

Paul Collier:

Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places

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If there is one book from 2009 you have to read, it would be Collier's *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places*. In the light of a popular uprising in Arab world which has changed many governments and deposed several leaders including Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and also led to the armed conflict in Libya, there are many new questions arising about the future of these countries shaped by instability for last few months. *Wars, Guns and Votes* by Paul Collier, the author of the famous *The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can Be Done About it*, is another pearl in the field of social sciences dealing mainly with African countries. The Author's evidence based approach, backed with economic and social data, is discovering new dimensions of power and the use of political violence in the

countries of the bottom billion. The book is simply trying to find out what is behind the endemic nature of political violence in the countries of the bottom billion and what can be done to curtail it. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, several major changes occurred in the international environment including the spread of elections across the bottom billion and an outbreak of peace. With these changes, also relations and their interactions took a different course. As Collier wrote, his book is about power, mainly about factors that are influencing the outbreak of political violence, civil wars, coups, ethnic politics or simply elections in the countries of the bottom billion.

In one of the first chapters, Collier is asking simple question: What is the relationship between democracy and

political violence? Collier discovered that democracy had an opposite effect in poor countries to that in rich countries (p. 20). He found that in countries at least at a middle income level, democracy systematically reduced the risk of political violence but in low-income countries the effect was exactly the opposite. The border has been discovered at around 2,700 dollars per capita per year (p. 21). After discussing possible reasons of these outcomes Collier set up several options as to how old autocrats retain power in a democracy, analyzing cons and pros of each option, which are more or less working in countries of the bottom billion. These strategies include: Turn over a new leaf and become a good government, lie to electorate, scapegoat a minority, use bribery or intimidation, and restrict the field to exclude the strongest candidates or miscount the votes. Some considerable part is dedicated to management of elections in the bottom billion countries. It has been discovered, that the larger a country's population, the faster reform after election took place (p. 42). The chance for policy improvement is better a few years after elections, but become worse over the time as the election approaches (p. 43). In general elections are working better in societies with larger populations and fewer ethnic divisions. However, there is some implication for the bottom billion: *"The increased democracy has quite probably retarded the reform of economic policies and governance. It has gone far enough to lose whatever might be the advantages of autocracy, while not yet having gone far enough to gain the benefits*

of democracy, and the typical society of the bottom billion remains well short of the point at which democratization would lead to improvement" (p. 44). In other words, it is easier to introduce elections, but it is harder with introducing checks and balances, which is making countries of the bottom billion more prone to violence.

Very interesting is also the part dealing with ethnic politics and dysfunction of the state. In divided societies it seems that mobilization of voters on ethnic basis is working. Moreover, after the election the formation of a coalition of parties is needed. However, sparing power polarizes voters and makes the dominant parties more extreme (p. 57). This is not only a problem of diverse societies. There are more problematic areas which are connected to them, like worse public services than in homogenous societies. It is interesting, that ethnic diversity is reducing the productivity of public capital, while increasing the productivity of private capital (p. 60). This discovery has another historical connotation, that countries of the bottom billion were ill suited to Socialism, which was unfortunately overwhelmingly their predominant ideology. Diverse societies are bad for democracy as well for autocracy. The proposed cure seems to be to overcome diversities by creating a sense of common identity. Fortunately, there are a few examples in history that might be followed: that made by president Sukarno of Indonesia, or Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.

Civil wars are another disease, which are the domain of countries of the bot-

tom billion. Collier, in his brilliant analysis discovered what aspects matter in a cause of civil war and what factors are supporting an outbreak of civil wars. Low income countries are significantly more at risk than rich ones. Dependence on natural resources works in the same way, as income. However, this is questionable in the light of the Arab popular uprising, whether countries with sufficient natural resources are safe (p. 127). Similar to the economy, history has same influence as well. There is not an increased likelihood caused by colonial experience, but it does matter if a country once experienced violence. Once a country has had civil war, it is much more likely to have another one. At same time, the risk of further conflict gradually declines with the passage of time (p. 129). The structure of society is another important fact. We know, that ethnic and religious division make war more likely, however Collier found out, that the proportion of young men in a population also matters. Size of society is another important factor, when big societies have lower risk of violence than small ones due to scale economies in the security (p. 131). Geography is also very important: while forests have no effect on the level of violence, mountains are dangerous, providing rebels better possibilities to fight and thus increasing the risk of civil war. Of course, there are other aspects which influence the outbreak of civil war, including a security guarantee by superpowers, and the character of rebel groups. Collier found out, that costs of civil war are disastrous. If we

accept the fact, that "*legacy of a civil war is a further civil war*" (p. 139), Collier estimated, that costs of typical civil war in a bottom billion country is equivalent to losing two years income or some 20 billion US dollars (p. 137).

There are some situations, which make war more likely. One of them is an arms race between countries. In general, big countries are spending a smaller share of income on the military: "*Security is subject to economies of scale. Big may not be beautiful, but it is safe: small is dangerous, and expensive*" (p. 107). Collier found very interesting fact that on average 11 % of all aid finds its way into the military budget (p. 111). Thus, aid could develop into an arms race as well and thus increase the risk of another conflict. Similarly, high military spending by a post-conflict government is also increasing risk of war, mainly because guns purchased for official use leak into the hands of rebels via holes in the delivery or storage system. Moreover, research found out, that because of leaks from army arsenals, there are more half-price Kalashnikovs in Africa than elsewhere (p. 115). Because of porous borders, this fact of cheap guns is increasing risk of civil war not only in a single country, but in whole regions. Thus, guns are fuelling the fire.

