

The Oxford Handbook of Africa and Economics: Volume 1: Context and Concepts

Célest n Monga (ed.), Just n Y fu L n (ed.)

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199687114.001.0001>

Published: 2015

Online ISBN: 9780191767012

Print ISBN: 9780199687114

CHAPTER

38 The Economics of Violent Conflict and War in Africa

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199687114.013.15> Pages 705–723

Published: 03 November 2014

Abstract

During the past 50 years Africa has experienced high levels of violent conflict. Historically, African wars have not led to state formation but have been destructive in character. Resulting weak states have found it difficult to deter rebellions. Since the end of the Cold War the number of conflicts has declined worldwide but Africa has not followed the global trend. Predictions suggest that African conflict levels will remain high. This chapter examines the commonly cited causes of violent conflict, such as historical, geographic, demographic and economic factors. One conclusion is that there is no evidence for an African exceptionalism: the global models explain the African experience; there is no need for an Africa-specific model.

Keywords: [violent conflict](#), [civil war](#), [state capacity](#), [state formation](#), [ethnicity](#), [poverty](#), [grievances](#)

Subject: [International Economics](#), [Economic Development and Growth](#), [Economics](#)

Series: [Oxford Handbooks](#)

Collection: [Oxford Handbooks Online](#)

38.1 Introduction

OVER the past 50 years the prevalence of violent conflict has been high in Africa: about 30 percent of all conflicts took place in Africa. These conflicts kill and maim combatants as well as civilians and are accompanied by torture, (child) abductions, sexual violence, hunger, disease, and trauma. The estimates of the cost of the average civil war in a low-income country range from US\$64bn (Collier and Hoeffler 2004a) to around US\$120bn (Dunne 2013). These are conservative estimates because they do not include the global cost of conflict (e.g. terrorism, people, and drug trafficking).

Civil wars in Africa have been longer and more devastating than elsewhere. The world's most deadly war since World War II was the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1998–2004), where violence and disease killed an estimated 3.9 million people (Coghlan et al. 2006). The key question this chapter seeks to answer is why Africa has experienced so much violent political conflict. The decision to focus on political

violence is somewhat arbitrary and leaves out other forms of violence (e.g. genocide, homicide, organized crime, intimate partner violence). The different types of violence may have common causes (Pinker 2012) but there is so far only a nascent economic literature on other forms of violence in Africa.

The chapter is structured in the following way. The second section sets the scene by presenting some data: Africa has become more conflict prone since the 1960s, civil wars have lasted longer and have resulted in more battle-related deaths than elsewhere. The third section examines the causes and correlates of violent conflict. History, geography, demography, and economic factors are discussed in turn. Some of these factors reinforce each other, resulting in high prevalence rates in Africa. Since African countries are ethnically diverse, the discussion critically reviews the evidence on ethnic wars. Section four concludes.

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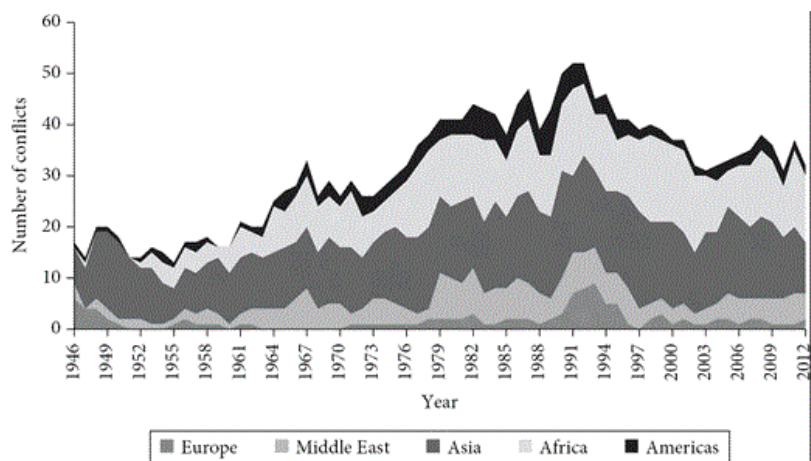
38.2 Data Overview: How Much Violent Conflict Has Africa Experienced?

