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**Ethnic fractionalisation and social cohesion: the relation between immigration, ethnic fractionalisation and potentials for civic, collective action in Germany**

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Since more than a century scholars from many social science disciplines have studied the relations between various forms of socio-cultural heterogeneity and social cohesion, the latter being understood here as the most general concept describing peaceful co-existence and societal integration. Classical thought on liberalism by scholars such as Mill developed in response to growing religious heterogeneity after the reformation. Likewise, classical sociologists such as Durkheim, Weber and Simmel have forcefully argued that socio-cultural homogeneity is not a necessity for modern societies to be integrated. Urbanisation, industrialisation, and modernity do not only erode classical forms, but go along with new forms of social integration. Rather than cohesion caused by similarity, some scholars argue that modern societies only depend on social ignorance or a “blasé outlook”, as Simmel called it, to be integrated; as long as we do not niggle about the lifestyle of others, modern societies are so well functionally differentiated that diversity does not pose a problem for social cohesion.

Immigration, such as experienced by European countries over the last decades, results in an ethnic and cultural fractionalisation of the population. Note, that at this moment I do not differentiate between different types of ethnic composition, such as diverse or polarised, and use the term ethnic fractionalisation as an overarching concept, because following Newton (2007) I am here merely interested in the differences between ethnically homogeneous as compared to fractionalized or divided societies.<sup>1</sup> A necessary by-product of this process is that ethnicity becomes a relevant category in social life, meaning it serves as explanatory device and justifies social relationships (Tajfel, 1981). As has just been noted in reference to classical social thought, this should not be a problem for liberal democracies, since these were conceptualised as an answer to growing diversification in the first

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<sup>1</sup> For more refined differences between ethnic *diversity*, *polarisation* or other kinds of compositions and discussion of those theories that imply them to be important, see section “Open Question”.

place (Appiah, 2005, XV), and so Walker emphasises:

“Democratic institutions exist not to level out differences between citizens, but to find ways to bring competing needs to the table and make difficult decisions about the allocation of resources and the production of values. Democracy does not demand that citizens like each other. The process is supposed to be messy, conflictual, and difficult” (Walker in: Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005, p. 237).

In a similar vein, but from a classical Durkheimian angle, Portes and Vickstrom (2011) emphasise that our contemporary, ethnically fractionalised societies rely on organic solidarity and not homogeneity. All these arguments have in common that they criticise scholars who warn about challenges associated with heterogeneity for overseeing that modern societies rely on modes of integration that are especially well suited for diversity and complexity, which supposedly also holds for ethnic fractionalisation as caused by immigration.

Nevertheless, there is also a growing literature that proposes possible challenges that are associated with an ethnic fractionalisation of countries and their regions, cities and neighbourhoods. Most notable are findings suggesting challenges to support the provision of public goods, an ability that is undeniably crucial to any society. Liberal and secular constitutions, blasé outlook and functional differentiation are not sufficient it seems, to guarantee the production of public goods in ethnically fractionlaised populations. Contemporary societies rely on public goods production to educate children, support the poor, maintain infrastructure or fight corruption, al of which have been shown to suffer from ethnic fractionalisation. Newton (2007) hits the nail on its head, by calling the challenges associated with ethnic fractionalisation “The New Liberal Dilemma”<sup>2</sup> and explaining that:

“While the kind of social unity often associated with social homogeneity is what Weinstock (1999) calls a morally ambiguous property that has both ‘goods’ and ‘bads’ attached to it, the irony of the liberal dilemma is that mixed societies seem to produce a set of serious ‘bads’ that result from the active pursuit of the ‘goods’ ” (Newton, 2007, p.2).

On the one hand a key idea of liberal democracy is to accommodate diversity and fractionalisation, but on the other hand ethnic fractionalisation seems to cause people to withdraw from public social life and from engaging in the civic life, which is one of the foundations of a well-functioning liberal democracy. Ethnic divisions seem to challenge the social foundations of liberal democracies, among them the willingness to engage, cooperate, share and deliberate.

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<sup>2</sup>Somewhat earlier Goodhart (2004) and also Pearce (2004) termed it the “Progressive Dilemma”, but I favour Newton’s term for its normative neutrality.

This debate began to receive widespread attention with a study by Alesina et al. (1999), who followed implications of social-psychological theories on in-group favouritism and showed that the proportion of tax money spent on education, trash disposal, and welfare declines with the racial diversity of US metropolitan areas. Such findings seem to be especially relevant for European countries, which try to maintain high levels of welfare state protection while also facing growing ethnic fractionalisation because of immigration. Such a situation can cause social tensions, as in Sweden for which Eger (2010) shows higher levels of ethnic fractionalisation to be associated with declining levels of support for welfare state spending.

