

Sins of Omission and Commission
The Quality of Government and Civil Conflict

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Abstract

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Is the risk of civil conflict related to the quality of government? This dissertation contributes to the quantitative research on this topic. First, it provides a more nuanced account of the role of the government in influencing the risk of civil conflict. In doing so, the dissertation bridges a gap between the quantitative literature, which primarily focuses on types of regimes, and the qualitative literature, which emphasizes variations in how political authority is exercised within these institutions. Second, the dissertation introduces novel measures of the quality of government, and tests their association with civil peace across countries, over time. The dissertation consists of an introductory chapter and four separate essays. Essay I examines the risk of conflict across different types of authoritarian regimes. The statistical results suggest that single-party regimes have a lower risk of civil conflict than military and multi-party authoritarian regimes. The finding is attributed to the high capacity for coercion and co-optation within single-party institutions. Essay II studies whether cross-national variations in the occurrence of civil conflict are due to differences in the quality of government. The essay finds that governments that are not able to carry through such basic governing tasks as protecting property rights and providing public goods, render themselves vulnerable to civil conflict. The focus of Essay III is on patronage politics, meaning that rulers rely on the distribution of private goods to retain the support necessary to stay in power. The statistical results suggest that patronage politics per se increase the risk of conflict. The conflict-inducing effect is mediated by large oil-wealth, however, because the government can use the wealth strategically to buy off opposition. Essay IV argues that patronage politics can also lead to violent conflict between groups. The results from a statistical analysis, based on unique sub-national data on inter-group conflict in Nigeria, are consistent with this argument. Taken together, the findings of this dissertation suggest that both the form and degree of government have a significant influence on the risk of civil conflict.

Keywords: civil conflict, civil war, quality of government, corruption, patronage politics, governance, authoritarian regimes, Nigeria

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List of papers

- I “Generals, Dictators, and Kings: Authoritarian Regimes and Civil Conflict, 1973–2004.” Forthcoming in *Conflict Management and Peace Science*.
- II “Coercion, Co-optation, or Cooperation? State Capacity and the Risk of Civil War, 1961–2004.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 2009, 26(1): 5–25. With Indra de Soysa.
- III “Buying Peace? Oil Wealth, Corruption and Civil War 1985–99.” *Journal of Peace Research*, 2009, 47(2): 199–218.
- IV “Sub-National Determinants of Non-State Conflicts in Nigeria, 1991–2006.” Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Studies Association, New York, NY, 15–18 February, 2009.

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1 Introduction

More than half of of the world's countries have experienced at least one episode of civil conflict since 1945.¹ The costs of these conflicts for the societies affected, as well as the countries that surround them, have been enormous. They include the loss of human lives, the destruction of human and physical capital, and crippled economic infrastructures. Lost opportunities for development have, in turn, made many of the countries vulnerable to renewed episodes of armed conflict. Due to this, civil conflict has been referred to as “development in reverse” (Collier et al., 2003). To improve our knowledge on how to prevent such destructive events, understanding their causes is an issue of inherent importance.

Civil conflicts occur when individuals in society decide to take up arms to challenge the political or territorial organization of the state, and the government chooses to use violence against its own citizens. The phenomenon represents a serious disruption in a country's political process. Much of the knowledge derived from cross-country analysis on the empirical determinants of civil conflict is, however, surprisingly non-political in nature. For example, we know that populous countries are

¹This number is based on data from the UCDP/ PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. It defines an armed conflict as a “contested incompatibility which concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths” (Gleditsch et al., 2002; Harbom, Melander and Wallensteen, 2008). Throughout the dissertation I use the term civil conflict, armed conflict, rebellion, and insurgency interchangeably to refer to intrastate armed conflict.

more at risk; that ethnically divided societies are particularly vulnerable; and that natural resource wealth, as well as mountainous terrain can be dangerous. These factors are, however, not problematic in and of themselves. Rather, it is governments' failure to manage these factors that lead to an increased risk of civil conflict. In the end, the problem is caused by governments that are either unable and/or unwilling to channel natural resource wealth into investments that are productive for the whole of society; to transform the diversity of a heterogenous and large population into a comparative advantage for the country; and to provide governance to the entire territory, even the more inaccessible parts. In spite of this, the role of the government in influencing the risk of civil conflict is not well understood.

This dissertation examines how variations in the quality of government are associated with the risk of civil conflict. Theoretically speaking, government behavior could precipitate civil conflict in two distinct ways. A government's pursuit of particular policies can render the society vulnerable to armed conflict. Alternatively, it can fail to perform the functions that we associate with good government, such as protecting property rights or safeguarding the rule of law. In other words, government failure can consist of both "sins of omission" and "sins of commission" (Goldsmith, 2000). In practice, the two will often be related. Public policies designed to maximize a leader's private wealth also dictate low levels of public goods. Leaders that rely on cabinet staffing as a tool to buy off political challengers also shun strategies for reform and transparency in the political sector. The distinction between errors of omission and commission is useful, however, because it highlights the fact that the *absence* of government is not the only issue of concern for students of armed conflict.

