Comparison of Violent Intergroup Conflicts: Towards a Conflict Typology

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Content

Why compare conflicts?

1. Develops a better understanding of the case study through a pre-existing similar one, especially in terms of escalation dynamics (Myshlovska, 2022)
2. Using previous experiences to respond to the environment (Charbonneau & Sandor, 2021)
3. Formulation & Implementation of conflict management policies (Charbonneau & Sandor, 2021)
4. Attracting attention of scholars and policy-makers into areas where violence is yet to erupt. (Hughes, 2022)
5. Establishing new regional and global trends (Szayna et al., 2017)

Theories on conflict comparison

1. Comparison of conflicts is an inherently political move. It produces categories and concepts that can be translated into policies. (Charbonneau & Sandor, 2019)
2. Can affect threat-perception, self-esteem, self-evaluation. (Wood, 1996)
3. Assimilative and contrastive reactions to social comparisons of conflict (Smith, 2000)
4. Has to be done carefully, as in situations of traumatizing event comparisons, people are likely to reject any comparisons. (Vollhardt, Ünal & Nair, 2023)

Practical applications of conflict comparison

1. Three ways to compare peace processes: identifying them as case study of conflict; addressing issue areas within the processes; examining procedural issues within a peace process. (Ginty & Özerdem, 2019)
2. Using analogies as an argument for hope (Dudai, 2022)
3. Producing better assessment of ourselves and our side of the story(Buunk & Gibbons, 2007)
4. Peace lessons & peace mobilization
5. Creating mechanisms to develop better tools for conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution, depending on the flow of the conflict

Macro-level goal

Create a typology for comparing and understanding conflicts, according to the processes behind causing military escalations.

Conflicts: the social-political-military triad through narratives, violence and structural causes, particularly within the roots.

A conflict is viewed as a process: from roots to escalations.

Comparative analysis of conflicts and possible solutions will become easier

Literature Review

- Cycles based on internal, system and inter adversary relations. (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2017)
- Aggressor-defender model, spiral model, structural change model. (Pruitt, Rubin & Kim, 2003)
- Ethos of conflict, past interactions, collective emotions. (Bar-Tal, 2007)
- A pattern of transformation: evolution & return to origin (Coleman et al., 2007)
- Contextual elements: power balance, arms race and polarity. (Siverson & Miller 1993)

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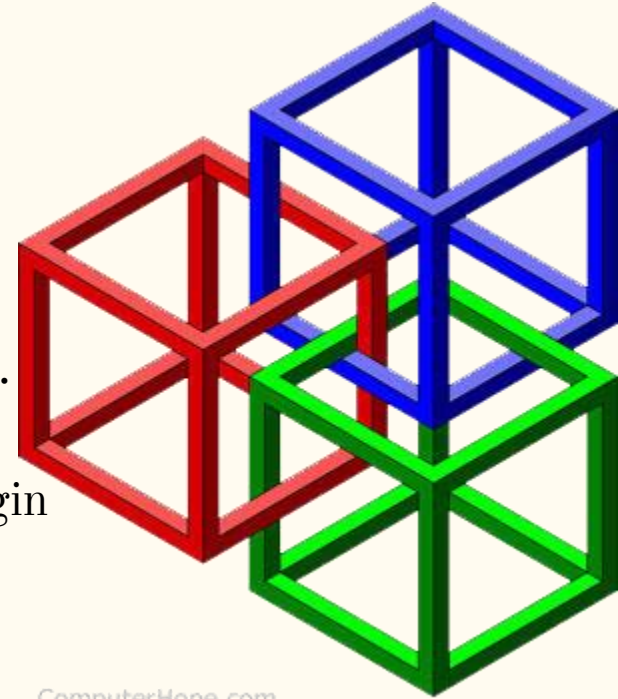
Literature Review