The data overview is based on the Armed Conflict Dataset, collected by Uppsala Data Conflict Program and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (Themnér and Wallensteen 2011; Gleditsch et al. 2002). This data set provides conflict data since the end of World War II and gives information on the adversaries and conflict location, and categorizes violent conflicts in terms of intensity and conflict type. Conflicts are defined as organized effective violent opposition to the government; this excludes genocides, pogroms, and communal violence. “Minor armed conflict” is limited to 25–999 battle deaths per year, while “major armed conflicts” or “wars” cause at least 1,000 battle-related deaths per year. Military as well as civilian deaths are counted as “battle related.” In addition to the intensity of conflict, the Armed Conflict Dataset also provides information on the type of conflict. A distinction is made between four types: (i) extra-systemic conflicts, mainly wars of independence, (ii) interstate conflicts, (iii) internal conflicts, and (iv) internationalized internal conflicts. Figure 38.1 depicts the global prevalence of all violent conflicts, this includes minor as well as major conflicts and all types of conflict. The number of conflicts peaked in 1991/92 at 52 conflicts. Since then the world has become more peaceful, but Africa has not followed this global trend. The number of conflicts in Africa increased until the 1970s and since then the number of conflicts has remained relatively high, ranging from 10 to 16 conflicts per year (with the exception of seven conflicts in 2005).

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Did Africa experience different types of conflict? Africa had a number of extra-systemic conflicts, for example the Mau Mau Uprising in Kenya from 1952 to 1956, but the last wars of this type were the Mozambican and Angolan Wars of Independence, ending in 1974. Interstate wars have been rare in Africa, the only interstate wars were between Ethiopia/ Somalia, Chad/Libya, and Eritrea/Ethiopia. Like in the rest of the world, the overwhelming type of violent political conflict has been internal.

Figure 38.1



Global prevalence of violent conflicts, 1946-2012.

Table 38.1 Severity of violent conflicts, 1946-2012

	Minor and major armed conflict battle related deaths	Minor and major armed conflict duration in years	Major armed conflict duration in years
Africa	8,565	3.2	6.8
Other Regions	4,830	3.9	3.9

Sources: Column 1 UCDP Battle Related Deaths Dataset V5 2013 and columns 2&3 UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset V4 2013, own calculations.

Figures are means of inter- and intrastate conflicts.

Since 1960 Africa has accounted for about 30 percent of all of the global conflicts in the average year. Compare this to making up about 9 percent of the world population (in 1960) or accounting for 23 percent of the global landmass. Is this high prevalence of conflict likely to persist in the future? In 2009/10 about 15 percent of all countries experienced internal armed conflict and Hegre et al. (2013) estimate that this global prevalence rate will fall to seven percent in 2050. Based on their analysis, sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely to follow this global downward trend, in particular East, Central, and Southern Africa will remain conflict prone.

How severe have Africa's conflicts been? Table 38.1 presents some data on battle deaths and the duration of conflict. African conflicts have been more devastating in terms of loss of life; they resulted in almost double the number of fatalities than conflicts in other regions. Conflicts have also lasted longer: Africa's civil wars lasted 75 percent longer than in other regions. Once African wars started they go on for a long time.

38.3 Why Has Africa Experienced so Much Conflict?

The discussion now turns to why Africa has experienced so much violent conflict. The focus is on explaining internal conflict or civil war because it is the most common form of violent conflict. There is now a considerable body of literature on the causes of civil war (for overviews, see Hoeffler 2012; Blattman and Miguel 2010). The bulk of this literature provides empirical evidence while a smaller number of works sets out a theoretical framework (e.g. Bates 2008a, b; Besley and Persson 2011a, b; Gates 2002; Grossman 1991).

One explanation could be that Africa is exceptional. There could be African-specific factors that explain the continent's conflict prevalence. A number of studies examine this possibility, but they find no evidence of an African exceptionalism (Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2002a; Goldstone et al. 2010). Factors that explain civil wars elsewhere also explain the outbreak of civil war in Africa. The region is more conflict prone because factors that increase the risk are unfavorable in Africa: on average there are high levels of poverty, low economic growth, poor state capacity, and high dependence on natural resources. Thus, the following discussion concentrates on the empirical evidence on the causes of violent conflict based on global panel studies. There will be no use of Africa specific models, instead the argument will give special consideration to the economic, social, and political circumstances in Africa.

One of the underlying assumptions in the economic literature on civil war is that a rebellion requires the maintenance of a private army. Members of this rebel army have to be recruited, cohesion within this force has to be maintained, and military operations have to be financed. Thus, the political economy literature has concentrated on rebel recruitment and finance issues rather than on the motivation to rebel. Large n studies as well as country case studies suggest that there are a number of correlates of war. There is considerable evidence that a history of past conflicts, poverty, and poor growth performance are correlated with civil war risk (Hegre et al. 2001; Collier and Hoeffler 2004b; Fearon and Laitin 2003). In addition to these large n studies a number of idiosyncratic factors have been considered in the literature. Examples include the study of asset inequality in Uganda (Deininger 2003), the provision of local public goods in Nigeria (Oyefusi 2008) and Sierra Leone (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008), stock market returns on diamond mining companies in Angola (Guidolin and La Ferrara 2007), and propaganda in Rwanda (Yanagizawa 2014).

