

Review of “Corruption and Armed Conflicts: Some Stirring Around in the Governance Soup”

The paper aims at exploring the relationship between the research fields corruption and armed conflicts. It looks for some causal linkages between both phenomena and, finally, draws some conclusions how results from one field of research impact the other.

The author starts with a detailed discussion of definitions of corruption and reviews critically approaches to measure institutional quality. Especially, he makes clear that possible indicators to quantify the extent of corruption should be more fine tuned to capture more differentiated forms of corruption. It follows a presentation of a theory about corruption and political instability inspired by Huntington (1968). The paper ends in discussing the resource curse as a hinge between corruption and conflict.

Although it is a particular analysis of the relationship between corruption and armed conflicts which will surely impact future research, I have some comments.

- Obviously, violent conflicts and corruption might appear jointly in many cases. But the intention to use corruption as an explanatory variable to explain the outbreak of violent conflicts is debatable. More specifically, I personally miss a discussion of the comparative relevance of corruption as one or even the trigger of conflicts. Rather I would expect violent conflicts to be caused by dramatic and persistent malfunctioning of institutions like imbalances in distribution of income, wealth, resources, entitlements or political power where corruption might also be a consequence of it. This is later reflected in the discussion of Huntington (chapter 6) but is not only related to political theory and modernisation. Personally, I find the argument putting social frustration as a source of corruption and civil violence at the same time on the upper part of page 22 as too simplistic. Then we would have to expect large unrest in Eastern Germany or other transition countries where unemployment is widespread. Put it differently, corruption as well as civil unrest are ways to channel social frustration but they operate at quite different levels and need quite different accumulation of frustration. It could also be possible that widespread corruption lowers frustration and thus lowers the probability of unrest. Again the formerly centrally planned economies could serve as an example.

- The paper has some lengths. It is not clearly motivated why the extensive discussion of governance indicators based on previous literature deliver interesting insights into the relation between corruption and conflict. Additionally, it is not clear why methodological aspects of composite indicators are discussed extensively if the focus is on corruption and not on the composite index. Especially, the focus on measures which somehow tie corruption and conflict propensity seems to be arbitrarily. Objective measures of civil conflicts are easily obtainable as, for instance, outlined in chapter 2. It is not clear why subjective ratings should be used instead. The author does not come up with a new indicator of corruption nor proposes a better methodology.

- Based on the discussion in chapter 3 it is surprising and confusing to meet the same names again on page 26. If the indicators are not useful for empirical research why sticking to them in the following short model? Especially, if the current paper does not undertake any empirical analysis. It would be better to come up with clearly defined concepts and terms, to build the theoretical framework using them and then looking for appropriate indices to prove it empirically. The assumption of all variables to be functions of time seems to be rather vague. Especially corruption is shown to be highly persistent and change only slowly over time.

- Comment on distinctions on page 5f: The distinction with respect to the availability of means is missing. Corrupt exchanges base to a large extent on money or exchanges in kind, as for instance in the former centrally planned economies. Money and other means of exchange are freely available and at the disposal of the bribing person. On the other hand, especially armed conflicts require some concentration of arms and weapons in the hands of a group of persons. In most cases, this constraint imposes a kind of threshold to choose such a strategy to pursue own interest.

- Comment on distinction e) on page 6: Corruption and conflict not only differ by the observable start and end of episodes but also with respect to their nature of persistence. Various papers have shown that corruption is a highly persistent phenomenon (e.g., Andvig and Moene, 1990; Herzfeld and Weiss, 2007). The emergence of widespread corruption and also its eradication evolves gradually. On the contrary, armed conflicts arise usually instantaneously related to a single incident.

- The expected relationship between GDP per capita levels and conflict on page 24 (third paragraph) is not supported by any source or data. Does it still base on Huntington or is it a hypothesis of the author? If so, it should be better supported with the help of some data.
- The flow of arguments is sometimes not clear. Does the discussion centres around a possible link between political instability and corruption (page 26ff.) or armed conflicts and corruption as stated in the title? Political instability might include armed conflicts but encompass much more. To treat peaceful change in power like in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 equivalently to change of governments due coups like in Iran 1979 or invasions from outside like in Afghanistan or Iraq provokes some doubts. The distinction between the different concepts is not clearly visible in the discussion of measurement issue and the Huntington theory.
- Most recent research casts doubt on the theory of resource curse (Bulte et al., 2005; Wick and Bulte, 2006; Brunnschweiler and Bulte, 2007).
- The paper could gain if the discussion centres more thoroughly on the stated aim of linking corruption and armed conflicts and additionally places the issue of corruption and its (potential) impact in relation to other determinants of armed conflicts.

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