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Extracting the root to reap the fruit: searching for a possible end to armed conflict

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Human development is defined as the process of widening choices for people to do and to be what they value in life. One of the pre-requisites in attaining human development is security which involves a situation that gives a sense or feeling of freedom and safety to move about or do certain things.

In the Philippines, one of the major factors that affect security is the country's overall peace problem. With a long history of ideologically motivated conflict that had resulted in armed hostilities through the years between government and certain groups, it behooves the government to look for solutions that will lead to lasting peace.

Thus, for several years now, the Philippine government has engaged in several series of peace talks with rebel groups that include the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), the

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Communist Party of the Philippines–New People's Army (CPP-NPA), with the objective of putting an end to the armed conflicts and of attaining lasting peace in the country.

By their very nature, peace negotiations are a delicate task and the process entails, at the very least, a willingness on both parts to listen to what each one has to say. It also calls for a recognition and understanding of the factors that give rise to the conflict.

This *Notes* attempts to identify the possible factors or determinants of the incidence of conflict. Making use of the results of the multisectoral consultations conducted in 1992 by the National Unification Commission (NUC) created during President Fidel V. Ramos' time and

PIDS Policy Notes are observations/analyses written by PIDS researchers on certain policy issues. The treatise is holistic in approach and aims to provide useful inputs for decisionmaking. This *Notes* is a condensed version of "Ideologically motivated conflicts in the Philippines: in search of underlying causes" written for the *Philippine Human Development Report 2005* by the same author. Ms. Jennifer P.T. Liguton helped in repackaging this *Notes*.

The author is Vice President and Executive Director of Asia-Pacific Policy Center (APPC). The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of PIDS or any of the study's sponsors.

improving on an earlier study of some of the poorest communities in the Philippines that this author did, a model was developed to test which factors are able to explain the incidence of armed encounters/conflicts in the Philippines for the period 1991 to 2004. Hopefully, a knowledge of these factors may give an early warning signal to the parties concerned and provide the basis for government to work on the appropriate measures to address them.

The spark that triggers: a framework

The empirical test and analysis done in this study is based on the theory of frustration-aggression linkage where aggression is said to arise from frustration. Of course, not all frustration translates into aggression. But there is one such kind of frustration that is most linked to aggression. This is the feeling or perception of being deprived relative to others that is felt by a group of individuals who are bound by some identity. If said relative deprivation is perceived to have been due to government action or inaction or to a systematic outcome of present political processes, then that aggression becomes directed toward the government.

This kind of frustration also extends to the concept of success. As the definition of human development indicates, every individual aspires to be able “to be” and “to do.” Achieving these aspirations requires certain basic “functionings” of an individual such as life expectancy, func-

tional literacy and standard of living. The presence of obstacles or barriers, however, that inhibit the full realization of these functionings of an individual, which are in turn perceived by a group of individuals to have resulted from government action or inaction, thereupon leads to the group’s frustration.

It is thus important to identify these obstacles or factors that are seen to inhibit the full realization of such functionings so that an early detection of a probable cause for an incidence of conflict may be made. And proposed solutions may immediately be put into place.

Laying the groundwork for the analysis

The study would have wanted to capture the processes by which frustration eventually leads to aggression but limitations in the data and other constraints prevented the author from doing so. At most, then, what was observed in the study was the initial situation that reflects relative deprivation, some evidence of government action (or inaction) and the resulting occurrence (or nonoccurrence) of conflict from the period 1986 to 2004.

The dependent variable considered in the analysis/model is the incidence of conflict. For this, the data on the number of reported armed incidents or encounters between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the NPA, MNLF and MILF from 1991 to 2004 were used. Data on the history of conflict were limited, meanwhile, to the incidents that were recorded during the period 1986 to 1990. The term encounter or incident refers to actual armed confrontation and raids on various installations.