The discussion now turns to the most commonly identified factors that are associated with the risk of violent conflict.

38.3.1 History

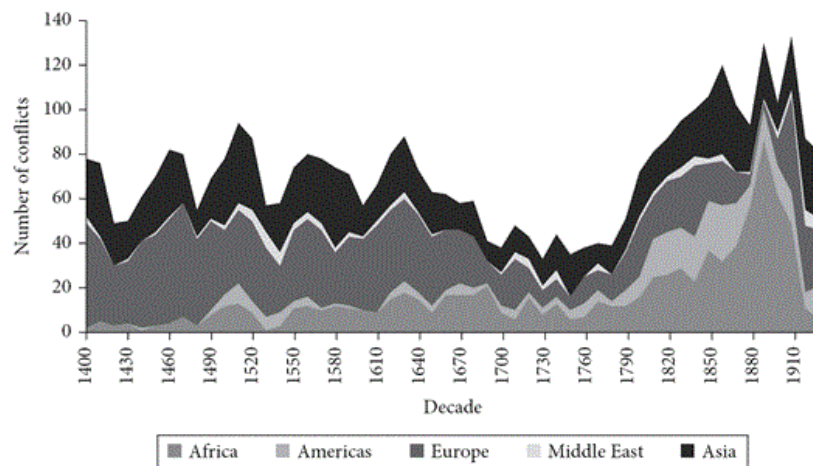
Past history of conflict has been identified as a robust predictor of future conflict (Hegre and Sambanis 2006). The definition of past conflict typically only covers conflicts since World War II, but recent empirical work on Africa by Besley and Reynal-Querol (2014) goes much further back in history. Their analysis suggests that violent conflicts during 1400–1700 are positively correlated with conflicts in the same location during the years 1997–2010. For a shorter time horizon these results are confirmed by Fearon and Laitin (2012): violent conflicts before 1945 are correlated with conflict after 1945, they take this as evidence for conflict persistence. While these empirical long run studies have been carefully conducted it is less clear *why* conflict is persistent in Africa and why the region has become so conflict prone. The following discussion sums up some of the historical evidence that may help us to understand Africa's conflict experience.

38.3.1.1 Historical data

How does Africa's historical experience of conflict compare to the rest of the world? Brecke (1999) offers global conflict data, covering the period 1400–1999. His definition covers any conflict in which two or more social groups pursue conflicting political goals that result in fatalities. At least one of the groups has to be organized, follow authoritative leadership and the conflict has to produce at least 32 deaths per year. Brecke records 3,708 violent conflicts and three examples of African conflicts are the Fulani–Hausa war (Nigeria), 1790–1801, the First Zulu War (South Africa) 1838–40, and the Hut Tax War (Britain–Sierra Leone), 1898.

Using only data up to World War II, Figure 38.2 shows the number of violent conflicts by decade and disaggregated by region. Globally, conflict prevalence was high until the middle of the seventeenth century. This is largely due to the number of violent conflicts in Europe; Africa experienced relatively little violent conflict during this time. The number of violent conflicts worldwide drops during the eighteenth century, mainly a result of a more peaceful Europe. At around 1780 the number of violent conflicts rises and African conflicts contribute to a considerable extent to this rise. During the period 1790–1890 African conflicts account for more than one third of all conflicts. In the 1890s the number of conflicts in Africa peaked at 87.

Figure 38.2



Global prevalence of violent conflicts, 1400–1939.

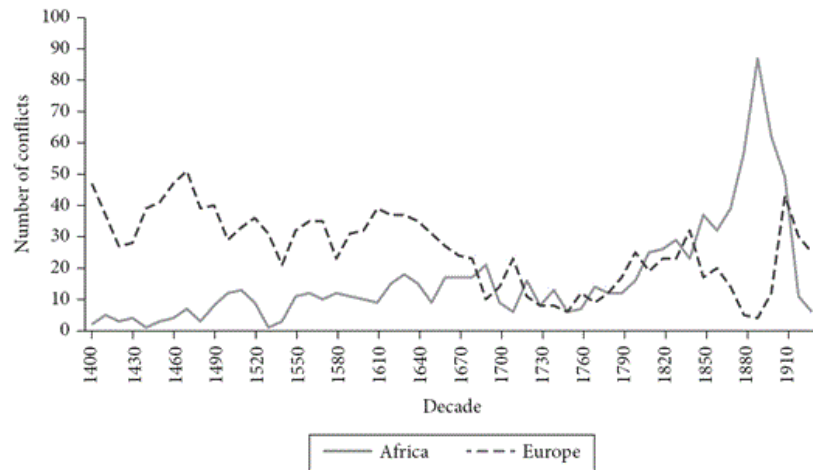
Apart from the nineteenth century, historical conflict levels in Africa have been low. In particular the two transformative periods of colonization (1880–1914) and de-colonization (late 1950s, early 1960s) are characterized by low conflict prevalence.