Several of the essays in this dissertation study "sins of commission". They examine the implications for civil conflict when government actors overstep their bounds and engage in the illegitimate use of public office for personal gain. In *Essays I, III* and *IV*, I use the term "patronage politics" to refer to this form of rule, which builds on the selective distribution of government spoils, such as public employment, economic

transfers, tax exemptions or other privileges, in exchange for political loyalty (Bayart, 1993; Chabal and Daloz, 1999; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Huntington, 1968). The dissertation suggests that the political ramifications of patronage policies are ambiguous. In general, they render governments vulnerable to violent challenges from actors that contest this narrow distribution of economic and political privilege. Yet, where government patronage is sufficiently high in relation to other economic opportunities, or where institutions exist to enhance the credibility of such exchanges, these policies will strengthen regime resilience to armed conflict.

The topic of *Essay II*, on the other hand, relates primarily to government “sins of omission”. It studies whether governments that fail to perform functions often attributed to modern states, such as protecting property rights and providing political goods, render themselves vulnerable to armed conflict. The essay suggests that a government that invests in institutions to safeguard the long-term productive investments of society will have a lower risk of civil conflict.

Jointly, the essays of this dissertation make two overall contributions to the quantitative research on armed conflict. First, the dissertation advances this literature by providing a more nuanced account of the role of government in influencing the risk of civil conflict. In doing so, the dissertation bridges a gap between the quantitative literature which focuses primarily on the formal institutions of the state and the qualitative literature that emphasizes variations in how political authority is *exercised* within these institutions. Second, the dissertation examines more disaggregated empirical measures of government characteristics and the quality of public institutions than have previously been used. For the first time, some of the arguments from the qualitative literature – for example those regarding patronage politics – are examined on a broad set of cases across time and place. The dissertation also clarifies some of the ambiguous findings in the existing literature, for example, regarding the relationship between regime type and civil conflict. Through these efforts, the dissertation helps us understand the absence of civil conflict

in circumstances where the quantitative literature of civil conflict would otherwise predict a high risk of conflict.

This chapter is an introduction to the four essays of the dissertation. In it, I outline my theoretical framework and my contributions. In the next section I situate this dissertation within the existing literature, and discuss the research lacunas that motivate the study. I move on to outline my approach and summarize the theoretical argument. I then present the four individual essays. In the last section I conclude by summarizing the main contributions of the dissertation and suggest some avenues for further research.

EXISTING LITERATURE AND RESEARCH GAPS

During the last decade, a broad research agenda has emerged around the question of how political and economic opportunity structures enable or constrain the onset of armed conflict. This research identifies factors that provide fertile ground for the onset of rebellion. The first is the availability of a means to finance rebellion, for example through the exploitation of natural resources (Collier, 2000; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The second is access to rebel recruits, with research focusing in particular on how low economic returns from peaceful activities affect the individual decision calculus (Thyne, 2006; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). This research agenda also emphasizes factors that make the state unable to launch an efficient response to rebellion, for example mountainous terrain or under-financed government institutions (Fearon and Laitin, 2003).²

What is characteristic for much of the recent quantitative literature, however, is a weak conceptualization of the state as an agent. Much of the literature approaches conflict as the outcome of a successful mobi-

²The focus on opportunity structures has largely replaced the focus on relative deprivation, such as political discrimination, economic inequalities, or ethnically-based grievances, as the central explanation for why rebellion takes place (Gurr, 1970). This does not imply that motives for rebellion are unimportant, but scholars point out that grievances seem to come in infinite supply across the world, making economic resentment or ethnic antagonism simply too prevalent to predict the onset of political violence (cf. Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 2003).

lization on the non-government side. The government – if anything – is characterized by its lack of presence. Accordingly, most of the mechanisms proposed to link national-level characteristics to an increased risk of armed conflict are framed in terms of incentives or constraints presented to prospective rebel groups. A large literature discusses how rebels are able to capitalize on structural opportunities, but how variations in governance influences the risk of armed conflict is generally far less understood.

The literature that does exist on this topic proposes two government characteristics associated with a lower risk of armed conflict: democratic accommodation and the use of strong coercive means. Institutional avenues for voicing opposition encourage the use of non-violent means to pursue political interests. With such institutions, entrance into the political system is far less costly than launching a rebellion (Muller and Weede, 1990; Hegre et al., 2001). Governments with strong coercive institutions and intrusive state apparatuses make violent conspiracies against the government more costly (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Hegre et al., 2001).³ Both of these government characteristics refer back to the state's formal institutions and structures.

There is a mismatch, however, between the quantitative literature's emphasis on the formal political institutions of the state, and the qualitative literature's emphasis on how state authority is exercised within these institutions (cf. Allen, 1995; Bates, 2008).⁴ The qualitative literature moves beyond general distinctions between democratic versus non-democratic governance, or well-equipped versus under-financed state apparatuses. Instead, it focuses on the influence of informal institutions,

³The argument about strong coercive force comes in two versions. The first emphasizes the structure of formal political institutions. It suggests that where power is monopolized, the authoritarian leadership is able to repress and deter dissent through high levels of threats and coercive behavior (cf. Muller and Weede, 1990; Hegre et al., 2001). The second emphasizes the strength of the state's coercive and intelligence-gathering apparatus, which makes rebellion more difficult overall (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Both arguments lead us to expect that authoritarian governments will have a lower risk of civil conflict, at least compared to inconsistent regimes (that is, regimes that mix democratic and autocratic institutional characteristics).

