

## **Probing the Recent Decade of Violent Conflict Globally and in Muslim Countries**

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### **Introduction**

Theories abound on the determinants of global civil violence. However, two lines of reasoning receive more attention than others: one concentrating on conflicts of ideas, culture, and religious beliefs, which tend to cause violence within national boundaries, and the other considering deprivation and grievances resulting from income differences and poverty, as well as the denial of political rights as root causes of rebellion and violence (Gurr 1970; Sen, 2008). The multiple consequences of violence include the destruction of infrastructure, losses to human and other capitals, and to social and political institutions, as well as injuries. (Blattman & Miguel, 2009; Collier 2006, 2007).

In our view contemporary reasons for public policy failures or interventions which may cause or prevent civil conflicts should be explored. This aim is fulfilled in our study. Western countries regard recent decades of rising global insecurity resulting from 'Islamic terrorism' rooted in the Middle East and South Asia, and these countries have waged joint efforts to curb its origins in recent decades. Cross-border terrorism, considered to originate from Muslim countries, is usually an offshoot of violent internal conflicts. Thus the research focus was made specific to Muslim majority countries to understand links between them and the occurrence of conflict, and whether those links are substantially different from or similar to the reasons for conflict in countries in the larger global sample.

### **Definitions and Technique**

For the investigation of the occurrence of conflicts, 160 countries with populations of at least one million as at the middle of the study period in 2005, are included (excluded were North Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong due to the unavailability of data for key variables).

This analysis adopts the definition of conflict from Conflict Barometer (2008). This publication classifies each conflict as crisis, severe crisis and, in its most extreme

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form, as civil war, represented by intensity levels of 3, 4 and 5 respectively. The classification of the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIK) differs from quantitative classifications of conflicts, which considers war to arise when 1,000 or more battle-related deaths occur in a year.<sup>4</sup> An absolute quantitative distinction of wars in practical terms is difficult to make (what if there are 999 deaths in a year or if there are different estimates which give different mortality figures?). Most importantly, it is difficult to count the exact number of victims during a conflict, particularly in developing countries with limited or sometimes concealed information. HIIK's qualitative classification identifies a crisis when at least one party uses violence: a severe crisis occurs when violence is used repeatedly in an organised way. Civil war is thus an aggravated form of severe armed conflict in which violent force is used continuously, and in an organised and systematic way.

### **Econometric Approach**

A binary Probit model is used where  $Y$  represents the presence/absence of conflict and the vector of regressors  $X$  from the data is assumed to influence the occurrence of conflict. A general specification of the model is:

$$\Pr(Y = 1 | X) = \Phi(X'\beta),$$

where  $\Pr$  denotes probability and  $\Phi$  is the cumulative distribution function (CDF) of the standard normal distribution. A country is coded 1 if conflict is reported during the study period, and is otherwise coded 0. Four groups of countries are analysed. One consists of 87 countries where conflicts of levels 3, 4 and 5 are reported by HIIK and are coded as 1 in the model. The second group comprises 45 countries (out of 87 countries in total) where severe violent crises or civil wars (level 4 and 5) occurred during the ten-year study period, and are coded as 1. A similar classification occurs among the two Muslim subsets. Tables 1 to 4 report empirical results with marginal effects.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### ***Countries with All Levels of Conflict***

The findings in Table 1 (Appendix 1), for models 1 to 7, the effects of per capita income, the index for developmental process (HDI), and democratic rights on conflict risk are highly significant. Infant mortality significantly associates with conflicts when the two manifestations for quality of life (health and education) are

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<sup>4</sup> This concept remains vague: as Sambanis (2004) notes, does it mean battle deaths or also civilian deaths?

grouped with democracy. The quality of public institutions in terms of the corruption index matters for the outbreak of conflicts in the last model along with political terror.

The results do not suggest strong linkages of conflicts with unemployment. However, this study observes that though the data set used is from credible international data sources, it is mostly collected and reported by individual countries, and may have measurement errors. For example, for Burundi, Benin, and Chad, adult unemployment rates are reported at just one percent by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), sourced from household surveys performed by the respective domestic institutions. This is close to full employment, which is doubtful for conflict-ridden developing countries.

