

REINTERPRETATION OF ETHNO-NATIONAL CONFIGURATIONS AS A FRAMEWORK FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

This article reinterprets Cederman et al.'s (2025) model of ethno-national configurations as not only an explanatory framework for civil and interstate wars but also as a diagnostic tool for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. By integrating theories of nationalism, ethnic conflict, and peace and conflict resolution, the paper demonstrates how state–nation incongruence, captured in five configurations United Home Rule, United Alien Rule, Divided Home Rule, Partial Home Rule (irredentism), and Divided Alien Rule generates different types of grievances and security dilemmas. We argue that these structural typologies can serve two distinct functions: (1) ex post analysis of conflicts, explaining why and how wars emerge; and (2) ex ante diagnosis of latent threats, offering early warning for peace practitioners. The paper further develops a Conflict–Peace Framework that links configurations to specific institutional remedies, ranging from power-sharing and autonomy to cross-border governance and international mediation. The contribution is twofold: (a) bridging political science and peace studies by transforming a conflict-centered typology into a peace-oriented architecture, and (b) proposing an analytical map for both scholars and practitioners to anticipate and resolve ethno-national conflicts.

Keywords: etno-nasionalisme; conflict diagnosis; peace architecture; conflict prevention; Cederman model.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic conflict is one of the most persistent issues in contemporary global politics. Although the intensity of interstate wars has declined since World War II, internal conflicts driven by ethnic motives have instead increased and become the dominant form of political violence (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). This pattern underscores that the relationship between state and nation is not only a domestic concern but also has direct implications for international stability. Many modern civil conflicts, such as those in Rwanda, Sudan, or Syria, demonstrate that the misalignment between ethnic identity and state structures can generate prolonged escalations of violence (Horowitz, 1985).

Theoretically, the nexus between ethnicity, political inequality, and violent mobilization has been extensively studied in political science and peace studies literature. The grievance–opportunity theory emphasizes that ethnic exclusion from power creates collective grievances that serve as the foundation for mobilization, while the structural conditions of the state provide opportunities for rebellion (Cederman et al., 2013). At the same time, globalization and growing interdependence among states have not eliminated identity-based tensions; rather, they often complicate them through external interventions, refugee flows, or diaspora support (Lake & Rothchild, 1998).

Empirically, various cases of ethnic conflict reveal different patterns of violence depending on the configuration of relations between ethnic groups and the state. For instance, majority dominance over minorities is prone to rebellion, while ethnic divisions that cross state boundaries may trigger interstate rivalries or cross-border conflicts. This is consistent with Cederman et al.’s observation that identifies five main ethno-national configurations: *United Home Rule*, *United Alien Rule*, *Divided Home Rule*, *Partial Home Rule*, and *Divided Alien Rule*. Each configuration carries distinct risks of conflict, whether in the form of civil war or interstate disputes.

However, previous studies have tended to use Cederman’s model only to explain retrospectively why ethno-national conflicts occur. The framework has not yet been fully explored as an early diagnostic tool for conflict prevention. In fact, from the perspective of peace studies, such structural analysis can serve as a basis for building early warning systems and designing more contextual prevention and resolution strategies (Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1997). Thus, there exists a research gap that needs to be bridged: how to transform a conflict-centered typology into a peace-oriented framework.

This article seeks to address that gap by reinterpreting Cederman et al.’s (2025) model of ethno-national configurations not only as an explanatory framework but also as an analytical map for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. By linking ethno-national typologies with institutional strategies such as power-sharing, federalism, cross-border governance, and international mediation, this article proposes a conceptual repositioning from a “*map of war*” toward a “*peace architecture*.” Its main contribution lies in providing a normative-analytical framework that can be utilized by both scholars and practitioners to anticipate, prevent, and resolve ethno-national conflicts in a more sustainable way.

RESEARCH METHODS

This article employs a qualitative-conceptual approach using the literature review method (Samsu, 2017). The data are drawn from academic literature, including both comparative politics and peace and conflict resolution studies.

The analytical steps include:

1. Reconstructing Cederman et al.’s (2025) typology of ethno-national configurations (Cederman et al., 2025).
2. Reinterpreting the typology through the lens of peace theory (Galtung, 1996; Lederach, 1997; Lijphart, 1977).
3. Developing a conceptual synthesis in the form of a Conflict–Peace Framework that connects ethno-national configurations, conflict trajectories, and peace resolution strategies.

