

# Pluralism and Contentious Politics in France

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Prepared for the Instituto Carlos III-Juan March de Ciencias Sociales Seminar Series  
November 16, 2018 - Madrid, Spain

Draft Version - Do Not Cite

## **Abstract (for entire book project):**

What explains the incidence of conflict between minority groups and the state in Europe? In particular, why do we see minority populations partaking in urban riots in some local European contexts but not in others? Using the natural social science experiment of the 2005 riots in France, this project aims to deepen our understanding of the conditions under which ethnic minorities engage in violent political confrontations with the state. In contrast with accounts that emphasize the effects of socio-economic inequality, cultural variables or national integration regimes, this research proposes a distinctively political explanation for group violence at the local level in Europe. At the core of this political argument is the historically rooted configuration of political parties and the degree to which the composition of this local political landscape fosters, or precludes, strategic socio-political alliances with minority populations over time. This research argues that when the breadth and depth of the relationship between local political elites and minority populations is either too robust (i.e. coopted) or too feeble, the risk of minority conflict increases as minorities experience diminished leverage vis-à-vis the socio-political infrastructure; whereas the features of strong party competition and strategic alliances with “decisive” minority populations militate against the onset of violence by decreasing its value as a tool for political expression. A central premise of the project is that we must explain not only why collective violence occurs but also why it *fails* to occur more often. To that end, these patterns emerged from the statistical analysis of 112 French cities and 4 in-depth case studies, including both rioting *and* non-rioting localities.

This research makes three key contributions to our current knowledge about minority-state conflict. First, the comparative study of the French 2005 riots shifts our current explanatory focus on the causes of such conflict away from national level frameworks and towards the unit of analysis on which variation actually occurs: the local level. Second, this work helps draw a clear analytic distinction between the political conditions that facilitate the “absence of minority-state conflict” versus those that engender a genuine “presence of peace”, where the former can signal that political order is only maintained by pushing minority-state tensions just below the surface without addressing their sources. This dormant tension paves the way for increased socio-political alienation, inequality and the disenfranchisement of minority populations, which has serious normative implications for the treatment of minority populations in liberal democratic states. Third, the project builds a more dynamic and comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a “political” variable in determining political violence by moving beyond traditional discussions of abstract institutional structures (i.e. electoral systems) or snapshots of political contexts (i.e. electoral results). Instead, the analysis systematically considers sources of minority political leverage that occur *outside* the formal political arena in the civil and associational sphere, taking into account how local historical legacies shape differing arrangements of formal *and* informal political access points.

## Introduction

What explains the incidence of violent conflict between minority groups and the state in Europe? Why are some localities more prone to riots, while others avoid them altogether? These are the questions that animate this paper. In contrast to prominent interpretations of minority- state conflict that emphasize the effects of socio-economic inequality, cultural variables or national integration regimes, this analysis develops a distinctively political explanation for collective violence at the urban level in Europe. Using the cases provided by the 2005 urban riots in France, I find that the incidence of urban rioting is ultimately rooted in the entrenchment of local political elites and the ways in which this influences their foundational social alliances with minority populations.

A central premise of this paper's analysis is that we must explain not only why collective violence occurs but also why it *fails* to occur more often. To that end, I propose a novel perspective on urban violence, which views conflict as a two-stage process rather than a single dichotomous outcome – conflict versus non-conflict. The first stage examines the conditions under which the initial impetus for collective minority violence emerges (i.e. conflict outbreak), whereas the second stage captures the mechanisms in place to manage the escalation of conflict (i.e. conflict intensity).

My theoretical and empirical analysis finds that where early socio-political configurations lead one party to dominate local politics, that party creates deeply entrenched (and coopted) social partnerships which stifle, rather than foster, minority political leverage and create incentives for conflict. In the second stage, however, this high level of partisan entrenchment also provides local states with the strong network of social alliances and coordinating resources to ultimately mitigate the escalation of that conflict. At the opposite end of the spectrum, historical legacies of political competition may create two strong opposing parties whose constituencies do not overlap, offering parties little incentive to broadly entrench themselves. In these cases of low partisan entrenchment, a party's lack of strong social partners decreases the political leverage of minorities – thus creating conflict – in the first stage, while also inhibiting municipal actors from mobilizing a response to escalating conflict in the second stage. Thus, it is only in cities where parties are forced to compete directly for the “decisive vote” of minority populations that the pathways of conventional political expression will be fully inclusive and conflict unlikely.