### **Countries with Severe Conflicts and Wars**

Models 1 to 3 in Table 2 (Appendix 2), have similar significant results to those presented in Table 1. The index for quality of life (HDI) has a very high probability value of 0.62 for decreasing the conflict risk. Models 4, 5 and 6 are in contrast to the earlier analysis; democratic rights are the only significant factor which links with the high intensity conflict risk. Model 6 has similar findings as political rights are significant, but column 7 gives an unexpected result. Along with political terror, which is highly significant, increases in adult literacy rate decrease the probability of severe conflict at statistically significant levels. However, the probability value (-0.002) is quite low compared to other significant values.

### **Results from the Muslim Subset: All Levels of Conflicts**

Models 1, 2 and 3 in Table 3 (Appendix 3), have similar significant results as in the global analysis (consisting of non-Muslim and Muslim sets), but have different likelihoods for outbreak of conflicts, the highest being for HDI in model 3 alongside lack of democratic freedoms. The strong effects of human development achievements are validated by the data, which includes African Muslim countries such as Chad, Burkina Faso, Somalia, Niger, and countries in South Asia like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan,<sup>5</sup> which have low HDI performance. However, some exceptions in this subset are the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan with reasonable human development records. These mostly

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<sup>5</sup> HDI is not available for Afghanistan for the study period but other relevant indicators for development are quite low.

Middle Eastern examples are under monarchical or authoritarian rule, thus supporting the connection of low freedom with the occurrence of conflicts.

In model 7, adult literacy has a statistically significant effect on the probability of occurrence of conflict. Prevailing and past Muslim attitudes of negating non-religious education (sometimes a cost-based decision), contribute to the low literacy, which results in underemployment or unemployment.

### **Muslim Sub-set with Severe Crisis and Wars**

Models 1 to 4 in Table 4 (Appendix 4), provide similar findings as in the previous analysis. Lack of democracy remains statistically significant in all the models, when used as a predictor. Typically, as Stepan and Robertson (2003) conclude, while the lack of democracy is an observed phenomenon in Arab Muslim countries, not all Muslim countries lack democracy. Electoral freedom and political rights are present in non-Arab Muslim countries like Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia, in West-African Senegal, and in low-income Bangladesh and Pakistan.

Model 7 finds that a lower corruption index (indicating more corruption) in public institutions and the use of public office for private gain, significantly increases the likelihood of civil wars in Muslim countries. Of 17 countries having severe crises or wars, 14 Muslim countries have a CPI lower than 3.

### **Conclusions**

We probed violent conflicts and their connections with a range of income and developmental parameters. This study explores these connections purely in terms of public policy mistakes. The results and discussion provide more opportunity to identify possible interventions, and to decrease the chances of conflict.

This study observed the handicaps associated with accurate data availability for some variables like unemployment data, for a cross-country analysis. Further, this paper establishes that it matters how we classify conflicts. It gives varying strength to the explanatory variables. Health infrastructure matters more than educational opportunities in countries with low to high intensity crisis, while minimum educational attainment negatively links with conflicts in countries with wars.

The developmental index has significant value in decreasing the chances of conflict in Muslim majority countries. Moreover, corruption in model 7 (Table 4), contrary to the global sets, solely explains the occurrence of conflicts. The Muslim world has many dictatorships and kingdoms, some of which have been sustained for decades. For the continuity of authoritarian rule they rely on some welfare initiatives which they provide with wealth obtained from natural resources. Nevertheless, there is another side: not every country under dictatorial rule is rich in resources. Further,

well-functioning democracies perform better in development indicators than countries under benevolent dictatorships. The fundamental roots of violent conflict may lie here. In the vicious circle of poverty and deprivation, when voices remain unheard for long periods, hardly any choice is left for the deprived other than violence.

***Keywords: Civil war, Muslim countries and Terrorism, Economic development and conflict, Democracy and conflict***

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