⁴This qualitative literature includes both case studies, comparative case studies, and analytical generalizations.

such as the prevalence of patron-client relationships and corruption, and other qualitative aspects of public institutions (cf. Reno, 2005). The qualitative literature identifies policy responses to prospective rebellion that are far more diverse than the above distinction between democratic accommodation or reliance on strong coercive force. To address this mismatch is an overall aim in the essays of this dissertation.

In addition, there is a mismatch within the quantitative literature, which concerns the link between central concepts pertaining to government characteristics, and efforts to measure these. For example, a widely accepted claim in the literature is that societies where the government is weak – that is, lacks military capacity and a strong administrative apparatus – are structurally vulnerable to rebellion (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Herbst, 2000; Lacina, 2004; Leonard and Strauss, 2003). Yet, there is less agreement on how to measure government capacity. Fearon and Laitin (2003), who propose this argument, corroborate it only indirectly. They use high per capita income as the main indicator of government ability to launch an efficient response to rebellion. However, taking this general relationships as evidence of a direct link from government capacity to civil peace is problematic, since this is only one of a number of plausible interpretations of why poverty is associated with conflict.⁵

Similar ambiguity holds for studies that examine the relationship between political institutions and civil conflict using the Polity index for democracy (Marshall and Jaggers, 2005). The Polity index is used to test two very different explanations for the absence of civil conflict: political accommodation (assumed to be highest at the democratic endpoint) and strong repressive capacity (assumed to be highest at the autocratic

⁵Fearon and Laitin (2003, p. 80) use low per capita income to proxy “a state’s overall financial, administrative, police and military capabilities”. Collier and Hoeffler (2004), on the other hand, use GDP/capita as a proxy for the prices in the market for rebel labor. They argue that poverty leads to low opportunity costs, i.e. a large gap between income foregone when taking up arms, relative to other economic activity for the individual. Fearon (2008), Hegre and Nome (2008) and Boix (2008) suggest an additional interpretation. They argue that low levels of development increase the payoff from using violence, because more of society’s wealth will be held in immobile assets. It is thus easier to expropriate than wealth in more developed economies, which makes the use of violence more feasible and attractive.

endpoint). The assumption of a general relationship between regime type and governing strategy is itself not unreasonable. However, the use of the Polity index to simultaneously proxy for both strategies makes it difficult to validate either of the arguments (Gleditsch and Ruggeri, 2007). Moreover, the aggregate and additive construction of the Polity index also implies that very different institutional configurations can underlie the same score. Users of the Polity index thus risk conflating a set of very heterogenous regimes across time and space (Gleditsch and Ward, 1997). Reducing the mismatch between theoretical concepts and empirical measures is another overall aim of this dissertation.

To sum up, the role of government strategies in influencing the risk of civil conflict remains under-theorized in the existing literature, and much of the quantitative research relies on aggregate and ambiguous measures that make it difficult to assess the relative merits of different theories. Considering the attention devoted to understanding the causes of civil conflict, we still know surprisingly little about how variations in government characteristics and the quality of government institutions influence the risk of armed conflict.

In this dissertation I approach this question by examining how a government's political incentives influence its strategies to avoid armed conflict. In doing so, I draw on the literature on regime survival, in particular on the work of Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003). In my view, the phenomena of civil conflict and regime survival are closely related, yet the two literatures are not well-integrated. I address this issue in the next section, which outlines my theoretical framework.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

This dissertation departs from the assumption that the primary incentive of all leaders - regardless of the formal institutional setting - is to retain political office.⁶ In short, where institutions hold leaders accountable

⁶This assumption is shared by many political scientists (cf. Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003); Gates et al. (2006); Magaloni (2008)), though not all. Geddes (1999), for example, argues that the overall aim of military dictators is not to survive in office but to preserve the military as an institution.

to voters and where survival in office depends on the continued support from a majority of the population, leaders will align public policies with the interests of the median voter. Where leaders are unconstrained, they will choose policies that minimize the risk that they lose power, while maximizing their private payoffs. Many leaders hence pursue policies that conflict with the interests of their constituencies (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003).

The onset of an armed rebellion constitutes one of the most serious challenges that a regime can face. From the regime's point of view, armed conflict constitutes not only a very costly disruption of the normal political process, but also a highly forceful threat to its power. Anticipating this threat, a government has strong incentives to rule through institutions and policies that reduce the risk of armed conflict. At the same time, however, a regime has incentives to choose a policy response to a prospective rebellion that allows it to retain its position in power, while expending as few public resources as possible.⁷

Based on this incentive structure I assume that – given the choice – leaders faced with a prospective rebellion will not choose democratic accommodation as a policy response to appease opponents. Political concessions move power away from the government. Democratic institutions also render leaders more insecure in office since the future of the leadership is conditioned by the endorsement of the population (Bates, 2008). Finally, they are also costly from the ruler's point of view because the need to satisfy the median voter necessitates higher levels of economic distribution, which in turn leaves fewer funds for the regime's discretionary use (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Fjelde and Hegre, 2007).