In assessing the usefulness of this theory, this paper undertakes an in-depth analysis of the 2005 riots in France. The story of the riots begins on October 27, 2005, when two young boys of Maghrebi descent, Zyed Benna and Bouna Traoré, 17 and 15 years old respectively, were looking for a place to hide from police whom they believed were chasing them and feared the delay of an identity check. They were killed (although their third friend survived) when they took refuge in an electrical sub-station in Clichy-sous-Bois, a suburb in the north of Paris. Since it appeared as though the boys got caught in the unfortunate confusion of a larger police identity check on youth suspected of burglarizing a nearby construction site and their death was therefore accidental, or worse the result of gross police neglect, minority youth quickly took to the street in the city of Clichy-sous-Bois and rioting spread swiftly throughout the country. Two other triggering events seem

to have worked with the youth's death to spur the spread of violence in 2005. The first was a political statement made by Nicolas Sarkozy only days earlier referring to the youth of the suburbs as "*racaille*", or scum, and later in response to the 2005 riots Sarkozy had also expressed the need to "clean the suburbs with a water hose" (Haddad and Balz 2006, 29). Sarkozy's initial reaction to the news that two boys had been killed while being pursued by police officers was to show support for the actions of the police, and to assume the rioters were categorically habitual delinquent offenders, despite data which revealed that—contrary to Sarkozy's claim that 80% of those involved were 'already known to police'—the majority had had no previous dealings with police (Beaud and Pialoux 2006, 19). Cumulatively, these accusations proved to be predictably provocative for many suburban minority youth.

A second watershed moment was the accidental use of tear gas at the entrance of a Clichy-sous-Bois mosque during Friday prayers at the close of Ramadan during a conflict between police and youth. This was viewed as yet another affront by the police force on the city and news of it spread quickly through peer groups across the cities in the *département*. The diffusion of conflict first touched the *département* of Seine-Saint-Denis (93) in the eastern cities like Sevran, Aulnay-sous-Bois and Bondy, which ultimately helped give *département* "93" the reputation as a hot spot for conflict. Eventually 300 other *communes* in France would follow suit over the next two weeks.

With all of the news coverage of cars being burnt and public and private buildings being destroyed, there was very much a sense that France was "*au bord de la guerre civile*", or on the brink of a civil war. At the time, the *Time* magazine described it as a "rolling wave of nightly clashes between young Arabs and French riot police that leapfrogged across the suburbs of Paris...reaching as far east as Dijon and south to Marseilles" (Snow, Vliegenthart, and Corrigan-Brown 2007, 2). The riots persisted over the course of 20 nights, finally culminating on November 17, 2005 when police declared that things were "back to normal", since only 98 cars had been burned the previous night, which was the nightly average in the country. The riots prompted the Prime Minister to declare a state of emergency for only the second time in the last half century on November 8<sup>th</sup>, and the following day on 9 November 2005 the Interior Minister Sarkozy issued an order to deport all foreigners (*étrangers*) who were involved in the rioting, whether they were legal or not. It seemed as though the French government was not wholly surprised by the protests that erupted as they had been aware of the volatile situation in the *banlieues* for a while, and just one week before the violence broke out, the interior minister Nicholas Sarkozy told *Le Monde*, "Violence in French suburbs is a daily fact of life. Since the beginning of the year stones were thrown at 9,000 police cars and each night 20 to 40 cars are torched" (Belien, 2005). However, this annual damage tally would nearly be surpassed by the events of just two weeks of rioting in 2005. In the process thousands of cars and busses were set ablaze and destroyed, schools were severely damaged, shops and buildings were vandalized and many people were injured. Overall, the riots resulted in 2,888 arrests, 126 police injured and 8973 burned vehicles (Snow et al. 2007: 386). In total, these riots are estimated to have done 250 million euros worth of material damage (Haddad and Balz, 2006).

This paper will proceed in three parts. First, a presentation of the paper's main theoretical insight will be presented. Second, I will briefly discuss the data and research design. Finally, I will present one empirical case study – the municipality of Saint-Denis - to illustrate one trajectory of urban rioting.

