The Dual Causal Effect of Local Social Capital on Political Violence: Evidence from Africa

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Introduction

This paper has two aims: 1) identifying the causal effect of local social capital (trust in their traditional leaders or neighbors) and 2) finding the relational mechanism that alleviates the adverse effect of local trust on political stability in Africa.

Conceptual Frameworks

Common Pool Resources (CPRs) → Mode of Production (settlement patterns) → Trust in local chiefs (ancestors) → Policy violence

CPRs indicate subtractive resources that are used by multiple appropriators, such as lakes or fishing grounds. CPRs cause overuse problem, thus the inhabitants near CPRs interact with each other to collectively manage the CPRs. The dense networks within a closed group of people lead shared norms (trust) to be emerged. Applying it to Africa, CPRs are the bodies of water as they determine the mode of production and the relational networks (settlement patterns). Therefore, the ancestors whose homeland has bodies of water formed sedentary communities which helped them extend trust from family to extra familiar level (trust in their local chiefs/or neighbors).

Applying the bounded solidarity (internally altruistic but externally aggressive) attribute of local social capital to the local-chief centered governance in Africa, it is hypothesized that trust in local chief reduces the violence within the community while it increases the violence against out-group members.

Data and Methodology

Data sources:
- Trust: Afrobarometer survey v. 3 to 7 (covering 53,374 respondents 2005-2018)
- Violence: Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project 2005-2018
- District level features (Petroleum, ethnic fractionalization, road density): UNOCHA, Geological Survey, Peace Research Institute Oslo and etc.

IV estimation (Individual Level)

\[ \text{Violence}_{cij} = \gamma \cdot \text{Trust}_{cij} + \delta \cdot \text{Control}_{cij} + \epsilon_{cij} \]

IV estimation (Community Level)

\[ \text{Violence}_{cij} = \mu \cdot \text{Trust}_{cij} + \theta \cdot \text{Control}_{cij} + \eta_{cij} \]

Result

Inhabitants whose ancestors constructed a sedentary community in precolonial era has 0.34 more trust in his or her local chief, 19.6% of sample mean, than those whose ancestor’s precolonial settlement is nomadic.

\[ \text{Trust}_{cij} = \beta \cdot \text{Distance to nearest lake} + \epsilon_{cij} \]

Inhabitants whose ancestors constructed a sedentary community in precolonial era has 0.07 more trust in his or her local chief, 0.7% of sample mean, than those whose ancestor’s precolonial settlement is nomadic.

\[ \text{Violence}_{cij} = \alpha \cdot \text{Trust}_{cij} + \phi \cdot \text{Control}_{cij} + \zeta_{cij} \]

The importance of trust in local chiefs on violence is not necessarily larger if the areas are at greater risk of others’ attacks. Rather, the influence of local trust on violence becomes substantial when the context feature is positively associated with the political dominance of local chiefs.

Conclusion

This study examines the importance of a psychological factor on political violence in the context of African statehood. Focusing on local social capital, this article describes how historically originated trust within a community exerts a dual causal effect on political violence. The findings suggest that the increased trust in local chiefs reduces civilian deaths by unilateral attacks by non-state militias, while increasing battle fatalities in clashes with external groups.

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