

State responses to 'Ethnic Riots' in liberal democracies: Evidence from Western Europe

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Resumen

The study of ethnic riots has a substantial pedigree in the social sciences, but so far there has been no systematic attempt to unify insights from scholars working on different areas of the world, nor has there been any extensive application of existing knowledge to the study of Western Europe. We address these two lacunae by drawing on contemporary scholarship to generate testable hypotheses about state responses to ethnic riots in liberal democracies, and by conducting a preliminary test of these hypotheses on four controlled comparison cases from Britain and France. Our cases reveal that states employ a relatively even balance of repression and accommodation in keeping with the social control perspective, but that the precise balance is affected by the electoral incentives of the party in power. This evidence suggests the external validity of findings by Fording (2001) – who emphasizes the significance of social control in the American context – and Wilkinson (2004) – who stresses the importance of electoral incentives in the Indian environment – but it implies that these separate insights may be more powerful in combination. Our study also demonstrates the limitations of perspectives that predict either simple repression or accommodation of rioters, and of those that emphasize distinctive national responses to riots.

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