Soon scholars started to investigate indicators of social cohesion such as civic engagement, levels of trust and generalised norms of reciprocity, as a kind of mediating or intermediate variable helping to explain why ethnically divided populations produce fewer public goods. According to this theoretical inclination, in ethnically divided populations the social radius within which people feel obliged to act reciprocally is smaller, probably narrowed to the people who fit the category of the own ethnic group, meaning that in return people also do not trust others to contribute to the general production of public goods. Overall, this decline in social cohesion is seen as a decline in the potentials for collective action and expected to result in lower levels of public goods provision. According to Putnam's (2007) influential study, trust in neighbours, generalised trust, trust in people of other ethnicity, and even trust in people who are alike are indeed lower in ethnically divided populations. In such communities people seem to "hunker down", meaning that they withdraw from public life. Subsequently, a range of studies have shown negative effects of ethnic fractionalisation on different measures of social cohesion.

At the same time, one should not overlook that diversification, especially in cultural terms, also comes with a lot of positives benefits, which is among others well discussed by Page (2008). Challenges and benefits of ethnic fractionalisation do not contradict each other and scholars like Putnam (2007) or Alesina et al. (1999) all emphasise that the long-run benefits will dominate as people adapt to ethnic fractionalisation as they did to industrialisation and urbanisation. Most scholars agree that the long run problems associated with segregation would be much more devastating. In this regard Ferrara and Mele (2006) show that while residential racial segregation increases average expenditures on public education per pupil, it also increases the inequality in resource endowments between poor and rich school districts and thereby deepens racial divisions. This makes integration rather than segregation the more promising route to take. Yet if it is also associated with short or mid-term challenges, we should understand how so, in order to be able to find solutions.

There are four types of theoretical approaches that try to explain why ethnically

divided populations are less cohesive. The majority of studies refers to theories on *cognitive biases* against out-group members (e.g. Tajfel et al., 1971), which might be triggered in ethnically fractionalised populations (e.g. Alesina and La Ferrara, 2000). Next to these approaches, network theory suggest that social control, which prohibits free-riding and thereby ensures high levels of trust, is a function of the *density of networks* (Granovetter, 1985; Coleman, 1988), which might be lower the more ethnically divided populations (e.g. Miguel and Gugerty, 2005). Social choice theory suggests that different levels of public goods provision might be due to a populations' *(a)symmetric distribution of preferences* (Hardin, 1982), which in turn might be more asymmetric the more ethnically diverse a population (e.g. Page, 2008). Cultural theories highlight the *coordination problems* associated with a lack of shared language, meanings and practices as an important aspect affecting social cohesion (Habyarimana et al., 2007; Deutsch, 1966).

However, there are few tests of these different explanations against one another, meaning that the reason for ethnic fractionalisation effects is still unclear. More than that, the various findings and arguments have not remained unchallenged. There is a range of confuting findings, and two journals have devoted entire special issues to a critical assessment of the literature, its theoretical claims and empirical evidence (Holtug and Mason, 2010; Harell and Stolle, 2010). There seem to be three main points of critique. First of all, classical and well established contact theory (Allport, 1954), is seen as predicting exactly the opposite. Everyday experiences with people of other descent should generalise the ways we trust in others to also encompass who are not alike or of our own kind. Second, it is claimed that the empirical findings show a spurious correlation, because heterogeneous regions tend to be socio-economically deprived and affluent, high trusting and socially engaged people move to other neighbourhoods as the share of migrants<sup>3</sup> increases. In addition, some scholars claim that the debate generalises from the exceptional racial situation of the USA and specific ethnic relations in some developing countries.

Against a mere spurious and globally exceptional correlation speaks the amount of confirmatory studies, most of which hold levels of deprivation constant and some of which rely on data from European countries. The overall picture rather suggests that any relation between ethnic fractionalisation and social cohesion depends on the workings of mediating mechanisms and moderating conditions. Given this background, three questions emerge: Why should people's reciprocity and trust be reduced in more ethnically fractionalized areas? How can we account for the mixed results of previous studies? Are there any solutions to the problem of

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<sup>3</sup>Throughout this work, I use the term "migrant" to refer to a person who was born abroad or who has at least one parent who was born abroad, meaning it includes both immigrants and children of immigrants. Hence my use of the word migrant is similar to the rather long-winded concept of "person with migration background" as used by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany.

negative ethnic fractionalisation effects?