Post-conflict situations are very fragile: just around 60 % of them have not again reverted to violence within a decade. However, there are some conditions, which influence the duration of peace. A post-conflict election shifts the risk of conflict reversion: in the year before an

election took place the risk is very sharply reduced. Exactly the opposite happens in the year after election (p. 81). Another factor is the presence of peacekeeping forces, which strongly and significantly reduces the risk that a post-conflict situation will deteriorate and civil war will outbreak again. Despite the fact, that peacekeeping is working, it is unpopular and expensive. As an alternative Collier is presenting over-the-horizon guarantees, which are not so expensive with reliability proven by history. For example French informal security guarantees reduced statistically the risk of conflict by nearly three-quarters (p. 87). Another important factor is a country's income: the lower income, the higher risk of conflict reversion, and the slower the economic recovery, the higher the risk. Following this logic, it is necessary to have peacekeeping forces present at least for one decade, when the economic performance of the country will improve. It is estimated, that an annual expenditure of 100 million USD on peacekeeping reduces the cumulative ten-year risk of reversion to conflict from around 38 to 17 % and with increasing expenditure the effect is even higher (p. 96). Counting with these numbers, there is still a big enough reserve in benefits to send peacekeepers and the ratio of benefits to costs is better than four to one (p. 96). So, peacekeeping seems to bring high value for money.

Very interesting research is presented about coups and factors influencing the probability that a coup will take place. Collier found out, that democracy makes

not coups less likely and the baseline risk for a coup in Africa is around 4 % per year (p. 147). It is interesting, that within a year after an attempted coup, there is a 10 % risk of a further coup, increasing the risk of civil war and, moreover, the average coup costs approximately 7 % of year's income. (p. 143). It is perhaps one or two of the reasons why, in general, coups are going out of fashion in the world. So, what matters make a coup more likely? In Africa ethnicity matters and is sharply increasing the risk of a coup. Another factor is the time a leader spent in office: *"Each year that a leader stays in power increases the risk of a coup: far from gradually becoming indispensable, political leaders who stay in power for decades overstay their welcome"* (p. 48). Collier also discovered strategies, which make coups less likely. One of them is setting a term for elections; another could be a change in the military budget in right direction — if the risk is small, cut the budget, if the risk is high then it is better raise the budget (p. 152).

Part of Colliers work is concerned with emergence of the state and nation. Going through evolution of states and nations the author makes note of some interesting facts. For example, Collier found out, that if people are educated, they are more like to identify themselves through their ethnicity or that a typical country of the bottom billion receives approximately a third of its expenditure through aid (p. 179). Collier also stressed the importance of the identity role in the nation building process. Creation of a common identity in diverse societies of

the bottom billion could bring peace and stability. The policy of president Nyerere in Tanzania could provide a good example, how can political leadership promote national unity through Pan-African and national identity without creation of a neighboring enemy. A good illustration of diseases which besets countries of the bottom billion is made in Cote d'Ivoire. A special chapter is dedicated to the political history of this country, starting with the Ivorian Miracle and then providing to the reader a guided tour through total meltdown, fraudulent elections, coups and war, also focusing on actual events. However, there are even more chapters, which could be highly valued for their background based on statistical data or contribution to the international discussion about international security in the countries of the bottom billion.

In the end Collier proposes in his book a kind of medicine for the countries of the bottom billion. Countries of the bottom billion are stuck with a lack of basic public goods. The most important two are government accountability and security. After a note about difficulties of state sovereignty and regional cooperation Collier is proposing a system based on a tree game about how to enforce accountability by harnessing violence for democracy. The main point of this suggestion is to connect fair conduct of elections with a powerful carrot. Because leaders of the countries of the bottom billion are afraid of coup, the carrot might be a security guarantee to them by the international community (p. 210). Theoretically, a system based on rational choice theory

might work; if there is enough political will on the side of the international community. Another proposal is to enforce probity in public spending. Because much of the money comes from aid, donors could simply connect investment activities with the conditions of a lower military budget, because arms races do not enhance overall security and are only a waste of money (p. 219). Corruption and public spending is another problem. The flow of finance could be well monitored by an agency, placed in between the ministry and suppliers, contracting with the suppliers' and monitoring their performance, but working to objectives set by the ministry (p. 217). Despite the fact that these proposals could theoretically work, it will require a lot of time to concentrate a huge amount of political will and a long time for something to be changed. States of the bottom billion cannot manage it alone: "*they are too large to be nations yet too small to be states*" (p. 229). They are too large, because they lack the cohesion needed for collective action and too small, because they lack the scale needed to produce the public good efficiently.

Paul Collier touched in his book the nature of political violence and contributed to the academic debate about this important issue. In some chapters it is also mentioned, how Collier searched and worked with the data, which makes the book more exciting. There is lots of presentation of some teamwork, mainly with Anke Hoefler, and thanks to it and Collier's economist profile almost every claim is backed by researched data and

analysis, offering an original point of view. His book is a very nice piece of social science, which will be appreciated by academics including teachers and students of international security, international

relations, developing studies, political scientists or experts on similar fields and NGO workers acting in countries of the bottom billion as well as all people interested in issues related to power.