### **A Theoretical Approach for Understanding Urban Conflict**

The cornerstone of my argument about urban conflict pushes for an understanding of my dependent variable where the explanatory journey is viewed as an extended process or sequence along which there are two phases of the outcome to be explained, rather than just one: an intermediate binary outcome of conflict *likelihood* or *vulnerability* (pre-trigger) and a final outcome of conflict measured in shades, or *degrees of intensity* (post-trigger). At the foundation of my theory is the reality that the outbreak of violent minority-state conflict as a viable political expression of grievance is more often the exception than the rule, and that in between the presence of group grievances and the escalation of rioting there is likely a range of factors that affect where along the pathway to conflict the momentum towards contentious expression will stop.

We need, in sum, a theory that explains the *evolution* of conflict, and in turn can systematically link a set of explanatory variables to this spectrum of final outcomes. My study provides such an approach, one that emphasizes how differential local-level abilities and willingness to address the expression of minority grievance determines how far along the trajectory of conflict that locality is likely to move. This proposition consists of three arguments connected in sequential order. First, the initial source of political expression directed against the state finds its roots in the existence of some grievance for which the authorities of the state are deemed responsible. Most likely such grievance will stem from a real or perceived inequality of conditions – social, economic, political – that serve to separate the minority population from that of the majority. In the literature on minority conflict, this notion of inequality is captured almost exclusively in terms of failed integration; However, rather than directly linking such inequality to outcomes of conflict, I argue that inequality is a necessary, but not sufficient precondition to conflict. Minority populations cannot simply feel aggrieved *vis-à-vis* authority to engage in violent political expression; conflict must also appear the most effective and efficient means of expression.

Second, once a city has met the necessary precondition of grievance-inducing inequality, the outbreak of violent conflict will follow only when it is regarded as the most viable option. This marks the pre-trigger stage of my argument, whereby localities will diverge on the pathway of conflict *likelihood*. In order for the politically non-conventional act of rioting to be perceived as the best mechanism of communicating a message to authorities, the formal and conventional system of political participation should be an inadequate means of wielding political leverage. When traditional political venues of expression are inadequate for minority leverage, I argue that the system is politically “exclusive”; the reverse is true in politically “inclusive” systems. Political inclusion and exclusion are fundamentally the product of two characteristics of any political apparatus: first, the *de*

*de jure* legal, institutional, and structural mechanisms available for minority groups to partake in political expression (i.e. what participatory venues are available to them?), and second, the *de facto* influence they can expect to exert by participating in these venues (i.e. will they be heard, and do authorities respond?). When the conventional options for minority populations to articulate grievances are limited on either of these dimensions, the political system is classified as “exclusive” and minority populations may turn to the use of unconventional tactics such as conflict. Conversely, when minorities possess the promise of **both** *de facto* and *de jure* participatory options, the system is “inclusive” and the likelihood of conflict decreases.

While this second pre-trigger stage is able to tell us which localities harbor the conditions most conducive to the outbreak of conflict, it is the third and final post-trigger stage that ultimately determines how and whether that conflict will escalate. When minority-state tensions appear to be reaching a tipping point, it is the responsibility of authorities to orchestrate an appropriate response according to their abilities, resources and willingness to engage the grievances of the rioting group. In this post-trigger stage, localities are differentially inclined in their response tactics, and I argue that whether or not authorities are able to diffuse conflict at this critical nascent stage will depend on their capacities of repression and mediation, which collectively are termed “resource mobilization potential”. At the core of this resource mobilization potential is not only the financial and manpower capabilities of the local authorities, but more importantly the existence of a well-developed and functional network of socio-political partnerships that offer governing elites the opportunity to quickly and effectively coordinate a unified response, disseminate information, and blanket vulnerable areas with actors able to repress or mediate the escalation of conflict. When a city possesses such a resource apparatus, I anticipate that instances of conflict can be more quickly diffused and are less likely to escalate than in cities with less resource mobilization potential.

Yet what explains differential conditions of political inclusion and exclusion in the pre-trigger stage, and varied resource mobilization potential in the post-trigger stage? I argue that these characteristics cannot be taken as ahistorical givens, but we need an explanation that reveals how cities come to adopt different structural and personal strategies for coping with minority grievance.