- Realist scholars attribute conflict escalations to nations' desire for influence and control in the international arena.
- Darwinian approaches suggest conflicts arise from material gain desires, with alliances forming based on perceived chances of success.
- Critics argue that social sciences' complexity makes formal modeling difficult, necessitating abstract theories adjusted to real-life cases.
- Conflict resolution research must combine relevant disciplines, include multiple input factors, and connect theory with real-life dynamics.
- Comprehensive models should account for chronological stages of conflicts, systematize political and social levels, and connect causes with violence.
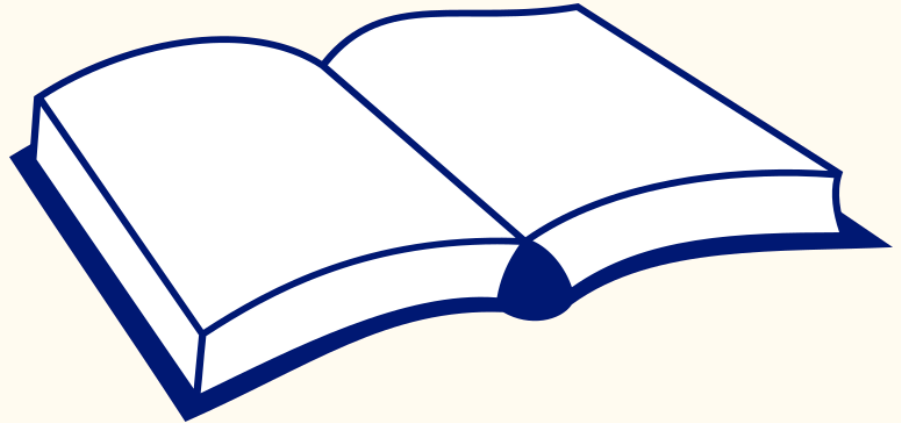
The gap

- Models: single or dual-disciplinary
- Interdisciplinarity: conflicts are affected by an extensive amount of both internal and exogenous factors
- The escalation model would focus on all disciplines will help understand conflicts better and later group them.

Factor 1: Structural Causes & Institutions

- Structural causes of conflict, such as unmet human needs and corruption, are deeply embedded in institutions and can precede current social and political environments, leading to conflicts if not addressed.
- John Burton argues that unmet human needs like equality, freedom, participation, and distributive justice can cause conflicts, and meeting these needs is crucial for resolving root causes.
- Corruption, as an institutional attribute, correlates with internal conflict and violence, weakening governments and leading to grievances and frustration.
- Structural flaws within regimes and constitutional systems, as well as socio-economic inequalities and political exclusion, can exacerbate conflicts, particularly in autocracies and regimes with flawed governance structures.

Factor 2: Social Identities & Groups

- SIT explains how bonds with social groups create an in-group/out-group dichotomy, leading to favoritism and discrimination.
- Nationalism fulfills the need for belonging, intensifies grievances, and is linked to increased chances of violent conflict.
- Sacred values, central to group identity, can escalate conflicts when threatened, intensifying defense efforts and emotional responses.
- Collective emotions shape group dynamics and actions, increasing violence, especially in identity conflicts rooted in social bonds and perceptions of oppression.
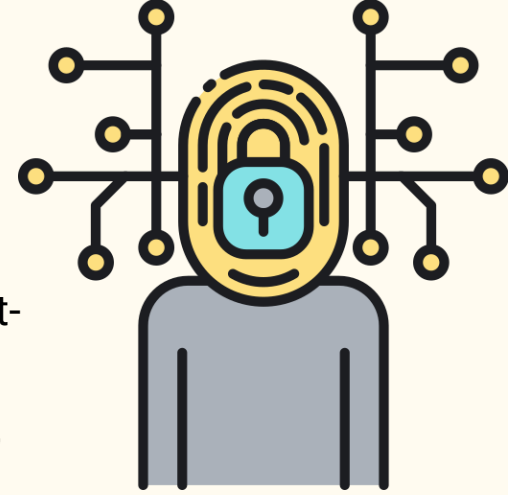
Factor 3: Narratives

- Social identities and bonds shape social contexts using symbols and narratives to connect personal and societal experiences, especially during conflict.
- Narratives, crucial for understanding conflicts, are used by groups to reduce cognitive uncertainty and are important for both social and elite levels.
- Governments construct narratives to reinforce biases, polarize viewpoints, and maintain power during conflicts, often institutionalizing these narratives.
- Escalatory narratives justify threats, delegitimize out-groups, glorify in-groups, and can increase support for violence, connecting to the final step of mobilization towards collective violence.

