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“Unlikely recruits”:

Why politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities participate in civil wars?

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***Abstract:** There is little research on why smaller ethnic groups with no political stakes in the conflict take part in civil wars. There is even less understanding as to why members of small ethnicities join ideologically-distant conflict participants to fight against an enemy that does not directly threaten their ethnic security. This study describes these ethnic minority combatants as “unlikely recruits.” It argues that members of politically-irrelevant minorities join stronger conflict participants – either governments or rebels – seeking to protect their ethnic interests from both their prospective hosts and their foes. Although the “unlikely recruits” have minimal grievances against enemies of their hosts and they receive limited participation rewards, forging an alliance with an actor which is likely to offer the highest benefits is sufficient to overcome the collective action problem. Recruiting members of*

smaller ethnic minorities in the context of ethnic civil wars allows armed actors to strengthen their image of ethnic diversity and all-inclusiveness, as well as to benefit from material resources provided by the “unlikely recruits.” These arguments are empirically tested using new evidence from Ukraine that offers a rare glimpse into the dynamics of politically-irrelevant minorities’ participation in civil wars.

Introduction

In October 2001, several hundred ethnic Chechens from the Pankisi Gorge district of Georgia joined the Georgian government forces in their attack on ethnic Abkhaz separatists in Kodori Gorge area of the breakaway republic of Abkhazia. The Pankisi Gorge – a valley region homeland to ethnic Chechens (Kists) in Georgia – does not share physical borders with Abkhazia and, located over 200 km from the breakaway republic, has never been threatened or affected by Georgia’s conflict with Abkhaz separatists. Unlike mostly Orthodox Christian Georgians, ethnic Kists, similarly to many Abkhaz, are Sunni Muslims. Far from being known for its pro-Georgian attitudes, the Pankisi Gorge is frequently raided by Georgian security forces seeking to weed out extremists among the local Kist population.ⁱ

Notwithstanding the lack of political and ideological grievances against Abkhaz and the absence of tangible material incentives, ethnic Kists chose to voluntarily join pro-Georgian forces attacking an adversary that did not challenge their ethnic interests or jeopardize their security. This example of ethnic Kists’ pro-Georgian mobilization is one of many cases when ethnic minorities join potentially hostile armed actors in campaigns against an enemy that does not challenge or threaten their ethnic interests.

Nevertheless the question of why individuals join conflict protagonists which promote ideologies unsympathetic to or even irreconcilable with their own ethnic identity has thus far received little attention in civil war studies. Previous research on the role of ethnic identity in civil wars described the process of armed mobilization against co-ethnics as “ethnic defection”.ⁱⁱ The existing literature on ethnic defection focused exclusively on why members of ethnic minority groups mobilize on the side of government forces explicitly opposed to ethno-nationalist aspirations of their own ethnic group and fighting against rebel group(s) consisting largely of the members of the same ethnicity as defectors.ⁱⁱⁱ Not much is known, however, as to why members of smaller ethnic minority groups seek to join non-co-ethnic armed groups – either pro-government or rebels – unsympathetic to their own ethnic aspirations and fighting against an enemy (from a different ethnic group) that does not necessarily threaten their ethnic identity. While IR literature is rife with studies on small states’ behavior and bandwagoning in the context of interstate conflict, research on intrastate conflict has tended to disregard the role of smaller ethnic minorities. The puzzle of “unlikely recruits” becomes even more relevant in the historical perspective. Examples of Jat Sikhs voluntarily mobilizing into the British Army to fight, among other conflicts, in the colonial war in Afghanistan and in the World War I,^{iv} and of Muslim mountaineers from the North Caucasus enlisting into the Russian Army in 1914, are just a few reminders that the phenomenon of “unlikely recruits” is part of the history of human warfare. While existing explanations of the phenomenon emphasize individual motivations (such as honor or military tradition), or financial incentives, systematic analysis of both supply and demand side for the “unlikely recruits” in the context of contemporary civil wars is absent in the extant conflict studies literature.

To fill this gap in literature, I introduce the concept of “unlikely recruits” which refers to members of “politically-irrelevant”^v ^{vi} ethnic minorities voluntarily joining armed actors,

either pro- or anti-regime, engaged in a civil war on the territory of their country of citizenship. These ethnic recruits participate in conflicts fought against an enemy that neither actively recruits from the same ethnic group(s) as “unlikely recruits,” nor directly threatens their security. In contrast to ethnic defectors, who mobilize against their own co-ethnics on the side of an actor opposed to their ethnic interests, “unlikely recruits” join armed actors ethno-linguistically and ideologically distant or even potentially hostile to their own ethnic aspirations, but which are not engaged in conflict with co-ethnics of the “unlikely recruits.” Since political, religious or ideological grievances of “unlikely recruits” against their chosen enemies are minimal and material incentives are often irrelevant, these unexpected ethnic recruits present a puzzling category of combatants that does not easily fit into existing categories of armed actors. In contrast to foreign fighters, “unlikely recruits” join armed formations in their own country of residence/citizenship, and unlike mercenaries, these ethnic recruits are not attracted exclusively by financial incentives. Nevertheless, ethnicity plays an important role in their mobilization as the “unlikely recruits” mobilize along ethnic lines and tend to maintain connections with other members of their ethnicity serving for the same armed group(s) by either creating formal ethnic units or by informally fostering ethnic networks.

This paper seeks to provide theoretically-grounded explanations for the phenomenon of “unlikely recruits,” which will be supported by empirical evidence from Ukraine. Theoretical examination of politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities’ participation in civil wars examines why do the “unlikely recruits” join conflict protagonists. I argue that in the context of civil wars members of smaller ethnic minorities join conflict actors, which do not explicitly support ethnic aspirations of ethnic minority recruits, because these conflict protagonists offer the “unlikely recruits” better opportunities to promote and safeguard their ethnic interests than other armed actors. The “unlikely recruits” are also more likely to join armed actors,

which they perceive as potential guarantors of their security should their ethnic interests become threatened by the armed group's foes. I also explore why do the conflict actors accept ethnic minority recruits. Conflict actors are likely to welcome ethnic minority recruits due to additional resources (both human and material) that these combatants are providing. Recruiting ethnic minorities can also enable armed groups – on both sides of dyad – to bolster their image of all-inclusiveness and diversity, which could be employed to facilitate international recognition and financial support, as well as to cement their position domestically.

This study draws its empirical insights from in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of Ukraine's smaller ethnic minority groups who mobilized for far-right pro-government volunteer battalions during Ukraine's armed conflict with pro-Russian separatists in 2014-15. Interviews with Ukraine's ethnic Jews, Greeks, Tatars, Hungarians, Armenians, Roma (Romani) and Romanians reveal that members of these ethnic minorities mobilized for pro-government volunteer battalions, many of which advocate radical far-right ideologies, convinced that the groups' membership promotes their ethnic interests and aspirations. A second wave of interviews with representatives of pro-government volunteer battalions demonstrated that these armed groups were keen to recruit ethnic minorities attracted by the public relations (PR) opportunities and resource inflow that the "unlikely recruits" were offering.

Smaller ethnic minorities in civil war

This study contributes to the broader literature on ethnic conflicts and the role of ethnicity in civil wars. Notwithstanding the large and growing number of studies on ethnic civil wars,^{vii} the role of ethnic minorities in civil war literature is ascribed to either minorities in control of

government, or minorities rebelling against the government. The first strand of literature examines ethnic minorities through the prism of association between ethnic minority's control of state and civil war onset.^{viii} Studies on ethnic minority rule emphasized the likelihood of ethnic conflict as a result of the minority's control over government and the emergence of ethnic grievances against the minority rule facilitating deeper ethnic fragmentation.^{ix} The second, and larger, group of studies analyzed the role of ethnic minorities in the context of insurgencies fought between an ethnic minority rebels and the government.^x The bulk of studies on ethno-nationalist and secessionist conflicts are centered on ethnic minorities mobilizing against the dominant ethnic group in order to obtain independence, autonomy or other socioeconomic and political concessions from the government.