38.3.2 The role of war in state formation

The comparison between Africa and Europe is instructive, because the European experience has been the opposite to Africa (Figure 38.3). Historically Europe has had high levels of violent conflict but has remained largely peaceful since World War II. Tilly (1975, 1990) suggests that war in Europe was fundamental to state formation. Leaders faced threats from within and outside their territories and they encouraged military innovation such as the development of firearms and mass armies. This made warfare expensive and as a result only states with large populations and strong tax systems were able to pay for security. War between European nations defined the number and boundaries of European states. The main phase of state formation came to an end with the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the number of violent conflicts in Europe declined. Taxation for the purposes of conducting war shaped European societies in a number of ways. Over time the taxed populations demanded greater accountability from their governments, leading ultimately to the modern democratic state (Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 2012). These democracies provide security and prosperity for their populations.

p 710 Warfare also shaped the African state, society, and economy (for a discussion see Reid 2012). However, in Africa wars were fought over different issues, they were fought differently, and they did not result in a process of state formation. Historically, Africa had many political units and forms of organizing society: villages, city states, nation-states, and empires. Centralized military states were rare because they can only develop under certain conditions. Arable soil, nearby rivers, and/or reliable rainfall are essential for an agriculturally based society to form surpluses in order to maintain armies for any period of time. Examples of such societies were along the river Niger, in Zimbabwe and in the Ethiopian Highlands. But most of Africa was characterized by low population density, rugged terrain, and challenging climate. Territorial boundaries were difficult to maintain due to the costly logistical challenges of providing security. Thus, wars were typically not fought over land but people, the scarce resource in Africa. During the nineteenth century the number of conflicts increased for a number of interrelated reasons. First, the abolition of the transatlantic slave in 1807 led to a decline of the slave trade in West Africa. This empowered interests that rivaled existing authorities, and political leaders resorted to violence in order to maintain their influence. In other parts of Africa slave exports increased after 1807 and were produced through violence (Fenske and Kala 2015). Second, Africa experienced a military revolution (Reid 2012). The changes in military technology and the diffusion of this technology resulted in the increased use of firearms and the professionalization of the military corps. Third, European powers were involved in more than half of all conflicts in Africa during the nineteenth century (Brecke 1999). For example the French fought in modern day Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Mauritania and the British in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Figure 38.3



Prevalence of violent conflicts in Africa and Europe, 1400–1939.

38.3.2.1 The imperial peace

p 711 The colonial powers partitioned Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, disregarding any boundaries of existing territorial entities. Herbst (2000) argues that the colonial powers were not able to project power over these annexed territories for the same reasons African rulers had not been able to do so: the terrain and climate in many regions of Africa are so challenging that it is not cost-effective to exert full territorial control. The brutality of colonial rule was not a sign of control but a result of the limited and incomplete power colonizers could project. The armed resistance against colonial rule took mainly the form of skirmishes and ambushes. Thus, with colonial rule (1880s to 1914) came a decline of violent conflict, also referred to as the “Imperial Peace,” and Bates (2014) suggests that this delayed Africa’s development. Like in Europe violence had shaped a number of prosperous polities in Africa, but colonial rule destroyed this link between security and prosperity. The European colonizers ruled through local elites and this style of imperial rule created rent seeking opportunities for local political leaders, hampering economic development.

38.3.2.2 Independence

In the twentieth century most African states became independent without violent struggles (notable exceptions are Algeria, Angola, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe). Overwhelmingly the new African governments accepted the boundaries as defined by their colonizers in the nineteenth century (Herbst 2000). None of the economically unviable, small states disappeared, resulting in poor prospects of succeeding as sovereign states. Africa’s new ruling elite wanted to maximize their chance of political survival by maintaining a link with the former colonial powers that provided military and economic support. Redesigning African states would have weakened this link. Like all the previous rulers, leaders in independent Africa faced the same problems with projecting power over their territories. Having accepted the existing order, they were left with firm external borders but weak internal control that turned into turmoil within these borders. Bates (2008c) provides an in depth analysis of political disorder and weak states in Africa.