In sum, we need a theory that explains the *origins* of these local-level pre- and post-trigger conditions, and in turn links these variables to the variegated stages of conflict. Here I posit that both pre- and post-trigger conditions can be traced back to earlier institutional arrangements and socio-political alliances that local-level governments have forged in an effort to gain and maintain power over time. In the process of developing a winning electoral strategy, local political actors must carve out a viable electorate and establish critical societal partnerships, the success of which will determine the duration in power of a given actor or party. The necessity of continuing to maintain these constituent and institutional relations (and to build new ones) as a means of perpetuating tenure in office, a process that I refer to as *partisan entrenchment*, will ultimately shape the overarching dynamics of state-society relations at the local level. The longer a party is able to remain in power, the more entrenched that party will become. Subsequently, the legacies of this partisan entrenchment profoundly shape both pre- and post-trigger

conditions of minority-state interaction. Here, I theorize a curvilinear relationship between partisan entrenchment and the likelihood of conflict, in which there are three possible trajectories based on the level of entrenchment.

### **Trajectory 1: High Partisan Entrenchment**

When a political regime at the local level is highly entrenched, the institutional, organizational and associational consequences of that stability will first have the effect of exasperating tensions in the pre-trigger stage making these cities susceptible to conflict. However, the very same factors that may cause conflict – tight networks and cooptation of resources and structures - are also likely to diffuse conflict rapidly in the post-trigger phase. These cases will, therefore, be highly vulnerable to the outbreak of initial conflict, but experience a very low overall intensity of conflict.

High partisan entrenchment cases refer to cities in which the political apparatus has been historically dominated by one party (or coalition of parties) for a significant amount of time (~30 years), such that the city's ideology and institutions are considered to have the "color" of a particular party. The ability of a party to become dominant begins with the social make-up of a city at a foundational period in its political history, whereby the structure of initial socio-political alliances is conducive to single-party takeover and subsequent organizational entrenchment. As a result, high partisan entrenchment cities have two primary characteristics: single party dominance (i.e. low competition), and very strong socio-political alliances (coopted civil society). In the French case these cities generally come in two forms: those cities of the "red belt" (*banlieues rouges*) dominated by the Communist party, and those more conservative cities dominated by the Church and parties of the right.

When it comes to political inclusion, highly entrenched cities tend to err on the side of exclusivity (Ireland 1994, Dancygier 2010: 183-199). This is not because there are any legal barriers to formal political participation, but rather that there are *de facto* limits to the expected leverage anyone in a position of opposition can hope to have in the system. Although formal venues of participation can be open to all, frequent, and allow for the possibility of citizen agenda-setting or leadership, it is the problem of transmitting information to policymakers on which high entrenchment cities falter. The characteristics of political exclusion are not limited to the formal political sphere, and the informal venue of *the associational and civic life* can also be a dead-end of political expression for minority groups. One of the hallmarks of a highly entrenched political system that has had decades to establish itself in a given locality is a very deep synergy between the party and almost every other aspect of societal life. This includes the municipality's social and welfare services as well as most associations and organizations on the ground. Even though the city's associations and state services tend to be extremely numerous, rich and very strong, the municipal government is likely to coopt them through a finely-tuned system of politically appointed municipal servants and financial incentives, which can sometimes give the appearance of patronage.

In practice this means that the expression of political grievances is difficult to achieve in the domains of policymaking, formal participation, and associational life, making high entrenchment systems highly exclusive in this pre-trigger stage. This inability to express political grievances through conventional modes of political participation will encourage citizens to turn to less conventional methods, including violent protest and conflict.

However, while high political entrenchment in the pre-trigger phase increases the likelihood of conflict outbreak, it also produces the conditions necessary for the effective control of conflict in the post-trigger state, often before it has a chance to escalate. With respect to the post-trigger dimensions of conflict management – *repression* and *mediation* - the very well entrenched and densely networked socio-political partnerships that will ultimately increase the capacity for resource mobilization in the face of crisis. For example, to curtail the spread of violence after a trigger event would require the ability to engage all actors on the ground – police, social workers, youth leaders, politicians, teachers, parents, heads of associations – in order to diffuse tensions as they arise in different geographic locations in an effective and timely manner. Municipal authorities would need a broad range of societal actors to be quickly dispersed, informed, coordinated, and centralized in their activities to engage those populations most vulnerable.

