Title: Electoral Sources of Stability in the Aftermath of Civil War

Key Words: Civil Wars, Political Institutions, Constitutional Design

Hypothesis: Political institutions, especially electoral systems, have a large impact on the behavior of armed groups after civil wars end. The electoral rules and timing of post-conflict elections influence whether peace endures after the first electoral cycle.

Research Plan:
Numerous factors influence the stability of peace and the prospects for democracy in the aftermath of civil war. The quantitative study of civil wars and their termination, which has grown tremendously in the past twenty years, has provided empirical verification of many theories concerned with why peace lasts or fails. Recent research has identified three broad categories of factors that influence post-civil war trajectories: conflict dynamics, societal characteristics, and international involvement, particularly the deployment of peacekeeping missions by the United Nations or other bodies (see Doyle and Sambanis 2000, 2006). While these categories provide a strong framework for studying civil wars, most recent empirical research has omitted one category of potential influence: post-conflict political institutions. Political institutions can play a large role in exacerbating or controlling conflict in society. Academic work in this regard began by focusing on institutional solutions for regulating ethnic conflict (Lijphart 1977, Horowitz 1985) and has more recently begun to focus on institutional designs for post-conflict situations (Lijphart 2004, Reynolds 2005). Institutions have strong capacity to shape the incentives of political actors, a crucial concern in the aftermath of armed conflict. If institutions are poorly designed, peace processes may be jeopardized and conflict may resume. Even if conflict does not return, poorly designed institutions may prevent the firm entrenchment of true liberal democracy by creating few incentives for compromise. Though the importance of institutional design has been acknowledged, the effect of a number of institutional and election characteristics on conflict and democratization has been largely uninvestigated. Filling this void of policy-relevant research is the goal of this project.

This research project will consist of three main portions. The first portion is compiling a unified database with the characteristics of electoral systems and elections in countries emerging from civil war in the post-WWII period. Variables of interest are electoral system type (plurality or proportional representation), institutional characteristics (presidential systems vs. parliamentary systems, degree of federalization), timing of elections after cessation of conflict, sequencing of elections (local elections before/after national elections), and the amount and type of international assistance for electoral processes. Data for these variables will be recorded in both qualitative and quantitative formats to enable easy future use of the data. Much of the data will come from sources specific to the cases in question, for example peace accords and historical accounts of transitions from conflict.

---

1 Electoral may discourage compromise create large costs for losing elections while how elections are planned can entrench hard-liners and sideline moderates. For example, the failure of Angola’s peace accords in 1996 is widely attributed to the presidential institutions put in place and the all-or-none dynamic they created. See Reilly (2002) for a discussion of the various aspects of post-conflict elections.

2 What empirical literature does exist focuses narrowly on two institutional features – parliamentary systems and proportional representation – rather than taking a more complete view of electoral institutions that takes into account timing and sequencing of elections as well as degree of decentralization. See Mukherjee (2006) for an example.
The second stage of the project is an in-depth statistical analysis of the impact of different institutional and electoral features in post-civil war environments. This portion of the project will seek to assess the impact of post-conflict electoral choices on several measures of post-conflict success. The primary dependent variable is how long peace endures after conflict ends. This will parallel the approach of much of the quantitative literature on civil wars. To provide a more thorough understanding of how electoral institutions shape trajectories after civil war this project will also use democratic stability and democratic consolidation as dependent variables of secondary interest. Keeping with the previous quantitative research on the determinants of post-civil war stability, this study will control for numerous variables previously linked to the duration of peace after civil war. Among these controls are the presence of an ethnic/identity war, ethnic diversity, GDP/pc, war outcome, presence of a peace agreement, and presence of a peacekeeping operation deployed by the UN or a regional body.

The last phase of the project will consist of structured comparative analysis of similar conflicts in which different electoral institutions were adopted in the post-war period. Conflicts will be paired according to severity, duration, nature, and degree of international intervention to identify potential matches for analysis. Paired cases with significant difference in the electoral institutions adopted after conflict will be analyzed to determine how much variation in the duration of peace and democratic stability can be attributed to electoral institutions. This analysis will help clarify the nature of causal mechanisms and pathways that are the root of this project. Of particular interest in these case studies are the dynamics of coalition forming and how different institutional factors contributed to changes in leadership in the political and military parties to the conflict, especially the rise or fall of moderates within these parties.

The output of this project will be at least two articles submitted to peer-reviewed journals. This is important not only for furthering academic understanding of post-conflict situations but also in providing important knowledge that negotiators and other individuals designing peace accords after civil can use to ensure that better practices are adhered to and further conflict is avoided. In addition, the database of electoral institutions and election details will be made publicly available for replication and further research.

References:


