Diversionary Domestic Conflict: Elites' Motivations and Popular Support for the Suppression of Chechen Secession in Russia

Why might elites and ordinary individuals choose to support diversionary domestic conflict? Previous researchers have emphasized the lack of popularity of leaders and their ability to scapegoat foreign countries or domestic groups to boost their chances of political survival. This study contextualizes the propensity of elites for policies of targeting domestic groups and the popular support for such actions. I argue that high income inequality in the society and economic communitarianism among its population form the social basis for diversionary domestic conflict. When income inequality in society is particularly high, the elites have incentives to divert popular discontent toward culturally alien minorities. High income inequality also raises the expectations for the state assistance among the economically communitarian population strata, who regard the alien minorities as a potential target for resource extraction. I use sentiment analysis of news articles corpus for the period of 21 years, economic, and survey data to show the evolution of the attitudes of Russians toward the secession of Chechnya to provide support for the proposed theory and find significant support for it.