

A multidimensional and disaggregated dataset on political conflicts in Asia and Oceania

Applying the Heidelberg approach

Thomas Wencker & Christoph Trinn

Heidelberg University

Contact Information:

Institute of Political Science

Heidelberg University

Email: thomas.wencker@

ipw.uni-heidelberg.de



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

Abstract

Political conflicts appear in diverse forms and might undergo many transformations. Existing concepts systematizing this empirical diversity are primarily operational definitions. In contrast, we hold that without a clear picture of what conflict is, neither can we measure it adequately nor can we succeed in building conflict theories. We identify two primary desiderata: (1) an integrative approach to conflict and (2) a multi-dimensional concept of intensity. Addressing these desiderata, the Heidelberg approach offers a systematic hierarchy of attributes and indicators, recognizes the structural-processual nature of conflicts, and discusses the demarcation between conflict and non-conflict. It offers a multidimensional yet integrative conception of conflict and intensity. The approach is applied in the new Disaggregated Conflict Dataset (DISCON) comprising disaggregated data on violent and non-violent conflicts in Asia from 2000 to 2014. To show its practical value, we test the explanatory power of four variables that are frequently linked to intrastate violent conflict: the size of the population, economic prosperity, rough terrain, and youth bulge. The results of the regression shows that population size and youth bulge are both positively correlated with conflict incidence. The effect varies, however, with conflict intensity levels. Regions with larger populations are more affected by violent crises. The effect seems to disappear, however, regarding higher intensities. The opposite is true for youth bulge, where the likelihood for limited wars and wars increases with a larger proportion of young people. Excluding cross-country differences, we find that poorer regions tend to be less affected by intra-state violent conflict.

Main objectives of the Heidelberg approach

1. Development of a real definition elaborating the essential attributes of political conflict
2. Multidimensional measurement of conflict intensity beyond fatality figures
3. Provision of a spatially and temporally disaggregated dataset
4. Reassessment of hypotheses based on new conflict data and spatially disaggregated data for explanatory variables

Based on a realist perspective (Goertz, 2006; Sayer, 2010), we develop four criteria in order to scrutinize conceptual designs underlying data collection. These criteria do not concern data availability, technical details of measurement, or empirical cross-validity. Rather, we examine whether concepts are complete, i.e. elaborate essential attributes and indicators, symmetric, i.e. clearly demarcate political conflict from non-conflict, comprehensive, i.e. take into account conflict as structures and processes, and deep, i.e. extensive and differentiated.

Definitions

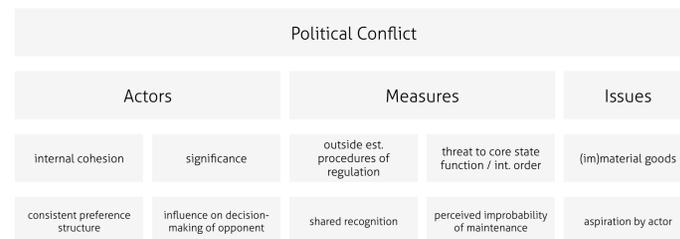


Figure 1: Concept of Political Conflict



Figure 2: Concept of Conflict Intensity

Data

DISCON comprises 131 violent conflicts, disaggregated into more than 6,300 violent region-month intensities based on 31,500 individual indicator assessments. Eight of these conflicts were fought between states, 84 between governments and rebel groups, and 39 among non-state actors. DISCON covers 242 unique regions affected by violent conflict. In addition, there were 25 conflicts remaining non-violent throughout.

