	Naga in India (2000)	
	Moro in the Philippines (1993)	
	Catholics in Northern Ireland (1998)	
Path 2	Tuareg in Mali (2003–2007)	
»Never Enough»	Basques in Spain (1985)	
	Basques in Spain (1990–1991)	
	Basques in Spain (1994)	
Path 3	Assamese in India (1986–1990)	Pashtun in Afghanistan
»Fighting Deprivation»	Assamese in India (1994)	(1982–1986)
	Kachins in Myanmar (1948–1949)	
Path 4	Slovens in Serbia an Montenegro (1987–1991)	
Path 5	Oroma in Ethiopia (1998)	
Path 6	Wa in Myanmar (1993–1997)	

Tab. 3: Cases covered by the solution paths

To sum up, the QCA more or less confirmed the theoretical expectations elaborated in Paragraph 3. Being excluded from central power alone is not sufficient to incite autonomous group to challenge the government violently. This is also supported by the fact that none of the autonomous groups that lost power engaged in conflict. Therefore, a grievance-mitigating effect of autonomy seems likely. But this changes if, firstly, the exclusion is accompanied by economic deprivation and if, secondly, autonomy was introduced after conflict had already occurred. Beyond that, using autonomy as an appeasement tool seems not be effective in preventing conflict at all as it also occurs as a condition for conflict in the combination with political inclusion.

Facing economic disadvantages is an important condition for conflict outbreak and this irrespectively the fact whether political participation at the central level is enabled. Thus, autonomy rights can hardly accommodate economic grievance. Sudden regime instability played a less important role than expected and its presence only matters for one single case.

That might be interpreted as a sign that autonomous groups are relatively immune against instabilities at the central level due to their independent institutions.

6. Conclusion

The csQCA was able to shed a first light on the complex circumstances motivating and enabling autonomous groups to challenge the government violently in their strive for independence. By taking complex causality into account, it was shown that a lot of different pathways lead to secessionist conflict onset and that also multifinality was a common phenomenon: for example, political exclusion contributes in its presence as well as in its absence to outbreak of violence.

From a policy-perspective, it was underlined how important it is to accurately evaluate the characteristics of a situation in which granting autonomy rights is considered. The results indicated that autonomy indeed might have a capacity to reduce the grievances resulting from political exclusion.[40] Otherwise, bidirectional economic inequality seem to be strong motivation to rebel that cannot be balanced by neither central level participation nor regional autonomy. Furthermore, introducing autonomy as a reconciliation measure does not seem to be a successful strategy since conflict often re-emerged nonetheless. Yet, this does not say anything about whether the granting of autonomy rights actively contributed to the re-emergence of violence.

Nevertheless, the results as well as the approach as such need to be seen in the context of their limitations. Firstly, the overall coverage of the solution is with 57% still relatively low implying that over 40% of the conflict onsets are not explained by the discussed configurations. This indicates that important conditions have been omitted.[41] Here, I see one reason in the heavily structuralist nature of civil war literature (Roessler 2011: 301). For example, social networks available through autonomous institutions as well as regional parties are important conditions that remain totally disregarded in this QCA. Having said that, I am aware that the negligence of group level processes is largely a question of lacking micro level data.

[40] Fair enough, this is more a policy recommendation for an autocrat who wants to avoid conflict outbreak and political participation at the same time.

[41] Additionally, further robustness tests of the QCA with varying thresholds and time periods should follow up to check whether the low coverage is partly caused by technical artefacts.

Secondly, the coding of the condition Excluded TEK needs to be improved to differentiate more accurately between included and excluded TEK and eventually TEK size. As long as this is not possible, the interpretation of the role of the TEK in the present QCA remains mainly speculation.

Finally – and more generally – the limits of a global ethnic group dataset have to be kept in mind. Ethnic identities are social constructions, often overlapping and with unclear boundaries between the group (Stewart 2008: 85). Even if the method QCA is chosen in order to capture more of the complexity of the social world, the narrowing down of ethnic identity and inter-ethnic relations into one quantitative dataset is opposing this idea. Whether it is acceptable remains an ontological and epistemological question at the end.

Future research should scrutinize the role of political inclusion further. It is noteworthy, that the absence of political exclusion was a condition in four of the six paths and the mechanism behind needs further understanding. Having in mind that QCA is often combined with small-n approaches (cf. Paragraph 2), I recommend to conduct a process tracing for cases covered by these paths to shed light on the role central state institutions might play here. In addition, the assumption of asymmetric causality should be honoured by conducting a »reverse« QCA to understand better when autonomous groups do not engage in conflict.

Last but not least, it seems a promising endeavour to widen the focus of the research question to comprehend better when autonomy lead to conflict and when it does not. Therefore, it is necessary to enlarge the population that autonomy is not a scope condition any more but a varying causal condition.

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Appendix

I. From the Group-Year-Dataset to the QCA Raw Data

The R-script accompanying this document provides the code on how the data needed for the QCA was manipulated by merging the different datasets and partially re-coding the variables to their binary form. This resulted in a group-year dataset with all necessary variables between 1946 and 2009 ("autonomy_raw.csv").