Factor 4: Elite Level Decision Making

- The decision-making of political elites, influenced by governance systems and institutions, often involves risky choices and personal ambitions.
- Rational Choice Theory, though critiqued, remains relevant when combined with leadership psychology to understand elite decision-making in conflicts.
- Leaders, especially in authoritarian regimes, may initiate conflicts for personal gain or regime survival, using hostile rhetoric to bolster support.
- Power asymmetry, coalition building, and external alliances significantly affect conflict dynamics, with leaders' personal views and experiences playing a crucial role.
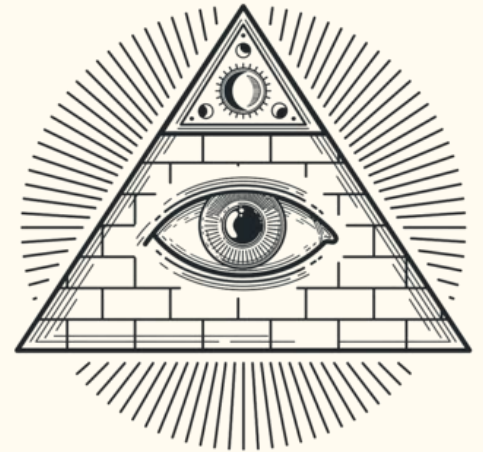
Factor 5: Mobilization towards organized collective violence

- Conflict escalations spread existential fears, leading to greater violence, often regulated by ruling elites, and used for bargaining and competitive risk-taking.
- Collective organized violence includes pre-planned actions by groups, driven by a sense of belonging, which is a strong motivator.
- Ethnic groups are more likely to produce intense violence, with niche groups, diasporas, and autonomous governance structures also posing significant threats.
- Mobilization can occur through networks and is influenced by weak rule of law, grievances, and governmental repression, with both official military and unofficial social mobilizations being crucial to understanding conflicts.

Theoretical Framework: Summary

Five key concepts:
1. Structural Causes of conflicts - unmet human needs, at times institutionalized, inequalities and cleavages (Stewart, 2002; Burton, 1979)
2. Social identity - reinforces in-group and out-group perceptions, creating an unremovable bond. (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)
3. Narratives - shaping social context into reality in times of uncertainty. (Wertsch, 1997;Hale, 2004)
4. Elite-Level decision-making - war and armed conflict as an extension of politics (von Clausewitz, 1997)
5. Mobilization towards organized collective violence - passing the threshold of conflicts and transforming it into physical violence (Misago, 2019)

Element interplay goes in both direction

What influences?↓	VIolence	Decisions	Narratives	Structural Causes	Social Identity
Violence		Simplification	Reinforcement	Perpetual cycles	Reinforcement
Decisions	War - extension of politics		Construction & Alteration	Institutionalization	Incentive provision
Narratives	Justifying violent behavior	Biases & Judgement		Selecting information Misrepresentation	Collective self-righteousness
Structural Causes	Provide motivation	Demand response	Story consistency		Binding material
Social Identity	Following leaders	Mobilize support	Drives the process of construction	In-group & Out-group division	

The Model

- The model aims to provide a comprehensive picture of conflicts, incorporating multiple disciplines and capturing all elements contributing to violence.
- Structural causes and social identity are the initial stages, influencing narratives and elite-level decisions, which then lead to mobilization towards violence.
- Narratives serve to amplify, misrepresent, and justify conflict, impacting social identity and political decision-making.
- Elite decisions can institutionalize inequalities, shape social identities, and drive mobilization, influenced by personal gain, regime survival, and external support.
- The model has three stages: initiation (structural causes and social identities), ignition (narratives and elite decisions), and manifestation (mobilization to violence), with all five conditions necessary for violent escalation.

