



CRISE CONFERENCE ON DECENTRALIZATION, FEDERALISM AND CONFLICT

Department of International Development, University of Oxford
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PANEL IV: LOCAL POLITICS, VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL CHANGE

1. Communal conflict and decentralization in Indonesia

Gerry van Klinken, KITLV

Abstract

Using the Indonesia case study, Klinken seeks to expose the inadequacy of grievance-based explanation of violent conflicts and to underscore the analytical value of mobilization approaches. He argues that the map of the six major episodes of communal violence does not correlate with the sites of socio-economic and political grievance. Violence occurred in West Kalimantan (twice), Central Kalimantan, Maluku (Ambon) and North Maluku. These areas were neither the most immiserated areas nor the hotbeds of economic grievance. This is not to abandon the notion of grievance altogether but to politicise them, to trace the process through the way identities are mobilised. Mobilization involves organization. Whether well established or ad hoc, open or clandestine, the presence of organizations correlates strongly with incidence of violence. Members of the urban lower middle class, who anticipated benefits from the decentralization reforms, and not the rural people led the violent group mobilization. The bone of contention was communal control over local state offices whose powers had been increased or were about to be increased. Decentralization thus provided an opportunity structure that ambitious elites appropriated for violent purposes.

2. How Village-Based Development Can Reduce Conflict in Vietnam

Andrew Catford, RMIT University

Abstract

Against the background of a longstanding history of conflicts arising mainly from external intervention, Catford explores the ways in which decentralization can facilitate development and yield peace dividends at the grassroots. He focuses on the impact of the Grassroots Democracy Decree (GRDD), which was adopted on 15 May 1998. The GRDD was government's response to stem protests at the community level against communist centralization that threatened the legitimacy of the Communist regime. By providing for periodic local elections and creating channels through which people at the Communes can be involved in policy formulation, implementation, the GRDD represented a significant shift in how decisions were made and power was handled in the rural areas. However, much of the promise of the GRDD is yet to be realised. For example in some areas, the people are not aware of the decree and in most communes the local government lacks financial and human resources necessary to implement the GRDD. However, survey evidence suggests some ways through which village based development could assist reduction in inequalities and conflicts. These include democratic processes of equality of decision making, enhanced transparency and accountability and more equitable distribution of resources among others.

3. Ethiopian Federalism: Autonomy Conflicts in the Somali Region **Asnake Kefele, University of Leiden**

Abstract

Kefele argues that Federalisation in Ethiopia has created the context for the rising incidence of conflicts in the Somali Region. The region, which is largely made up of Somali speaking people, had been source of conflict between Ethiopia and Somali in 1963 and in 1977 and 1978 as a result of the irredentist programme of the Somali government. The struggle for 'reunification' of the region then known as the Ogaden Region, lost momentum after Somalia lost the 1977/78 war with Ethiopia. The loss generated divisions within Somalia, which weakened the Somali government support for 'unification' struggle. The struggle also suffered a setback with the formation of the Ogaden Liberation Front (ONLF) in 1984 which started a campaign for the establishment of an independent Ogaden State. Another factor that undermined the 'unification' struggle was the collapse of the Somali State in the early 1990s. Finally, the introduction of autonomy and federalism in 1991 transformed the Ogaden conflict since it was based on 'ethnic self determination'. The availability of new resources at regional and local levels encouraged the politicization of clan identities. Two types of conflicts have emerged as a result of federalisation. These are regional level conflicts and clan level conflicts with the former having more destabilizing impact on the region. Federal restructuring has transformed the Ogaden conflict from an inter-state conflict to a more complicated and multi-level conflict. These conflicts are partly linked to the limitations of the federalisation project itself.