One consequence of the colonial borders is that states have a number of ethnic groups and typically African countries are characterized by high ethnic diversity. This is associated with lower economic performance, poorer provision of public goods, less trust (Alesina et al. 1999, Easterly and Levine 1997; Kimenyi 2006), and makes it difficult to form a national identity. Boundaries also split ethnic groups, resulting in higher levels of violence (Michalopoulos and Papaioannou 2011; Gleditsch 2007).

However, ethnic differences do not necessarily result in political differences. Colonial boundaries can be interpreted as the source of a “natural experiment” and a comparison of ethnic groups across borders suggests that the right policies can bridge social divisions and have a positive impact on economic outcomes (Miguel 2004: Kenya and Tanzania). The comparison of Malawi and Zambia shows that cultural differences do not necessarily lead to political differences, but they can be manipulated for political gain (Posner 2004).

38.3.3 Geography

Certain geographic characteristics may favor rebellion. This section presents an overview of the current knowledge of the correlation between terrain, natural resources, climate change and the risk of civil war.

p 712 38.3.3.1 Terrain and borders

Mountainous and densely forested terrain is more difficult to control, making it difficult for rulers to project power over their territory. The global cross-country evidence supports the claim that mountainous countries are more conflict prone but forest cover is insignificant (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hegre and Sambanis 2006; Collier et al. 2008).

Another geographic characteristic that can make government control difficult is “non-contiguity.” Countries with territory holdings that are separated from the capital city are “non-contiguous” and these countries are more conflict prone (Fearon and Laitin 2003). An African example is Cabinda Province (Angola); it has been home to an armed independence movement. Although there is some evidence that wars have spillover effects, that is, that they lower growth in neighboring countries (Murdoch and Sandler 2002), there is no strong evidence that wars in neighboring countries spill over and make civil war more likely (Hegre and Sambanis 2006).

38.3.3.2 Natural resources

There are a number of reasons why primary commodity dependence can make a country more conflict prone. The volatility of global primary commodity prices makes economic management difficult. Primary commodities also generate location-specific “rents” which can provide large non-tax income for the state or any other organization that controls the territory. These rents tend to weaken state capacity and may provide an income stream for rebels. Thus, rents and volatility create multiple routes by which primary commodity dependence may be linked to the risk of conflict.

Collier and Hoeffler (2004b) find that countries with a high ratio of primary commodity exports to gross domestic product (GDP) are more conflict prone. They interpret this as support for the hypothesis that local rents can help to finance rebellion. They use an aggregate measure of primary commodity exports; it includes agricultural products, oil, and minerals. This aggregation makes it impossible to examine *why* natural resources are associated with higher conflict risk.

Le Billon (2001) argues that point resources (e.g. oil) and diffuse resources (e.g. coffee, alluvial diamonds) generate different types of rents. Rents from diffuse resources may be used to finance rebellion while point resources may motivate rebellion. There is evidence that oil exporters have a higher risk of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003). This can be explained in different ways. Oil-producing countries tend to have weaker institutional capacity (e.g. Ross 2012; De Soysa and Neumayer 2007). These states may not be capable to deter rebellion. Or they may neither be capable nor willing to distribute their oil wealth evenly, causing grievances which lead to civil war. A related hypothesis is that the oil wealth is a honey pot that motivates rebellion.

Diffuse resources can potentially finance rebellion. Lujala et al. (2005) use sub-national data and find that locations with alluvial diamonds are more likely to experience conflict, providing some evidence that diamonds have been used to finance conflict. Thus, there are multiple channels through which the conflict enhancing effect of natural resources can manifest itself. On average, African countries have a small manufacturing base, many are resource dependent, and it seems likely that more natural resources will be discovered in the future. The World Bank's survey of global sub-soil assets in 2000 suggests that Africa has got fewer sub-soil assets than other regions (Collier 2010). This may be due to Africa's geology, or more likely because large parts of the continent have not been surveyed. Violent conflict has been an important reason why international companies have not explored and exploited sub-soil assets. Recent discoveries of oil in Ghana and Uganda and gas in Tanzania and Mozambique indicate that more natural resources are likely to be discovered across the continent.

38.3.3.3 Resource scarcity and climate change

International studies of climate change suggest that global temperatures have increased, precipitation has decreased, and that our climate has become more volatile. The world is experiencing more extreme climate events, such as floods, storms, and droughts. The combination of decreased land precipitation and increased temperatures enhance evapotranspiration and drying, that is, leading to more frequent droughts (IPCC 2007). These changes in climate are often cited as drivers of conflict (e.g. Homer-Dixon 1999), and the studies by Burke et al. (2009) and Hsiang et al. (2013) found that climate change leads to an increased risk of conflict.

