Violence and Ethnic Identity

Aldo Elizalde[1] Eduardo Hidalgo[2] Sotiris Kampanelis[3]

[1]Queen's University Belfast

[2]University of Cologne

[3]Cardiff University

CRETE 2026

Motivation

- Violence remains common across societies; insurgencies strategically use violence to suppress or alter ethnic identities
- Ethnic identity profoundly influences individual behavior, social interactions, and economic outcomes (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010; Chen & Li, 2009)
- Amartya Sen (2007): when freely chosen, ethnic identity fosters social cohesion; when imposed or coerced through violence, it leads to division and conflict
- **Key question:** What are the consequences of violence on ethnic identity?

What We Know

Economics and identity:

- Identity affects economic outcomes: within-group charity, tax morale, trust (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Chen & Li, 2009; Xin Li, 2010)
- Education policies shape ethnic identity (Clots-Figueras & Masella, 2013; Aspachs-Bracons et al., 2008)
- Social environment and culture of origin are determinants of ethnic identity (Battu & Zenou, 2010)

Ethnicity and conflict:

- Ethnic diversity correlates with civil conflict (Alesina et al., 1999; Esteban & Ray, 2011)
- Inter-ethnic violence erodes generalized trust and *increases* ethnic identification (Rohner et al., 2013a,b)

What We Don't Know & Hypothesis

Gap in the literature:

- The effect of violence on ethnic identity remains underexplored
- Existing evidence focuses on *inter*-ethnic violence $\rightarrow$ strengthens own-group identity
- What happens when violence is perpetrated by your *own* ethnic group?

Hypothesis:

- Exposure to *intra*-ethnic group violence during formative years (ages 0–19) **reduces** Indigenous identity
- Own-group violence erodes interpersonal trust and weakens incentives to maintain ethnic identity
- Effect strongest in ethnically homogeneous districts where perpetrators are from the same group

The Shining Path Conflict

- May 17, 1982 – 1992 in Peru
- Maoist insurgency led by Abimael Guzmán
- Over 70,000 deaths; extensive torture, rape, displacement
- Affected $\sim 1/3$ of Peruvian districts
- Indigenous population: 75% of victims but only 30% of total population
- Conflict ended with Guzmán's capture in 1992

Key Feature

Violence was perpetrated locally, by people from the **same village** — not by a different ethnic group

Shining Path Ideology & Indigenous People

- "Pensamiento Gonzalo": Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology applied to Peru
- Revolutionary subject = **peasant**, not proletariat
- Class identity (peasantry) over *all* other identities, including ethnic identity
- Indigenous identity seen as "alienation from capitalism" $\rightarrow$ must be abandoned
- Indigenous people = "soldiers of the revolution" under party direction

Quote from Shining Path leader

"First they [rural population] will be given political reeducation, and if that fails, they will receive what we get now: dictatorship, prison ... death." (Wheat, 1990)

Identity Formation

Psychology literature (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1989):

1. **Childhood (0–9):** Ethnic awareness begins at age 4; attitudes form and increase with age
2. **Adolescence (10–19):** Active exploration and commitment to identity
3. **Adulthood (>19):** Identity is largely established

Implication for Identification Strategy

If violence affects ethnic identity, it should affect individuals exposed during ages 0–19 (formative years) but **not** those exposed after age 20

Data: Dependent Variable

Source: ENAHO surveys (2013–2017), Peru

Two measures of ethnic identity:

1. **Self-identification:**
   - Indigenous = Quechua, Aymara, Other Indigenous
   - Non-Indigenous = Mestizo

2. **Mother tongue:**
   - Indigenous = Quechua, Aymara, other Indigenous language
   - Non-Indigenous = Castellano (Spanish)

Mestizo baseline chosen because identity shifts are most likely between Indigenous $\leftrightarrow$ Mestizo