Notwithstanding efforts to expand the focus on ethnic groups beyond a classical two-actor analysis,^{xi} the existing scholarship continues to examine ethnic civil wars through the lenses of "two nominally rival ethnic groups".^{xii} The role of multiethnicity in civil wars remains a relatively underexplored variable that has been examined primarily from the perspective of the relationship between the presence of multiple ethnic groups in a country and incidence of political violence.^{xiii} Sambanis^{xiv} has argued that "more ethnically heterogeneous societies are likely to engage in civil wars." Similar arguments were raised by other scholars.^{xv}

Nevertheless, much of the scholarship remains centered on the analysis of largest ethnic minority groups.^{xvi} Cederman et al.^{xvii} insisted that the size of an ethnic group is critical towards their decisions to rebel. The focus in the ethnic conflict literature has been on "politically-relevant" groups as the unit of analysis, advanced by Cederman et al.^{xviii}, defined as ethnic contender groups challenging the power of ethnic majority, and as a result discriminated against and excluded from power-sharing. In Cederman et al.'s^{xix} definition, an

ethnic group is “politically relevant if at least one political organization claims to represent it in national politics or if its members are subjected to state-led political discrimination.” The bias towards the largest ethnic minority was justified by the argument that “larger groups will be able to stage successful collective action thanks to their superior numbers”.^{xx} Large-N studies examined the effect of ethnic fractionalization and ethnic exclusion on civil war onset and dynamics from the perspective of largest ethnic groups,^{xxi} but few efforts were made to understand behaviors of smaller ethnic minorities. Whose side of the dyad are politically-irrelevant ethnic groups – or smaller ethnic minorities – with no ethnolinguistic ties either to the largest ethnic minority or ethnic majority can be expected to take in the context of civil wars?

Hypothetically, smaller ethnic minorities can join government, which often is a stronger actor; they can remain neutral, or become part of rebellion. With the exception of neutrality, which also sometimes hard to maintain, other two options involve overcoming the collective action problem,^{xxii} common for insurgencies.^{xxiii} Bearing in mind that politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities have much fewer chances than larger minority groups to obtain political or economic benefits from their participation in insurgency, they have less incentives to join rebellions. Supporting a rebellion can entail much higher cost to politically-irrelevant minorities than abstaining from participation regardless of the outcome of civil war. Supporting a government can be similarly cost-inefficient, particularly if we assume that neither the dominant ethnic group (government) nor the largest ethnic minority (rebels) are sympathetic to the plight of smaller minorities and therefore would be uninterested in offering high participation rewards.

One theoretical approach previously employed to explain why ethnic group members join conflict actors unsympathetic to their own interests is *loyalism*. In Kalyvas’s^{xxiv} wording, loyalism is “the manipulation of cleavage salience through the introduction of a new political

dimension.” However, loyalism entails that an ethnic minority is offered sufficient bonuses by either government or rebels to maintain its loyalty, and that participation in war is likely to be rewarded. Examples of “unlikely recruits” from different corners of the world demonstrate that politically-irrelevant minorities are rarely purposefully offered participation rewards, and instead they are likely to face further marginalization from stronger actors. Using evidence from Ukraine, this article shows that irrespectively of seemingly limited opportunities and participation rewards, “unlikely recruits” join conflict participants that are likely to offer them highest rewards and which are also more likely to appreciate benefits that politically-irrelevant minorities bring along.

Introducing “unlikely recruits”

The first contribution that this study makes is to unravel the neglected question of politically-irrelevant (smaller) minorities’ role in civil wars by encapsulating a somewhat ambiguous role that smaller ethnic minorities play under a more nuanced and enduring concept of “unlikely recruits.” Who are the “unlikely recruits” and how do they differ from other conflict participants? The first most critical characteristic of “unlikely recruits” is that these members of politically-irrelevant minorities mobilize not against armed actors which directly threaten their security, as for example is the case with the Yazidi Protection Force of Sinjar (HPŞ) mobilized against the Islamic State group. Rather, “unlikely recruits” take up arms against conflict participants, which pose no imminent threat to ethnic interests or human security of smaller ethnic minorities. For example, ethnic Armenians in Turkey’s Diyarbakir province volunteered into anti-PKK Village Guards militia regardless of the PKK’s sympathies for Armenians and the gruesome history of persecution of ethnic Armenians by Turks.^{xxv} In a same vein, Syriac Military Council, a Christian-Assyrian militia in Al-Hasakah

governorate in Syria, has been fighting alongside Kurdish YPG forces against Turkish troops in Afrin in 2018.

The second feature of “unlikely recruits” is that these ethnic combatants join an armed actor, which is unlikely to support ethnic aspirations of politically-irrelevant minorities, and which often shares no common sectarian or ethno-linguistic ties with its ethnic minority allies. For example, Syrian Circassians – mostly Sunni Muslims – have taken the side of Alawites against fellow Sunni anti-Assad rebels from the Free Syrian Army during the early stages of the Syrian Civil War. The most rational explanation would be that smaller ethnic minorities are likely to join the strongest actor involved in civil war, with largest territorial control.^{xxvi} However, examples demonstrate that neither military strength, nor territorial control of armed actors emerge as decisive factors behind the smaller ethnic minorities’ choice of allies. Since the mid-2000s, ethnic minorities have been actively mobilizing for Taliban in Afghanistan’s north. The non-Pashtun recruits include ethnic Uzbeks, Tajiks, Hazara and Turkmens, who were known to fiercely oppose Taliban during the 1990s civil war. Taliban’s brutal campaigns against ethnic minorities in the north were instrumental behind widespread support among non-Pashtun ethnicities for the Northern Alliance’s Uzbek and Tajik warlords.^{xxvii} A brief capture of the northern provincial capital city Kunduz by the Taliban in 2015 and a series of successful offensives in most northern provinces from 2014 to 2018 were largely attributed to the Taliban’s ability to recruit members of ethnic minorities in non-Pashtun parts of the country.^{xxviii} It is noteworthy that “unlikely recruits” among Afghan ethnic minorities have joined the armed group well-known for its Pashtun ethno-nationalist aspiration and hostility to northern ethnicities in order to oppose the government that has consistently sought to accommodate ethnic interests of Afghanistan’s Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmens and other minorities of the north.

The other factor peculiar to “unlikely recruits” is that they mobilize along ethnic lines, and their ranks consist almost exclusively from co-ethnics residing on the territory of their country of citizenship. In contrast to ethnic defectors,^{xxix} “unlikely recruits” do not purposefully mobilize against their own co-ethnics,^{xxx} but instead maintain close networks within their ethnic group. Bearing in mind that ethnic identity is crucial for collective action,^{xxxi} the “unlikely recruits” employ their ethnic networks to communicate preferences and coordinate action.^{xxxii}

The second contribution that this study makes is in providing an explanation for why politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities create unlikely alliances and mobilize on the side of an actor that does not explicitly promote their interests and choose to become adversaries with a conflict actor that does not directly threaten their security or interests. This study also seeks to explain why armed actors on either side of dyad are willing to welcome members of smaller ethnic minorities into their ranks. The following sections focus more in detail on these aspects of the politically-irrelevant minorities’ participation in civil wars.

Why do the “unlikely recruits” mobilize?

The extant theory of ethnic rebellion posits that ethnic groups rebel if they are excluded, downgraded and underrepresented.^{xxxiii} Not only political exclusion and economic marginalization, that are widely rehearsed in the literature, but also “threats to group identity”^{xxxiv} and efforts by the largest ethnic group to dominate others were identified as causes of ethnic mobilization. The current theory of participation in civil wars is centered on two key strands of arguments. The first group of scholars promotes the “greed and grievances” paradigm, which prioritizes either material^{xxxv} or ideological and perceptual group motivations.^{xxxvi} The second strand of civil war studies argues that grievances-based explanations fail to provide an exhausting explanation, which has led to the emergence of the

opportunities-based theories of ethnic civil conflicts.^{xxxvii} Drawing upon the collective action theory,^{xxxviii} the proponents of opportunities-based approaches posit that "[s]uccessful mobilization requires *both motivation and organizational capacity*"^{xxxix} that are needed to overcome collective action problem.

This study echoes the opportunities-centered school in arguing that politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities mobilize on either side of dyad driven by both motivations and opportunities to transform their grievances into action. This argument also draws upon the grievances-centered school of thought as the "unlikely recruits" do not only seek opportunities to promote their aggregated ethnic group interests, but also to alleviate the conflict-related uncertainty and their ethnic group's security concerns. Along with larger ethnic groups, smaller ethnic minorities harbor political and ethnic aspirations, which, in contrast to ethnic majority and larger ethnic minorities, they often lack opportunities and resources to materialize. Political status, representation and access to other participation-related benefits are among the motivational factors encouraging smaller minorities to participate. A conflict actor which is more likely to offer these opportunities to the "unlikely recruits" has more chances to obtain their support. Since smaller ethnic minorities can only offer limited benefits to more powerful conflict actors, they too can only expect limited rewards. Along with "grievances" dimension of motivations, material incentives could be instrumental. For example, some members of the Afghan ethnic minorities were attracted by the Taliban's protectionism of opium industry and smuggling, which offered jobs and incomes that the government was unable to provide.