Comments and Questions

Corinne Caumartin:

To Asnake on Ethiopia:

How new are the conflicts? Are these old conflicts in new forms? What is the intensity of the conflict? She didn't have a sense of the extent of the casualties. Are there variations? The paper focussed so much on the Somalia Region. It would be nice to know what obtains elsewhere. Are the conflicts confined to the region or are they elsewhere? Are we dealing with the problem of a 'bad' federation or is the conflict restricted to the area? Let's consider the counterfactual? What would have happened without the changes, would there have been no conflicts?

To Catford and van Klinken on Vietnam and Indonesia

From the Indonesia paper she had a sense of the process of decentralization in Indonesia but not the nature of local politics there. This is what the paper on Vietnam focuses on. There is so much focus on local politics that one does not have a sense of the nature of national politics.

Indonesia is very complicated and she made no pretence to understanding the dynamics there. However, she thought the paper identifies specific actors and why they played a prominent role. The author argues that access to bureaucracy is vital to the leaders in the conflicts but does not establish the link between 'mobilisers' and 'mobilisees'. What is in it for those being mobilised if this is the agenda of the urban middle classes? We also need to know the nature of local politics in Indonesia.

The Vietnam paper shows the long history of external intervention in Vietnam and top-down policy making approaches. In 1998, there was a rise in dissent at the rural level, which led to the government adopting the grassroots democracy decree.

However, there is no indication of the course and timing of the protest or why the people decided to protest at that point in time. There is also no indication of the types of cleavages in Vietnam; how many ethnic groups there are and what is the extent of fragmentation. It would also be helpful to make some comments about the prospects of ethnic conflicts in Vietnam.

Frances Stewart

Her comment was directed at Klinken paper. She thought it made a false contrast between theories of economic deprivation and mobilisation. You cannot just mobilise people out of nothing. There has to be some latent identity to mobilise from. We think it is more rewarding to look at the ways in which historic perceptions of inequalities interact with mobilization opportunities and strategies rather than regarding them as mutually exclusive.

Donald Horowitz

It is problematic to treat secessionist violence and communal violence together. The former requires more planning and resources and can be more protracted. He also did not think that it was helpful to reduce conflicts in Indonesia to a single explanation.

John McGarry

His first comment was directed at the paper by Asnake. He thought it was important to note that the fact that federalism can create the context for communal violence does not suggest the inappropriateness of federalism. It only points to the need to be aware of the imperative of ensuring that power sharing and decentralization arrangements are not limited to federal-region levels but also within the regions themselves. His second comment relates to the point that Frances raised about the paper by van Klinken but with a different spin on it. This mobilization approach is prominent and blames conflicts on the entrepreneurial abilities of elites. Klinken makes the point that identity is not important because it is the elites that stoked it up. It is important to be right with your diagnosis of a problem as this is crucial for the kind of prescriptions made. The simple question is, if peasants were looking for land why then did the elites frame the conflicts in terms of identity and not in terms of class?

Rachael Diprose had two questions. First, for Catford, she wanted to know the impact of decentralization in Vietnam. She wanted an explanation of the role of the commune and the role of the villages. Which one supersedes the other? To a certain extent, she agreed with Klinken. The mobilization aspect of conflict is important but it is not the sole explanation. She thinks there is an element of identity. Her question relates to the fact the conflicts examined started way back in 1997 and continued into 1999 and 2000 whereas decentralization was only introduced in 2001. Since decentralization was clearly not the trigger, how did it impact on the conflicts? Were there negative and positive aspects?

Graham Brown noted that Klinken's rejection of structuralist grievance explanations was based on similar arguments to some of Collier and Hoeffler's, namely that grievances are everywhere and are time insensitive. He suggested that that assumption is fallacious because grievances change over time. From the Poso case for example, the devaluation of the currency was a factor that impacted on the perceptions of grievance and then the onset of violence.