Theoretical Framework
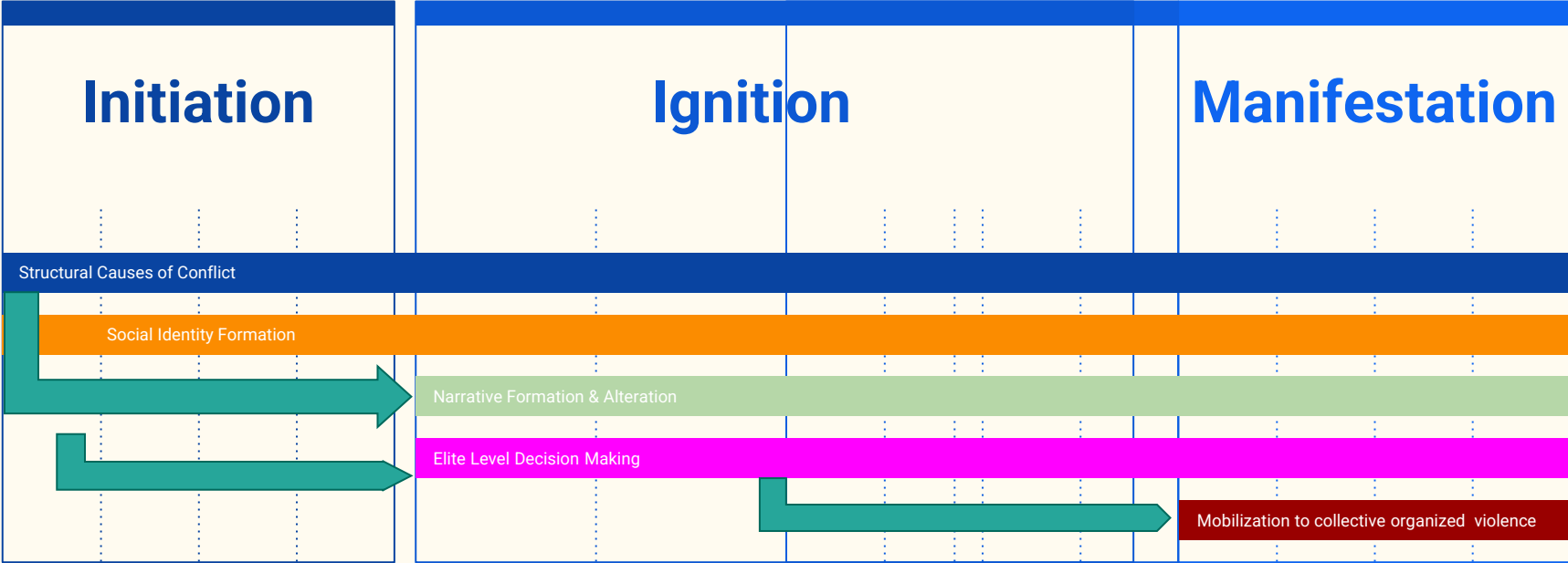
RQs & Hypotheses

1. To what extent are the elements of the model present in violent intergroup conflicts ?

H0 - Some cases do not possess all five elements and/or there is no connection in the influence of elements on one another

H1 - These five conditions are all present to different extents in conflicts, making them necessary and together sufficient for conflict escalation

1. What is the variance between the different violent intergroup conflicts as it pertains to the model?

H0 - Conflicts do not vary and follow an identical process

H1 - Conflicts vary as a result of a different interplay, positioning and linkage of the 5 elements within the model, producing different types that furthermore vary in their scale, flow and should be tackled through unique mitigation strategies.

Description of the study

- An interdisciplinary case study of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a process

- Unit of analysis: Narrative

- Level of Analysis: Macro

- Macro goal: develop an interdisciplinary conflict typology to be used across the field of social sciences. Add spatial and temporal variance to the model.

Data Analysis Armenia

- Looking at the emergence of the conflict and the 1992-1994 escalation, started by Armenia.
- Majority of respondents viewed the region as a <u>sacred value</u>, as well as saw the Azeri control of the territory as a <u>threat</u>.
- Institutionally, all of the respondents recognized the fact that <u>autonomy</u> given to the region enabled mass mobilization and gave limited control to the ethnic Armenian Minority.
- Armenians see the connection between the conflict and the Armenian Genocide as the <u>trauma</u>.

