AN OVERVIEW OF DATABASES ON CONFLICTS AND POLITICAL CRISES

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SUMMARY

This paper provides an overview of important projects concerned with the development of databases on conflicts, crises and similar political events and those dealing with the structural characteristics of nation-states. The various databases are usually differently conceptualized, even when they describe the same phenomenon. Different conceptualization of the problem leads to distinct operational definitions, and eventually to divergent coding rules. Therefore, the researcher intending to use the existing data for statistical analysis or modelling social processes can become lost browsing the multitude of diverse datasets. In this overview, the short descriptions of important data-gathering projects include information on the institutions where the projects are placed, their principal investigators, time span and number of cases they include. Finally, all databases are classified according to their focus (event/structure) and their level (nation-state/international relations) of observation.

KEY WORDS

CLASSIFICATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The history of quantitatively-oriented research on conflicts and, more broadly, international relations begins with studies of Pitrim A. Sorokin (*Social and Cultural Dynamics*, 1937), Quincy Wright (*A Study of War*, 1942) and Lewis Fry Richardson (*Statistics of Deadly Quarrels*, 1960). Although they made important early contributions the real research community, gathered around the task of empirical research of conflicts, did not exist before sixties. Its development started at the University of Michigan with the group of scholars gathered around the J. David Singer's Correlates of War project.

Their basic idea was to code the data on historical cases of conflicts[1] and test the theoretical hypotheses about the "roads to war" (Singer, 2000), that is, about the factors that promote the escalation of crises to wars. In his paper *Variables, Indicators, and Data: The Measurement Problem in Macropolitical Research* Singer (1990) elaborates the research framework of the Correlates of War project. He writes that "the types of variables that data set is supposed to represent ... [are]: the attributes of social entities, the relationships between and among entities, and the behaviors that these entities manifest vis-à-vis one another" (1990: 7). Identifying the nation-state as the most relevant entity within the realm of international relations, he arrives to the other important issue - that of the level of observation. Depending on hypotheses we want to test, we have to decide whether to look "outside" or "inside" of the nation-state, to the macroperspective of international relations or the microperspective of decision-making processes.

Correlates of War project addressed the problem of conflict primarily from the international relations perspective, and Singer decided to test the assumptions of political realism. As the prevailing paradigm of both the theoretical explanation and the political decision-making, it provided coherent set of assumptions[2] (some called it theory, some paradigm, and others - the dominant set of prejudices [Wayman and Singer, 1990]) that could easily be translated into testable hypotheses. Therefore, the Correlates of War project focused on macroperspective and neglected the "black box of the state" (Maoz, as cited in Wayman and Singer, 1990: 262). This research framework greatly influenced later research projects and it took much time for other scholars to complement it with other approaches.

Jack S. Levy in his *Reflections on the Scientific Study of War* (2000) discusses the developments and changes in this research area. He emphasizes "movement from a preoccupation with the great powers, the shift from the systemic level to more emphasis on dyadic-level interactions and on societal-level explanatory variables,

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[1] Singer speaks of "the population of wars" which means – all the historical cases (after 1816). It is obvious that this "population" will highly vary, depending on the definition of war. We discuss this problem later in this introduction.

[2] Wayman and Diehl identified ten main assumptions of realism as: "(1) states are the key actors; (2) the state system is anarchic; (3) states are unitary and pursue state interests, not the interests of subnational groups; (4) states are rational and are not constrained by ethics other than self-interest; (5) states aim to survive, to maintain their own territorial integrity, and to enhance and maintain their own power; (6) states focus on military security; (7) national material capabilities, leadership, and unity create power, and other power centers are threats and must be monitored, especially when revisionist (i.e., willing to use force to overturn the status quo); (8) the state should (and does) strengthen its capability relative to other states; (9) the state should (and does) form alliances to balance power when its own power is insufficient; and (10) the state should (and does) resolve crises to further enhance its power over outcomes" (as cited in Wayman, 2000: 222-223).

and increasing complexity of our theories of international conflict (Levy, 2000: 319). Besides, some scholars refused to treat political events as discrete, unique and unconnected and emphasized the interconnection of conflicts over space and time. They research recurring disputes and enduring rivalries and see conflicts rather as processes than as the events (Goertz and Diehl, 2000; Wayman, 2000).