Climate change can affect violent conflict through a number of channels. Buhaug et al. (2008) discussed the effect of climate change on (i) economic instability, (ii) political instability, (iii) social fragmentation, (iv) migration, and whether this results in a higher risk of violent conflict. There may also be inappropriate responses to climate change that increase the risk of conflict. One example is the production of biofuels and the associated price rise for staple foods. However, they found no empirical evidence that climate change increases conflict prevalence. This is also confirmed by a number of other panel studies (e.g. Buhaug 2010; de Soysa 2002; Theisen et al. 2013), and by a study of conflict in Kenya (Theisen 2012).

To conclude, the evidence for a positive relationship between climate change and the prevalence of violent conflict is weak and some of the political debate on the impact of climate change on conflict appears to be running ahead of the academic evidence (Theisen et al. 2013).

38.3.4 Demography

Different measures of population have been considered in the civil war literature. Since most studies use a measure of violent conflict that is based on absolute death thresholds, the total population is typically included in the regressions to control for size effects. Countries with larger populations have a higher risk of war. This may be because a large population is made up by a number of distinct groups, or because the territory is larger. Raleigh and Hegre (2009) used sub-national data for Africa and found that conflict events are clustered in peripheral regions with high population densities. This may proxy the value of a location, thus indicating that conflict is fought over more valuable territory. Fearon and Laitin (2011) and Toft (2003) suggested that many conflicts in remote areas are ethnic based. Geographic concentration makes coordination and communication easier and therefore strengthens the group's capability to mobilize a rebel army. The long distance to the capital makes it difficult for the government to police the ethnic group's activities. The discussion now turns to other population characteristics that are of particular importance for Africa: ethnic diversity and youth bulges.

38.3.4.1 Ethnicity

If we understand internal violent conflict as the result of societal groups organizing armed opposition to the government, we have to explain collective action (Hoeffler 2011). Groups can form along ethnic, religious, or class distinctions. However, there is relatively little cross-country evidence that religion or class is associated with violent conflict (see Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2003; Gates and Murshed 2006; Macours 2009, for analyses of religion and class). It may be that groups defined by religion or class are not sufficiently cohesive to form the basis of collective action. Another possible explanation is that religion cuts across ethnicity and class and may thus unify diverse societies (Selway 2011).

In the civil war literature the role of ethnicity has received a lot of debate. The most commonly used proxy is ethno-linguistic fractionalization; it measures the probability that two randomly drawn individuals from a given country do not speak the same language (Alesina et al. 2003). Regional comparisons indicate that Africa is the most ethnically diverse continent (Easterly and Levine 1997). An alternative measure is ethnic polarization. Esteban and Ray (1994) and Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2005) argued that group size and cultural distance between groups matter. If groups are very small they may not be able to mobilize sufficient support and ethnic groups which are similar to each other may not perceive ethnicity as a salient cleavage.

There is some limited empirical support for the hypothesis that more ethnically diverse societies have a higher risk of conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 2012; Collier et al. 2009) but other studies find no significant correlation (Hegre et al. 2001; Wimmer et al. 2009). Thus, it appears that the relationship between ethnic diversity and civil war onset is not robust. However, Hegre and Sambanis (2006) provide evidence that ethnic diversity is robustly correlated with the onset of lower level violent conflicts. There is little evidence that ethnic polarization is correlated with the onset of civil war, but appears to be positively correlated with its prevalence (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005). Prevalence analysis considers onset periods as well as subsequent war periods and is thus a conflation of onset and duration. It may be that polarization is not important for war starts but more important to sustain a war once it has started.

What are the reasons for these weak results? One possibility is that ethnicity is a much more dynamic concept than commonly assumed. Broadly speaking, primordialists believe people with the same biological features, beliefs, and cultural traditions form distinctive groups. They argue that the deep and longstanding differences between groups cause conflicts in diverse societies (Horowitz 1985; Huntington 1996). Constructivists stress the importance of the socially constructed nature of ethnic groups, drawing on Anderson's concept of the imagined community (Anderson 2006). People have to imagine themselves as part of a group because they cannot maintain a personal relationship with all the other group members. Over time new identities are constructed (Ahlerup and Olsson 2012). One example is the distinction between Hutus and Tutsis (Lemarchand 2009). There is no genetic difference between these two groups and they speak the same language. The distinction goes back to a tax classification system during Belgian colonization and has been reinforced through cycles of violence and exile. Tragically, the examples of Rwanda and Burundi demonstrate that imagined and mythologized ethnicity can be instrumentalized and result in genocides and civil wars.

The results in Fearon and Laitin (2012) provide some support for the hypothesis that ethnicity should be understood as an endogenous concept in the study of violent conflict. While ethnic diversity measured in the nineteenth century is positively correlated with violent conflicts before World War II and ethnic diversity measured after 1945 is correlated with violent conflicts after World War II, the nineteenth century measure is uncorrelated with violence after 1945. This runs counter to the suggestion that deep and longstanding differences between groups are to blame for recent violent conflicts.