Data Analysis Armenia (2)

- Armenian diaspora and the Karabakh Committee founded the Karabakh movement and many times raised the question over the status of the region, <u>constructing nationalism</u>.
- The interviewees see that Azerbaijan was not paying attention to the <u>economic needs</u> of Karabakh and wanted to force them out. Pogroms that occurred in the late 1980s and 1990s made Armenians relive the horrific events of the genocide, <u>adding trauma</u>.
- This rallied masses in Yerevan, in order to claim Karabakh as part of Armenia during *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*.
- <u>Power asymmetry</u> occurred due to better organization and mobilization that the Armenians had, finally bringing the conflict towards the first war.

Data Analysis Azerbaijan

- Looking at the emergence of the conflict and the 2020 escalation, as Azerbaijan started it.
- Strong belief among respondents that it is an integral, untradeable part of Azerbaijan, which is <u>sacred</u> for the population, stating that the lands are ancestral.
- Black January (1990) and Khojaly Genocide(1991), which pre-dated the First Nagorno-Karabakh war is the <u>trauma</u> that widely mourned and commemorated in the Azeri culture where Soviets and Armenians are seen as perpetrators.
- Having de jure <u>institutional</u> control over Karabakh made it possible to mobilize the masses around the idea of taking it back.

Data Analysis Azerbaijan (2)

- Azeri <u>nationalism</u> was largely <u>constructed</u> by Heydar Aliyev and later continued by his son, Ilham - both of whom have a cult of personality in Azerbaijani cultural narratives. Nationalism is purely civic, rather than Armenian ethnic.
- The loss in the war served as an <u>additional trauma</u>, as many had to flee their houses and many were killed. This forced the identity to unite and solidify. Furthermore Azeris believe that Armenians were much richer both in Soviet Armenia and Karabakh.
- The <u>nationalism manifested</u> itself in a reactive form, for every Armenian element - an Azeri counterpart was created.
- Lastly, due to vast resources - Azerbaijan was able to not only compensate for the existing <u>asymmetry</u> but largely overcome it through new technology, bringing us to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh war.

Nagorno-Karabakh

1. Structural causes: Perceived threat of safety, outlook for economic prosperity and institutional autonomy
2. Social Identity: Ethnic nationalism through governmental policies
3. Narratives: Creating a very hostile out-group perception, heavy reliance on history
4. Decision-making: autocratic, hostile, subjects to centralized authority
5. Mobilization to violence: creating nationalism, early manifestation through mass protests and pogroms

Nagorno-Karabakh

Initiation	Ignition	Manifestation

Structural Causes of Conflict: **Autonomy, incompatibility integrity & self-determination, Economics (3)**

Social Identity: **Ethno-nationalistic**

Narrative Formation & Alteration: **Appeal to History & Negative Out-group Framing**

Elite Level Decision Making: **Autocratic regimes with hostile rhetoric, lack of control through third-party dominance**

Mobilization to collective organized violence: **protests & pogroms**

Implications and Conclusions

- The hypotheses and hence the model were supported by both cases of conflict escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenia (1992-1994) and Azerbaijan (2020)
- Unintended conclusion that arose: through the framework the narratives that both interview groups have shown are very similar to one another structurally, despite being different from the content standpoint.
- Mirror-images of narratives lead to an important implication: they exacerbate already existing divisions through showing incompatibilities, leaving no room to see the out-group's perspective due to reinforcing beliefs in collective self-righteousness. (Ringer,2017)

Israel-Palestine

1. Structural causes: Perceived threat of safety, existence of economic cleavages and struggles for self-determination
2. Social Identity: Ideological nationalism, Zionism vs Pan-arabism
3. Narratives: Incompatibility of goals of self-determination over the same piece of land
4. Decision-making: Hostility by both sides, while being oppressed from the British Colonial regime
5. Mobilization to violence: started on the local level with clashes and attacks

