



Local institutional quality and conflict violence in Africa

Tore Wig*, Andreas Forø Tollefsen

University of Oslo and Peace Research Institute Oslo, PRIO, Oslo, Norway



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 15 February 2016

Keywords:

Civil war
Political institutions
Quantitative methods
Good governance
Political violence

ABSTRACT

All politics is local. In spite of this familiar dictum, most studies that have investigated how institutions shape the conditions for violence and peace have focused on national institutions, and neglected the local dimension. This paper investigates the effects of high-quality local political institutions on the location of violence in internal conflicts in Africa, demonstrating that the quality of local political institutions matters even when the characteristics of national institutions are accounted for. We combine georeferenced survey data from the Afrobarometer surveys with georeferenced conflict data, allowing us to study the links between institutional quality at the subnational level and the occurrence of conflict-related violence. Crucially, we find that administrative districts with high-quality local government institutions are less likely to experience violence in an internal conflict than poorly governed districts. This relationship holds when controlling for a number of relevant factors like economic development, demographics, political opinions, urbanization and country-fixed effects. We also use matching techniques to improve inference, finding rather robust indications that local institutional quality pacifies.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

While the claim that “all politics is local” will be familiar to any political scientist, most generalizable research looking at the links between political institutions and civil conflict focuses on institutions at the national level. Studies have predominantly emphasized national institutional features such as regime type (e.g., Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates, & Gleditsch, 2001), the quality of government (e.g., Hegre & Nygård, 2014), or power-sharing institutions (e.g., Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007). Yet, it is a truism that political institutions are more than the parliaments, constitutions and departments that populate national capitals. Crucially, important political institutions can be found at the local level.

A number of contemporary examples indicate the importance of local institutions for violent conflict. Countries such as Kenya, Nigeria and Iraq have all recently experienced localized rebellions that have emerged in conditions of very poor local governance. Al Shahaab (Kenya), Boko Haram (Nigeria), and the Islamic State (Iraq) have all profited from weak local institutions, and capitalized on the frustrations they engender among citizens. Although a handful of studies have investigated the local institutional correlates of violence (e.g., Voors & Bulte, 2014; Tajima, 2013; Bellows & Miguel, 2009), they are restricted to single-case studies of individual countries and predominantly focused on how violence affects institutions, rather than the causal effect(s) of institutions on violence.

We address this gap by investigating how variation in the *quality* of formal political institutions at the local level impacts on the *location* of conflict violence in 20 countries in Africa. We focus on *formal local government institutions*, understood as “the set of formal institutions legally established to deliver a range of specified services to relatively small geographic jurisdictions” (Bratton, 2012, 517). Formal local government institutions are distinct from the ethno-specific customary institutions that also populate the institutional landscape in Africa and have been shown to matter for a range of outcomes (e.g., Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2013).

Our explanatory focus is on the quality of local institutions. High-quality institutions are uncorrupt, law governed, capable, trusted by the public, and efficient in their performance, and instantiate the general concept of “quality of government” (see e.g. Rothstein & Teorell, 2008) or “good governance” (e.g. Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2009). There is substantial variation in the quality of formal local government institutions in Africa. Some are trusted by the public and function well, with little corruption and efficient administration, while others are corrupt, wasteful and enjoy little trust from the citizens they are set to govern (see e.g. Olowu & Smoke, 1992; Bratton, 2012).

We claim that the quality of local institutions affects conflict risk through two primary channels: By shaping the *motivations* that give rise to violence, and by functioning as *opportunity structures* that can either facilitate or curtail conflict.

To test our main expectation we create a dataset combining spatialized survey data with georeferenced data on conflict events in Africa. Specifically, we rely on georeferenced data from the Afrobarometer rounds 3 (2005) and 4 (2008) to proxy for local institutional quality, as perceived by citizens, and combine this with

* Corresponding author. Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, Postboks 1097, Blindern, Oslo 0317, Norway. Tel.: +47 22844998.

E-mail address: tore.wig@stv.uio.no (T. Wig).

geographically disaggregated conflict data from the UCDP-GED database (Sundberg & Melander, 2013). While acknowledging the limits of survey data for measuring institutional quality (discussed below), we maintain that this dataset presents us with a comprehensive picture of perceived local institutional quality across surveyed countries. Our dataset contains information on over 50,000 respondents in 1638 administrative districts and 20 states in Africa. While the nature of our sample – restricted to countries in waves 3 and 4 of the Afrobarometer – limits the scope for generalization, this allows us to assess more general patterns than the ones probed in extant single-country studies.

Our main finding is that administrative districts with high-quality local government institutions are less likely to experience violence. This relationship holds when controlling for a number of potential confounders, such as previous levels of violence, poverty, demographics, local support for the government, urbanization and geographic location. It also holds when we control for country-level characteristics by including country-fixed effects. A central threat to inference regarding this finding is endogeneity; while institutions have an impact on the risk of conflict, conflict impacts on institutions, creating a circular relationship. While we do not identify a satisfactory instrumental variables strategy for untangling this knot, we rather present a set of robustness tests that go some way toward alleviating at least some of these concerns, such as matching on previous levels of violence and assessing the sensitivity of our results to omitted variables following Altonji, Elder, and Taber (2005). While our results align with and contribute to previous cross-country studies showing that good governance can pacify (e.g., Hegre & Nygård, 2014), we extend this insight to political institutions at the local level, contributing to an emerging discussion on the interlinkages between local institutions and civil war violence (e.g., Voors & Bulte, 2014). Ultimately, the results indicate that the quality of formal local government institutions matters to local civil peace.