## **Trajectory 2: Low Partisan Entrenchment**

On the opposite end of the spectrum, low partisan entrenchment cases refer to cities in which the political system is susceptible to extremely high rates of party turnover and contentious political competition. The conditions of foundational politics in the city meant that no single party could claim a monopoly over the existing constituency base *and* that the existing societal composition was sufficiently polarized such that political parties would also find themselves on opposite ends of the political spectrum. Where this polarized societal demographic created two similarly sized constituency bases that did not overlap, this would mean that political parties had to organized themselves around maintaining their respective bases in relative isolation. Neither political party could hope to capture the constituency of opposing parties, which was similarly organized and thus unattainable.

Given this constituency make-up, no election outcome is entirely certain before it begins. The process of political competition in these cases implies the existence of viable opposition parties, where no single party holds a monopoly on the political ideology of the city and the municipal government changes partisan hands every few election cycles. More specifically, the mere presence of political competition is not sufficient to qualify a city as exhibiting low partisan entrenchment, but that this political competition must also take place between parties that are isolated and contentious. This contentious competition stems from the inability of political parties to venture too far from their loyal societal bases and attempt to broaden their social partnerships: (1) because the available “decisive voters” already belong to the electoral potential of the opposition and are therefore unavailable to other parties and (2) any attempt to move closer to this electoral risks severely alienating their existing support base. This polarized political competition



implies that each party carries not only a similarly strong party following but also that they do not (can not) seek socio-political partnerships outside their immediate sphere of influence. Each party's ability to forge alliances and networks with social actors and societal groups will not extend beyond their constituency base – both because it is unattainable and potentially risky.

With respect to political exclusion in the pre-trigger stage, the features of competition will exacerbate the tendency towards exclusion. Because the political opposition is relegated to the sidelines of policy-making, I predict that the political opposition will be unable to effectively lobby on behalf of their constituency for targeted policies. This disenfranchisement is not limited to formal political life and extends well into the third dimension of inclusion, *associational and civic life* of the city. As long as political parties are not compelled to reach out to elements of civil society and establish partnerships – either within or outside their support base – the bargaining power of those groups will cease to exist. As a result the venue of associational life as a mode of political communication will be highly exclusive.

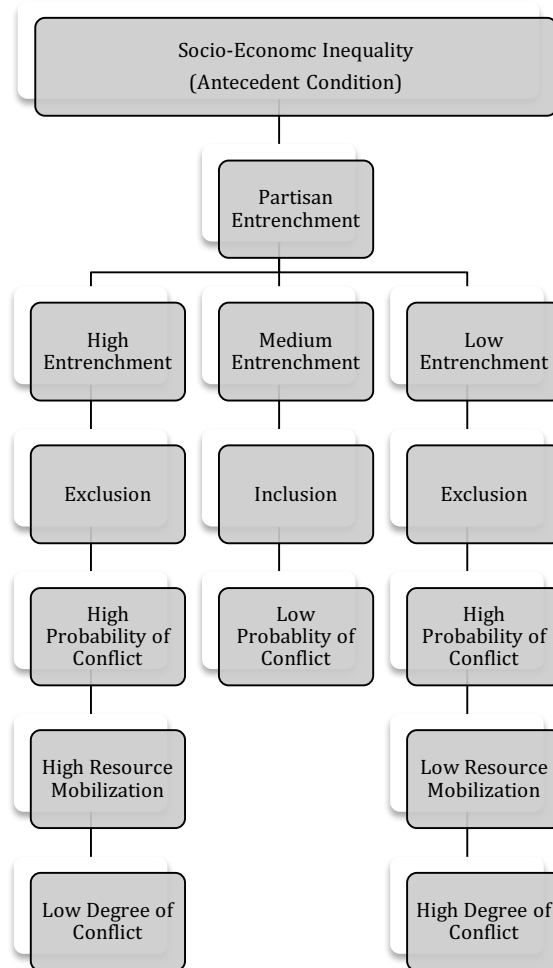
The combined exclusiveness of the political apparatus in the pre-trigger stage will increase the likelihood of conflict for low entrenchment cities. However, unlike high entrenchment cities, in the case of low entrenchment this capacity for post-conflict resource mobilization is lacking. Due to the high degree of partisan isolation and antagonistic competition have precluded the formation of deeply entrenched socio-political alliances in low entrenchment cities, municipal authorities will lack the requisite networks and structures of coordination to mobilize a quick response to conflict. In these cases where there is low entrenchment, we expect that conflict risk and conflict degree will both be high.

