Census Enumeration and Group Conflict

 a global analysis of the consequences of counting

By EVAN S. LIEBERMAN and PRERNA SINGH

Does the enumeration of ethnic, racial, and/or religious categories on national household censuses increase the likelihood of conflict? The authors propose a theory of intergroup relations that emphasizes the conflictual effects of institutionalizing boundaries between social identity groups. The article investigates the relationship between counting and various forms of conflict with an original, global data set that classifies the type of enumeration used in more than one thousand census questionnaires in more than 150 countries spanning more than two centuries. Through a series of cross-national statistical analyses, the authors find a robust association between enumeration of ethnic cleavages on the census and various forms of competition and conflict, including violent ethnic civil war. The plausibility of the theory is further demonstrated through case study analysis of religious conflict in India.

Contributor Information:

Evan S. Lieberman is a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His research focuses on questions about democratic governance, active citizenship, and the mobilization of ethnic and national identities. Lieberman is the author of *Race and Regionalism in the Politics of Taxation in Brazil and South Africa* (2003), and *Boundaries of Contagion: How Ethnic Politics Have Shaped Government Responses to AIDS* (2013). He can be reached at evanlieb@mit.edu.

Prerna Singh is an assistant professor of political science and international studies and a faculty fellow in the Watson Institute at Brown University. Her research interests include the comparative political economy of development, especially the politics of welfare and public health; identity politics including ethnic politics and nationalism, and gender politics; and state-society relations and the politics of South Asia and East Asia. Singh’s publications include, as author, *How Solidarity Works for Welfare: Subnationalism and Social Development in India* (2015), and, as coeditor, *Handbook of Indian Politics* (2013). She can be reached at prerna\_singh@brown.edu.