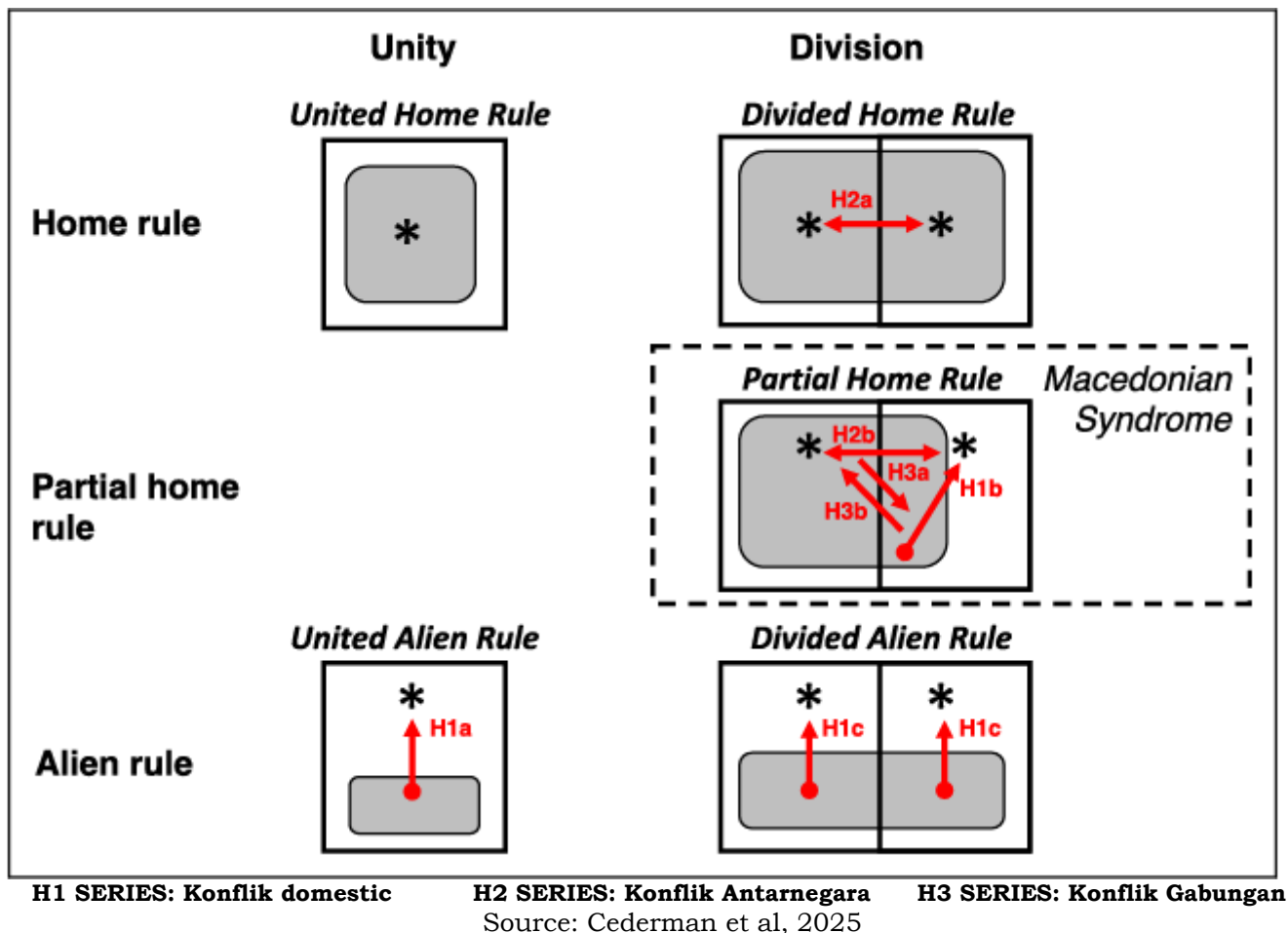
Accordingly, this article is normative-analytical in nature. It does not empirically test hypotheses but instead develops an analytical framework intended for use in the study of ethnic conflict and its resolution.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The doctrine of modern nationalism emphasizes that state borders and national identity should coincide (Gellner, 2006). When this alignment is not achieved, grievances emerge: ethnic groups marginalized from political power or divided across borders tend to mobilize (Cederman et al., 2013;

Horowitz, 1985). The grievance opportunity framework (Muller, 1980) explains that exclusion provides the motivation, while cross-border networks or state weakness provide the opportunity.

