Civil Wars: Relationship Between Conflicts And Natural Resources

Intro

In history, people have fought because of their ethnic differences. However, let's not generalize and associate ethnic differences with civil wars. I argue that large diversities do not necessarily increase the chances of social conflicts. Over the decades' many nations have been able to live cohesively with various distinct groups within their communities. It may be possible that the reason for civil wars may not come for grievance but rather from grief. My question is; Does economic grief cause civil wars?

Theory

Some scholars defined and divide the causes of civil wars into two explanations 'greed' and 'grievance'. Those two identifications allow understanding if a conflict is created by economic or ethnic conflicts. During a study ordered by the World Bank, two scholars, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler defined those two principles and created a debate about whether civil wars start because of 'Greed or Grievance'. Grief occurs is when individuals try to increase their well-being by creating a rebellion. Indeed, grief conflicts are associated with economic reasons. If a group starts a rebellion because it has been deprived of economic goods it would most likely be identified as grief conflict. Grievance happens when people start rebellions over racial, ethnicity, religion(Collier and Hoeffler, 2002). Not all scholars have accepted Collier-Hoeffler's model, some believe that other effects may lead to civil wars.

Civil wars occurring because of grief are more likely to occur in countries with poor economies and large differences in wealth between groups (Collier and Hoeffler, 2002).

If we follow the Collier-Hoeffler model countries whose wealth depends largely on the outcomes of natural resources those countries are exposed to civil war. For the two researchers, if we wish to understand the causes of civil wars, we should ignore grievance-based justifications and instead look to the side of the conflict. the grief that rebel groups try to obtain. Some conflicts may appear as they were started because of grievance, but instead, greed may be the primary reason for conflicts. If a group owns and controls the wealth a contender group may rebel. Ones the rebellion started “grief” may join itself to the conflict and create hatred between ethnic groups.

Hypo

Collier and Hoeffler affirm that to find an explanation for civil wars one should identify the greed first. For them, Grievance on its own cannot be sufficient. I argue that civil wars may occur mainly because of greed. I can look at plausible greed reasons. Controlling natural resources can be a benefit for the groups that own power. Groups that monopolize natural resources may be a good reason for rebel groups to engage in conflict. Natural resources could provide the means to finance rebellions. However, natural resources can be a source of revenue for rebels,

but they might be motivated by other interests than the resources themselves. Also, as is often the case, natural resources are concentrated within a particular region of a country, the belief that a group can find prosperity due to its control and not sharing the natural resources can spread among dissatisfied groups. Finally, the sense of injustice in the distribution of wealth may be greater for those derived from natural resources than for other forms of wealth. Governments that rely more on natural resources than on taxes for their survival can lack capabilities to create strong institutions. This can lead to weak state structures. Resource-dependent economies may be more vulnerable as it creates only one source of revenue. If a country relies only on its natural resources it may not allow other sectors to develop. This could produce instability and dissatisfaction within the deprived groups. The literature on the reasons why civil war originates from resource control brings me to form my hypothesis. Grief over natural resources is associated with conflict.

Results and discussion:

I focus on the relationship between conflicts and natural resources so I will only study countries that rely on a high mineral dependence such as Angola, the Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville), and Sierra Leone. Qualitative research has been conducted to see whether or not natural resources can be a starting point for conflict. Different mechanisms may help to explain the conflict around natural resources. I will look at how the variables apply to Angola, Congo-Brazzaville and Sierra Leone. Angola and Congo-Brazzaville are highly dependent on their oil resources. While Sierra Leone has diamonds that make the country highly dependent on the extraction of its mineral.

The grievance was not the primary reason for conflict in the Angola and Congo civil wars(Ross,2005). However, with Sierra Leone, it is ambiguous whether or not ethnic conflict did play a role in the civil war. When the revolutionary group (RUF) invade the region where the diamond mines where the government sent the army to retake possession of its resource. However, the revolutionary group did not start the conflict in the area where the mines were located(Ross, 2005). Michael Ross, a scholar, Made some qualitative research on countries concerned by recent civil wars. According to his results, none of the three cited countries started their civil wars due to grievance. For him, some sort of grievance always exist but he argues that we cannot systematically assume that grievance is responsible for conflicts. Also, if a rebel group can control resources it seems to have an impact on the duration of the conflict which is the case with the three cited countries. When the weaker take the resources of the stronger, the weaker (rebel groups) can sustain for a longer period its efforts to overcome the stronger. 'Rebel groups in Angola, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo and elsewhere enrich themselves through the sale or exchange of diamonds '(Ross, 2005).

It is not possible to affirm that the presence of natural resources can be linked with civil wars. Multiple variables can justify the links. Angola, Congo and Sierra Leone, are three countries that are one of the richest when it comes to natural resources and had a civil war. However, there is not one specific explanation of why those civil wars occurred. All three are dependent on extraction, and the reason for their civil wars appear to be mostly from grief rather than grievance.

Table 1:

Country:

Angola

Sierra Leone

Congo-Brazzaville

Natural resource type

OIL

DIAMOND

OIL/DIAMOND

Duration of CW (in years)

27 (with short interval periods of peace)

11

6

Grief

Yes

Yes

Yes

The qualitative table created above helps to further demonstrate that grief can explain the reason why civil wars are happening. For the three countries, the table shows that the natural resource type did not influence the beginning or the duration of the conflicts. Groups were attracted by the resources whether it was oil, diamond, or both. Resource types did not have any impact on the grief in those cases. All three countries were engaged in a conflict that lasted for quite a long period of time. The duration of conflicts was longer in some countries compared to others. The conflict duration could explain the fact that opposing groups were fighting back and forth to establish control over the resources. The long duration of conflict can be a consequence of grief and the wish for groups to benefit from resources. Longer conflicts may occur if there is some kind of resource to control and exploit. In the absence of resources, conflicts may be shorter as there are no particular grief interests. In the three situations, grief was present which creates a crucial similarity to demonstrate conflict. It can be concluded that conflict is an outcome of grief over natural resources.

Conclusion:

Overall, I started by mentioning the work of Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler and their explanations on “greed and grievance”. Following their main argument, I tried to conclude that grief was the primary source of civil wars for countries with consequent natural resources. I argued natural resources increase the desire for grief. Governments that are looking for their own benefits are likely to generate rebellions. However, rebel groups tend to see natural resources just as the government does. I showed with my own qualitative data the duration of conflicts was probably longer when there are important outcomes coming from grief. As Collier and Hoeffler, I argued that grief could lead to social crisis and divisions, but grievance cannot be the starting point of civil wars. Rebels and governments are eager to own natural resources to benefit themselves and their entourage, and civilians. As Collier argues, the civilians' population suffers, pays, dies, as victims of the initial grief conflicts between governments and rebels.