Data: Independent Variable

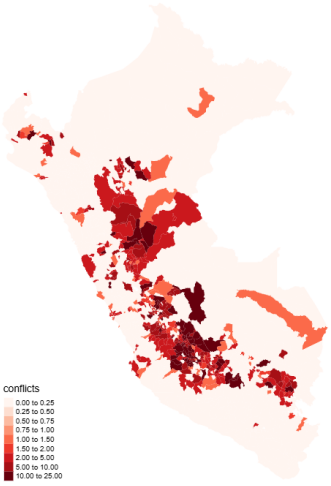
Source: Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

- 36,019 unique violent events from 16,917 testimonies
- Includes: murders, disappearances, illegal detentions, kidnappings, forced recruitment, torture, rape, woundings
- Location, time, type of violence, ethnicity of victim

Exposure variable:

- Combined TRC + ENAHO using district and year of birth
- $Exposure_i = 1$ if born in a district that suffered a violent event
- Differentiate: exposure during formative years (0–19) vs. after identity formed ($>$19)
- Restricted to events with **Indigenous victims** ($\approx$75% of all events)

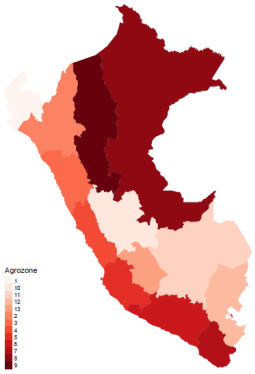
Spatial Distribution of Violence



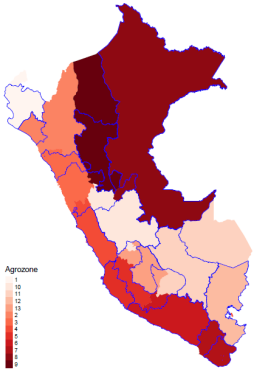
- Map shows average number of violent events per district (1980–2000)
- Violence concentrated in the **Andean rural region**
- Darker shading = more intense conflict
- Conflict spread across Peru but was **not uniform** — this spatial variation is key to our identification

Source: Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Events include murders, disappearances, illegal detentions, kidnappings, forced recruitment, torture, rape, and woundings.

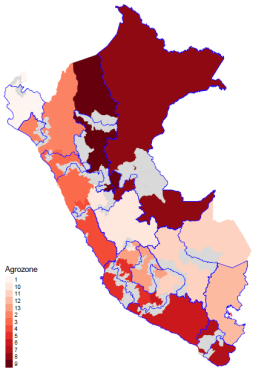
Border Sample: Agrozone Design



(a) 13 agrozones



(b) Core vs. periphery



(c) Border sample

(a) Peru's 13 agrozones (each colour = one zone). **(b)** Within each zone: "core" (more land reform → more violence) vs. "periphery"; blue line = border. **(c)** Grey districts = our analysis sample: adjacent districts with similar characteristics but different violence.

Why Agrozones? The Albertus (2020) Design

- Agrozones are **agricultural/ecological zones**—not political divisions. Peru's political units are departments → provinces → districts.
- Peru's **land reform** (1960s–70s) was implemented through agrozones. Within each zone, "core" districts received more land reform; "periphery" districts received less.
- Albertus (2020) showed that more land reform → **more Shining Path violence** (reform disrupted rural power structures, creating conditions the Shining Path exploited).
- **Why this helps us:** The core/periphery split was driven by *agricultural* factors (location of haciendas, land suitability), not by ethnic composition or political preferences. Districts on either side of the boundary share geography, climate, Indigenous population shares, and literacy—but differ in violence intensity.
- This gives us **quasi-random variation** in violence that is unrelated to ethnic identity.