Institutional quality and conflict: state of the art

If institutions can pacify societies, they should do so not only through what they prescribe – e.g. elections, civil liberties or power sharing – but through how well they *function*. Institutional quality here refers to quality in the *output* side of the political process, and is thus distinguishable from democracy which is (primarily) conceptualized with reference to how policies and politicians are selected (see e.g., Dahl, 1971). We here draw on extant literature on institutional quality (see for example Kaufmann et al., 2009; Rothstein & Teorell, 2008), and define high-quality institutions as uncorrupt, law governed, capable, trusted by the public, and efficient in their performance.

Does institutional quality matter to peace? The most prominent arguments come in three main varieties. Some claim that well-functioning institutions help solve commitment problems that can lead to armed conflict (e.g., Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003; Walter, 2014), while others have been more concerned with how institutions alleviate conflict-inducing grievances through inclusion in the political system (e.g., Hegre & Nygård, 2014; Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013). Yet others emphasize that high-quality institutions shrink the opportunity space for rebellion (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). In short, these arguments yield the expectation that high-quality institutions should reduce political violence in a society.

A handful of cross-country studies duly investigate whether institutional quality is indeed associated with peace. Hegre and Nygård (2014) find that informal aspects of institutions, such as low corruption and strong rule of law, have a significant pacifying effect at the national level. This also resonates with Fearon (2011), documenting that “good governance” is associated with less conflict (see also Walter, 2014). Missing from this literature however, is the local dimension of political institutions. This is out of step with recent

trends in the study of internal conflict, where studies are increasingly moving beyond focusing on the macro-level of the nation state, to take a geographically disaggregated look at conflict processes at the local level *within* countries (e.g. Buhaug, Gleditsch, Holtermann, Tollefsen, & Østby, 2011; Rustad, Buhaug, Falch, & Gates, 2011). Our paper extends this move toward disaggregation to the link between institutions and conflict.

It is to some extent understandable that the reorientation toward the local has not been followed in studies of the institutions-conflict link. Firstly, most of the political institutions that scholars are interested in only exist at the national level *per definition* (e.g., national elections, supreme courts, power-sharing constitutions etc.). Secondly, there is a disconcerting lack of high-quality data on the design and functioning of local political institutions. In spite of this, studying the impact of local institutions is vital. Crucially, many conflicts have been shown to have local roots and dynamics that do not fit neatly within the national-level perspective (Kalyvas, 2006), and conflict areas are often unrepresentative of the country at large (Buhaug & Rød, 2006). Given this, ignoring local institutions misses a crucial dimension of variation that can give us more leverage in terms of identifying causal effects of political institutions. Moreover, looking at the local level brings us closer to the actual level of interaction; occurring between groups and individuals in their local institutional surroundings. While we readily acknowledge that there are important links between national institutions and local-level institutional patterns (discussed below), this study seeks to isolate the impacts of local institutions as such.

There are indeed a handful of studies investigating how local institutions shape conflict-patterns. These draw on single-country evidence, with examples covering Nepal (Bohara, Mitchell, & Nepal, 2006), and Indonesia (Barron, Kaiser, & Pradhan, 2009; Tajima, 2013). Although few in number, the general pattern appearing in these studies is that high-quality local institutions reduce the incidence of local conflict. Relatedly, a number of recent contributions study the reverse causal direction, namely how conflict violence affects institutions (and related outcomes), in diverse contexts such as Burundi (Voors & Bulte, 2014), Sierra Leone (Bellows & Miguel, 2009), Nepal (Gilligan, Pasquale, & Samii, 2014), and Kenya (Linke, 2013). However, there is a need for studies with a greater potential for generalization than these single-country designs. This article contributes to this.

Why local institutional quality pacifies

This section discusses why local institutional quality should reduce local-level violence. We argue that aspects of local institutions should affect both the motivations and opportunities that give rise to violence in a local context. While explicitly focusing on how institutions affect conflict risk, we acknowledge the potential for reverse causality in the institutions-conflict relationship, and that this affects the scope for drawing causal inferences. Hence, we end this section with a discussion of institutions as endogenous to conflict.

To structure our discussion of how local institutions impact on local conflict risk we sort the causes of local conflict-related violence into two categories: *External* and *internal*. External explanations highlight external actors' strategic motivations for attacking in a given locality. This can be done to target collaborators of the opposing side (Fjelde & Hultman, 2014), terrorize a population into supporting the attackers (Lyall, 2009), gain strategic control of an area (Zhukov, 2013), or to access lootable resources such as diamonds (e.g. Buhaug & Rød, 2006). Another brand of external explanations downplays the strategic aspect, focusing on the spread and diffusion of conflict events across space and time. On this view, conflict can be seen as an “epidemic” that can spill over administrative boundaries and

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1061829>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1061829>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)