The Governance-Conflict Trap in the ESCWA Region

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Overview

- Governance is relatively poor in the ESCWA region
  - How we measure governance
- Poor governance increases risk of conflict relapse
  - ... and conflict leads to poor governance
- Improvement in governance may lead to conflict reduction
Conflict trends in ESCWA and the world

Since 1990, a declining trend in number of conflicts. An increasing fraction of conflicts are conflict recurrences.

Figure: Trends in number of active conflicts in the world and the ESCWA region. Internal (left panel) and international or internationalized internal (right panel).

Source: Uppsala Conflict Data Program
Battle deaths, in ESCWA and the world

ESCWA conflicts have been particularly lethal

**Figure:** Trends in number of battle deaths in the WORLD and the ECSWA region. Internal and international conflicts

Source: Lacina & Gleditsch 2005
How to measure quality of governance

Governance is a multifaceted concept.

Seven ‘dimensions’ of governance → index of governance

Components:

▶ Formal political institutions (democracy/autocracy): SIP measure
▶ Civil liberties (Freedom House)
▶ Corruption (Transparency International)
▶ Military influence in politics (ICRG)
▶ Bureaucratic quality (ICRG)
▶ Country Policy and Institutional Assessment index (World Bank)
▶ World Governance Indicators (World Bank)

Forms an index of governance ranging from 0 (worst) to 1 (best)
Governance and development: ESCWA governance poor relative to comparable countries

Figure: Governance and infant mortality in ESCWA countries and the world.

Source: World Development Indicators 2010 and our governance data
Governance indicators

ESCWA countries perform poorly relative to other developing countries according to most governance indicators.

Figure: Governance indicators; ESCWA (left panel) and other developing countries (right panel)
Governance outcomes

Repression levels are also high, but education and income levels high

**Figure:** Governance outcomes; ESCWA (left panel) and other developing countries (right panel)
Governance and conflict relapse

- Statistical analysis indicates that poor governance increases risk of conflict relapse (but not conflict onset)
- Repression also increases risk of conflict
- Conflict increases risk of conflict and amount of repression

**Figure:** Estimated risk of conflict recurrence
Three categories of conflict-affected countries

- Most conflict in a few ESCWA countries: Israel, Palestine, Iraq and Sudan
- We group countries in categories based on income and conflict history
  - Low-income conflict countries: Yemen and Sudan
  - Medium-income conflict countries: Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine
  - Countries suffering from the immediate spill-overs from conflict: Egypt, Jordan, Syria
  - Countries suffering from more distant spill-overs from conflict: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE
Governance across different conflict categories

Conflict countries have poorer governance, and the gap is widening

**Figure:** Governance scores: poor conflict countries (left panel) and countries suffering from immediate spill-over (right panel)
Conflict countries develop more slowly than other countries

Figure: Reduction in IMR 1965–89 vs. IMR in 1965 (left) and 1990–2009 vs. IMR in 1990 (right). Area of circles are proportional to per-capita fatalities in conflict

Source: Hegre & Holtermann, forthcoming: ‘Poverty and conflict’
How to break the vicious circle?

- Vicious circles can be turned into virtuous ones, as in Latin America
- If Sudan’s governance could improve to the level of Lebanon, the risk of conflict recurrence would be reduced by 50%
- The various aspects of good governance are correlated and may substitute for each other
- Any governance reform that is feasible has potential to reduce risk of conflict relapse
- Democratization movements have great potential if successful
  - May decrease international tensions
  - Provide entry-points for other reform initiatives ‘from below’
- Some external factors help: Globalization, economic growth, reform in neighboring countries
Governance and conflict relapse

- Is the ESCWA region exceptional?
- The region has had more conflict than its level of development would suggest
- Figure shows predicted share of countries in conflict and average predictor values, ESCWA and North Africa region, 1995–2050

Source: Hegre et al. 2011: ‘Predicting armed conflict’