Rotimi Suberu's comments were for Asnake. If as Asnake argued there is a polarising debate in Ethiopia about federalism, between those who want a unitary system and those who want a separate state, he believes federalisation provides a middle ground. Secondly, if as argued, the creation of the Somali region has fostered intra-regional conflicts, he thinks that is one of the achievements of federalism for as Horowitz argues in his 1985 book, federalism generates intra-conflicts in homogenous sub-national units and thereby takes the heat from inter-ethnic conflict and helps to stabilize the system. His view therefore was that the Ethiopian system was more positive than most observers would admit.

Gordon Crawford's first question for Catford was what powers and resources do the communes have to deliver services. Secondly, is village-based development effective? With regards to Klinken's presentation, he liked the point about strengthening state structures. His question was which level of the state should be strengthened? The decentralised level or the central? The question arises from the general assumption in the literature that decentralization succeeds more in the context of strong central governments.

Luca Mancini's question was for Klinken. He thought the ability to predict occurrence of violence is constrained by our assumption of normality. He thinks we need to think more in terms of market rushes. While both market rushes and conflict have to do with timing, the former does not involve memory that obtains in the latter. Because memory is important in conflict that is why identity is important.

Yvan Guichaoau's question was for Catford. He conducted his survey in different villages with different features and characteristics. However, he ends with a homogenous picture of successful implementation. He wondered if Catford encountered some cases of failures.

Ukoha Ukiwo

For Asnake, why was the region called Somali Region and not Ogaden Region.

Responses from the presenters

Van Klinken

Why was violence attractive? The security dilemma made violence an attractive option especially in a context of low institutionalisation. The urgency and the haste of reform and the fact that elections had to be conducted provided the environment for elite mobilization. It is clientelist relationships that link the people to the elites in the context of a poor society where everyone needs a boss. The other answer is moral panics, which occur in periods of change. When the president was gone, it seemed everything was up for grabs. Is it a transition? Yes, he thinks so. He does not think this is a time to start a conflict resolution institute for Indonesia although he was consulting for one last week. Local politics is much more important than we once thought. He tends to think of an imperial model in explaining Indonesia. What we have is an indirect rule system where the central state depends on local power structures that build their own social capital. It is true that we can't mobilize against nothing. He is not suggesting that grievances don't cause conflicts or that nothing should be done to address grievance. What he is saying is that there are many grievances out there and they do not always cause violent conflicts. There is space for studying why and how things do get violent. Elites do transform the terms of the conflict in the process of mobilizing for conflict. As conflicts escalate, brokers connect hitherto unconnected groups by raising issues that appeal to relevant constituencies.

There is a lot of elite capture and shadow state that is accentuating conflict at the local level.

Andrew Catford

Protests arose in areas close to the cities and areas that had leaders in government. This indicates that they had more access to information. The conflicts occurred in the highlands. He does not think ethnic conflicts will be generalised in Vietnam in the future. With regards to the comment on democracy, he thinks this leads us to the debate over whether democracy must always follow the Western model of multi-party elections or whether we should be looking at popular participation and some level of good governance. Some would argue that development thrives in a context where there is no multi-party democracy. Vietnam and China seem to confirm that assertion. The Commune is part of the Government and the Village is not. The distinction is getting blurred, though. In terms of responsibilities and resources, the point he made is that the Communes lack adequate resources to carry out programmes. He did not touch on different outcomes in the presentation because of time constraints but I reflected them in the paper.

Asnake Kefale

Some of the conflicts are new and others are old conflicts but have been transformed by the federalisation process. The conflicts have been more intense in the region than elsewhere in the country. Federalisation fostered conflicts because it was not negotiated but was imposed. Some of the conflicts arise from disagreements of some groups about the present arrangement, which are perceived to favour other groups. It is not that national or inter-state conflicts have disappeared. They have been frozen and intra-regional conflicts have become more prominent. The region was named Somali Region because not all parts belong to the Ogaden clan. Non-Ogaden groups therefore opposed the name and the Ethiopian government also preferred the Somali Region instead of the former because of the separatist identity associated with the Ogaden.