Notwithstanding the importance of political rights and material benefits, security concerns seem to dominate the smaller minorities' motivations to ally with more influential conflict protagonists. Although politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities may not be facing immediate security threats emanating from either side of dyad, conditions can easily change

under the precarious environment of a civil war. Failure to create alliances with stronger actors may lead to negative for politically-irrelevant groups outcomes. The urge by ethnic groups to ensure their own security – even in the absence of imminent threats – is encapsulated in the ethnic security dilemma, and was identified by Sambanis^{xi} as one of the causes of ethnic conflicts. To an extent, smaller ethnic minorities ally themselves with more powerful conflict actors in order to avoid what Fearon^{xii} dubbed as commitment problem wherein ethnic majorities cannot stop themselves from abusing ethnic minorities in the context of political crises or uncertainty. Unlike larger ethnic minorities which could be expected to rebel in response to perceived injustices,^{xiii} politically-irrelevant minorities often lack capacity and resources to start insurgency and are compelled to join either side of dyad. As rational actors, ethnic minorities choose to join not necessarily the strongest actor, but the one that is likely to offer them protection should it become necessary. This is not to say that the “unlikely recruits” will take side of the weakest conflict actor. Rather, they will seek alliance with the actor that, in their perception, has higher capacity to guarantee their security and to provide them access to public goods. There is also no guarantee that the “unlikely recruits” will maintain their loyalty to just one conflict protagonist in the course of civil war.

In search of ethnic security, smaller minorities may also choose to ally themselves with groups that are more likely to pose threat for them. Therefore, mobilizing for a conflict actor with the higher potential to endanger their security and ethnic interests may serve as a pre-emptive protection mechanism. For instance, efforts of Mali’s predominantly nomadic Fulani herdsmen to ally themselves with Jihadi militants could be explained by the Fulanis’ search for ethnic security from the conflict participant with the highest potential to jeopardize their security. By forging alliance with the conflict actor which is more likely to threaten them, smaller ethnic minorities not only gain access to potential participation rewards – both political and material – but also thwart possible attacks against them.

Along with motivational factors, organizational capacity is critical towards the ethnic minorities' ability to mobilize. There does not seem to be a definitive agreement among the scholars as to whether the group size matters when it comes to mobilizing for participation in intrastate conflict. While some argue that larger minorities can draw large numbers of recruits,^{xliii} others present insurgency as an “elite-level struggle for status”^{xliv} wherein smaller groups are more efficient at coordinating the collective action. A cursory look through empirical findings of this study suggests that although politically-irrelevant minorities are never by default numerically large enough to facilitate massive mobilizations, they also should not be too small or geographically dispersed in order to organize coordinated ethnic mobilization. Ethnic networks emerge as crucial in facilitating mobilization and overcoming collective action problem.^{xlv} In the absence of ethnic networks, even medium sized ethnic groups would find it hard to communicate ethnic interests and encourage participation as a group.

Why do conflict actors accept the “unlikely recruits”?

Why would conflict actors in ethnic civil wars recruit individuals from ethnic minorities with different ethnolinguistic, sectarian and sometimes even ideological background? The key theoretical puzzle that this study seeks to examine is the determinants of mobilization among smaller ethnic minorities. However, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of the “unlikely recruits” phenomenon, I also discuss why the conflict protagonists are willing to accept the “unlikely recruits.” Despite mobilizing for stronger conflict actors, the “unlikely recruits” tend to harbor few sympathies for ethnic aspirations and goals of their hosts. Instead, for members of politically-irrelevant minorities participation in conflict on the side of another ethnicity is associated with pursuing their own objectives. I argue that conflict

actors recruiting members of smaller ethnic minorities pursue at least two major interests of their own.

First, public and external relations are important even for secessionist movements with limited international aspirations.^{xlvi} Whether to achieve international legitimacy and recognition, or to establish and maintain collaboration and communication with domestic and international support networks,^{xlvii} both government and rebels involved in civil war seek to maintain (at least on surface) the image of diversity and all-inclusiveness. Both ethno-nationalist rebels and minority-ruled states (ethnocracies) tend to seek creating an image of ethnic diversity and ethnic minority representation. For example, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has sought to extend its recruitment to ethnic Armenians in order to create an image of all-inclusive Kurdistan. Welcoming members of "neutral" ethnic minorities allows conflict actors to present themselves both domestically and internationally as ethnically diverse and open to cooperation with different types of actors. While extending their recruitment to competing ethnic groups can be both ineffective and undesirable – with the exception of ethnic defectors – for both sides, the third-party ethnic minorities can be expected to be more trustworthy and reliable.

Second, ethnic minority recruits provide additional material resources. Although the politically-irrelevant minorities cannot be expected to bring along extensive economic resources, they nevertheless can count on ethnic networks and even Diaspora support to provide their host with extra funding, military hardware and other supplies. For example, during the early stages of Sri Lankan Civil War, Tamil Tigers (LTTE) eagerly recruited members of Sri Lankan Muslim (*Lanka Yonaka*) ethnic minority, because of material resources and weapon supplies that this group offered to the LTTE.^{xlviii} Similarly, the Syrian Palestinian groups fighting for pro-Assad forces, particularly the al-Quds Brigade and the Galilee Forces,^{xlix} channeled funds and hardware through Palestinian Diasporas around the

world, as well as – through ethnic networks – directly from Palestine. It is erroneous to expect that material resources offered by the “unlikely recruits” are of high significance for the host forces.¹ However, the economic support channeled through ethnic minority recruits is likely to serve as part of broader support base, identified in literature as critical for success in the context of an intrastate conflict.^{li} On more practical level, host forces receive an opportunity to promote their interests among ethnic minority constituencies. They obtain access to territories and settlements occupied by ethnic minorities and can make use of infrastructure in control of friendly minority groups. For many civil war actors the above listed benefits are sufficient to welcome “unlikely recruits”, particularly considering that the minority combatants do not demand high rewards in return for participation.

Methods and Data

To empirically illustrate the dynamics of the “unlikely recruits” participation in civil wars, I draw on the case study of pro-government mobilization among Ukraine’s ethnic minorities during the East Ukraine conflict of 2014-15. As a country hosting an ethnic majority (Ukrainians), largest ethnic minority (Russians) and over a dozen smaller ethnic minorities, Ukraine provides an excellent laboratory for research on politically-irrelevant minorities’ participation in civil wars. The empirical data was collected from a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews with conflict participants. Due to challenges of access and the small sample size, qualitative interviews were chosen as the most appropriate empirical strategy. During fieldwork two categories of informants were interviewed.

The main group of informants consisted of members of ethnic minority groups, composing between 0,3% (156,000) and 0,1% (48,000) of country’s population, who mobilized for pro-government volunteer battalions in 2014-15 (see Appendix, Table 1). The

sample consists of 38 participants, representing the following ethnic minority groups: ethnic Jews (8), Roma (Romani) (7), Tatars (6),^{lii} Hungarians (5), Greeks (5), Romanians (4) and Armenians (3).^{liii} Since all members of ethnic minority groups maintained close-knit ethnic networks with members of their own ethnicity both within pro-government armed units and among civilians, it was possible to determine approximate numbers of “unlikely recruits” from each ethnicity.^{liv}

<Table 1. Interview Data Sample>

As per the informants’ admissions, the average number of smaller ethnic minority recruits fluctuated between 20 and 50 individuals, with ethnic Jews and Roma (approximately 50 combatants each), followed by Greeks (around 40) and Tatars (over 35) as the largest contributors among smaller ethnic minorities. Bearing in mind relatively low total numbers of ethnic volunteers from each ethnicity, I am confident that the current sample is representative (see Appendix, Table 2). The sample representativeness is further confirmed by the fact that – owing to ethnic networks – ethnic minority combatants were in frequent contact (either directly or through social media) with other members of their ethnic group, and therefore were well informed about opinions and attitudes of the rest of ethnic contingent. Most ethnic recruits from the same ethnicity were introduced to the respective battalions through the same recruiters and remained in touch with other members of their ethnicity serving in the same or other battalions through Facebook groups.

<Table 2. Sample Representativeness>

All informants were males aged between 20 and 45 years old. Geographical origins of informants echoed historical distribution of their respective ethnic groups. The majority of informants of Greek, Tatar and Armenian ethnicities were originally from southern regions (predominantly Black Sea coast). Hungarians, Romanians and Roma were from western provinces of Ukraine, and ethnic Jews were residents of either Odessa or Kiev regions. Interviews were carried out in Russian and Ukrainian languages, which most informants – with the exception of Hungarian recruits – identified as their primary languages of communication. With the exception of ethnic Jewish informants, members of other ethnic minorities confirmed knowledge of their ethnic languages.