Identification: Border Sample Design

Challenge: Shining Path did not randomly select districts

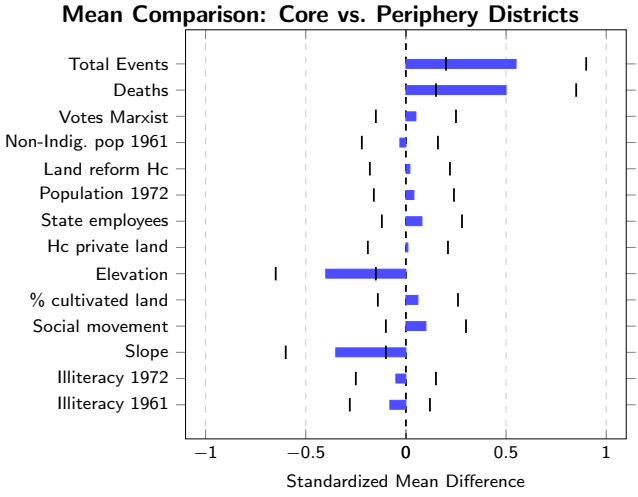
Solution: Border discontinuity design (Albertus, 2020)

- Select bordering districts: similar before the conflict but different violence intensity
- Core vs. periphery across agrozones

Reading the chart →

Each bar = one variable compared across district groups. A bar at **zero** means the two groups are identical on that characteristic.

Violence (events & deaths): core districts got significantly more → this is the variation we exploit.



Empirical Strategy: Difference-in-Differences

Main specification (Equation 1):

$$Y_{ikdtp} = \beta\, Exposure_{ip} \times T_{ipk} + \gamma_k + \gamma_t + \gamma_d + \gamma_p + \delta c_i + \varepsilon_{ikdtp}$$

- Y: ethnic identity (Indigenous self-ID or mother tongue)
- $Exposure_i$: born in district with violent event
- T_{idk}: exposed to violence between ages 0–19
- $\hat{\beta}$: difference in ethnic ID between exposed/not-exposed during formative years vs. after identity formed

Fixed effects: Year of birth, year at interview, district at interview, district of birth
Controls: Age, age^2, sex
Clustering: District-year level

Empirical Strategy: Cohort Analysis

Flexible specification (Equation 2):

$$Y_{ikdtp} = \sum_c \beta_c \, Exposure_{ip} \times D_{pc} + \gamma_k + \gamma_t + \gamma_d + \gamma_p + \delta c_i + \varepsilon_{ikdtp}$$

- D_c: indicator for cohort $c \in \{\text{post}, 0\text{–}4, 5\text{–}9, 10\text{–}14, 15\text{–}19, 25\text{–}29, 30\text{–}34\}$
- Baseline cohort: **20–24** (identity already formed)
- $\hat{\beta}_c$: cohort-specific treatment effects

Pre-trends test:

- Cohorts 25–29 and 30–34: identity already formed $\rightarrow$ expect no effect
- Post cohort: born after violence occurred $\rightarrow$ expect no effect

Main Results

	Mother Tongue		Identify Indigenous	
	All	Border	All	Border
Exposure × T	−0.014**	−0.034**	−0.005	−0.023**
	(0.006)	(0.016)	(0.005)	(0.009)
District-interview FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
District-born FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year FEs	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean DV	0.23	0.25	0.36	0.40
N	208,768	33,326	168,301	27,842

- Border sample: **3.4 pp** less likely to speak Indigenous mother tongue
- Border sample: **2.3 pp** less likely to identify as Indigenous
- Represents 13.6% and 5.75% decrease relative to the mean

Cohort Analysis: Mother Tongue

Cohort	All Districts	Border Sample
Post	-0.130^{***}	-0.034
0–4	-0.088^{***}	$\mathbf{-0.070}^{***}$
5–9	-0.049^{***}	$\mathbf{-0.044}^{**}$
10–14	-0.045^{***}	-0.029
15–19	-0.014^{***}	-0.006
20–24 (baseline)	—	—
25–29	0.007	0.036
30–34	0.003	-0.015

- Strongest effects in childhood: **7 pp** (ages 0–4) and **4.4 pp** (ages 5–9)
- No significant effects for ages 10–19 or older cohorts
- Pre-trend cohorts (25–29, 30–34): not significant $\rightarrow$ supports parallel trends