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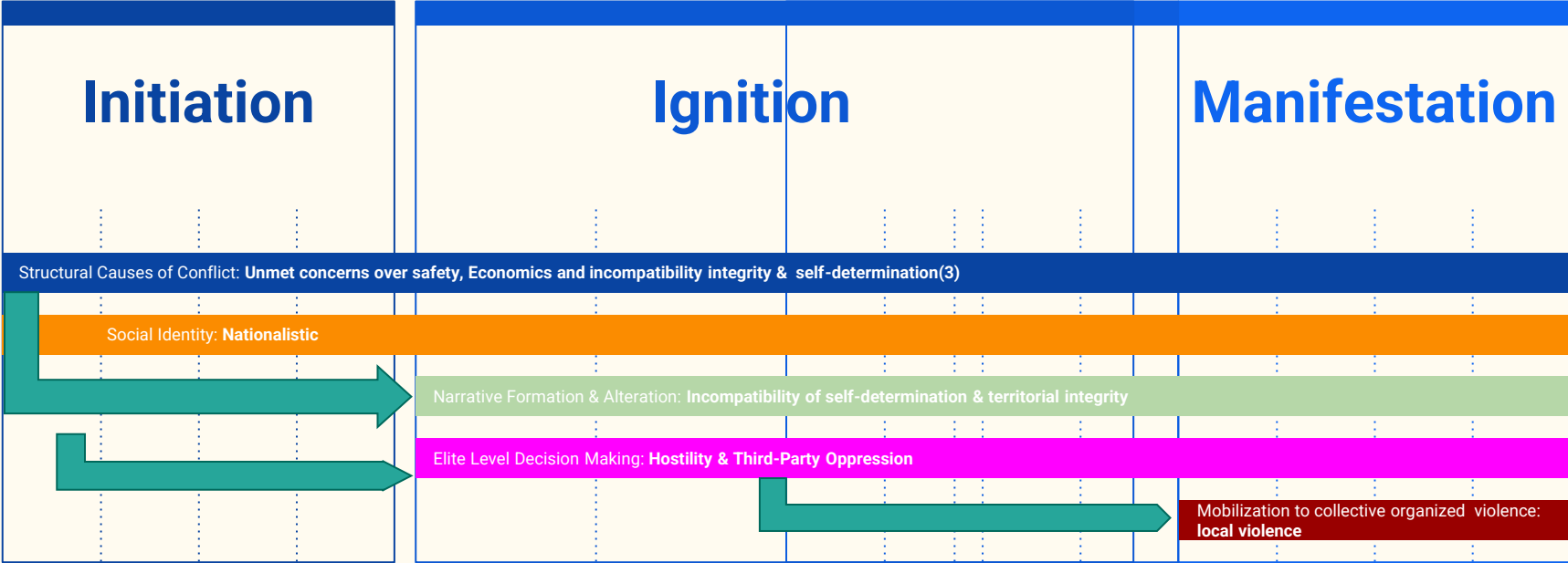
Juxtaposing the two conflicts