To conduct the QCA, this data was manipulated manually into the QCA raw data ("QCA_wiehler.csv"). This was necessary to collapse the group-years into five-year periods. Starting from the latest group-year and counting backwards, the five years were summarized to one period. The group-years remaining at the end were collapsed into one period irrespective of the number of group years. In cases where a group lost autonomy in-between, the counting of group-years was interrupted as well and the periods ended before and started again after the gap (e.g. the group-years 1987–1990 & 1994–1997 were summarized in two separate periods). The periods were denominated in the Variable "QCAid" based on the first three letters of the country name, the first three letters of the group name, and the first year of the period.

Coding Rules to collapse the condition values into periodes:

Political Exclusion:	Coded as given if the variable was coded 1 in at least half of the group-years
Economic Inequality:	Coded as given if the variable was coded 1 in any group-year of a period
Loss of Political Power:	Coded as given if the variable was coded 1 in any group-year of a period
Autonomy as Reconciliation:	*No coding rule due time invariance*
Medium Number of Ethnic groups:	Coded as given if the variable was coded 1 in any group-year of a period
Excluded TEK:	Coded as given if the variable was coded 1 in at least half of the group-years
Sudden Instability:	Coded as given if a change of at least three points in the polity variable occurred during a period; coded as given if -66, -77, or -88 appeared in any group-year of a period

Conflict Risk:	Coded as given if the variable was coded 1 in at least half of the group-years; if value is missing, period was conservatively coded as 0

This resulted in a dataset with 1,425 group-periods, containing 28 events and 1,397 non-events. From the non-events a random sample of 232 group-years was taken and merged with the 28 events to the final QCA raw data.[1]

II. Qualitative Coding of Economic Inequality

The group-periods for which not data on economic inequality was available through the replication data of Cederman et al. (2015) or the MAR data (Marshall et al. 2011) the variable was coded based on a qualitative assessment.

Coded as 1	***Reason***	***Sources***
Uyghurs (China) 2004–2008		
inequ_low coninequ_low	The high income inequality between the Uyghur and the Han Chinese is frequently mentioned as reason for inter-group tensions. Especially in the non-state sector, there are large income gaps disfavouring the Uyghurs.	Zang (2011) Wu et al. (2014)
Wa (Myanmar) 1993–1997		
no inequality	The Wa live isolated and quasi-independent in the eponymous state. They are known for rich mineral resources and being involved in drug trafficking. The earnings from tin-mining are assumed to by-pass the Myanmar government. But due to their isolation and their dependence on agriculture it remains difficult to assess whether they are richer or at the end nonetheless poorer than rest of the population in Myanmar. Therefore, they are conservatively coded as being more or less equal.	Fiskesjö (2010) Gardiner et al. (2015)

[1] The random sampling was done with the „sample_n“ command in R, without replacement.

	Turkmen (Afghanistan) 1979–1982; 1983–1987; 2002–2005	
coninequ_high	The Turkmen in Afghanistan are considered important contributors to the economy, occupying the greatest share of arable land in the Northern Afghanistan. They live as semi-nomads in relative prosperity. But because they suffered under the Taliban rule and are vulnerable to climate impacts only the control variable is coded as given.	Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (2017) Minority Rights Group international (2017)
	Swiss Italians (Switzerland) 1950–1954; 1960–1964; 2000–2004	
coninequ_low	There are major disparities between the Swiss cantons but it is difficult to establish whether they co-incident with the language boundaries taken as ethnic group marker. Also, there were efforts to improve the situation of the Swiss Italians. However, the Tessin remains to be considered an economically weak region. Accordingly, the control variable of low inequality was coded as given.	Bundesamt für Statistik (2012) Bundesamt für Statistik (2016)
	Khakass (Russia) 1950–1954; 1955–1959; 1960–1964; 1965–1969; 1980–1984; 1990–1994	
inequ_low coninequ_low	The Khakass live in the republic Khakassia in Siberia. Originally a nomadic people, their traditional sources of earning were destroyed through the industrialization without being compensated. For example, land reforms in the 1960s led to major erosion and thereby destroyed arable land.	Panakarova et al. (2013)
	Kalmykia (Russia) 1970–1974; 1985–1989; 1995–1999	
inequ_low coninequ_low	The Kalmykia live in the eponymous republic in Russia. In 1997, 46% of the population lived under the poverty line in comparison to a country average of 20%. Their monthly income is around one fifth of an average income in Moskau and they considered to lag behind in education and urbanisation.	Lane (2013) Bahry (2002)

	Dayak (Indonesia) 1949–1951; 1957–1961; 1962–1966; 2005–2009	
inequ_low coninequ_low	The economic marginalisation of the Dayak is considered an important factor for the violent tensions between the Dayak and other ethnic groups like the Madura. During the rule of Suharto they were disenfranchised and deprived from their land property.	Dove (2006)

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