As an alternative to democratic accommodation, leaders can rely on coercive means to increase the organizational costs of rebellion. Coercive strategies both increase the cost of participation in civil conflict (for

⁷I thus assume government leaders and the people they interact with to be rational actors, that is, that given their goals they choose the means they believe best to achieve them. I rely on this assumption to be able to derive general expectations about actors' behavior. This does not mean that I assume that actors are perfectly informed, or incapable of error.

example, by banning political associations and by employing harsh retaliation against dissent) and weaken the belief that rebellion could be successful (for example, through overt manifestations of regime strength). The existing literature tends to portray coercion as the key instrument through which non-democratic regimes avoid civil conflict (Muller and Weede, 1990; Hegre et al., 2001). However, a pure reliance on coercive means can be politically costly. Coercion depletes bases of support, and strengthens the cause of forces wishing to depose the regime.⁸ Hence, coercive policies might hurt the government's own mobilization effort. Furthermore, there are groups in society that are difficult to control through coercive means – for example, the military and bureaucratic service, and significant economic actors in the private sector. The government thus must choose other political strategies to placate these important actors (Wintrobe, 1998).

Much of the existing literature on armed conflict suggests that regimes are faced with a choice between these two strategies. In this dissertation I propose the existence of a more diverse policy response from governments to a prospective rebellion. I argue that governments have strong incentives to rely on co-optation strategies to undermine the organizational capacity for rebellion. By co-optation I mean attempts by rulers to transform opponents into supporters by making them offers of private gain, such as economic transfers, public positions, or some other transfer or concession in exchange for their support (c.f. Bertocchi and Spagat, 2001; Gandhi and Przeworski, 2006). Where private goods are exchanged for political support I refer to it as patronage politics. Through such policies, governments can bribe opponents, entice the support of competing elites, and retain the loyalty of critical actors in society.⁹ The target of such patronage

⁸Repression increases the cost for individuals of participating in violence due to the threat of severe sanctions. The same fear might, however, also increase what Wintrobe (1998) has referred to as the “dictator’s dilemma”. Banning dissent creates uncertainty about the government’s actual level of support among the in-group, as well as the population at large. This, in turn, breeds uncertainty and often more coercive strategies (Haber, 2006).

⁹Much of the case study literature discusses how political leaders use the strategic disbursement of state resources to solicit support from critical segments of the society

will differ depending on the political context. It for example includes traditional leaders, actors within the military, groups in the private sector that control economic assets, community leaders, and other powerful political entrepreneurs within society. The tacit or explicit endorsement of this “in-group” provides critical support to the regime. In exchange, the regime transfers patronage.

Co-optation strategies serve the personal interests of leaders. A distributive regime whereby leaders buy their continuation in office through private, rather than public, goods, implies less net economic distribution, and thus maximizes personal payoffs to the regime (Buono de Mesquita et al., 2003; Fjelde and Hegre, 2007). Moreover, this kind of distributive regime does not empower competing political organizations. The personal and reciprocal exchange of economic privilege for political support promotes personal loyalty to the regime, serves as a strong deterrent against the shifting of political loyalty, and links the self-interest of these important societal actors to the continuation of the regime (Bayart, 1993). The critical question, then, is whether such narrow co-optation strategies can pre-empt the occurrence of civil conflict.

In much of the literature on armed conflict it is suggested that governments are likely to avoid armed rebellion as long as regime opponents are not able to muster the force necessary to challenge the regime. As discussed above, the government can thus increase the organizational costs of launching a rebellion directly, through coercive strategies, or indirectly, by making alternative expressions of political discontent less costly relative to the use of violence. I suggest, however, that the regime’s ability to avoid armed conflict depends not only on its response to declared regime opponents: it depends on the regime’s ability to uphold

and facilitate elite integration. For example, Bayart (1993, p. 186) describes the success with which Mobutu used such strategies in Zaire to defeat opposition, through promotions from “revolutionaries” of the first republic to parliamentary members within his own regime.

strong relations with its in-group, the critical segment of society that it depends upon to stay in power.¹⁰

Prospective rebellions face collective action problems, and are particularly vulnerable to the need for leadership.¹¹ Political entrepreneurs that can coordinate and mobilize followers are a critical factor in turning collective discontent into collective violence (Brown, 1996; Lichbach, 1995; Gurr, 2000; Nilsson, 2008). Defection from the in-group of dissatisfied elites could provide valuable leadership to a prospective rebellion. There are many empirical examples of rebel groups who are led by, or contain, individuals who have a history of belonging to the privileged in-group, and who later seek to recapture lost benefits through armed force (Bøås and Dunn, 2007). Morrison, Mitchell and Paden (1989, 124) point out that political unrest is “often a response on the part of communal groups [...] to elite instability which either fails to bring about a re-apportionment of ethnic representation in government or a redistribution of other goods”. A cohesive in-group limits the availability of such political entrepreneurs. Attracting and maintaining their support is thus critical to undermining the potential organizational capacity of rebel groups.

Government patronage can be strategically deployed to contain opposition and bribe opponents into siding with the regime. The use of selective rewards have an established place in the literature on rebel recruitment (cf. Lichbach, 1995; Weinstein, 2005). I suggest that governments compete with rebel groups over the supply of selective incentives, sometimes outspending prospective rebel groups. This assumes that prospective rebel leaders respond to offers of pecuniary gain. Although not all prospective rebels are opportunistic, as Lichbach (1995,

¹⁰This is what I refer to as the regime’s launching coalition in *Essay I*, borrowing the terminology of Haber (2006); Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) refers to it as the winning coalition.