For the independent variables that would test the hypothesis on which factors may explain the incidence of conflict directed toward the government, four sets of factors/evidences were used, largely adopted from the list of causes

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identified from the NUC consultations in 1992. These are:

- ❖ Factors that may lead to frustration
 - Relative deprivation in terms of access to services/facilities
 - Income poverty
 - Income inequality
 - Land disputes
 - History of conflict
 - Minorization
- ❖ Factors that increase the cost of “learning the truth”
 - Poor or nonexistent roads
 - No access to electricity and information facility
 - Low educational attainment
- ❖ Evidence(s) of government response/nonresponse
 - Poor governance, including lack of basic social services
 - Government programs on redistribution (CARP)
 - Government policy on peace
- ❖ Factors that affect expected cost and benefit of supporting the armed struggle
 - Income level
 - Demographic characteristics of the family

Box 1 outlines in detail the definition and characteristics of each of these factors.

The results: figuring out which count and which do not

Among the general findings of the study/analysis are:

Incidence of conflict by political administration

In general, the period under study (1986-2004) may be characterized by a wide disparity in

the incidence of conflict, especially if the figures are broken down by political administration.

The average number of encounter per province during the Aquino administration, for instance, was 0.86. This dramatically declined to 0.04 during the Ramos administration, affecting only nine out of the country’s 74 provinces. The figure, unfortunately, shot up again during Estrada’s time to 0.93 encounter per province and increased further to 1.45 per province during the present Macapagal-Arroyo administration, affecting 64 out of the 74 provinces.

Box 1. Defining and operationalizing the variables

1. Marginalized groups – defined as ethnolinguistic groups that constitute less than 1.5 percent of the entire population based on the 2000 Census of Population and Housing (CPH).
2. Income inequality – given by the Gini ratio. The ratio of the incomes in the highest and lowest quintiles can also be used as proxy.
3. Minorization – proxied by the proportion of “original” settlers (identified from history books and censuses dating back to the 40s) in the region.
4. History of conflict – limited to the armed encounters that took place from 1986 to 1990.
5. Data on educational attainment of all individuals of schooling age – taken from the 1990 CPH where the aggregation is according to age group and ethnic classification of a municipality.
6. Income – measured in terms of per capita expenditure, thereby capturing permanent income.
7. Government policy on peace – represented as a catch-all variable that stands for policy on peace and defense or on growth and income redistribution.

One of the glaring results of the study is that in the mixed provinces, the issue of minorization is the more relevant factor that affects incidence of conflict, where the source of frustration goes beyond disenfranchisement of land and is closer to political and cultural marginalization.

Evidence of relative deprivation

In terms of the evidence of relative deprivation, the differences in access to facilities and services as well as differences in outcomes are highlighted when municipalities within provinces are classified into those with high or low concentration of ethnic minorities. Obviously, the “majority” municipalities (those with low concentration of minorities) are the better off. And while at first glance, the average differences between minimum and maximum values are not so stark, when probed deeper, one finds that in the “minority” municipalities (those with high concentration of ethnic minorities), there are households with no access at all to basic facilities like water.

Evidence of minorization

Relatedly, among provinces with mixed municipalities (some have high concentration of ethnic minorities while others have low), the average proportion of original settlers has dropped to 65 percent and for some, the figure can go down to as low as 1.5 percent. In this sense, in-migrants have managed to outnumber the original settlers, resulting in the process of minorization.

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In terms of the specific results from the model, meanwhile, the following are to be noted:

The variables/factors that did not count

According to the model, the following variables did not figure as determinants in explaining the average number of encounters observed.

- Poverty incidence – the explanation may be that poverty incidence is too aggregate a figure and cannot capture the extent of deprivation relative to certain groups. Moreover, an individual is usually aware only of his own status in life but not of others.
- Income inequality – this may be looked at as an abstract concept. What is more obvious to the individual is the inequality in outcomes. At the same time, if access to services were equal, then clearly, inequality in incomes could not have been due to government action or inaction.
- Demographic characteristics – they do not figure either as significant determinants.

The variables/factors that mattered

The following came out as significant determinants of the incidence of conflict.