### **Trajectory 3: The Middle Cases**

These middle range cases are much more representative of the political reality that exists in the average European city. Just as the title suggests, middle entrenchment cities are those in which the dynamics of political competition have produced a system in which there is a medium level of socio-political entrenchment – no single party has a monopoly over society, but the drive to solidify social bases means constantly seeking to enlarge those social ties. In practice, this generally includes competition between parties of the same “color” (parties of the left, or of the right), or parties centrist enough to share the potential for capturing voters from an identical pool. Whereas high and low entrenchment cities were shaped by historical legacies of early political foundations and societal make-up, medium entrenchment cases also have roots in initial socio-political compositions. In this case, early societal demographics did not permit any single party to become dominant (high entrenchment), nor did it push political parties to assume opposite ends of the political spectrum in order to capture a polarized public (low entrenchment). Instead, political parties were required to engage in active competition to attract “decisive voters” from within a broader constituency base. The existence of overlapping constituencies not only facilitated competition and partisan turnover, but it also required parties to engage in broad societal outreach as a matter of solidifying a “winning” strategy.

In the drive to create this winning electoral strategy, parties seek to establish a working relationship with the broadest possible societal coalition within their reach, while being similarly limited in the depth of this entrenchment by constraints of time (tenure in power) and direct political competition over the same domain. The characteristics of a medium entrenchment city, therefore, include a high degree of partisan competition where the drive to find the “decisive voter” amidst an overlapping constituency necessitates the forging of socio-political partnerships.

One of the primary benefits of these middle entrenchment characteristics is that venues of political expression for minorities are accentuated, encouraged and inclusive. This propensity for political inclusion is extremely important in attenuating the frustration that is likely to lead to conflict (Dancygier 2010; Ireland 1994; Garbaya 2005). As a result, it is likely that middle entrenchment cities will have averted the crisis of conflict in the pre-trigger stage and will be less vulnerable to a trigger event when it happens. Ultimately this means that such cities are less likely to experience conflict and therefore to enter the post-trigger stage of conflict mediation.



**Figure 1.1. Causal Hypothesis of Conflict Risk and Degree**

## **Research Design and Data**

In this research, I posit a new theory to explain variegated outcomes in local-level minority conflict, whereby conflict is viewed as a sequence of events punctuated by the dynamic relationship between minority grievance and the components of partisan entrenchment. Thus my research design requires an approach that can link these sequenced variables with limited intrusion from other confounding forces, while still maintaining a sufficiently long time-horizon to bear out the fundamental evolution in interactions between minorities and the state. To do this, I argue that a structured and focused comparison between several local-level cases in France can reveal a shared sequenced relationship between the components of partisan entrenchment, minority grievance and conflict, which identifies the critical moments and precise explanatory variables responsible for generating different trajectories of conflict outbreak and conflict intensity.

The findings presented here emerged from analysis of rich evidence that I collected during 12 months of fieldwork in France. I did four in-depth case studies using data from roughly 130 personal interviews conducted in French and Arabic. The interviews included members of the elected elite, namely representatives from parliament, cabinet members, local councilmen, Alderman, representatives from mayoral offices, labor unions, municipal boards, members of opposition parties, as well as members of the local administration, members and directors of voluntary and professional local associations and municipal services, non-governmental representatives, protest movement participants and lobby groups, and other professionals who specialize in issues of conflict and policy in the suburbs. I relied heavily on an assortment of additional primary documents collected from archival research in the municipal archives and other local agencies, looking specifically at police reports, policy documents and other official statements, association mission statements, legislative meeting minutes, and speeches. For the two primary local case studies, I also examined issues of respective municipal magazines - *L'Oxygène* in Aulnay and *Le Journal de Saint-Denis* - from 1980 – 2005 as these are municipally funded and offer a great insight into the local presentation of municipal issues to the public.