¹¹The collective action problem refers to difficulties in organizing groups of individuals for the pursuit of a public good, which is non-rival and non-excludable in nature, because of incentives to free-ride on the efforts of others (i.e. enjoy the good once it has been realized, without contributing to its realization) (Olson, 1965). Lichbach (1995) has applied this concept to the formation of rebel groups, referring to it as “the rebel’s dilemma”.

p. 236) argues, “predatory states [...] encourage rent-seeking among dissidents”. Lam and Wantchekon (2003, p. 5) also suggest that pervasive patron-client ties are likely to divert the behavior of the population away from strategies of collective action and finding that “rent-seeking [is] more efficient than political unrest as a way to induce redistribution”. In this sense, co-optation policies work according to a divide and rule logic that undermines the capacity for collective action beyond its immediate beneficiaries (Acemoglu, Robinson and Verdier, 2004)

In short, I suggest that governments are able to avoid armed conflict as long as they can offer powerful constituents enough of a pay-off to prevent them from engaging in violence. To do so, the government can rely on a political strategy centered on bribing opposition and using state patronage to retain the support of important actors, such as ethnic leaders, political figures, and economic actors in the private sector. Where the economic resources for such strategies are plentiful, and the government has the institutional means to facilitate efficient co-optation of the in-group, this strategy both promotes in-group cohesion, and aggravates coordination problems within the out-group.

In the next section I present the four essays, situating each of them within the relevant literature, and clarifying the contribution of each. I also briefly introduce the data and methods used, and discuss the main findings.

PRESENTING THE FOUR ESSAYS

Essay I

The essay, “Generals, Dictators, and Kings. Authoritarian Regimes and Civil Conflict” is forthcoming in *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. The essay addresses a significant research gap in the literature on how political institutions influence the risk of civil conflict. First, earlier quantitative studies have employed aggregate regime categorizations that mask substantial differences in institutional configurations among regime types, and hence possibly also conceal diverging risks of armed con-

flict emerging from these differences. In particular, the non-democratic regimes have been treated as a residual category. Second – and linked to the empirical approach – scholars have conceptualized the risk of civil conflict in non-democratic regimes as a function of the level of coercion that the leader is able to enforce. Largely overlooked in this literature is that the ability of non-democratic leaders to survive in power not only hinges on their ability to forcefully control opposition, but also to transform influential opponents into supporters of the regime and maintain the unity of this ruling coalition.

This essay suggests that the institutional foundations of the regime are key to understanding non-democratic leaders' ability both to coerce and to co-opt political challengers. Based on this argument, the essay unpacks the authoritarian regime category. It theoretically and empirically explores how the risk of civil conflict differs between single-party regimes, multi-party authoritarian regimes, military regimes, and monarchies.

I argue that dictators that govern through a single political party are better able to apply coercive strategies to undermine the out-group's organizational capacity than dictators who rely on the military apparatus to stay in power, or who coordinate their rule through the royal family. Institutions are key to turning strategies of patronage into durable and self-enforcing arrangements. The stronger the party institution, the more efficient patronage policies become as a tool to co-opt opponents.

Utilizing new data on authoritarian regimes from Hadenius and Teorell (2007), the essay examines empirically the risk of civil conflict across authoritarian regime types between 1973 and 2004. The results show that single-party authoritarian regimes have an institutional set-up that makes them particularly resilient to armed conflict, compared to multi-party and military autocracies. These results suggest that the finding that authoritarian political institutions are not a significant determinant of civil conflict results from treating a heterogeneous set of authoritarian regimes as homogenous. Furthermore, the study expands our knowledge about the effect of regime instability, showing that the immediate influence of a regime transition is conditioned by the type of regime taking power. The risk of conflict in multi-party electoral autocracy decreases

with the amount of time since regime transition. For military regimes, the risk is initially lower, but then increases over time.

Essay II

The second essay, “Coercion, Co-optation or Cooperation? State Capacity and the Risk of Civil War, 1961–2004”, was published in *Conflict Management and Peace Science* in 2009 and is co-authored with Professor Indra de Soysa.

There is little disagreement in the quantitative literature that low governing capacity makes states structurally vulnerable to conflict. There is more debate, however, on what state capacity is and how to measure it. In their seminal article, Fearon and Laitin (2003) interpret the empirical association between wealth and peace as state capacity effects. But they are not able to discriminate between the impact of administrative reach and capacity for coercion, as opposed to good governance aspects related to the provision of political goods and impartial state institutions. Conceptions of state capacity often contain both elements, emphasizing the capacity to coercively control activities and resources within the territory as well as legitimacy in the exercise of this authority (cf. Levi, 2006). This essay investigates the relationship between state capacity and civil conflict by moving beyond the aggregate concept. It does so *theoretically* by exploring distinct dimensions of governing capacity and *empirically* by testing novel proxies for each of these dimensions.

First, we study what is perhaps the most conventional notion of state capacity, the government’s ability to project its force across the territory, backed by institutions of coercion, surveillance and administration (North, 1981; Olson, 1993). The ability to extract revenues is seen by many as the *sine qua non* of state building (see North, 1981; Tilly, 1985; Thies, 2007). We use a measure of the state’s extractive capacity (relative to its level of income) from Arbetman and Kugler (1997) to proxy the state’s capacity to penetrate society and control resources and activities through enforcement.