The fieldwork was conducted in Kiev and Dnipro between July 2015 and September 2017. The interviews cover period from the start of armed conflict in Donbass region in April 2014 until the end of large scale combat and partial demobilization of volunteer battalions in June-July 2015. Informants were contacted through press-services of volunteer battalions and through two volunteer recruitment centers in Kiev and one in Dnipro. Alongside the informants' ethnicity, the key selection criterion was membership in a volunteer battalion, which promoted ultranationalist or far-right ideology, for at least 30 consecutive days. All informants were members of three major volunteer battalions: Volunteer Corps of Ukraine - DUK ("Right Sector"), "Azov" and "Karpatska Sich". All three battalions are notorious for their ultranationalist and far-right ideological stance.^{lv} As enlistment into paramilitary battalions – in contrast to service in Ukraine's conscription-based military forces – was voluntary, the sample includes only individuals who joined the armed units on their own will. A non-random sample was used, which involved identifying one or two members of each ethnic minority among the battalions' former and active members and requesting these informants to refer the researcher to other ethnic combatants.

The second smaller group of informants consisted of representatives of volunteer battalions responsible for recruitment (4), public relations (4), image-building and public awareness (1). This group of informants consisted of two female and five male informants. All informants identified themselves as ethnic Ukrainians and bilingual speakers of both Ukrainian and Russian languages. This category of informants was contacted for their views and opinions about their respective battalions' policies and attitudes towards recruiting members of politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities.

Each in-depth face-to-face interview lasted at least 20 minutes. The interviewees were asked open-ended semi-structured questions enabling them to elaborate their views and opinions on why members of Ukraine's smaller minorities mobilized for far-right volunteer battalions and why the battalions were willing to accept the "unlikely recruits". Due to security concerns of informants and their discomfort with digital recording, interviews were recorded as field notes. This study has used a de-identified sample, whereby names and other identifiers of informants were replaced by a code (pseudonym). Narrative analysis was selected as the method of data coding.

Pro-government mobilization in Ukraine

The start of official mobilization in 2014 Ukraine was directly associated with the annexation of Crimea by Russia on March 16, 2014. On March 17, a decree was issued by the acting President Oleksandr Turchinov on nationwide mobilization and the formation of Territorial Defense Battalions (*Bataliony Territorialnoi Oborony*). The call to assemble volunteer battalions was issued by the Ministry of Defense in order to create "citizen volunteer" units able to assist the National Army and National Guard to maintain the law and order. By the end of March, only about 4,000 volunteers joined the Army and volunteer units.^{lvi} The first

wave of mobilization was marred by the highest level of draft evasion since Ukrainian independence.^{lvii} It is only after the start of anti-government pogroms in Donetsk and Lugansk which led to the occupation of government buildings by pro-separatist protesters in the early April that the formation of volunteer battalions began in earnest.^{lviii} The flow of Russian weapons, funds and manpower across porous Russian-Ukrainian border into Donbass region,^{lix} enabled separatists to secure full control over Donetsk and Lugansk. On April 13, the start of anti-terrorist operation (ATO) in eastern Donbass region was officially declared. By the end of April, there were over 30 volunteer battalions assembled to fight counterinsurgency in the East.

The early weeks of ATO were marked by complete incompetence of the Ukrainian military, who have suffered crushing defeats in Donetsk, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk and several smaller cities in Donbass region.^{lx} Not only the Army demonstrated the lack of preparedness for combat, but also a number of government platoons voluntarily surrendered their weapons and vehicles to separatists and on some occasions even switched sides.^{lxi} By the mid-April, separatists managed to seize control of the large swathes of Donbass region. Having declared the creation of Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Lugansk People's Republic (LNR), separatist forces advanced towards the coastal city of Mariupol.

The second wave of nationwide mobilization was declared on May 6. The government's botched counter-offensive, launched on the eve of mobilization call in the last week of April, was stalled near Donetsk. From the first weeks of conflict it became obvious that the 130,000 strong Ukrainian Army, only had 6,000 men (mostly in the National Guard), prepared for combat. Notorious for its systemic corruption, embezzlement and hazing, the national Army was seen by many Ukrainians as incapable and derelict.^{lxii} Thus, the rise of volunteer battalions took place hand in hand with the decline of regular Army. From the second half of April to mid-May, a steady flow of volunteers to the battalions began to increase reaching its

peak by the end of May.^{lxiii} When the numbers of volunteer combatants were estimated to be between 20,000 to 30,000 men and women,^{lxiv} battalions began to multiply in numbers. Over 40 battalions were operating in the ATO area by the mid-June. Independently financed, armed and equipped, some volunteer battalions received a status of “territorial self-defense” units within the Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defense, others, such as for instance the DUK battalion, had no formal affiliation at all.

The largest, militarily strongest and most popular battalions, such as “Azov” and DUK, and UDA (Ukrainian Volunteer Army), were notorious for their ultranationalist and far-right ideologies.^{lxv} Combining radical Ukrainian nationalism with elements of Slavic paganism, “Azov” battalion in particular served as the hub for ultranationalist activists from all walks of life, including, but not limited to football hooligans (*ultras*) and former members of security forces.^{lxvi} Other nationalist battalions included “Karpat’ska Sich,” “Aydar,” “Tornado” and the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) battalions. The reliance on radical nationalism enabled volunteer battalions to present themselves as force which, unlike the government, is capable to protect the Ukrainian statehood and territorial integrity. The popularity of the battalions among volunteer recruits – all of whom chose the battalions’ membership instead of formal conscription – stemmed from their ability to effectively raise funding and to create military force free of corruption and hazing.

Notwithstanding the battalions’ scandalous ideological background, both “Azov” and DUK attracted large numbers of recruits from the Ukrainian ethnic minorities. Large numbers of Russian-speakers and ethnic Russians joined “Azov” and DUK battalions from the early stages of East Ukraine conflict.^{lxvii} In the words of a former “Azov” recruiter: “Many of our platoons in ATO regions in 2014 consisted primarily of Russian speakers. West [regions] provided considerably less people.”^{lxviii} The DUK was similarly overwhelmingly staffed by Russian-speakers from the east and south of Ukraine.^{lxix} A former DUK recruit attested that

he was surprised to discover that most other recruits in his new regiment: “were speaking mostly Russian and were from Kiev, Odessa and some other [Russian-speaking] cities.”^{lxx} Not only Russians, but also the largest Muslim ethnic minority, Crimean Tatars en masse mobilized into the battalions.^{lxxi} While many Crimean Tatars were serving with DUK, Crimean Tatar activists have also collaborated with “Azov” members during the blockade of Crimea events.^{lxxii}

Along with politically-relevant ethnic minorities, Ukraine’s smaller ethnic groups flocked the recruitment centers to join volunteer battalions. In the words of a former battalion recruiter who worked at a recruitment center in Kiev in Spring 2014: “there were so many different nationalities queuing up in our recruitment center, so that some of our divisions were made up entirely of non-[ethnic]Ukrainians.”^{lxxiii} Although, in contrast to ethnic Russians and Crimean Tatars, most of Ukraine’s smaller ethnic minorities were not directly affected by the conflict, the politically-irrelevant ethnic groups chose to take part in the conflict. Ukraine’s ethnic Jews were actively involved in the war effort in the East. Ukraine’s southern city of Odessa, as well as the Black Sea coastal regions, is a home to large ethnic Jewish community, which provided numerous Jewish recruits.^{lxxiv} Some were even credited with participating in establishing the “Azov” battalion.^{lxxv} Most continued practicing Judaism while serving with volunteer battalions.^{lxxvi} Partly due to their exposure to conflict violence in the Black Sea coastal city of Mariupol and in Donbass, ethnic Greeks – despite maintaining official neutrality – mobilized for pro-government forces since the early weeks of conflict. Dispersed across the country, Ukraine’s Roma community was actively involved in the conflict.^{lxxvii} Ethnic Armenians is another small ethnic minority which took part in the Donbass War.^{lxxviii} Often confused with Crimean Tatars, Ukrainian (Western) Tatars were heavily assimilated during the Soviet period,^{lxxix} and maintain relatively weak ethnic networks, which affected their ability to mobilize along the ethnic lines. With the mass

exodus of ethnic Hungarians from Ukraine's Zakarpattia region to Hungary, among other small ethnic minorities, Hungarians were the least involved in participation in East Ukraine conflict.^{lxxx} Similar dynamics exist among ethnic Romanians, who owing to steady relocation to the neighboring Romania were rather reluctant to dispatch large contingents to the eastern front.

