Hypotheses

H1: Vertical inequality: Higher risk for violent and organized unrest in polygynous societies.

H2a: Horizontal inequality: Higher risk for organized unrest in polygynous societies.

H2b: For trickle down effects of horizontal inequality, requires resources for mobilization.

H3: Gender inequality by itself or in combination with polygyny, increases the risk for violent unrest.

Data and Methods

Incidence of social unrest from Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD) for 1990-2014.

Collective regression with clustered standard errors and time polynomials ⇒ 932 Observations

Diffusion of economic power resources (time invariant, Vanhanen, 1990)
Access to electricity (WDI)
Sex Ratio (age 15-49) (UN)
Sonbias (OECD, SIGI)

Horizontal inequality

Polygyny Scale=4
Polygyny Scale=3
Female labor force participation (VDEM), alternative: economic and political rights (CIRI)

Gender inequality

Female political participation (VDEM), alternative: economic and political rights (CIRI)

Results

Dispersion of economic power resources (time invariant, Vanhanen, 1990)
Access to electricity, t-1
Sex Ratio (age 15-49) (UN)
Sonbias (OECD, SIGI)

H1: Less dispersed resources ⇒ higher risk for non-violent and organized unrest

H2a: No significance for a direct effect of horizontal inequality

H2b: Vertical inequality: Higher risk for organized unrest in polygynous societies.

H3: Gender inequality (lower female labor force participation) ⇒ Unrest risk (all forms) is higher

H3: Female political participation increases the risk for spontaneous unrest, but not for others

Horizontal inequality and mobilization

H2b ⇒ Mobilization requires resources ⇒ Capability of elite
⇒ For higher levels of GDP, the risk of unrest is higher for higher levels of horizontal inequality.

Theoretical and empirical challenges

• Strategic behavior of the elite ⇒ Not supported by empirical tests
• Male compromise theory ⇒ Elites may restrict polygyny to pacify society?
• Reverse causality ⇒ Not supported by empirical tests
• Does population growth make polygyny viable? ⇒ Not supported by empirical tests
• Robust results: in a linear model, a count model for the number of events, controlling for youth bulges and GNI, alternative democracy or female political empowerment measures

Conclusion

• We argue that the institution of polygynous marriages is tied to three different forms of inequality
• This potentially affects the stability of the society
• Correlative evidence supports this argumentation:
  • Higher/medium levels of polygyny are associated with a higher likelihood of social unrest
  • Gender inequality and vertical economic inequality coincide with more social unrest
  • Strong horizontal inequality comes along with higher risk of non-violent and organized unrest if GDP per capita is high enough

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References

Kroe, C. and Neupert-Wentz, C. (2009). Polygyny in South and East Africa. polygyny and its associated manifestations of inequality —directly or indirectly —affect the likelihood of social unrest?

Introduction

Polygyny may be associated with different kinds of inequality...

• Vertical inequality
• Horizontal inequality
• Gender inequality

Related literature: Polygyny (inference (obstructions) on the marriage market ⇒ conflict/violence (e.g. Henrich et al., 2012; Karwan, 2009; Kroe and Neupert-Wentz, 2009)

Contribution

• Broader theoretical perspective on inequality and polygyny
• Correlative evidence:
  • New data set for inequality within the elite (inheritance in polygynous societies)
  • Focus on 41 African countries with different levels of polygyny
  • Differentiate results by type of inequality and type of unrest (Violent, non-violent, organized and spontaneous unrest)

Vertical inequality between elite and non-elite men

• Individual-level grievances:
  • Reproduction, productivity, social status & mobility
• Ex.: Boko Haram, Sierra Leone, Saudi Arabia, South Africa
  • Reinstated at societal level
• Conditional on mobilization

Horizontal inequality within the polygynous elite

• Competition for resources (e.g. among wives, for bride prices among sons) (e.g. Boe, 2019; Gibson and Guarin, 2011)
• Most intense for generational succession
  • Very unequal (primogeniture, e.g. South Africa), unequal (rank- ing of wives, e.g. Uganda), rather equal (Islamic family law)
• Destabilization of elite / Mobilization of non-elite

Gender inequality

• Polygyny: Gender inequality: Patriarchal values, bride prices and patrilineality, higher spousal age gaps & fertility rates (e.g. McDermott, 2019a; Bommes and Meulder, 2017)
• Gender inequality ⇒ Systematic discrimination and acceptance of violence in the society (e.g. McDermott, 2015a; Bommes and Meulder, 2017)
• Gender inequality ⇒ Interstate and intrastate conflict more likely (e.g. Hudson et al., 2019; Caprara and Boyer, 2015).

Plural marriage, bred of inequality, begets violence

The Economist, Dec 19, 2017

Polygyny, Inequality, and Social Unrest

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Polygyny and Inequality

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