Another explanation for the weak ethnicity results is that conflicts are labeled as ethnic but that they are not fought by people because of their ethnicity (Regan 2009, chapter 7). Whatever the true motivation of rebel

leaders is, they do not recruit randomly from the entire population. Ethnic groups provide an ideal recruitment pool. Their shared experiences (of real or perceived discrimination) make it easier to motivate collective action and the threat and use of social sanctions curbs free riding (Fearon and Laitin 1996). The circumstances that lead to a civil war outbreak are often complex and ethnicity is a tool for mobilization. But ethnicity may not be the cause of the war.

38.3.4.2 Youth bulges

Research on attitudes and participation indicates that young men have a taste for rebellion and that they are more likely to join one (e.g. MacCulloch and Pezzini 2007; Oyefusi 2008; Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). Sub-Saharan Africa's population is young: 10- to 24-year-olds make up one-third of the population (United Nations 2013). Large cohorts create problems of unemployment, institutional bottlenecks, and the crowding of urban centers. This generates grievances and lowers the cost of recruitment into an opposition movement. Urdal (2006) finds no evidence that youth bulges (defined as the proportion of 14–25 year olds) are significant in civil war onset regressions but are significant in models explaining terrorism, rioting, violent demonstrations, and lower levels of political violent conflict. Thus, the young are more likely to rebel but their numbers are not the decisive factor in the scaling up of small conflicts.

38.3.5 Income: levels and growth

38.3.5.1 Level of income

The level of per capita income is included in most empirical studies of civil war. It was found to be significant in the studies of attitudes to rebellion (MacCulloch and Pezzini 2007) and in the analysis of participation (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008). Cross-country results also show a strong link between income and civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Collier and Hoeffler 2004b; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). The sign of this partial correlation is negative, that is, low average income makes civil war more likely. Although this is one of the most common results in this literature there are concerns whether we can really interpret this as a causal relationship. Many countries experience repeat conflict and are caught in a conflict trap (Collier et al. 2003), making low income a cause as well as a consequence of conflict.

Apart from endogeneity concerns, it is also unclear how to interpret this result. Collier and Hoeffler (2004b) suggest that low incomes are synonymous with low opportunity costs, facilitating recruitment. But average per capita income captures a number of different social, economic, and political processes and outcomes. It does not only proxy economic outcomes, which are largely due to state capacity, but also proxies grievance due to poverty as well as opportunity costs of recruitment. Thus, it is unclear which type of explanation (state capacity, grievance, feasibility) receives more support from this empirical result.

38.3.5.2 Income growth

Income growth is another variable that is robustly correlated with civil war onset. Typically studies measure growth before the outbreak of the civil war. However, measuring growth before the war still raises concerns about endogeneity, growth rates may be low because economic agents perceive the risk of war as high. For their analysis of African civil war Miguel et al. (2004) used rainfall data to instrument for growth rates. Rainfall is a valid instrument in their study, because African growth is to a high degree determined by agricultural output which depends on rainfall. This instrumental variable analysis suggests that growth shocks cause civil wars in Africa.

38.3.6 Aid

African countries receive large amounts of development aid: it makes up about 11 percent of their GDP; this compares to under 7 percent in other recipient countries.² Theoretically, aid could either increase or decrease the risk of conflict (see Grossman 1991; Azam 2012) and it can have a direct impact on the risk of conflict or via other variables such as for example growth. In addition, different types of aid may have a differential impact on the incidence of civil war: food aid may have a different impact to budget support.

38.3.6.1 Food aid and civil war

Allegedly, in a number of cases the misappropriation of food aid has promoted conflict (Anderson 1999), and this qualitative evidence has been assessed by Nunn and Qian (2014). Their analysis suggests that US food aid increases the risk and duration of violent conflict. In order to address endogeneity concerns, they use US wheat production as an instrumental variable. US weather shocks and government price stabilization policies determine the amount of food aid, thus providing an exogenous source of variation for food aid. The evidence suggests that food aid increases the risk of minor armed conflicts (25–999 battle-related deaths), but the evidence is weaker for civil wars. Although the results on food aid are convincing, they may not be that important for the contemporaneous risk of conflict. Over the past decade the share of food aid in total aid has decreased to about 2 percent.³ Thus, unless food aid becomes more important in the near future, it is unlikely to significantly increase the risk of conflict.