Our second notion of state capacity focuses on the bargaining power derived from the ability to deliver political goods, that is, the ability of the state to co-opt opposition. A major challenge to creating capable government is, as Levi (2006, p. 9) argues, to “offer powerful constituents enough in the way of benefits to retain their loyalty and to desist from violent predation”. As an indicator of the state’s ability to buy compliance through economic transfers, we use a measure of government control of societal wealth: government spending as a share of GDP.

Our third notion of state capacity parallels the economic theory that trust and the ability to credibly commit to agreements is the fundamental aspect of prosperity (Weingast, 1993; North, Summerhill and Weingast, 2000). Much like economic order, political order ensues where the state is entrusted to manage part of society’s wealth and to use its force to safeguard the long-term productive investments of the population, rather than to pursue narrow personal interests (Bates, Greif and Singh, 2002; Bates, 2008; North, Summerhill and Weingast, 2000). The population’s trust in the social contract requires state enforcement capabilities, but above all, confidence that the government will not overstep its boundaries. We use a measure of people’s perception of the security of property rights as an indicator of the trust in state institutions.

In a cross-country statistical analysis we evaluate how these notions of governing capacity co-vary with civil peace. We find that high levels of government spending on political goods and trustworthy institutions are more significant predictors of civil peace than is our measure of the states’ capacity to extract revenue. Government expenditure seems to be particularly conducive to peace where institutional constraints limit the possibility of rent seeking.

Essay III

“Buying Peace? Oil Wealth, Corruption and Civil War, 1985-99” was published in *Journal of Peace Research* in 2009. The essay situates itself in the literature on natural resources and armed conflict. It starts from the observation that many scholars have provided a governance

interpretation to the empirical fact that oil-rich countries have a higher risk of armed conflict than their level of income would otherwise suggest. Few studies, however, have actually examined how governance variables, such as corruption, influence this relationship.

Moreover, the study speaks to the mismatch between two literatures. The quantitative conflict literature suggests that oil wealth increases the pay-off from state capture, corrupts the state apparatus, and precipitates instability. The mainly qualitative literature, on the other hand, suggests that so-called rentier states are remarkably persistent in spite of high economic inequality, misappropriation of public funds by political officials, and weak development outcomes (Smith, 2004; Omgba, 2009).¹²

This essay argues that within the context of a rentier economy we will not necessarily see an association between high levels of political corruption and high conflict risk. Political corruption denotes the misuse of public office for private gain, and the illegitimate diversion of public resources into private payoffs (Heidenheimer and Johnston, 2007). While these forms of distributive regimes distort economic and political development, they also involve powerful stakeholders. I argue that governments with large incomes from oil can use this wealth strategically to buy off rivals and reward followers. Patronage politics, as reflected in high levels of political corruption, could thus co-opt opponents through offers of private goods – for example lucrative jobs within a large public sector – in exchange for political loyalty. In short, oil-rich governments can use political corruption to buy support from key segments of society, outspending rebel entrepreneurs.

The essay examines how oil wealth and patronage politics interact by including an interaction term between oil production and political corruption in the statistical models. Based on a logit analysis of civil war onsets in the time period 1985-99, the essay finds support for the co-optation argument. A negative and statistically significant interaction

¹²The term “rentier state” is used in Luciani (1990), to describe states which base their income on an external source such as oil wealth, rather than on domestic taxation, and the political and economic distortions associated with this type of distributive state.

term between oil production and political corruption is consistent across different models, and robust to a number of specifications. Whereas both oil dependence and corruption increase the risk of conflict overall, the risk of conflict is lower in highly corrupt and oil-dependent countries than one would assume from only considering their independent effects. The findings suggest the need for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between natural resource wealth, governance, and armed conflict.

Essay IV

“Sub-National Determinants of Non-State Conflicts in Nigeria, 1991–2005” is an unpublished essay. Here I apply the overall theoretical argument from the previous essay to sub-national political processes. I suggest that one reason for the paradoxical longevity of many corrupt regimes is that the political contest comes to revolve around inclusion in the patronage network, generating incentives for mobilized groups to signal their strength through competition with other groups rather than contesting the system itself. Carefully crafted patronage politics, combined with high economic stakes, are likely to transform the state into an arena for violent rent-seeking between non-state groups. Such dynamics could undermine the organizational capacity for government opposition, and rather precipitate fierce conflict between non-state actors over the access to resources.

The lack of data on patronage politics at the sub-national level makes it difficult to directly test the proposed relationship in a systematic manner. Instead I choose an approach where I derive implications regarding the factors that will be associated with an increased risk of non-state violence on the basis of the theoretical argument above. The essay proposes that non-state conflict will be most likely to occur where the pay-offs to violent mobilization are particularly high, either because of the geographic distribution of wealth, or because political opportunities for such opportunistic behavior emerge.

There are few cases that provide a better illustration than Nigeria of how the strategic distribution of state patronage – on the basis of a large income from oil exports – can uphold a corrupt, plundering, and dysfunctional state. While Nigeria has avoided large-scale civil war since 1970, the country has experienced widespread local political violence between ethnically and politically mobilized groups. The data I have collected for this study show that during the 1991–2005 period, armed conflict between non-state actors in Nigeria claimed at least 8,000 deaths.¹³ The empirical section of this essay examines the local determinants of such violence, both their incidence and intensity.