Nowadays, there are datasets that describe political events and other that describe socioeconomic and demographic attributes of states. Organizations like WHO, World Bank and UN have on-line, publicly available (free or commercial) databases. Nevertheless, the researcher intending to use and, more important, merge existing data for the purpose of statistical analysis or modelling the social processes can face many obstacles. In the first place, he or she can get lost browsing the multitude of different datasets. Other unavoidable problems would be: to find the particular database that fits the model he or she wants to examine; to find the specific data for the specific time period; to assess the reliability of the data. These can seem as easy-solvable problems – in the end, there are lots of databases, so one can reasonably expect to find what he or she wants. It may be so, but this search could take too much time may end up without results.

Early scholars engaged with data gathering shared the belief that the scientific research is cumulative process and that improvement of our knowledge on international relations is matter of time and effort. But as old approaches were complemented by newer ones, this assumption was put under a question mark. Different databases were differently conceptualized, even if they described the same phenomenon (for example, the interstate war). The different conceptualization of the problem leads to different operational definitions, and eventually to different coding rules. If we agree on the basic definition that the war is the armed conflict with minimum 1000 casualties, we can nevertheless arrive to the different list of wars for the same time period, depending on: first, what categories of persons are included (only those under arms or the civilians too); second, whether this number includes all warring sides or just one; third, whether it includes yearly casualties or all, for the whole length of the war; fourth: how we treat the intervening sides, etc. The final form of the data depends on the answers to all these questions.

Inappropriate coding will produce the data that are not good representation of the phenomenon which they are suppose to describe. For example, in one of the datasets mentioned below, Croatian Homeland War is coded as two wars – one during 1991 and the other in 1995. This happened because it defines civil war as the armed conflict with minimum 1000 casualties per year.

This illustration shows how difficult can it be to find the data that one needs. Therefore, it seems that an overview of existing databases could be good starting point for anyone who is interested in exploiting the data that are publicly available at the moment. This paper will give such an overview. The list is not full, but hopefully, the most important data collection projects are presented.

For every database there will be information about:
-   the institution where the project is placed
-   principal investigators
-   year span
-   number of cases,
including short project description.

In the following sections, projects are classified according to their main research focus (i.e. subject of observation). This classification is adopted version of abovementioned Singer's typology of variables. So projects usually either

a) describe structural (macroeconomic, social, demographic, political...) attributes of the social entities (usually the nation-states),

or

b) code the data on occurrence of specific category of political events (where the political events are treated as essentially discrete events). With the state as the main point of reference, the events can be either domestic or international. Also, it can be (unilateral) behavior or bilateral/multilateral interaction between political actors[3]. Main goal of these projects is the description of specific types of political events.

Some projects go beyond the mere description and try to explain specific type of political events. They design the research according the assumption that the structural attributes of social entities are factors that decisively influence the political events. This kind of projects we put under separate chapter titled Internal and Interstate Conflicts.

2.   THE STRUCTURAL ATTRIBUTES OF THE STATES

2.1.   POLITY[4]

Polity project is one of the oldest and the most cited projects of this kind. Currently it is part of Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research (INSCR) program at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland. Its first and the most important investigator was Ted Robert Gurr, but its current director is Monty G. Marshall. The project published four versions of datasets. Polity IV covers the period 1800-2000 with the time series for 161 contemporary and 20 historical regimes. It collects the data about political authority patterns, and it is focused on their institutional dimensions. It also codes the data on birth, changes and the death of the political regimes.

2.2.   CIFP

Country Indicators for Foreign Policy project is based at Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, Toronto, and the Principal Investigator is David Carment. It provides data on 196 countries, covering years from 1985 to 2000. The database includes variables on following issues: history of armed conflict, governance and political instability, militarization, population heterogeneity, demographic stress, economic performance, human development, environmental stress and international linkages.

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[3] It could be argued that criterion for Singer's classification of variables is not clear because the relationships are *derived* both from the structural attributes and from behavior. Even Singer speaks of two meanings of the relations. We can describe relationships between social entities by comparing their structural attributes and, on the other side, from their "connections, links, bonds, and associations between and among entities. How independent, durable, cooperative, open, and so on was the relationship between or among some specified population of entities" (Singer, 1990: 8).

[4] Almost all databases are available on-line, usually on the project's website. Older datasets can be downloaded from Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, but the full access is limited to registered users.