Since neither of these ethnic groups has representation in the parliament or has a political party of their own, there are few rewards – if any – that the “unlikely recruits” from these ethnic groups could reap at the group level.^{lxxxii} Although Roma, Hungarians and Romanians^{lxxxii} could be expected to harbor latent grievances against the Ukrainian state over perceived discrimination and marginalization, none of the smaller ethnic minorities experienced systematic and targeted discrimination from the government. These characteristics make Ukraine's smaller ethnic minorities incompatible with Cederman et al.'s^{lxxxiii} definition of politically-relevant ethnic groups. Notwithstanding their lack of political “relevance” and seemingly limited participation rewards, the Ukraine's smaller ethnicities succeeded in overcoming the collective action problem and mobilized for the most unlikely hosts – the far-right battalions. The following sections provide empirical findings of this study, explaining why the Ukraine's “unlikely recruits” mobilized for armed groups unsympathetic and even ideologically hostile to their ethnic interests and why their unlikely hosts have welcomed the members of smaller ethnicities.

Strange bedfellows: Ethnic minorities and far-right battalions

The start of armed conflict in East Ukraine – with the exception of some Greek and Roma communities – had no immediate impact on security of Ukraine's smaller ethnic groups. In the words of a Tatar volunteer from Kiev,^{lxxxiv} “apart from inflation and frequent political

rallies, the war had no other effect on [our] life.” A Hungarian volunteer from Lvov region in western Ukraine,^{lxxxv} echoed that opinion: “because the war was so far from us, and many in our community believed that it has nothing to do with us [Hungarians], many did not care at all.” Since many members of smaller ethnicities in Ukraine are Russian-speakers with little sympathies for the Ukrainian nationalism, the battalions’ ideology was terrifying for ethnic minorities. A former Jewish volunteer recalled that when he first heard of the “Right Sector” (DUK), “I was disgusted with them.”^{lxxxvi} An ethnic Armenian combatant^{lxxxvii} held similar opinion in spring 2014: “I just did not take them seriously. I am a Russian-speaker [apart from native Armenian language], and I could never imagine joining these people.” Over 60% of other informants shared similar views of distrust and dislike towards the volunteer battalions.

Nevertheless, defeats suffered by the Ukrainian army in the East and the rise of volunteer battalions ignited sudden interest towards the war among smaller ethnicities. The initially wary attitude towards far-right battalions began to shift particularly fast after the battalions, spearheaded by “Azov”, succeeded in halting the separatists’ offensive on the Black Sea coast. The battle for the strategic coastal city of Mariupol in June 2014, along with the pro-government forces’ successful advances around Donetsk, raised the profile and popularity of volunteer battalions. The battalions’ awareness raising campaigns, their powerful presence on social media, and frequent TV appearances solidified the image of battalions as committed to protecting the state,^{lxxxviii} rather than to promoting far-right ideologies. Large numbers of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers among the battalions’ leadership and the rank-and-file membership was another factor demonstrating the multi-ethnic makeup of the battalions.^{lxxxix}

When asked about their choice of host armed groups, the informants’ aspirations to cement their ethnic groups’ position and status were prominent. Unlike the formal armed

forces, the battalions were perceived to provide better opportunities for recognition of the ethnic groups' status. As emphasized by a Roma combatant: "We can serve together [with co-ethnics] here and we are being taken seriously. The commanders see us as representing Roma, rather than just regular soldiers as we would be in the army."^{xc} A Jewish volunteer added: "our [non-Jewish] mates and commanders understand that we are Jews and are very respectful of our religion and traditions."^{xc} Another ethnic Jew commented: "Often when I speak to my superiors here, or when I am being interviewed by the press, I feel that I am speaking on behalf of the Jewish community. ... And this is what my rabbi told me back home, that I am not here on my own, I am part of Jewish community."^{xc} Similar opinion was held by a Hungarian volunteer, who said that: "we are often consulted by commanders or interviewed by journalists, but not as regular soldiers, rather as Hungarians. They want to know what we think as Hungarians."^{xc} The sense of agency in representing their respective ethnic groups was seen as motivating by the volunteers: "here for the first time in my life I have fully embraced my Tatar identity and I was proud to represent my community."^{xc} Several informants confessed that as representatives of their ethnic communities, they could advise on behalf of their communities not only the battalion commanders, but also leaders of political parties and the government officials. A Roma volunteer explained: "Since those who served in the ATO are well respected, we often felt that we serve as ambassadors for our people."^{xc} During their service, many informants were frequently in touch with their ethnic community leaders, communicating on behalf of their communities with journalists and politicians, who often visited the ATO area. In the words of a Jewish volunteer: "We Jewish volunteers had many opportunities to discuss what our community wanted with senior people [in government]. They would listen to us, because we were much more than [just] regular citizens."^{xc} The "unlikely recruits" unique status was actively exploited by their ethnic community leaders who communicated their political agenda through the recruits not only to

the battalions' leadership, but also to the broader political establishment and the Ukrainian public. Some recruits vividly described these processes: "Our community needed to use all possible avenues to show to the Ukrainian people that Romas are not thieves or criminals, but that we are fighting in the ATO."^{xcvii} The Roma volunteer further added: "In a way, ... we had an [important] mission of presenting Roma community in an honorable light." A similar opinion had been voiced by many other informants. For example an ethnic Greek volunteer confessed that: "when I joined [the war effort], I was not sure whether I was doing the right thing, but [later] I became confident that I am doing a big favor not only to my country [Ukraine], but most of all to my own [Greek] community."^{xcviii}

The feeling that being part of the battalions was far better for their ethnic groups than being neutral, or opposing the battalions was widespread among the "unlikely recruits." An Armenian volunteer explained: "My [Armenian] mates and myself here, we represent our community and we know that because of our contribution, our blood spilt here, [Ukrainian] nationalists won't ever think of [ethnic] Armenians as enemies."^{xcix} A former Jewish volunteer agreed: "'Azov' knows what we [ethnic Jews] did for it. I joined not only because the battalion is better than the army, but also because it will remember and honor our [Jewish] contribution."^c As one the most vulnerable ethnic minorities in Ukraine, Roma were highly concerned that their contribution to the war effort should protect Roma communities from the nationalists.^{ci} "We Roma have always been at a disadvantage and we have to be careful whose side do we choose. Serving for the battalion is a safe bet."^{cii} Other "unlikely recruits" were more concerned with practical security matters. A Greek volunteer elaborated: "if we [Greeks] collaborate with separatists and later Ukraine recaptures the territory, as it happened in Slovyansk, the battalions will purge us."^{ciii} He added that "we'd rather fight for the battalions than fight against them. Separatists are not there to stay, but Ukraine is." Slightly different perspective was offered by a Jewish recruit: "Everyone expects that we

[ethnic Jews] will be first to be harassed by the nationalists. Guess what: we are among them now!”^{civ}

The efforts to overcome the commitment problem^{cv} by the ethnic majority were evidently present among the participation motives of “unlikely recruits”. The Ukraine’s “unlikely recruits” have both feared the battalions and were proud to be their members, which offered them unwritten guarantees of ethnic security. Decisions to ally with the most threatening conflict actor were often intuitive. A former Roma recruit^{cvi} recalled: “As Roma I both feared the battalions and dreamed to be a part of them.” In the reasoning of a Tatar combatant,^{cvi} “if I have to choose between separatists, Ukrainian army and the battalions, the battalions have the most to offer: respect, protection, brotherhood, no hazing, and no corruption. The choice isn’t hard to make at all.”

Although most informants cite patriotism, concern for the Ukrainian statehood and individual obligations to assist their home country, ethnic security concerns were clearly pronounced among the individual reasons for mobilization. A Greek volunteer^{cvi} explained that “on [rebel] occupied territories, separatists tried to co-opt Greek communities to collaborate and were very friendly to us, but we didn’t fit in Novorissiya [rebel state].” He further explained that “although they [rebels] did not harm us, we weren’t sure what will happen after the war.” An ethnic Jewish combatant from Odessa shared similar views: “My hometown [Odessa] was always known for its multi-ethnic background, ...we know that Ukraine is determined to keep it that way, but we don’t know what are the separatists’ plans.”^{cix} He added: “They [rebels] want to create a Russian state ... and we know that there won’t be place for Jews.” Ethnic Hungarians and Romanians were similarly concerned about the rebels’ possible attitudes towards non-Slavic minorities. As encapsulated in the words a Romanian combatant: “we Romanians, as well as Hungarians of western Ukraine, we see ourselves as part of Europe, not of *Russkii mir* [Russian world], needless to say we are

worried as a community.”^{cx} Notwithstanding the deep-seated grievances that both Hungarian and Romanian communities had held against Ukraine, nearly all informants believed that, as it was termed by Nicolae: “Ukraine and its nationalists did not seem that dangerous.”^{cxii} In the absence of immediate threat to their ethnic identity and interests, smaller ethnic minorities voiced concerns about uncertainty and unpredictability of separatists. In the words of a Roma volunteer, “we Gypsies, always have to choose the lesser evil. Currently Ukraine seems to us as such.”^{cxiii} Thus, participation as means of “pre-emptive security” for their ethnic group was frequently mentioned by the informants.