38.3.6.2 Development aid as a peace-building strategy

What is the relationship between aid, irrespective of purpose, and conflict? Development aid could potentially reduce the risk of conflict directly. Aid increases the government budget and since aid is fungible these additional funds can be used to increase military expenditure (Collier and Hoeffler 2007) and thus deter rebellion or suppress it. Transfers to potential rebel groups could also be used to deter rebellion (Azam 1995). However, there is no empirical evidence that aid has a direct effect on conflict risk (Collier and Hoeffler 2002b; de Ree and Nillesen 2009).

However, aid could potentially lower the risk of conflict by increasing growth and income. Growth and income are robustly correlated with the risk of conflict and if aid increases growth and cumulatively income, aid may reduce the risk of war through increased growth. Despite the vast literature on the economic impact of aid on growth (e.g. Burnside and Dollar 2000; Dalggaard et al. 2004) there is no evidence of a robust causal relationship between aid and growth (Rajan and Subramanian 2008). Thus, aid is unlikely to affect the risk of conflict through growth.

Another line of inquiry is whether aid can help to stabilize post-conflict countries and reduce the high rate of recurrence. Collier and Hoeffler (2004c) and Hoeffler et al. (2011) focus their analysis on whether aid can enhance post-conflict growth, also referred to as the peace dividend. In contrast to the general literature on aid and growth, they find that aid has a positive effect on growth in post-war economies. However, the effect is moderate: an extra one percent of aid increases growth by about 0.75 percent. Importantly, these results do not hold in violent post-war situations, aid in violent post-war situations has no growth enhancing effect (Hoeffler et al 2011).

38.4 Conclusion

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Since the 1960s Africa has experienced relatively high levels of political violent conflict and this chapter examines why this is the case. Explanations center on historical, political and economic arguments. Historical data suggest that pre-colonial Africa was not a violent region (with the exception of the nineteenth century). This is due to the geographic, demographic, and political characteristics of the continent. The terrain is rugged, making the projection of force costly. Furthermore, the continent was sparsely populated, with few large political entities that were interested and capable of prolonged warfare over land. Africans were more likely to engage in skirmishes and ambushes to capture people, the scarce resource on the continent. The two transformative periods of colonization (1880–1914) and de-colonization (late 1950s, early 1960s) are characterized by low levels of violent conflict. Since the 1960s Africa has experienced an increase in violent conflicts, apart from a few exceptions all of these conflicts were internal not international. Civil wars lasted longer and were significantly more deadly than in other world regions. Globally, the number of conflicts has declined since the end of the Cold War but this is not the case in Africa. Predictions suggest that the number of conflicts is likely to remain high, especially in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa.

There is evidence that locations with historical conflict are more conflict prone; this is termed conflict persistence. While the statistical correlation is not in dispute it is unclear *why* past conflict during the (pre-)colonial era is correlated with modern violent conflict. Besley and Reynal-Querol (2014) suggest that violence has long-term consequences, shaping attitudes, trust, and national identity. However, based on the analysis by Fearon and Laitin (2012), it appears less likely that the recent conflicts are rooted in “ancient hatreds,” but that they are due to the impact past wars had on the formation of strong states that successfully prevent opposition movements from arming and scaling up (Herbst 2000; Reid 2012). In Europe warfare determined state formation and capacity and led ultimately to the development of democratic institutions. In Africa, the experience of warfare shaped modern states in a very different manner. Warfare did not result in state formation, instead colonization generated African states with fixed external boundaries but weak internal control. Thus, making them vulnerable to political violent conflict.

Furthermore, panel data evidence suggests that low income and poor economic growth cause violent conflict. There is somewhat weaker evidence that ethnic diversity and youth bulges are correlated with violent conflict. Countries rich in natural resources have experienced more conflict, while resource scarcity (due to climate change) does not appear to increase the risk of conflict. Development aid has no effect on the likelihood of conflict onset but it supports post-conflict growth, in turn preventing the recurrence of conflict. However, this peace dividend can only be enhanced in truly peaceful situations, not if there is low-level ongoing conflict.

On average African countries are distinctly different from other developing countries. They are poorer, are dependent on natural resources, and have experienced growth collapses. The high number of violent conflicts can be explained by these factors, there is nothing exceptional about conflict in Africa and therefore no evidence for an African exceptionalism.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Charles Anderton, Robert Bates, Tim Besley, Peter Brecke, James Fearon, James Fenske and David Laitin for helpful comments and suggestions. All remaining errors are my own. This work has received funding from the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013) under grant agreement no. 290752.

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Notes

- 1 For further discussion, see Auty (2001) and the special issue of the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2005, vol. 49, issue 4).
- 2 World Development Indicators 2010, own calculations.
- 3 OECD/DAC data for 2000–2010, own calculations.