2.3. DON

Rudolph J. Rummel's Dimensionality of Nations project is placed at the University of Hawaii, and it was begun in sixties. His current work, based on original DON is presented at his Power Kills website. The work on original database resulted with the book Dimensions of Nations (1972). This database can be downloaded from Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), Ann Arbor University, Michigan, and it covers the data on 133 states for the years 1950, 1955, 1960, 1963 and 1965. It has four datasets: the first has 90 political, socioeconomic and demographic variables; second codes 13 000 cases of foreign policy acts for whole period 1950-1968; third includes data on behavioural characteristics of political interactions for the representative sample of 182 country-dyads in above mentioned, selected, years; fourth, coding only conflict interactions for the same country-dyad sample. Updated version of database is not publicly available, but Power Kills website presents the results of statistical analyses and the tables with some of the data.

2.4. FIRST

FIRST is joint project of the International Relations and Security Network (ISN) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). According to user's query it browses through the other databases (HIIK, INCORE, CIFP, NRC, NISAT, CIDOB, SIPRI, World Bank, IPU) that include data on 199 countries on period 1988-2000. It provides data on political systems, international organizations and alliances, military budgets, arms trade, conflicts and peace operations, etc.

2.5. WORLD HANDBOOK OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INDICATORS

This is an old and finished project, but it codes the data for the period back to 1948 (and ending with 1977). As a part of World Data Analysis Program at the Yale University, three editions of World Handbook were published. Principal investigators were, chronologically, Bruce M. Russett, Charles Lewis Taylor, Michael C. Hudson and David A. Jodice. The data is provided on 136 countries. It is conceptually organized in two parts - one deals with the political, socioeconomic and demographic data (303 variables!) and the other codes 57,268 daily events (these numbers are for the version II). This is extensive database that could be useful source of information about earlier post-WW2 period, especially because it is based on many various primary sources. It is available at ICPSR.

3. POLITICAL EVENTS

3.1. STATE FAILURE

State Failure project compiled the data on the cases of state collapse in time period between 1955 and 1996. Originally it was requested by the US government, and the goal was to develop model that could be used as a tool for the state failure risk assessment. The main investigators of the project are Ted Gurr and Barbara Harf, and it is closely related to the Polity project. The database is still being updated and, recently, the project has become a part of Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research (INSCR) program at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland. The dataset has the information on 231 cases (1571 country-years), categorized within four principal categories: revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, genocides/politicides and rapid or destructive regime changes.

3.2. COPDAB

This database codes over 400.000 foreign and domestic political events for 135 nation states, from 1948 to 1978. The project was initiated by Edward E. Azar during the 1960s and was finished in 1980s. The data is available at the ICPSR website. Every event is described by its score on the conflict-cooperation scale. Yearly aggregates are given for country dyads, with the information on the volume (the number of interactions) and the intensity (sum of the intensity scores of individual events) of the interactions between them.

3.3. WEIS

This database codes the events in the period 1966-1978. The accent is put on the international events. There are 22 categories and 63 subcategories of the events and activities. This categorization of the events became widely used by the other similar projects, like KEDS. The dataset has been compiled under the direction of Charles McClelland from the University of Southern California. The data is available at the website of ICPSR.

3.4. GEDS

GEDS project extends the COPDAB project, coding the data for more recent time period. The project was initiated in 1989 at the Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland. The data covers daily political, economic, military and other interactions between and within the nation states. The other, non-governmental, political groups are included as well. It is currently being updated with the data for the other countries and there is a plan for introduction of the software for automatic coding of the events. The coding is inherited form the COPDAB project.

3.5. KEDS

The Kansas Events Data System project was founded in early 1990-ies at Kansas University. Principal investigator, Philip A. Schrodt, and his associates developed software for automatic data coding. Existing datasets are based on Reuters' reports on political crises in following regions: Levant, Gulf, Central Asia, Balkans, and West Africa. The latest version of coding software and data are available at the project's website. The datasets consist of information on political events and interactions between actors (nation-states) and they are constantly being updated. Current research is focused on development of early warning models.

3.6. IPI

International Political Interactions (IPI) Project is the continuation of earlier VICDP (Violent International Conflict Data Project) and is co-directed by David R. Davis, Department of Political Science, Emory University and Will H. Moore, Department of Political Science, The Florida State University. Database includes data on political interactions within 15 nation-states for the time period between 1979 and 1992. Observed are Nigeria, Zaire, Zimbabwe, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, South Korea, Belgium, Hungary, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela. For each nation-state there is a list of relevant political actors. Their interactions are categorized as either one of 69 types of conflict or 45 types of cooperative events, which produced thousands of records per country.