Cohort Analysis: Indigenous Self-Identification

Cohort	All Districts	Border Sample
Post	−0.017	−0.001
0–4	−0.020	**−0.040****
5–9	−0.007	−0.025
10–14	−0.014	−0.017
15–19	0.009	0.008
20–24 (baseline)	—	—
25–29	0.004	0.023
30–34	0.012	0.020

- Cohort 0–4: **4 pp** less likely to identify as Indigenous
- No significant effects for older cohorts → parallel trends hold
- Consistent with attachment theory: early childhood most vulnerable

Why Childhood? Attachment Theory

- During infancy/childhood: main attachment figure is the **mother**
  - Parents transmit language and culture
  - Violence may have led parents to **stop transmitting** Indigenous language/culture fearing violent consequences
- During adolescence: identity influenced by **multiple sources** (parents, teachers, peers)
  - Children may have already learned an Indigenous language during childhood
  - Mitigates the negative effect of violence on identity
- Consistent with finding: strongest effects at ages 0–4 and 5–9, no effects at 10–19

Robustness: Non-Indigenous Violence

Test: Does exposure to violence against *non-Indigenous* victims affect Indigenous identity?

Result:

- No significant effect on mother tongue
- No significant effect on self-identification
- All cohort coefficients statistically indistinguishable from zero

Implication

Violence affects Indigenous identity **only** when the victim is an Indigenous person $\rightarrow$ supports own-group violence mechanism

Robustness: Migration

Concern: Selective migration could confound results

Tests:

1. Controlling for migration: results remain similar (-3.4 pp mother tongue; -2.3 pp self-ID)
2. Interaction with migration:
   - Non-migrants exposed to violence: -5.1 pp (mother tongue), -3.6 pp (self-ID)
   - Results driven by individuals who **stayed**
3. Migration as outcome: no differential effect of violence on migration probability between formative vs. post-formative cohorts

$\Rightarrow$ Migration does not confound the main results

Robustness: Class Identity

What is a "peasant community" (*comunidad campesina*)?

In Peru, *comunidades campesinas* are legally recognised rural collectives—predominantly Indigenous—that hold communal land, share agricultural labour, and govern local affairs through traditional assemblies.

	Workers' assoc.	Professionals' assoc.	Political party	Peasant community
Exposure × T	0.008	0.005	0.002	**−0.023****
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.005)	(0.011)
All FEs & Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean DV	0.037	0.37	0.011	0.22
N	13,868	13,868	13,868	13,868

Findings: No effect on workers', professionals', or political-party membership. Violence *reduced* peasant-community membership by 2.3 pp. The Shining Path destroyed Indigenous identity but **failed** to replace it with peasant class solidarity—people retreated from *both* identities.

Robustness: National Identity

Source: Latinobarómetro survey — "How proud are you to be Peruvian?"
(1 = not proud ... 4 = very proud; dummy = 1 if proud/very proud)

	Dummy (proud)		Ordered (1–4)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Exposure × T	**−0.057*****	**−0.052****	**−0.099*****	**−0.098****
	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.036)	(0.038)
Non-Indigenous		0.084***		0.177***
		(0.027)		(0.044)
District FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Survey & Year-birth FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean DV	0.83	0.83	3.38	3.38
N	2,675	2,656	2,675	2,656

Findings: Exposed individuals are **5.7 pp less likely** to feel proud of being Peruvian. Results robust to controlling for Indigenous identity. Likely reflects absence of state protection during the early years of the conflict.

