Religious Institutions and the Impact of Inter-Ethnic Inequality on Conflict: the Case of Xinjiang, China

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Collaborative Effort

Goals:

- understand political (in)stability in Xinjiang/peripheral regions of China
- develop and test theories on ethnic violence and conflicts in IR/CP
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Benefited greatly from existing work: e.g., most recently Hong & Yang 2015.
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- current efforts: measure horizontal inequalities at the sub-national level ⇒ geo-coded surveys (e.g., DHS), combining spatial distribution of ethnic groups and GDP data (and night lights data), census data, ...
Theoretical contribution

New theoretical development?
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This paper: moving beyond testing the marginal effect of grievances associated with collective actors by bringing in the conditional effects of social institutions:

- grievances caused by between-group inequalities provide motivations for the oppressed group to revolt;
- whether such motivations would translate into violence depends on the ways by which religious institutions bridge local population and the government.
How would religious institutions increase the effects of grievances?

- provide opportunity structure for collective action
  - aggregating and expressing public opinion;
  - serving as arenas for socialization and increasing social capital;
- even more involved ⇒ e.g., their leaders actually influence opinions of the mass in a way that is leading to violence against the government.
How would they dampen the effects of grievances?

- 1: assisting local population/public goods provisions;
- 2: bridging local population and the government by facilitating information flows;
1: Assisting local population/public goods provisions

“... And now we help people. There are several people coming to ask for help every day. For instance, we buy home tickets for them or we pay their medical costs when the condition is very critical.” — Interview II.
2: Information

- local population \(\Rightarrow\) mosques \(\Rightarrow\) the government: local grievances and potential unrest
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the government $\Rightarrow$ mosques $\Rightarrow$ local population:

“First, mosque is a bridge between ordinary people and the government. We educate people and pass on the requirements and laws and regulations of the government. Second, we are broadcasters. As long as we speak, those words would be spread quickly in the society. For me, I would go to Kashgar and Hotan every week to disseminate policies of the state.” — Interview II
sources for event data

- Government documents: Xinjiang Public Security Gazette, the unpublished draft of Xinjiang Public Security Gazette, government white papers, and county gazettes of Xinjiang;

- Online event data sets and news search engines: the Global Terrorism Database (GTD, http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/), Minorities at Risk (MAR, http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/mar), and the WiseNews (http://libguides.ust.hk/wisefnews);

ethnic violent events in Xinjiang, 1990-2005
variables

- horizontal inequality (HI): e.g., $HI_1 \Rightarrow$ prefecture-level difference, between Han and the largest minority group, in the percentage of individuals who completed lower secondary school, using 1% 1990 census;

- mosque density: county-level mosques per 1000 non-Han population;
change in probability of violence given one standard deviation increase from the mean
effect of horizontal inequality conditional on religious institutions
findings and thoughts

Key findings:

- local inter-ethnic horizontal inequality in education attainment has the most important substantive marginal effect on the chances of county-level ethnic violence;
- but this effect is conditional: only present for counties that are characterized by low and medium levels of mosque density.

Future research:

- how to differentiate underlying causal mechanisms associated with this mediating effect?
- “underground” mosques not captured (or impossible to capture?).
- other potential omitted variables: marketization, migration, ...
correlations between eight HI measures
HI1: differences in the percentage of individuals who completed lower secondary school
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Mosque Density

County Level
Mosque_Density

- 0.13 - 0.33
- 0.34 - 0.91
- 0.92 - 2.59
- 2.60 - 5.40

Xinjiang county lines

Miles