3.7. EUROPEAN PROTEST AND COERCION DATA

European Protest and Coercion Data is research project of Ronald A. Francisco, Department of Political Science, University of Kansas. It codes the cases of protests and government coercion. The data include 1980-1995 period and 28 European countries (Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, FR Germany, GDR, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden). For every coded event there are information on: date, type of action, protester, description of event, target or government agent (police, court, ministry, etc.), country, location, issue, time, number of protesters (all, arrested, injured, killed), property damage, state force involved (number, injured, killed), organizational strength of protesters, organizational strength of the state.

4. INTERNAL AND INTERSTATE CONFLICTS

4.1. MINORITIES AT RISK

Minorities at Risk Project was initiated in 1986 by Ted Robert Gurr. Since 1989 it is located at Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland. Database consists of data on 275 minority groups in 112 countries, their activities tracked since the end of 1980-ies onwards. For every minority group there are 300 variables that describe following issues: group characteristics and status, group discrimination, group organization, collective interests, group conflict behaviour (protest activities, anti-regime rebellion, government repression of group, international contagion and diffusion).

4.2. PARTITION AS A SOLUTION TO ETHNIC WAR

Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War is a part of World Bank-funded program The Economics of Civil War, Crime and Violence. Its principal investigators are Nicholas Sambanis and Paul Collier. They are primarily focused on providing the empirical evidence that would shed a light on the problem of ethnic conflict resolution. Main question is whether the state partition or, on contrary, formation of bigger multi-ethnic state presents better long-term solution of ethnic civil wars. The database includes 125 cases of civil wars since 1944 all are described by over 30 war-related and socio-economic variables.

4.3. KOSIMO

KOSIMO database codes the data on the cases of violent and non-violent conflicts where at least one actor is nation-state. It is a project of Heidelberg Institut für Internationale Konfliktforschung (HIIK), University of Heidelberg, with Frank R. Pfetsch as its principal investigator. The database includes 301 conflicts (693 conflict episodes) from 1945 to 1999. Every conflict is described by 28 variables including political regime characteristics, political and economic development, conflict issues, third-party reactions, and outcome. The data is available at the project's website along with Conflict-Barometer, yearly project's on-line publication.

4.4. ARMED CONFLICT DATASET

Armed Conflict Dataset begun as Conflict Data Project at Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. Principal investigators are Peter Wallensteen

and Margareta Sollenberg. In collaboration with International Peace Research Institute (PRIO), Oslo, the dataset was expanded so it now covers 1946-2001 period or 255 conflicts. Database consists of three datasets: the first is focused on conflict as event, the second provides time-series for every state and the third codes information on dyadic interactions. It includes only basic conflict-description variables but as its coding rules are quite flexible, it provides reliable and comprehensive conflict list. Research results of this project are regularly published in Journal of Peace Research.

4.5. ACI

Armed Conflict and Interventions Project is joint project of CSP and CIDCM, University of Maryland. Its principal investigator is Monty G. Marshall. In fact, this project is based on his regional and cultural approach to conflict explanation. Marshall identifies few protracted conflict regions (CPRs) trapped within the culture of violence, which diffuses from CPR centre outwards. This project consists of 7 subprojects that are currently in different phases of development. These are: Conflict Regions (MAC), Direct Military Interventions (DMI), Political Interaction Events (PIE), Bilateral Trade Flows (BTF), Memberships in Conventional Inter-Governmental Organizations (CIO), Forcibly Dislocated Populations (FDP), and Arms Trade.

4.6. COW

Correlates of War Project was already partially described in the introduction. Since its very beginning, in 1963 at University of Michigan, to early 1990-ies its principal investigator was J. David Singer. COW database cover 1816-2000 period and consists of 11 datasets: State System Membership, Inter-State Wars, Extra-State Wars, Intra-State Wars, Militarized Interstate Disputes, National Material Capabilities, Formal Interstate Alliances, Territorial Change, Direct Contiguity (geographical relations), Intergovernmental Organizations, and Bilateral Trade. Since 1990-ies its principal investigator is Stewart A. Bremer. Its base is moved to Penn State University and nowadays is run as Correlates of War 2 (COW2) Project.

4.7. BCOW

Russell J. Leng started Behavioral Correlates of War Project in 1972, as integral part of COW project. Leng selected 47 representative cases form the original COW list of conflicts. For every war he coded the data on all significant events and interactions between warring parties according to his own typology. He differentiates three main types of events: military, diplomatic, economic and un-official. They are further categorized as positive, negative or neutral and as physical or verbal. The database is searchable by Crisis software that can be downloaded from author's website.