The data structure for this study consists of a grid of 1,456 squares (25 km x 25 km in size) that covers the entire territory of Nigeria. Each annual observation of a square constitutes my unit of analysis. Explanatory variables – including the location of oil wealth, income level, election years, and changes in governmental organization – are used to predict the occurrence and the intensity of non-state conflict events within each grid.

This is one of the first systematic studies of the sub-national determinants of non-state violence. The results are consistent with a political and economic interpretation of these conflicts, rather than the popular account that emphasizes religious and ethnic animosity. More specifically, my findings suggest that the two factors related to changes in the political and administrative organization of the state are both significant predictors of non-state armed conflict in Nigeria. Areas with oil production and high levels of income are, on the other hand, particularly likely to have more intense non-state conflicts, with higher numbers of battle deaths.

¹³The data are collected in accordance with the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's definition of a non-state armed conflict as "the use of force between two organized groups, neither of which is the government of a state, which results in at least 25 battle-related deaths per calendar year" (Sundberg, 2009, p. 2).

CONCLUSION

All the four essays of this dissertation are written as distinct articles, addressing specific gaps in previous research and hence have specific contributions. However, what they all have in common is a focus on government characteristics as a central determinant of cross-country variations in armed conflict. The dissertation makes two overall contributions to the quantitative literature on armed conflict. First, it expands on this literature by incorporating insights from qualitative research to produce a more nuanced account of the role of government for the risk of civil conflict. Second, it proposes more nuanced empirical measures of these government characteristics that allow us to examine the above account on a broader set of cases across time and place. Below I discuss the joint contributions of the essays in more detail.

The first contribution of the dissertation is to provide a more diverse account of the role of government in influencing the risk of civil conflict. In doing so, the dissertation bridges a gap that has existed between the quantitative literature that has focused primarily on the formal institutions of the state and the qualitative literature that has emphasized variations in how political authority is exercised within these institutions.

To begin with, the dissertation moves beyond a simple distinction between democratic and non-democratic government. Most studies see the risk of armed conflict within the non-democratic regime category as a decreasing function of the level of coercion that the regime is able to undertake. The theoretical discussions advanced in this dissertation, most explicitly in *Essay I*, suggest that the non-democratic regime category is far more heterogeneous. To begin with, the different institutional configurations of authoritarian regimes constrain the effectiveness of coercive strategies. In particular, the dissertation suggests that to monitor, identify and forcefully control opposition, non-democratic regimes need political organizations with a strong societal reach, such as a political party. Non-democratic regimes that are politically insulated must rely to a larger extent on indiscriminate purges, which are more likely to backfire and increase the risk of civil war. This suggests that qualitative

differences in institutions, that is, differences not captured through the use of aggregate measures, are critical to understanding variation across countries in the onset of armed conflict. Moreover, I propose that even though non-democratic regimes lack institutional avenues for popular accommodation, non-democratic regimes differ in their ability to retain the backing of critical constituents. This dissertation suggests that the use of co-optation, that is, a strategic distribution of state patronage to buy-off opposition, is a strategic complement to the use of coercion in non-democratic regimes. It thus questions the received wisdom that, short of democratic representation and accommodation, a reliance on coercive means is a ruler's primary instrument to avoid armed conflict.

In doing so, the dissertation also suggests the possibility of a more diverse policy response to a prospective rebellion than the one advanced in the existing literature. A central part of this effort is the move away from the formal institutions that regulate access to political power, to focus instead on the theoretical arguments regarding variations in how political power is exercised within these political institutions.¹⁴ The discussion about variations in the provision of political goods and property rights protection in *Essay II* is illustrative of this point. These policies represent variations in government that cannot be deduced from the formal political institutions of the state as such. Moreover, *Essays I, III and IV* all discuss how governments can choose to rely on a strategic distribution of resources, positions, and privilege, in order to enlist the support of critical backers. The essays argue that co-optation can promote loyalty and cohesiveness among government supporters, and indirectly increase the organizational costs of rebelling against the government. They thus emphasize the significance of informal institutions for understanding political outcomes.

The significance of co-optation strategies that are designed to offer opponents sufficiently high personal gains to convince them to abstain from violence is often highlighted in the qualitative literature on armed conflict. This dissertation tries to incorporate these insights into the

¹⁴I borrow this distinction from Rothstein and Teorell (2008) who use it to define the meaning of governance.

quantitative literature on armed conflict. In order to do so, the essays turn to recent contributions within the quantitative literature on regime survival. Within this literature, several scholars have attempted to systematically test the influence of co-optation strategies on the longevity of regimes (Magaloni, 2008; Arriola, 2009), the survival of their leaders (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003), and the stability of the institutions (Fjelde and Hegre, 2007; Morrison, 2009). *Essays I* and *III* suggest that co-optation strategies might help us understand unexplained variation in the risk of civil conflict across countries. *Essay III* also proposes that the efficiency of these strategies are conditioned on access to economic resources. *Essay I* proposes that this efficiency is related to the set-up of the formal political institutions.