- Set of factors that may lead to frustration – would include disparity in access to facilities, in particular, to convenient water supply systems in provinces. History of conflict also increases the expected number of encounters as traumatic experience from the past, which is blamed on the government, consequently plants the seed of frustration.

Minorization, as noted earlier, is a very significant determinant of conflict in mixed provinces where the process has resulted in much frustration among the original settlers.

- Set of factors that decrease the cost of “learning the truth” – where the proportion of

households having (a) access to electricity, and (b) adults aged 65 years and above with more education, is higher, then the incidence of conflict is lower because the act of verifying the truth about the probable cause of frustration is easier, more convenient and less costly.

- Evidence of government response/nonresponse – the government’s cumulative accomplishment on the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP)—and not just the additional accomplishment of an administration at a particular time—is a significant determinant of and a deterrent to the incidence of conflict. Ditto with the government’s policy on peace and income distribution.
- Set of factors that affect expected cost and benefit of supporting the armed struggle – while incidence of conflict increases with average permanent income (where average is represented by the average income of the middle quintile), at a high enough level of permanent income, though, the incidence of conflict decreases. This implies that incomes of the middle class have to increase sufficiently high in order to discourage would-be followers from supporting the struggle’s cause. Again, the classification of the province—mixed, majority or minority—has a bearing on this.

What interventions can help – and how?

Based on the above results/findings, what measures or interventions may then be adopted to address or counter the incidence of conflict? Using a sensitivity analysis test, the study looked into six different interventions that the government may adopt and assessed their likely impact:

- Increasing adult education gives the best results regardless of the type of province. This will certainly help in decreasing the cost of “learning the truth.” This, however, is easier

said than done since the data indicate that the average educational attainment among adults aged 65 years and over is only less than 1 year of education. Obviously, then, the disparity in educational attainment began several decades ago because investment in education is long term. The challenge in addressing this is therefore tremendous.

- Adopting policies regarding peace similar to those during the Ramos administration has a “radical” positive impact, especially among majority and mixed provinces. In fact, the probability of bringing down the number of incidents/encounters to zero is very high.

And while the peace and rehabilitation policies and programs of the Ramos administration may have had various external and past events/developments working in their favor, the fact that the period of peace was evident for seven years during that time must certainly have benefited directly from such policies.

- Removing the disparity in access to water supply, in particular, the inconvenience of sourcing water from outside the households’ premises, is an effective intervention especially in minority provinces.
- Increasing access to electricity to 80 percent of the households will bring the probability of encounters down but not low enough.
- Finishing the CARP scope will not give the desired radical results but this should not stop

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Government policies on peace and income redistribution are, by far, the most significant determinant of incidence of conflict. Those that address relative deprivation especially in terms of access to and provision of safe water as well as settlement of land disputes are very important. The same is true with policies leading to economic growth.

the implementation of the CARP. This program, after all, might be capturing the issue of settlement of land disputes as a possible source of frustration.

- Increasing road density will just yield minimal reduction in the incidence of conflict because its impact is indirect.

Conclusion and recommendations

What can government do in the face of these findings?

One, government policies on peace and income redistribution are, by far, the most significant determinant of incidence of conflict. Those that address relative deprivation especially in terms of access to and provision of safe water as well as settlement of land disputes are very important. The same is true with

policies leading to economic growth. Government must make sure that this will be adequate as to increase incomes of the middle class.

Two, programs that improve adult education should be actively pursued as they are worthwhile investments in achieving peace in the future.

Three, in the short run, interventions that encourage truth-learning behavior and reduce the cost of learning the truth must be pursued. Efforts to bring government closer to the minority groups through the provision, for instance, of easy access to information for them should be strengthened.

And *four*, extreme caution must be exercised in encouraging the resettlement of majority groups into minority provinces.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that the model/analysis in this study is able to capture only a little more than 50 percent of the observed variability in conflict incidence. Notwithstanding this, however, the root causes identified are more than enough inputs for government to pursue the necessary policies and programs that would properly target and address them. Hopefully, they can provide the necessary impetus in achieving lasting peace in the country. 📄

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