Alongside motivational factors, organizational capacity emerged as noteworthy. The interview findings reveal that smaller and more territorially dispersed ethnic minorities had much harder time organizing collective action. For example, Ukraine’s (western) Tatars owing to their geographic dispersion maintain limited community (ethnic) networks. A former Tatar combatant^{cxiii} recalled, “first I joined with a [Tatar] friend of mine, but later we became part of broader Tatar group in ATO.” The geographical spread and relatively small numbers of the highly localized Roma communities resulted in Roma from some regions of Ukraine more actively involved in the war effort than from others. A Roma recruit^{cxiv} explained: “Although we [Roma] all had very similar motivations [to join] we did not have a single [ethnic] center to coordinate our mobilization. Recruits from different [Roma] settlements did not communicate with each other until they enlisted. Only later on we all got in touch.” By contrast, larger and more tightly-knit ethnic groups, such as Hungarians,^{cxv} ethnic Jews and Armenians were more effective at mobilizing along ethnic lines. As a Hungarian recruit^{cxvi} recalled, “we all knew each other before we joined and we joined as a [Hungarian] group.” These findings demonstrate that although in smaller and less homogenous ethnic minorities, mobilization lacked centralized coordination – as it was in

larger ethnic minorities, which boast well-established community networks – the role of interpersonal networks was still notable.

Ethnic minority volunteers are welcome!

Since their creation in the spring of 2014, Ukraine’s volunteer battalions succeeded in coupling their far-right ideology with an “open-to-all-ethnicities” recruitment strategy. Along with actively recruiting into their ranks members of Ukraine’s non-Slavic ethnic minorities, and collaborating with ethnic volunteer battalions – such as Crimean Tatars – the battalions also eagerly welcomed foreign fighters from different parts of the world.^{cxvii} The battalions’ ethnic diversity was widely employed to counter the image of these armed groups as ultranationalist or neo-Nazi organizations.^{cxviii} In the words of an “Azov” representative, “our regiment has people from most nationalities in Ukraine and beyond.”^{cxix} He further added that “although some [pro-Russian] sources call us fascists, we have Jews and Muslims among our members, ... we even have Jewish founding members. How can we be neo-Nazis?.” Another battalion representative^{cxx} offered similar arguments: “nobody can argue that we are more multicultural than separatists. How many Ukrainian speakers do they have? More than half of our guys communicate only in Russian.” A former battalion recruiter and combatant^{cxxi} recalled that “in our unit on the frontlines we had not only mobile [Orthodox] church, but also a synagogue, mosque and Catholic church.” Speaking about multi-ethnicity, a battalion representative^{cxxii} claimed that “we are the true army of the people, because we represent all nationalities [of Ukraine].”

The “unlikely recruits” were keen to confirm that in contrast to fellow Ukrainian combatants, they often found themselves in the center of attention. A former Jewish combatant^{cxxiii} mentioned “I was frequently asked by my *kombat* [commander] to talk to

press, to record video messages for Youtube and Facebook. I was sort of a local celebrity.” A similar opinion was shared by a Hungarian recruit,^{cxxiv} who recalled that often “journalists travelled all the way [to frontlines] just to talk to us [Hungarians]. Our unit commander was always ‘advertising’ us to all visitors and [battalion’s] guests.” An ethnic Jewish combatant mentioned that his fellow ethnic combatants were well aware that their presence was often used for the PR purposes. He described that “we all realized that we are being shown as examples of how diverse the [Ukrainian] nationalists are.”^{cxxv} However, he added: “I did not mind that at all. I call myself *zhidobanderovets*^{cxxvi} because I am a Jewish Ukrainian nationalist and I enjoyed the role of promoting both Jewish and Ukrainian causes.”

Along with PR opportunities, the “unlikely recruits” have brought to the battalions material resources. Financial donations were channeled to the battalions through ethnic networks and ethnic community groups. In the words of a battalion public relations official,^{cxxvii} “some [ethnic] communities have been particularly generous in their donations to us.” An ethnic Jewish recruit offered more details: “We [ethnic Jews] received good sums of money from the [Jewish] community, Diaspora, friends in Israel. We spend some of this money on our food, living expenses and other items, but most of it we gave to the battalion, because it was the battalion that provided for us.”^{cxxviii} Reports reveal that powerful ethnic oligarchs, including the richest person in Ukraine, Rinat Akhmetov (an ethnic Tatar), were allegedly secretly financing the “Azov” and DUK battalions.^{cxxixcxxx} Ihor Kolomoisky, a powerful ethnic Jewish oligarch was also reportedly financing the Azov battalion.^{cxxxicxxxii} In addition, Kolomoisky is credited with creating and founding in his hometown of Dnipro one of the largest volunteer battalions “Dnipro-1”.^{cxxxi} While smaller ethnicities had lower capacities to channel material resources to the battalions, the ethnic community support was still relevant. For example, recruits from among Roma and Armenian ethnicities mentioned that instead of money, their communities regularly supplied them with commodities, such as

food, clothing, and other living necessities, which were distributed among all members of the battalion. A battalion representative^{cxv} observed that “although we receive lots of donations from many different sources, [ethnic] communities are very consistent and generous in their support. Sometimes they give us more [goods] than we actually need.” Both the material benefits and PR opportunities offered sufficient incentives for the battalions to welcome the “unlikely recruits,” particularly in lieu of limited payoffs that the ethnic minority combatants requested in return for their services.

Conclusion

The role of smaller or politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities in civil wars has often been disregarded in the literature where the focus was primarily on larger ethnic minority groups. This study has sought to present a nuanced theoretically-grounded account of the smaller ethnic minorities’ participation in civil wars. Evidence from Ukraine demonstrates that the members of political-irrelevant minorities mobilized for far-right volunteer battalions irrespectively of the armed groups’ ideology and limited participation rewards. Although ideologically distant from their hosts, the “unlikely recruits” perceived the battalions as both the most threatening actors and the only conflict participants, which could effectively safeguard their ethnic interests. The Ukraine’s smaller minorities did not perceive pro-Russian separatists as a direct threat, but they believed that the alliance with the pro-government battalions is of much higher benefit for them than neutrality. Although further research will need to confirm the broader external validity of these findings, they demonstrate that in the context of ethnic conflicts the “unlikely recruits” distinguish themselves as different from other conflict participants and tend to pursue their own ethnic objectives. From the armed groups’ perspective, ethnic minority recruits provided opportunities to “embellish”

the battalions' image and also offered extra material resources. Due to limited demands of the “unlikely recruits”, the armed groups were satisfied with their similarly limited contribution. The post-war (2016-19) radicalization of the battalions and their affiliated groups – which this study did not discuss – and their attacks on ethnic minorities, suggests that the most valued for the “unlikely recruits” participation objective, their ethnic security, was not guaranteed through their participation. This indicates that participation rewards for politically-irrelevant groups are far more precarious than the “unlikely recruits” perceive them, and that their ethnic interests may easily be ignored by their hosts.

This study advances knowledge about politically-irrelevant minorities' role in civil wars in at least two ways. First, it underscores the need for proper understanding of multi-actor conflicts. The emphasis on politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities shows that irrespectively of whose side ethnic minorities are on, they might harbor their own agendas and that their participation incentives may not easily fit into the “greed and grievances” or opportunities'-centered strands of theories. The empirical evidence of this study demonstrates that even pro-government conflict actors often distinguish themselves from the government and that the “unlikely recruits” may join any of the parties involved regardless of their ideological stance. Second, this study suggests that conflict participants can choose alliances with actors with opposing or conflicting interests and ideologies as far as they expect perceived participation benefits to outweigh disadvantages. Studying “unlikely recruits” can also shed further implications relevant for policy and practice. For example, the involvement of smaller ethnic minorities in civil wars is likely to have implications for conflict outcomes and post-conflict processes that can be of importance for both international organizations and national governments alike.

NOTES

ⁱ Jaba Devdariani, "Georgian security operation proceeds in the Pankisi gorge." *Eurasia Insight*. 09 March, 2002.

ⁱⁱ Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Ethnic defection in civil war," *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 8 (2008): 1043-1068.

ⁱⁱⁱ Paul Staniland, "States, insurgents, and wartime political orders," *Perspectives on politics* 10, no. 2 (2012): 243-264; Jason Lyall, "Are coethnics more effective counterinsurgents? Evidence from the second Chechen war," *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 1 (2010): 1-20.

^{iv} Alongside Sikhs, 13,400 recruits from Punjab province voluntarily enlisted into the British Army in 1914 to fight in the World War I. See: <https://qz.com/india/1425486/british-indian-army-recruited-half-a-million-from-punjab-in-ww1/>.