**The Central Argument** This work answers these three questions by making the following argument. Following recent social thought, I define ethnicity as a three-dimensional concept consisting first and foremost of cognitive categories with which actors might identify as social identities, and the two possible but not necessary dimensions of networks that are clustered along the lines of these ethnic categories and of ethno-cultural habits and practices. I discuss how these three dimensions of ethnicity each relate to the above-mentioned types of explanations why ethnic fractionalisation might drive down levels of social cohesion; ethno-categorical diversity is supposed to cause cognitive biases, ethnically clustered networks are expected to result in problems to exert social control and ethno-cultural diversity is argued to result in asymmetrically distributed preferences and coordination problems. Answering the question why ethnic fractionalisation drives down social cohesion, should hence be possible by decomposing ethnic fractionalisation into such indices of ethno-categorical fractionalisation, ethnically clustered networks and ethno-cultural diversity that are explicitly connected with one of the different explanations.

Next to any attempts of statistically measuring observable levels of ethnic fractionalisation, I secondly argue for the prime importance of peoples' perceptions of fractionalisation in explaining levels of social cohesion, because these are more than just reflections of the environment as measured by public statistics. This is because the geographical units for which statistical measures of ethnic fractionalisation are estimated do not reflect people's individual everyday life-worlds, as characterised for example by their way to work or the view from their favourite café's windows. Moreover, people tend to draw conclusions from single, unrepresentative experiences, are subject to media influences, and generally bad in making inferences. Yet, following the Thomas theorem — "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas, 1928, p. 572) — it is exactly those aspects of ethnic heterogeneity that are actually perceived by actors that are the most likely to have an impact on their attitudes and actions. This is why perceptions should be considered both as mediators of statistically measured levels of ethnic fractionalisation and as predictors in their own right. As such they might be the reason why previous findings are so inconclusive and suggest media coverage, party mobilisation or other elite-driven framings of migration issues as likely moderators of fractionalisation effects.

I expand this principal argument by two further steps. First, one might be concerned that in emphasising the role of individuals' perceptions, one gives an unsatisfactory explanation consisting of arbitrary subjective impressions. Yet, I continue to show that subjective perceptions are not arbitrary, but arise from ob-

servable conditions such as regional economic decline, which should be the subject of further research. Second, one of the conditions that leads to more positive perceptions of ethnic fractionalisation is having personal inter-ethnic contact, which should not be confused with inter-ethnic co-existence as measured by indices of ethnic fractionalisation. Throughout all empirical analyses, I show personal inter-ethnic contacts to attenuate negative effects of (perceived) ethnic fractionalisation and make the categorisation of neighbourhood problem-groups as ethnic minorities less likely. Since this result parallels the classical approach of contact theory by implying personal inter-ethnic contact as the most obvious solution to the challenges of ethnic fractionalisation at hand, I finally investigate determinants of inter-ethnic neighbourhood acquaintanceships and argue that inter-ethnic partners and children act as brokers, meaning they help to establish inter-ethnic ties, but do so in particular social contexts such as local bars and restaurants or parks and playgrounds respectively.

**Research Design** The empirical analyses of this study make use of German subset of the Ethnic Diversity and Collective Action Survey (EDCAS), the implementation of which was my responsibility within the project “Ethnic Diversity, Social Trust and Civic Engagement” under the supervision of Ruud Koopmans at the Social Science Research Center. The EDCA-Survey is a large-scale computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) survey with 7,500 standardised telephone interviews in Germany. The survey allows for the statistical comparison of 55 theoretically and randomly sampled regions, which vary on contextual characteristics of interest. Further information are given in Chapter 3.

**Outline** This work is divided into three classical parts. Besides this introduction, part I contains the theoretical background (Chapter 2) as well as the research design (Chapter 3) of this study. Note, however that the theoretical background aims to be a review of the literature on ethnic fractionalisation at large and not only the theoretical background for the analyses of this work. The subsequent empirical chapters contain further theoretical discussions that relate to the specific questions investigated. Similarly, the research design chapter gives a general overview of the data used as well as the modelling strategy, but specificities are again discussed in each single empirical chapter.

Four empirical chapters form the body of part II. Chapter 4 investigates fractionalisation indices that relate to different types of explanations of the ethnic fractionalisation effect, so that the comparison of their explanatory power should yield suggestive evidence of the relevance of one explanation over the others. Chapter 5 introduces and investigates different types of perceived ethnic fractionalisation and in how far these mediate statistically measured ethnically fractionalisation

indices or even show predictive power in their own right. Chapter 6 investigates respondents' use of categories to characterise neighbourhood problem groups and studies under which conditions people are likely to use ethnic categories. Thereby Chapter 6 supports the argument that perceptions do not only have real consequences (Thomas and Thomas, 1928), but also real causes. Finally, Chapter 7 investigation is devoted to the explanation of inter-ethnic neighbourhood acquaintanceships, because of their positive role in attenuating ethnic fractionalisation effects and rendering experiences with ethnic fractionalisation as positive. Part III contains a summary of the study along with concluding remarks.