The ethno-national configurations mapped by Cederman et al. (2025) offer a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between state–nation structures and conflict potential. The five main configurations *United Home Rule*, *United Alien Rule*, *Divided Home Rule*, *Partial Home Rule (irredentism)*, and *Divided Alien Rule* each represent distinct conditions in the relationship between ethnicity and the state. These configurations serve not only as analytical classifications but also as structural indicators that enable us to anticipate the trajectory of conflict.



Information:

- H1a: **United Alien Rule** has a higher probability of experiencing civil rebellion.
- H1b: **Partial Home Rule** carries a higher risk of domestic conflict compared to other configurations.
- H1c: **Divided Alien Rule** is also more likely to generate rebellion or separatism.
- H2a: **Divided Home Rule**, there is a greater risk of interstate conflict due to competition over legitimacy among different segments of the nation.
- H2b: **Partial Home Rule**, interstate conflict is more likely to occur because the self-ruling state may support its ethnic segment oppressed in another country.
- H3a: **Partial Home Rule** represents a dual-risk configuration (civil conflict and interstate conflict), making it the most conflict-prone.
- H3b: The combination of domestic exclusion and cross-border fragmentation increases the likelihood of external intervention in the conflict.

Figure 1. Conflict Patterns in the Five Configurations

In the context of *United Home Rule*, one nation dominates political power within the state. This situation is relatively stable; however, the potential for discontent remains if the rights of ethnic minorities are neglected. A case in point can be seen in Iceland or Japan, where a single majority ethnic group predominates. These states are relatively peaceful, yet they still need to ensure protections for small immigrant communities or ethnic minorities.

Conversely, under *United Alien Rule*, one ethnic group is entirely dominated by another. This configuration creates the most vulnerable conditions for rebellion, as political injustice and structural exclusion drive resistance mobilization. This aligns with relative deprivation theory, which argues

that when groups perceive themselves as oppressed, collective mobilization arises (Gurr, 2015). A frequently cited example is Rwanda before the 1994 genocide, where the dominance of the Hutu over the Tutsi minority contributed to the escalation of brutal violence.

In the case of *Divided Home Rule*, a nation is split across several states, but each segment has control over its own government. Although domestic situations tend to be stable, there is a risk of interstate rivalry due to competition for political legitimacy. A classic case is the Korean nation, divided between North Korea and South Korea: each state exercises authority over its population, yet ideological rivalry and competing claims of legitimacy have generated enduring tensions.

A more complex scenario arises with *Partial Home Rule*, in which some segments of a nation hold power in their own state, while others are oppressed in different countries. This configuration carries a dual risk of conflict, encompassing both civil wars and interstate disputes. This resonates with the theory of the ethnic security dilemma, which argues that mutual distrust among actors reinforces cycles of conflict (Posen, 1993). The most relevant example is the Kurdish people, who enjoy relative autonomy in Iraq but remain oppressed in Turkey, Syria, and Iran. This situation has generated domestic conflicts within each country while simultaneously creating the potential for cross-border tensions linked to aspirations for independence.

Finally, *Divided Alien Rule* describes a situation in which all segments of a nation are oppressed across different states, thereby fueling aspirations for self-determination and prolonging dynamics of separatism. A clear example is the Palestinian nation, with some living under Israeli occupation while others remain refugees or stateless minorities in neighboring countries. Aspirations for independence and the recognition of sovereignty continue to serve as a persistent source of conflict in the region.

This framework can serve a dual function. First, as a diagnostic tool for conflict threats (*ex ante*), it helps identify high-risk areas before violence breaks out. For example, the *Partial Home Rule* configuration conceptually indicates a critical flashpoint because it combines two sources of conflict at once internal exclusion and cross-border tensions. Thus, the framework can be used by international organizations or governments as part of an *early warning system*, enabling preventive interventions such as diplomacy or confidence-building measures before conflict escalates.

Second, the *framework* also functions as a tool for conflict analysis (*ex post*), useful for explaining why a war occurred and how its escalation pathways unfolded. In the case of *United Alien Rule*, for instance, rebellion can be interpreted as a response to exclusive ethnic domination. Meanwhile, in *Divided Home Rule*, interstate rivalry is more readily understood as a consequence of competing claims to legitimacy among divided national segments. In this way, the framework assists conflict resolution practitioners in designing appropriate strategies, whether through power-sharing, federalism, or international mediation.