Robustness: Heterogeneity Across Ethnic Groups

	Mother Tongue			Identify Indigenous		
	Quechua	Aymara	Other	Quechua	Aymara	Other
Exp.×T	−0.031**	0.002	−0.007*	−0.011	−0.007	−0.012**
	(0.015)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.005)
All FEs & Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mean DV	0.22	0.006	0.029	0.22	0.006	0.029
N	32,395	25,471	26,074	26,130	17,509	17,869

- Violence mostly affected **Quechua** identity (22% of population)
- No significant effect on Aymara (<1% of population) — lack of statistical power
- Significant effect on Other Indigenous groups
- Consistent with own-group violence: Quechua majority → higher likelihood of own-group perpetrators

Mechanism: Trust

Key contrast with Rohner et al. (2013a,b):

- Uganda (inter-ethnic violence): ↓ generalized trust, ↑ interpersonal trust, ↑ ethnic ID
- Peru (intra-ethnic violence): ↓ interpersonal trust, ↓ ethnic ID

Results (same DiD framework, trust as dependent variable):

Trust measure	Effect	Source
Interpersonal trust	-0.167^{**} (-6.5%)	LAPOP
Generalized trust	$+0.014$ (n.s.)	Latinobarómetro
Institutional trust	No effect	ENAHO

Own-group violence erodes trust in neighbors → weakens ethnic identification

Mechanism: Trust — Interpretation

Interpersonal trust (-6.5%):

- LAPOP: "Would you say people in this community are trustworthy?" (1–4 scale)
- If your own neighbours joined the Shining Path and killed people in your village, you stop trusting those around you

Generalized trust (no effect):

- Latinobarómetro: "Can you trust most people?" (yes/no)
- Rohner et al. (2013a,b) found inter-ethnic violence in Uganda *decreased* generalized trust
- In Peru: intra-ethnic violence destroyed trust in neighbours specifically, but not the general view of humanity

Institutional trust (no effect):

- Trust in government, judiciary, congress, church — none affected

Caveat

LAPOP and Latinobarómetro are sampled at the **province** level (196 units), not district level (1,873). This measurement error biases coefficients *toward zero*, making the significant interpersonal trust result more convincing.

Mechanism: Own-Indigenous Group Violence

Test: Indigenous diversity index × Exposure to violence

	Diversity Dummy		Diversity Continuous	
	Mother T.	Identify	Mother T.	Identify
Exp.×T	-0.069^{***}	-0.045^{**}	-0.058^{***}	-0.029^{***}
	(0.022)	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.011)
Exp.×T×Diversity	0.061^{***}	0.034	0.213^{***}	0.042
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.057)	(0.053)
All FEs & Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	29,911	25,566	29,911	25,566

- **Homogeneous districts**: violence → strong *decrease* in Indigenous identity
- **Diverse districts**: more Indigenous groups → violence has *weaker* (or positive) effect
- 1 s.d. increase in diversity: +5.8 pp mother tongue, +1.1 pp self-ID

Contributions

1. **Economics and Identity:**
   - First evidence that exposure to violence has a *negative* effect on ethnic identity
   - Complements literature on education policies, social environment, and culture (Clots-Figueras & Masella, 2013; Battu & Zenou, 2010)

2. **Ethnicity and Conflict:**
   - Shows heterogeneous effects: *inter*-ethnic violence strengthens identity vs. *intra*-ethnic violence weakens it
   - Complements Rohner et al. (2013a,b) by showing the opposite dynamic

3. **Shining Path Literature:**
   - Conflict affected not just economic outcomes (labor, education) but also *identities*
   - Complements Galdo (2013) and Leon (2012)

Conclusion

- Exposure to the Shining Path violence during formative years significantly **reduced** Indigenous identity in Peru
- Effects strongest in **early childhood** (ages 0–9) — consistent with attachment theory and parental transmission of identity
- Mechanism: **own-group violence** erodes interpersonal trust and weakens incentives to maintain ethnic identity
- Key insight: rather than reinforcing group solidarity, **internal conflict** leads individuals to distance from their ethnic identity
- Historical conflicts can leave **lasting marks** on ethnic identity with implications for societies where ethnic identities remain politically significant

Thank you!

Aldo Elizalde — a.elizalde@qub.ac.uk
Eduardo Hidalgo — hidalgo@wiso.uni-koeln.de
Sotiris Kampanelis — kampaneliss@cardiff.ac.uk

CRETE 2026