1. Very similar structural causes by magnitude, amount and impact
2. Narrative incompatibility
3. Questions of self-determination
4. Third-party influence on decision-making
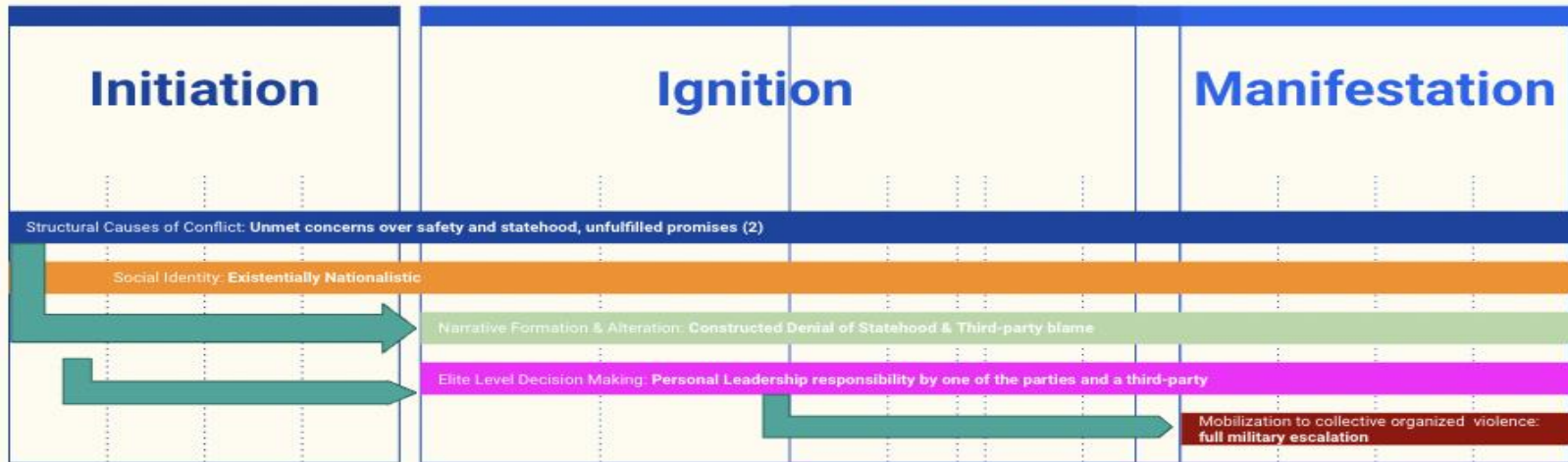5. First resulting into local ethnic violence, until the third-party departs

Within the typology this type of conflicts will be referred to as structural conflicts, ones that occur more organically due to existing incompatible concerns over unmet needs

Not all conflicts are the same

1. Not all roots are created equal, environment matters - ie structural inequality in different regimes.
2. Group size in formation: is the group large enough/clearly defined enough to split the society/neighbours.
3. Narratives can be less or more aggressive, externally manipulated towards the outgroup.
4. Elites can be pressured exogenously or from within to wage war or keep peace intact.
5. Magnitude of violence and who perpetrates it differs: military, radical groups, civil society; massacres, genocides, terror attacks, civil unrest.
6. Why this matters? Through the typology we will be able to better forecast whether a conflict will occur and judging by the type - how it would progress.

Counterexample: Russia-Ukraine

Russia-Ukraine

| Initiation | Ignition | | Manifestation |

Structural Causes of Conflict: **Unmet concerns over safety and statehood, unfulfilled promises (2)**

Social Identity: **Existentially Nationalistic**

Narrative Formation & Alteration: **Constructed Denial of Statehood & Third-party blame**

Elite Level Decision Making: **Personal Leadership responsibility by one of the parties and a third-party**

Mobilization to collective organized violence: **full military escalation**

Russia-Ukraine

- The Russian-Ukrainian conflict began with the 2014 revolution in Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea, escalating to active violence with Russia's 2022 invasion.
- Russia cites unmet needs related to NATO expansion, while Ukraine's concerns center on security and territorial integrity.
- Nationalism fuels Russian aspirations, while Ukrainians perceive the conflict as a fight for statehood survival.
- Russian narratives deny Ukrainian statehood, blaming NATO, the US, and the EU, with elite-level decision-making, particularly by President Putin, playing a significant role.
- The conflict is primarily elite-driven with well-constructed narratives and less emphasis on structural causes, distinguishing it from previous structural conflicts and categorizing it as an elite-constructed conflict.

RUSSIA

■ Moscow

■ Kiev
UKRAINE

500 mi
500 km

Conclusions & Outlook

- Two conflict types were identified: structural and elite-created, aiming to form a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates five key elements.
- The key elements are: structural causes (unmet human needs), social identities, narratives, elite-level decision-making, and mobilization towards organized violence.
- The process is split into three stages: initiation, ignition, and escalation, addressing gaps in multidisciplinary approaches and analyses of both social and political elements.
- Existing typologies are critiqued for their lack of comprehensive insights and applicability in conflict prevention, management, mitigation, and resolution.
- The proposed model serves as a basis for creating typologies in conflict studies, requiring further methodological development and balancing quantitative and qualitative methods to address research gaps.

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