^v In Cederman et al. formulation an ethnic "group is considered politically relevant if it forms part of the national government, if it is mobilized at the national level, or if it is discriminated by the government." I define as politically-irrelevant ethnic minority groups, which fail to satisfy either of the above criteria. See Lars-Erik Cederman, Halvard Buhaug, and Jan Ketil Rød, "Ethno-nationalist dyads and civil war: A GIS-based analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (2009): 496-525, 511.

^{vi} I use terms "politically irrelevant" minorities and "smaller ethnic groups" interchangeably throughout the article.

^{vii} I use the definition of ethnic civil war coined by Sambanis, which presents "ethnic war as war among communities (ethnicities) that are in conflict over the power relationship that exists between those communities and the state." See Nicholas Sambanis, "Do ethnic

and nonethnic civil wars have the same causes? A theoretical and empirical inquiry (Part 1)," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 3 (2001): 259-282, 261.

^{viii} Ernest Gellner and John Breuilly, *Nations and nationalism*. Vol. 1 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic groups in conflict, updated edition with a new preface* (Univ of California Press, 2000).

^{ix} Dan Miodownik and Ravi Bhavnani, "Ethnic minority rule and civil war onset how identity salience, fiscal policy, and natural resource profiles moderate outcomes," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28, no. 5 (2011): 438-458.

^x Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Verso books, 2006); Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and social communication: An inquiry into the foundations of nationality*. Vol. 34. (mit Press, 1966).

^{xi} David E. Cunningham, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Idean Salehyan, "It takes two: A dyadic analysis of civil war duration and outcome," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 4 (2009): 570-597.

^{xii} Bhavnani and Miodownik, "Ethnic minority rule and civil war onset," 30.

^{xiii} Tanja Ellingsen, "Colorful community or ethnic witches' brew? Multiethnicity and domestic conflict during and after the cold war," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 44, no. 2 (2000): 228-249.

^{xiv} Sambanis, "Do ethnic and nonethnic," 265.

^{xv} James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war," *American political science review* 97, no. 1 (2003): 75-90.

^{xvi} Ted R. Gurr, *Minorities at risk: A global view of ethnopolitical conflicts* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1993); Rogers Brubaker and David D. Laitin, "Ethnic and nationalist violence," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 423-52.

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- ^{xvii} Lars-Erik Cederman, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min, "Why do ethnic groups rebel? New data and analysis," *World Politics* 62, no. 1 (2010): 87-119, 96.
- ^{xviii} Cederman et al., "Ethno-nationalist dyads," 511.
- ^{xix} Cederman et al., "Why do ethnic groups rebel?," 99.
- ^{xx} Cederman et al., "Ethno-nationalist dyads," 501.
- ^{xxi} Halvard Buhaug, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Jan Ketil Rød, "Disaggregating ethno-nationalist civil wars: A dyadic test of exclusion theory," *International Organization* 62, no. 3 (2008): 531-551.
- ^{xxii} Mancur Olson, *The logic of collective action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- ^{xxiii} Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Who fights? The determinants of participation in civil war," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (2008): 436-455, 439.
- ^{xxiv} Kalyvas, "Ethnic defection," 1050.
- ^{xxv} Şemsa Özar, Nesrin Uçarlar, and Osman Aytar, *From Past to Present a Paramilitary Organization in Turkey: Village Guard System* (Diyarbakir Institute for Political and Social Research, 2013).
- ^{xxvi} Kalyvas, "Ethnic defection," 1051.
- ^{xxvii} Carl Conetta, "Strange victory: A critical appraisal of operation enduring freedom and Afghanistan war," *Afghan Digital Libraries* (2002).
- ^{xxviii} See: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/15/ethnic-minorities-are-fueling-the-talibans-expansion-in-afghanistan/>.
- ^{xxix} Kalyvas, "Ethnic defection."
- ^{xxx} This is not to say there is no ethnic defection within smaller ethnic minorities. Members of politically-irrelevant ethnic minorities could possibly be found fighting on both

sides of dyad. This study focuses exclusively on those ethnic minority recruits, which seek to represent a majority opinion of their ethnic group. However, it cannot be excluded that more geographically dispersed ethnic groups, or divided along sectarian and ideological issues, could develop more than one position towards the conflict incompatibility and therefore pledge their allegiances to different armed actors.

^{xxx} Jennifer M. Larson and Janet I. Lewis, "Ethnic networks," *American Journal of Political Science* 61, no. 2 (2017): 350-364, 320.

^{xxxii} As found by Larson and Lewis, "communication travels among coethnics more easily than it does among individuals of different ethnicities." See Larson and Lewis, "Ethnic networks," 352.

^{xxxiii} Cederman et al., "Why do ethnic groups rebel?," 94.

^{xxxiv} Ellingsen, "Colorful community," 231.

^{xxxv} Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil Wars," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004): 563–95.

^{xxxvi} Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict: Shadows of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Roger Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

^{xxxvii} Elaine K. Denny and Barbara F. Walter, "Ethnicity and civil war," *Journal of Peace Research* 51, no. 2 (2014): 199-212; John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, "Resource mobilization and social movements: A partial theory," *American journal of sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1212-1241; Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

^{xxxviii} Olson, *The logic of collective action*.

^{xxxix} Cederman et al., "Why do ethnic groups rebel?," 96.

^{xl} Sambanis, "Do ethnic and nonethnic civil wars," 263.

^{xli} James D. Fearon, *Ethnic war as a commitment problem* (Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association, 1994).

^{xlii} Fearon, "Ethnic war," 2.

^{xliii} Cederman et al., "Why do ethnic groups rebel?," 96.

^{xliv} Janet I. Lewis, "How does ethnic rebellion start?," *Comparative Political Studies* 50, no. 10 (2017): 1420-1450, 1427.

^{xlv} Larson and Lewis, "Ethnic networks."

^{xlvi} Stephen M. Saideman, "Discrimination in international relations: Analyzing external support for ethnic groups," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 1 (2002): 27-50; Anthony Vinci, *Armed groups and the balance of power: The international relations of terrorists, warlords and insurgents* (London: Routledge, 2008).

^{xlvii} Idean Salehyan, "Transnational rebels: Neighboring states as sanctuary for rebel groups," *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (2007): 217-242.

^{xlviii} Dennis B. McGilvray, *Crucible of conflict: Tamil and Muslim society on the east coast of Sri Lanka* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

^{xlix} See: https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/app/uploads/2018/03/E_054_18.pdf.

¹ Huseyn Aliyev, "'No peace, no war' proponents? How pro-regime militias affect civil war termination and outcomes." *Cooperation & Conflict* 54, no.1 (2018): 64-82.

^{li} Denny and Walter, "Ethnicity and civil war," 204-05.

^{lii} To be distinguished from Crimean Tatars who constitute one of the larger ethnic minority groups at 0,5% of population (248,200), as per 2001 population census.

^{liii} According to the latest (2001) population census in Ukraine, these minorities constitute the following percentage of Ukraine's population: ethnic Jews 0,2% (103,600), Tatars 0,2 (73,300), Hungarians 0,3% (156,600), Armenians 0,2% (99,900), Roma (Romani)

0,1% (47,600), Greeks 0,2% (91,500) and Romanians 0,3% (151,000). See

<http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/general/nationality>.

^{liv} There are no official statistics on nationality of the volunteer battalion members.

^{lv} Rosaria Puglisi, *A people's army: civil society as a security actor in post-Maidan Ukraine* (Istituto affari internazionali, 2015).

^{lvi} See *Argumenty i Fakty* article (in Russian):

<http://www.aif.ua/society/social/1126578>.

^{lvii} See *RiaNovostiUkraine* (in Russian):

<https://rian.com.ua/columnist/20150207/363141410.html>.

^{lviii} Huseyn Aliyev, "When neighbourhood goes to war. Exploring the effect of belonging on violent mobilization in Ukraine." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*. Online first: 10.1080/15387216.2020.1756366.

^{lix} Andrew Wilson, "The Donbas in 2014: Explaining Civil Conflict Perhaps, but not Civil War," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 4 (2016): 631-652.

^{lx} Rajan Menon and Eugene B. Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Mit Press, 2015).

^{lxi} Kyiv Post, "A day of humiliation as Ukrainian military offensive stalls, six armored vehicles seized," *Kyiv Post*, 16 April, 2014.

^{lxii} Lawrence Freedman, "Ukraine and the art of limited war." *Survival* 56, no. 6 (2014): 7-38.

^{lxiii} Huseyn Aliyev, "The logic of ethnic responsibility and pro-government mobilization in East Ukraine conflict," *Comparative Political Studies* 52, no. 8 (2019): 1200-1231.