To clarify the relationship between configurations, conflict risks, and relevant peace strategies, see Table 1 below:

Tabel 1. Ethno-National Configuration, Conflict Risk, and Peace Strategy

Configuration	Conflict Risk	Peace Strategy
United Home Rule	Low, minority grievances	Minority rights protection, constitutional guarantees
United Alien Rule	Civil rebellion	Power-sharing, mediation, autonomy
Divided Home Rule	Interstate rivalry	Diplomacy, regional integration, confidence-building measures (CBMs)
Partial Home Rule	Civil and interstate conflict	Dual-track resolution, federalism, cross-border governance
Divided Alien Rule	Prolonged separatism	Referendum, transitional power-sharing, international trusteeship

Furthermore, integrating Cederman’s framework with peace theory demonstrates that each configuration requires an appropriate institutional solution. *United Alien Rule*, for instance, demands policies of *power-sharing* and political decentralization, while *Divided Home Rule* is more effectively addressed through regional diplomacy and interstate cooperation mechanisms. Thus, the main outcome of this analysis is the repositioning of Cederman’s framework from merely a tool for conflict classification to an architecture for peace. The model not only explains conflict trajectories but also guides context-sensitive strategies for conflict prevention and peaceful resolution.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Cederman et al.'s (2025) framework serves a dual function. First, in an *ex post* sense, the framework is able to explain the mechanisms behind the outbreak of civil wars as well as interstate conflicts through the varying positions of ethno-national groups within state structures. Second, in an *ex ante* sense, the typology can function as an early diagnostic instrument that enables the identification of potential conflicts before the eruption of open violence. Thus, the model is relevant not only for retrospective academic analysis but also for early warning systems and preventive diplomacy. The main contribution of this article is the repositioning of Cederman's typology as part of a peace architecture. By linking each ethno-national configuration to appropriate institutional strategies from power-sharing and federalism to cross-border mechanisms this framework expands its application from conflict explanation to prevention and resolution. Theoretically, the article bridges the literature on nationalism with peace studies. Practically, it provides an analytical map that can be used by governments, international organizations, and mediators to design more proactive and context-sensitive interventions. Nevertheless, this article is conceptual and normative in nature, and its main limitation lies in the absence of empirical testing. Further research is needed to examine the validity of this framework through comparative case studies, both in domestic and interstate conflict contexts. Moreover, integrating this framework with quantitative data such as the *Ethnic Power Relations (EPR)* dataset would strengthen its utility as a predictive instrument within *early warning systems*. Overall, the conclusion that can be drawn is that ethno-national configurations not only embody risks of conflict but also present opportunities for building sustainable peace. With the right understanding, this framework can be transformed from a "map of war" into a "map of peace". Beyond the theoretical and practical conclusions already outlined, this article also emphasizes the importance of applying Cederman et al.'s (2025) framework within the context of conflict early warning systems. Such systems are essentially designed to identify potential conflicts at an early stage, thereby allowing for preventive interventions before escalation into open violence. In this regard, ethno-national configurations can serve as powerful structural indicators. For example, the existence of ethnic groups under conditions of *alien rule* or *partial home rule* can be viewed as early warning signals of rising risks of both domestic and interstate conflict. Accordingly, mapping ethno-national configurations at national and regional levels should be considered a crucial first step in developing early warning databases. Furthermore, this framework can be combined with quantitative data such as the *Ethnic Power Relations (EPR)* dataset, human rights reports, and indicators of political exclusion to build an evidence-based system. Such integration would strengthen the predictive capacity of *early warning systems (EWS)*, making them more sensitive to dynamics of ethnic grievances and cross-border fragmentation. However, an early warning system should not stop at the stage of diagnosis; it must be followed by preventive diplomacy. The results of conflict vulnerability detection should be immediately utilized to facilitate inter-ethnic dialogue, activate early mediation, and reinforce *confidence-building measures* in conflict-prone areas. In this way, Cederman's framework functions not only to assess risks but also to guide concrete steps toward conflict prevention. Finally, it is important to emphasize that the implementation of an ethno-national configuration-based *early warning system* can be carried out at multiple levels. At the global level, the United Nations could integrate it into the Security Council's early warning mechanisms. At the regional level, organizations such as ASEAN or the African Union could employ the framework to anticipate cross-border conflicts. At the national level, governments could operationalize it through foreign ministries, intelligence agencies, or security institutions to strengthen domestic stability policies. By operationalizing Cederman's framework within conflict early warning systems, this academic approach can be transformed into a practical instrument. At the same time, it underscores the article's key contribution: positioning ethno-national typologies not merely as tools for post-conflict analysis, but as a foundation for conflict prevention strategies and sustainable peacebuilding.

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