4.8. ICB

International Conflict Behavior is US-Canadian project that is currently based at CIDCM, University of Maryland and is headed by Michael Brecher, McGill University (Canada) and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, University of Maryland (USA). The database includes four datasets and covers the time period between 1917 and 2001. Each dataset is focused on different unit of analysis: international system, nation-state, and nation-dyad. Variables cover context description, crisis

description and attributes of actors. Much of attention is given to the problem of perception of conflict. How does the perception influence crisis behavior? The last datasets codes only those crises that are perceived only by one actor-state but not by its supposed opponent. Such crises are called "one-sided crises".

5. INSTEAD OF THE CONCLUSION

As many of mentioned research projects include more than one datasets, the decision to put it under one chapter or another was in some cases provisory. Those more representative for each category were put at the beginning of corresponding chapter and the most ambiguous ones at the end. So it seemed to us that the above classification of the projects themselves should be complemented by the classification of the individual datasets they consist of.[5] In the table 1, "the subject of observation" dimension follows the same classification rationale as discussed in the final paragraph of introduction.

The "level of observation" dimension, theoretically ranging from identity group to global political system, differentiates the datasets according the "vertical axis". Among the politically relevant social entities projects usually focus on the nation-state, as the most relevant one. They either examine the nation-state itself (its structural attributes or internal political events) or look how patterns of bilateral or multilateral interactions frame the global political system.

The individual datasets mentioned in sections 2, 3, and 4 are classified, therefore, according their subject and level of observation.

Table 1. Categorization of abovementioned datasets.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td colspan="3">The level of observation</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>State</td><td>International relations</td><td>Both</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">The subject of observation</td><td>The description of political events, crises and conflicts</td><td>▪ State Failure
▪ Don
▪ DON – 2nd dataset
▪ World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators II – 2nd part
▪ World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators II – 2nd part and III – 2nd part
▪ COPDAB
▪ IPI
▪ European Protest and Coercion Data
▪ Minorities at Risk
▪ Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War
▪ ACI: MAC</td><td>▪ DON – 3rd dataset
▪ KOSIMO
▪ ACI: DMI, PIE
▪ COW: Intra-State Wars, Extra-State Wars, MIDs
▪ BCOW</td><td>▪ COPDAB
▪ WEIS
▪ GEDS
▪ KEDS
▪ Armed Conflict Dataset
▪ ICB (context and crisis description)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Structural attributes of actors (nation-states)</td><td>▪ Polity
▪ CIFP
▪ DON – 1st dataset
▪ World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators I, II – 1st part and III – 1st part
▪ ACI: FDP
▪ COW: Material Capability, Inter-State Wars, Territorial Change
▪ ICB (attributes of actors)</td><td>▪ ACI: BTF, CIO, Arms Trade
▪ COW: Formal Interstate Alliances, IGOs, Contiguity, Attributed Diplomatic Importance</td><td>▪ FIRST</td></tr>
</table>

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[5] For example, Armed Conflict and Interventions Project includes seven different datasets.

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PREGLED BAZA PODATAKA O SUKOBIMA I POLITIČKIM KRIZAMA

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SAŽETAK

Rad donosi pregled važnijih baza podataka o konfliktima, krizama i sličnim političkim događajima te baza podataka koje se sadrže informacije o strukturalnim obilježjima država. Različite baze podataka najčešće su različito konceptualizirane, čak i kada opisuju isti fenomen. Različita konceptualizacija problema dovodi do različitih operacionalnih definicija te na kraju do različitih pravila kodiranja. Zbog toga se istraživač koji namjerava koristiti podatke sakupljene u bazama za statističke analize ili modeliranje društvenih fenomena može "izgubiti" u mnoštvu različitih skupova podataka. Ovaj pregled, stoga, pruža kratke opise važnijih projekata koji se bave prikupljanjem i kodiranjem podataka o konfliktima. Za svaki projekt su uključene informacije o matičnoj instituciji, osnovnim istraživačima, vremenskom rasponu i broju obuhvaćenih slučajeva. Na kraju su spomenute baze podataka klasificirane s obzirom na fokus (događaj ili struktura) i razinu (država ili međunarodni odnosi) promatranja.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

Baza podataka, konflikt, politički događaj, nacionalna država