^{lxiv} Huseyn Aliyev, "Strong militias, weak states and armed violence: Towards a theory of 'state-parallel' paramilitaries," *Security dialogue* 47, no. 6 (2016): 498-516, 507.

^{lxv} Josh Cohen, “Commentary: Ukraine’s neo-Nazi problem,” *Reuters*. March 18, 2018; Vladislav Maltsev, “Chas ‘Azova’. Chem voinstvo ‘belogo vojdyia’ privlekaet k sebe ukraintsev,” *Ukraina.ru*, June 17, 2018.

^{lxvi} Shaun Walker, “Azov fighters are Ukraine’s greatest weapon and may be its greatest threat,” *The Guardian*, September 10, 2014.

^{lxvii} While there is no verifiable data on the exact numbers of Russian- and Ukrainian-speakers in volunteer battalions in 2014, the consensus among interviewees was that there were about as many Russian-speakers as Ukrainian-speakers across the entire spectrum of paramilitary forces. In fact, the founder and commander (*kombat*) of Azov battalion (currently regiment), Andryi Biletsky is also a Russian-speaker from the eastern city of Kharkov.

^{lxviii} Anton, Kiev, Spring 2016.

^{lxix} Katerina Tsibenko, “Russkii iz batal’ona ‘Azov’,” *Lib.ua*, July 27, 2014; Andrey Vadjra, “Neizbezhnaya russifikatsiya ukrainskogo natsionalizma,” *LiveJournal*, November 14, 2016.

^{lxx} Gavriil, Kiev, Summer 2016.

^{lxxi} Alexandr Matushenko, “A chto na yuge? Krymskie tatary xotyat mira potomu gotovyatsya k vojne,” *RiaNovostiUkraina*, March 27, 2016, at: <https://rian.com.ua/inquiry/20160427/1009102942.html>.

^{lxxii} Tony Wesolowsky, “Tatar leader vows Crimea blockade will continue,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 19, 2016.

^{lxxiii} Alexander, Kiev, Summer 2015.

^{lxxiv} Yevgeni Kucherov, “V podrazdelenii ukrainskie rebyata krichat ‘evreyam slava’ – ravvin-volonter,” *Krym.Realii*, November 01, 2015, at: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/27338618.html>.

^{lxxv} Daria Gorskaya, “Komandir evreiskoi sotni Maidana teper spasayet boitsov v zone ATO,” *Fakty.ua*, December 09, 2014, at: <https://fakty.ua/192310-komandir-evrejskoj-sotni-majdana-teper-spasaet-bojcov-v-zone-ato>.

^{lxxvi} Elena Gordeeva, “Vot on ya, zhidobanderovets: ukrainskii evrei rasskazal, pochemu voyuet v ATO,” *Argumenty i Fakty.Ua*, March 25, 2015, at: <http://www.aif.ua/society/people/1478279>.

^{lxxvii} See more details at: <https://nnils.livejournal.com/2677952.html> and <http://press-centr.com/ru/news/Uzhhorodski-tsihani-ydut-dobrovoltsyami-v-zonu-ATO>.

^{lxxviii} See more at: <https://inosmi.ru/military/20160905/237737282.html> and <https://hromadske.radio/podcasts/gromadyany-ukrayiny/virmeny-zavzhdy-zahyshchayut-tu-derzhavu-u-yakiy-zhyvut-tygran-karagyzyan>.

^{lxxix} Tatyana Baybak, “Zapadnye tatory i ikh sled v istorii Ukrainy.” *Krym Realii*, July 08, 2018, at: <https://ru.krymr.com/a/29348902.html>.

^{lxxx} See more at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NRSxbWhFKg> and https://24tv.ua/ru/jetnicheskie_vengry_v_zakarpate_massovo_pokidajut_region_klimkin_n_899405

^{lxxxii} Huseyn Aliyev, “End to informality? Examining the impact of institutional reforms on informal institutions in post-Euromaidan Ukraine.” *Debatte: Journal of Contemporary Central and Eastern Europe* 24, no. 3 (2016): 207-221.

^{lxxxiii} Almost exclusively in the post-Maidan period.

^{lxxxiiii} Cederman et al., “Ethno-nationalist dyads,” 511.

^{lxxxv} Murad, Kiev, Autumn 2016.

^{lxxxvi} Gabor, Kiev, Summer 2015.

^{lxxxvii} Moshe, Dnipro, Summer 2015.

^{lxxxviii} Tigran, Kiev, Summer 2016.

^{lxxxviii} Montana Hunter, "Crowdsourced War: The Political and Military Implications of Ukraine's Volunteer Battalions 2014-2015," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 18, no. 3 (2018).

^{lxxxix} See more details at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vn4IIGF6Nyo&t=7s>.

^{xc} Almaz, Kiev, Summer 2017.

^{xcⁱ} Lev, Kiev, Summer 2015.

^{xcⁱⁱ} Roman, Kiev, Summer 2015.

^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} Sandor, Dnipro, Summer 2015.

^{xc^{iv}} Javid, Kiev, Autumn 2016.

^{xc^v} Alek, Kiev, Winter 2017.

^{xc^{vi}} Samson, Kiev, Summer 2017.

^{xc^{vii}} Vlad, Kiev, Autumn 2016.

^{xc^{viii}} Alesandro, Kiev, Winter 2017.

^{xc^{ix}} Robert, Kiev, Summer 2017.

^c Moses, Kiev, Summer 2015.

^{ci} Violent attacks on Roma encampments near Kiev and in western Ukraine in 2018 and 2019 by the far-right vigilante groups "National Corps" (an off-shoot of Azov battalion) and "C-14" (formed on the basis of several far-right battalions) are a grim reminder that nationalists did not honour the Roma's contribution to the war effort. See Christopher Miller, "With axes and hammers, far-right vigilantes destroy another Romany camp in Kyiv," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, June 08, 2018.

^{ciⁱ} Dragomir, Kiev, Winter 2016.

^{ciⁱⁱ} Leonidas, Kiev, Summer 2015.

^{ci^v} Adam, Kiev, Winter 2017

^{cv} Fearon, "Ethnic war."

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- ^{cvi} Vlad, Kiev, Autumn 2016.
- ^{cvii} Aleks, Dnipro, Summer 2015.
- ^{cviii} Alesandro, Kiev, Winter 2017.
- ^{cix} Moses, Kiev, Summer 2015.
- ^{cx} Simon, Kiev, Summer 2015.
- ^{cx i} Nicolae, Kiev, Summer 2015.
- ^{cxii} Danko, Dnipro, Summer 2015.
- ^{cxiii} Azad, Kiev, Summer 2015.
- ^{cxiv} Svetoslav, Kiev, Summer 2017.
- ^{cxv} Despite their close-knit ethnic networks, Ukraine’s ethnic Hungarians were rather reluctant to mobilise.
- ^{cxvi} Balla, Kiev, Winter 2016.
- ^{cxvii} Patrick Jackson, “Ukraine war pulls in foreign fighters.” *BBC News*, September 01, 2014, at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-28951324>.
- ^{cxviii} See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAz1Fq_ksyE.
- ^{cxix} Sem`yon, Kiev, Summer 2017.
- ^{cxx} Svitlana, Kiev, Winter 2017.
- ^{cxxi} Anton, Kiev, Spring 2016.
- ^{cxxii} Sem`yon, Kiev, Summer 2017.
- ^{cxxiii} Moses, Kiev, Summer 2015.
- ^{cxxiv} Jozsef, Dnipro, Summer 2015.
- ^{cxxv} David, Kiev, Summer 2017.
- ^{cxxvi} A term derived from the Russian derogatory word “zhid” (a Jewish person), and “banderovets” (a follower of Ukrainian nationalist movement).
- ^{cxxvii} Olena, Summer 2016.

^{cxxviii} Moses, Kiev, Summer 2015.

^{cxxix} Elena Ostryakova, “Akhmetov finansiruet ukrainskikh natsionalistov – SMI.” *Politnavigator.net*, February 02, 2018, at: <https://www.politnavigator.net/akhmetov-finansiruet-ukrainskikh-nacionalistov-smi.html>.

^{cxix} See also: https://antikor.com.ua/articles/133832-partija_natsionalnyj_korpus_-_ugroza_ili_spasenie_dlja_ukrainy.

^{cxixi} Wojciech Konończuk, *Oligarchs after the Maidan: the old system in a 'new' Ukraine* (Warsaw: OSW Commentary, 2015), 5.

^{cxixii} See more at: <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2015/05/05/in-the-battle-between-ukraine-and-russian-separatists-shady-private-armies-take-the-field/>.

^{cxixiii} Puglisi, *A people's army*, 11.

^{cxixiv} Andryi, Kiev, Fall 2016.