The second overall contribution of this dissertation is to help bridge the mismatch between some of the central concepts in the literature on the political determinants of armed conflict and the measures used for these concepts in statistical analysis. *Essay I* unpacks the authoritarian regime category by introducing new and disaggregated data on different types of authoritarian regimes. These data allow, for the first time, an identification of how the institutional set up of non-democratic regimes render them differently prone to civil conflict. *Essays II* and *III* both introduce data on variation in government characteristics that have not previously been examined in studies of armed conflict. *Essay II* theoretically unpacks the concept of state capacity. It proposes empirical indicators that more directly capture variations in government characteristics, compared to previous literature's use of economic development as a catch-all for this concept. The findings suggest that the good governance aspect of state capacity, that is, credible and impartial state institutions, are particularly salient to reduce the risk of conflict. *Essay III* moves beyond the focus on formal political institutions, and represents one of the first attempts in the quantitative literature to measure the influence of informal institutions such as patronage politics and corruption on the risk of civil conflict. The essay corroborates the notion that higher levels of political corruption are associated with a higher risk

of civil conflict. But the essay also qualifies this argument, finding that the government's access to large economic resources mediates this effect.

What I propose in *Essays I-III* are theoretical accounts. The statistical results from the cross-country analyses are consistent with the theoretical arguments advanced in this dissertation. The Nigerian case which is discussed in *Essay IV* also provides evidence supporting the overall theoretical argument (in particular with reference to *Essay III*). At the national level, state patronage is strategically deployed to pull together a heterogeneous elite. At the inter-group level, however, these elites capitalize on group divisions to mobilize a strong constituency and thus negotiate larger shares of the "national cake", as it is known in Nigerian colloquial language. The Nigerian case suggests that political struggle thus is channeled into competition with other societal groups rather than against the state. While the statistical analysis of non-state conflict in Nigeria cannot directly corroborate this argument, the qualitative discussion of the case provides some further support to the arguments. Moreover, the statistical analysis provides empirical evidence that is more consistent with this argument than with competing accounts that centre on ethnic and religious animosity as the main determinant of non-state armed conflict.

Implications

Several of the essays in this dissertation suggest the possibility of an "uncivil peace". In many countries we observe the absence of civil conflict under adverse conditions, that is, conditions that are identified by the quantitative literature as highly conducive to rebellion. The essays of this dissertation propose theoretical propositions and empirical evidence to help us understand why this is the case. This dissertation suggests a more nuanced picture regarding the diverse set of political strategies a government has for preventing armed resistance against the state. Furthermore, it shows that undemocratic and exclusionary government strategies can be associated with other types of political collective violence than armed challenges to the state.

Whereas policy-makers often seem to work under the assumption that all positive outcomes - including peace, good governance, and development - coincide, the findings of this dissertation suggest a more nuanced picture. Political orders can occur where state resources are put to illegitimate use and utilized to pursue the interests of a narrow group of the population, but without resulting in armed conflict. These findings resonate with a growing recognition within the recent literature on regime survival that “bad policies” from the point of view of the population can be good politics from the point of view of the leaders. While armed conflict and regime transitions traditionally are studied as separate phenomena, and are described in distinct literatures, the findings of this dissertation suggest that these phenomena might have similar determinants. A challenge of future research is therefore to examine common determinants for armed conflict and regime stability, but also to understand what separates these two political phenomena. Under what conditions do challenges to the government lead to civil conflict, and under what conditions does the regime choose political concessions and reform to appease threats? *Essay I* suggests that the institutional set-up of regimes and their probability of surviving through a democratic transition might be one important determinant of this choice. Future research should probe this issue further.

Furthermore, this dissertation points to the importance of developing a more refined conceptualization of civil conflict. A controversy in the recent literature concerns whether civil conflict is best understood as a grievance-driven, mass-based struggle undertaken by the poor – or a more opportunistic endeavor led by a few conflict entrepreneurs (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). The theoretical argument advanced in this dissertation places strong emphasis on the availability of elite patronage, and is hence related to the latter approach. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive. When using cross-country statistical datasets, such as the UCDP/PRIODATA data, we lump together a range of potentially very different phenomena into one heterogeneous category. Armed conflict data include, for example, instances of both insurgencies initiated among poor urban youth, and coup attempts from factions within the

ruling elite. A challenge for future research is to refine the dependent variable in conflict studies in order to enhance our ability to validate specific theoretical arguments. This dissertation has taken some steps in that direction, for example in *Essay I*, by parsing out military coups from other types of civil conflict in the dataset. Related to this, *Essay IV* also shows that long periods where civil conflict is absent at the national level can coincide with widespread collective violence at the local level. The statistical results suggests that, at least in Nigeria, non-state armed conflicts also have political determinants. Examining common as well as diverging determinants for different types of collective political violence is an important task for future research.

Several of the essays support the contention that there can be multiple roads to peace, short of democratization. When supported by a resource-rich economy, or upheld through persistent authoritarian institutions, patronage policies can increase the resilience of governments to armed rebellion. An important challenge for future research is to identify the conditions for peaceful transformation of these political systems, into societies governed by transparency, rule of law, and political accountability. The challenge is to make this happen without the occurrence of political violence as the by-product of a societal transformation that disrupts the lucrative privileges of a few powerful stakeholders.

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