### **An Empirical Case Study: The Case of Saint-Denis**

This section presents a detailed illustrative case study of the minority conflict trajectory for a city with high levels of partisan entrenchment – Saint-Denis in the north of Paris. Saint-Denis, which is a suburb typical of the Parisian “red belt”, located just 5.8 miles directly north of the capital and accessible directly by metro, train and bus from the city center, is an exemplary case of a city that (surprisingly) escaped large-scale rioting as its neighbors were falling victim to conflict in 2005. In a study conducted by French scholars, in which each city in the Ile-de-France region was given a rating between 1 to 3 based on the “predicted violence” according to their score on measures of socio-economic inequality mapped against their “actual violence” (LaGrange and Oberti, 2006), the city of Saint Denis scored a 3 for “predicted violence”, indicating a predicted “2 consecutive weeks or more of car burning”. However, in reality Saint-Denis’ “actual violence” score barely rated a 1, which indicates the minimal level of conflict at “one day

of car burning”. So why did Saint-Denis fail to live up to these predictions for violence?

### **The Pre-Trigger Stage: Political Exclusion and Conflict Likelihood**

The two main characteristics of high entrenchment in Saint-Denis – party dominance and deep socio-political alliances (societal cooptation) – are the product of a much longer historical legacy. Since the early years of the municipal rule by the Communist party, a broad base of stakeholders in the party ideology was created and the majority party was slowly able to embed itself throughout the services, societal groups and otherwise autonomous organizations of the city. As a result many groups have developed a strong stake in the system (financial, material, or via cooptation), which in turn imposes certain implicit costs to contesting majority-rule: they are either unwilling or unable to facilitate an oppositional voice. It would be wrong to consider the Communist majority in France to have “complete rule” over societal actors, as leaders must certainly be cognizant of making concessions to the relevant constituents and societal groups by including them, in some capacity, in the decision-making process. However, the party has managed to do this without ever diminishing their own power by bringing other political parties and civic organizations into their ideological camp, while still retaining ultimate veto power. As a result, the French Communists in Saint-Denis have managed to continually ensure broad-based support (or at least tacit indifference) without ever relying exclusively on any one segment of society. Instead, they support, finance and encourage the broadest possible array of social, economic and institutional organizations to flourish in the city. The major caveat being that they also assert their authority by offering financial incentives or simply by implanting pre-selected representatives to sit on boards or determine program agendas at the exclusion of incorporating the “voices” of those they are serving.

The key to the Communists success was an early ability to dilute the influence of historical opposition parties in the 1920s. Because outright repression and exclusion of societal actors is really not an option for a liberal democracy, in the early years the party was more interested in coopting as much of its potential source of opposition as possible, by undermining the ability of any one group to present real threat. While the constituency of Saint-Denis at this time was largely conducive to left-wing rule (i.e. workers, immigrants), the main source of opposition came from the Socialist party, which was ultimately defeated in 1925 and strategically incorporated into the Communist majority as an “oppositional” ally. Immediately after gaining control of the municipal government, the Communists worked to secure their presence equally vibrantly throughout society by continually creating institutions aimed at increasing the theoretical space for political expression and negotiations with society. However, these institutions were created in the context of political rule that firmly embedded the reigns of reform in the Communists’ hands. In Saint-Denis, there is no doubt there is a terrific “consultative” culture with multiple theoretical avenues for reconciliation with the state and its policies, namely the demarche quartiers, Conseil de quartiers, and a gamut of social services, centers and associations. Similarly, the wide range of services and policy domains that make up the

platform of the Communist party also allows them to successfully bypass the potential legitimacy of opposition parties when addressing grievances amongst social actors. As long as the Communists appear to champion every important cause – from the economy, to social issues, discrimination, education or political participation – they can make the opposition seem less relevant as a contender.

Unfortunately for Saint-Denis, the city's system of organizational and associational structures of participation fall into the category of "cooptation". Overall "Communists were adept at maintaining the sentiment of neighborhood identity and in channeling them toward their own goals" (Stovall, 1990: 163). As a result, although certainly inclusive on the outside, the true style of participatory democracy that emerged under the Communists was fairly far from democratic. Saint-Denis suffers from two serious deficiencies, both of which stem from two seemingly contradictory characteristics of high partisan entrenchment. First, the necessity of the dominant Communist party to maintain broad societal appeals to assure continued support encourages policymakers to adopt highly universalist and all-encompassing policies, where resources might be better allocated (and beneficial to minorities) if territorialized policies were pursued. Second, because the PCF is so dominant even though the structures for extensive consultation of local actors exists, policymakers can easily bypass the direct influence of inhabitants with relative impunity. It was therefore not surprising that the city was highly susceptible to the triggering events that threw France into riots.

