Comments on "Power Mismatch and Civil Conflict: An Empirical Investigation" M.Morelli, L.Ogliari & L.Hong

by Mathieu Couttenier
ENS de Lyon, CERGIC, CEPR

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(quick) Summary

- Main results: Imbalance between ethnic group's political and military power matters to understand civil violence.

→ Sizable effect: groups characterized by a higher mismatch between military & political power are approximately 30% more likely to engage in a conflict against the government.

→ Extra-results: non-linearity, high-mismatched groups are involved in larger & centrist conflicts.

- Policy implications: policies for peace should reduce power mismatches between relevant groups.

- Another (empirical) contributions:
  - ☐ (relative) political power: matching armed groups to ethnic groups
  - ☐ (relative) military power: machine learning

- Comments
  - ☐ Data construction
  - ☐ Interpretation
  - ☐ Policy implications

Military power - I

- Inference on the ethnic (rebel) group strength from the probability of winning a conflict against the government
  - Measuring the military strength through alternative actors of violence
    Some facts (ACLED, Africa 1997-2022)
    → Government: *36% of the total violence & 33% toward rebel groups.*
    → Rebel groups: *24% of the total violence & >50% toward non-gov.*
  - Coalition of ethnic groups against the government?

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- A crucial aspect is to define the winning side: no data available → making use of fatalities ratio as a proxy whether a group has won the battle

- Assumption: winning party has a lower # of fatalities (relative to the population) than the losing party
  - Why do you exclude civilian fatalities?
    → If there is a lot of civilian fatalities in group A, it tells us a lot on the strength (and the strategy/technology) of group B
    → And group A may win (low level of military fatalities) but a larger share of civilians fatalities

Military power - II

- 88% of the variance of the military power measure is explain by difference across ethnic groups & Military power is extremely persistent overtime (by construction)
→ Identifying variation left after inclusion of ethnic group FE?
→ % of groups with within variation $\neq 0$?
→ Cross-sectional results?
→ Adding more time-variant determinant in the machine learning procedure

- Data: why UCDP instead of ACLED?
→ ACLED: more low intensity events

- Random (small) other comments
  - Sensitivity not using Asia for the machine learning procedure?
  - To ease the reading, I would keep only the linear measure as baseline (+results on non-linearity are great)

Political power

- Define rebel group ethnicity: new methodology (*geomatching*) based on where is located the violence
  - ◇ More violence is taking place there because they try to contest/take control of some regions?
  - ◇ Very few events used: 3k events for 369 rebel groups from 1989-2015.
    → Is the matching $\neq$ if you relax the constraints about the events included?

- Continuous measure (that should be the baseline): relative political power of group i in country c is the ratio of the cabinet seats of the group in a given year relative to the seats held by the government's ethnicity g.
  - ◇ "value" of cabinet seats: defense vs sport

Interpretation

- Two findings, one contradiction?
  - Military mismatch seems to be the most important driver (Table 10)
  - Power mismatch positively correlated with centrist conflict (Table 11), that you find "reasonable given the dimension of political power captured by the mismatch variable"

    → To conclude, we need estimates with whether groups with high military power and low political power are affected differently by mismatch than groups with high political power and low military power.

- Big vs small conflicts: Comparison is crucial and not only the presence/absence of significant effect (Table 12)

→ You should display the LHS mean

Policy implications

- Policy oriented angle of this special issue: more discussion about the policy implications

- More heterogeneity: country (usual suspects: level of development, institutional quality...) and local characteristics (usual suspects: local development, local specialization, urban vs rural areas, trade openness...)

- Dig deeper on the origin of military and political mismatches [last paragraph of the conclusion].
→ Historical roots: "scramble for Africa", colonization, ethnic & cultural diversities...
→ Political determinants: democracy vs autocracy, democracy characteristics, free elections, quotas...
→ Ethnic determinants: traditional practices (herding, segmentary lineages...), traditional beliefs/customs...
→ Economic determinants: economic inequality, socioeconomic reforms...

Minor comments

- Why do you stop in 2015?

- Why do you stop measuring political power in 2012?

- Definition of big/small conflicts: "For instance, assume that a conflict lasts 3 years. In the first year, there are 10 casualties reported, in the second 20 casualties, and in the third 100 casualties, then the average number of casualties is 43.3 and the conflict is considered "big". Following the convention of UCDP/PRIO, we chose 25 as a cutoff." $\rightarrow$ Less arbitrary by counting the number of events.

- Endogeneity: replicate the dynamics of mismatch for groups that experienced conflict, but looking at small-scale conflict

- Better to present the strategy to identify military power (e.g in section 3.3) to fully understand section 3.4.

THANK YOU