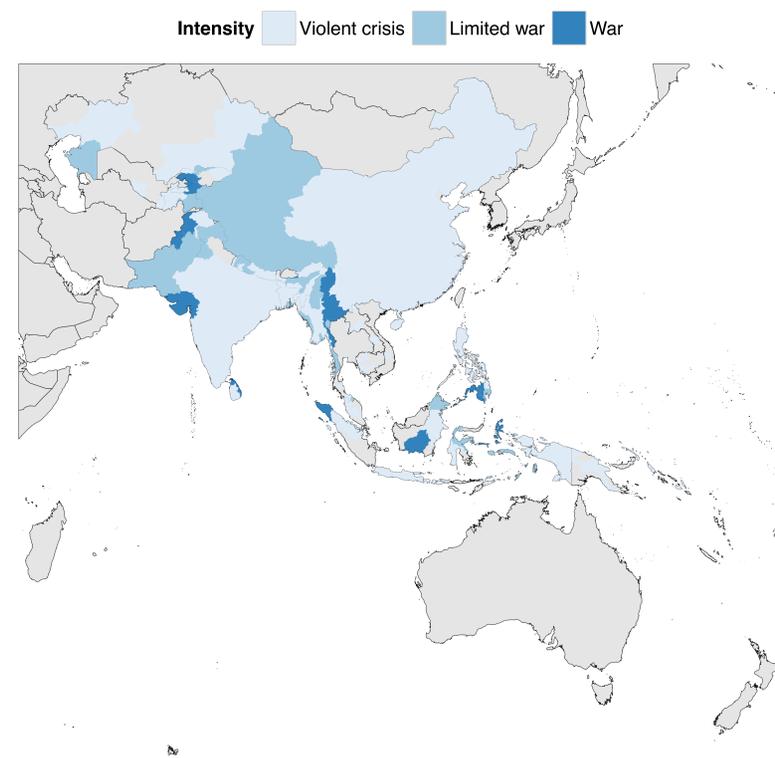


Figure 3: Maximum region-month intensity 2000-2014

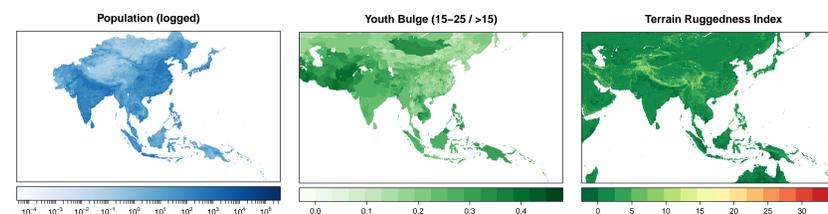


Figure 4: Raster data for explanatory variables (Alegana et al., 2015; Nunn and Puga, 2012; Stevens et al., 2015)

Results

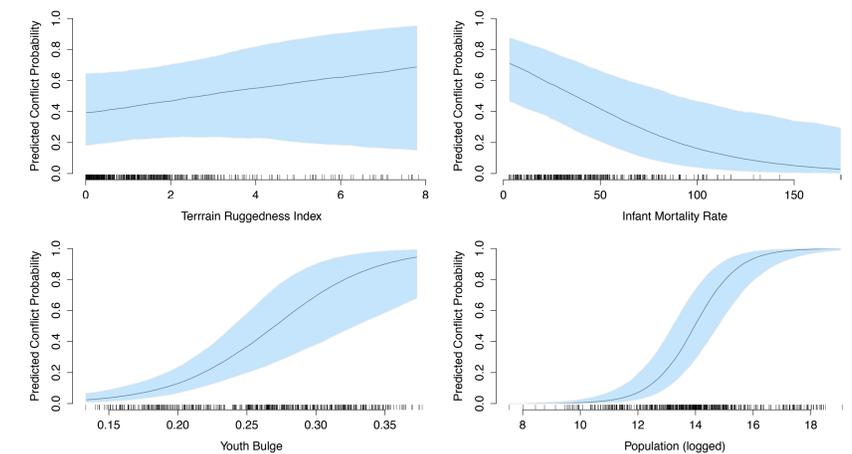


Figure 5: Results of logistic regression with country-fixed effects and conflict dummy as dependent variable (incidence of intrastate conflict in region, 2000 - 2014)

	Violent Conflict	Violent Crisis	Limited War	War
Population, logged	+	+	n.s.	n.s.
Youth Bulge	+	n.s.	+	+
Terrain Ruggedness	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Infant Mortality Rate	-	-	n.s.	n.s.
Rare Event Adjustment	-	-	X	X
Observations	530	530	530	530

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Forthcoming Research

- Extension to other world regions
- Localization of non-violent conflicts in space and time
- Typological extension to transnational conflicts

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