### **The Post-Trigger Stage: High Resource Mobilization and Decreased Conflict**

The narrative of events in Saint-Denis has demonstrated that the city did in fact break out into conflict in 2005, yet rioting in Saint-Denis certainly appeared more subdued relative to other rioting cities at the time, registering only one day of "official rioting" and remaining off the radar of policymakers and publics (Cicchelli 2007). I propose here that the very same condition of deep Communist entrenchment that engendered political violence also provided the municipality with the dense network of actors and coordinating capacity to prevent the escalation of conflict intensity in the "post-trigger" stage.

In particular, the combined interaction of mediation and repression gave Saint-Denis a unique advantage in terms of resource mobilization potential consisting of four key components: (1) a dense network of social partners (in particular mediators); (2) a centralized capacity to unify, coordinate, and disseminate information and action; (3) the ability to reach vulnerable areas; and (4) organizations with pre-established legitimacy within the local population.

The municipal response to the riots in Saint-Denis, in fact, began well before rioting even took hold in the city. Municipal officials in Saint-Denis immediately took note of the events in Clichy on the night of October 27<sup>th</sup> and moved quickly to action in order to shield their own city from devolving into similar violence. Their tactic was to coordinate a preventative response of *mediation*. Already on the night of October 28<sup>th</sup>, Saint-Denis'

mayor, Didier Paillard, and a select group of representatives from different municipal services and local associations met at the City Hall to create an informal centralized system of information gathering with their partners in the municipal police forces, services, associations, and inhabitants of the city. Although violence had not yet erupted in Saint-Denis, municipal authorities were fearful that it might, and worked quickly and efficiently to guard against this possibility. The overarching objective of the municipal government's initial response was to reach out to existing municipal institutions that were already in place to work closely with the city's most vulnerable populations – in particular youth centers, leisure and sports centers, cultural associations, big brother clubs - and to prompt them to take additional measures to engage at-risk youth in their neighborhoods. This strategic “politics of prevention” employed often in Saint-Denis called on a myriad of municipal actors to coordinate their activities on the ground. The main objective was to prevent the propagation of an image in these neighborhoods of “total abandon” by the state, and to officials in Saint-Denis, maintaining the image of order was just as important as maintaining order itself.

The city also hosted frequent meetings at youth centers. The goal of these neighborhood dialogues was “reflection...to take a position and affirm the injustice of the two boys in Clichy”, to let the youth participants know that the city was willing to engage in the “*politique de l'écoute*”, or “politics of listening” (Interview in Kokoreff et al., 2006: 114). Finally, on the night of November 10<sup>th</sup>, the municipal authorities organized two demonstrations in front of the Hôtel de Ville to protest the use of violence as a tool of communication. Even as the police became involved, the effectiveness of the national police forces was amplified in Saint-Denis with the help of the municipality's coordinating capabilities, informational networks, and density of partnerships, characteristics that can be attributed to the city's high level of partisan entrenchment.

In Saint-Denis, the end result is a tightly-weaved net between the political apparatus and all domains of society. On the one hand, there is a political system that is highly exclusive of oppositional political expression, including the expression of minority grievances, which limits the availability of viable alternatives to rioting and political violence for frustrated youth. However, on the other hand, the same deep socio-political entrenchment has afforded the municipal elites the resources necessary to quickly and effectively stop the escalation of conflict in its tracks.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, this paper hopes to make three key contributions to our current knowledge about minority- state conflict. First, this comparative study of the French 2005 riots shifts our current explanatory focus on the causes of such conflict away from national level frameworks and towards the unit of analysis on which variation actually occurs: the local level. Second, my work helps draw a clear analytic distinction between the political conditions that facilitate the “absence of minority-state conflict” versus those that engender a genuine “presence of peace”, where the former can signal that political order is only maintained by pushing minority-state tensions just below the surface without

addressing their sources. This dormant tension paves the way for increased socio-political alienation, inequality and the disenfranchisement of minority populations, which has serious normative implications for the treatment of minority populations in liberal democratic states. Third, I aim to build a more dynamic and comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a “political” variable in determining political violence by moving beyond traditional discussions of abstract institutional structures (i.e. electoral systems) or snapshots of political contexts (i.e. electoral results). Instead, my analysis systematically considers sources of minority political leverage that occur *outside* the formal political arena in the civil and associational sphere, taking into account how local historical legacies shape differing arrangements of formal *and* informal political access points.

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