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CLIMATE CHANGE AND AFRICAN POLITICAL STABILITY

Rapporteur's Summary:
CDCM Planning Meeting
Washington, DC – June 30, 2010

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Following is a summary of the discussion at the Constitutional Design and Conflict Management (CDCM) planning meeting held on June 30, 2010, in Washington, DC. This summary also reflects the decisions reached regarding the scope and methods of the CDCM research project.

The first topics were definitions and scope. The project leader clarified that the outcome variable being studied was the level of violence and not the development of democratic institutions *per se.* Participants next discussed the analytical distinction between *post-conflict* constitutional design, intended to end violence, and peacetime constitutional design that may help to prevent violence. The group agreed that the project's scope should incorporate peacetime constitutional design.

Broad definitions of "constitutional design" were put forward by several participants. They argued that the concept should encompass not merely constitutional texts but "constitutionalism" in general. This includes the governmental structure and electoral system, veto powers and procedures for constitutional change, and provisions for distribution of resources. Additional topics included federalism and decentralization of authority, innovations in power-sharing institutions, assessment of executive-legislative relations, and the role of constitutional courts. It was agreed that constitutional design encompasses not merely the formal structures of government but also the informal rules and social norms that legitimate the constitutional order. Some participants also highlighted the importance of transitional governance institutions. There was no support for narrowing this broad definition of constitutionalism. It was, however, emphasized that each case study need not encompass all possible aspects of constitutional design, but could rather interpret the term according to the particular context being studied.

A research framework was presented that situated constitutional design as a factor that can mediate societal stresses and thereby increase or decrease the likelihood of violent conflict. Participants noted that various elements of constitutional design may interact with each other in ways that alter their mediating effect, so that a systemic analysis is essential. There was general agreement on this basic model, but there was significant discussion about how to analyze the societal stresses or shocks.

A consensus was reached that such societal stresses include, but are not limited to, climate-related shocks. Some participants expressed skepticism about the relevance of a long-term process, such as climate change, for relatively shorter-term political dynamics and outcomes. It was countered that major weather events – related to climate change or not – can cause societal stresses that affect the chances of violent conflict. It also was underscored that examining climate shocks is an innovative aspect of the research project. It was finally resolved to broadly include for possible study: (1) any climate-related shocks, such as floods and droughts; (2) events such as migration flows that may or may not be climate-related; and (3) other internal or external factors that may affect the likelihood of conflict. The last category includes trade shocks, resource windfalls or shortages, environmental problems, and political shocks from elections or other governmental actions, whether domestic or foreign.

Participants noted that other factors may also mediate societal stress and that the case studies should acknowledge this while focusing mainly on the mediating role of constitutional design. The main research question was thus formulated as "specifying the linkages between constitutional design and violent/peaceful outcome" – acknowledging but not emphasizing the role of other factors. It was understood that each case study would presumably analyze a different set of shocks and stresses.

An additional question was whether to study the "process" by which constitutions are drafted and adopted, or to take the substance of constitutional design as given. Some participants argued for the importance of such process issues on conflict management, and they provided examples of cases where these processes have exerted strong effects on outcomes. But it was counter-argued that process issues were analytically separate and often not directly relevant to conflict management. For example, flawed or illegitimate processes have sometimes led to benign outcomes, and the inverse also has occurred. It was agreed that process issues might be relevant in some cases, particularly where there was a constitutional change during the period being studied, but that for a pre-existing constitution the focus should be not on historical analysis of how it came to be, but rather on how it has been implemented and its role in mediating societal stresses.

Regarding methodology, there was consensus that a case-study approach should be utilized. Such a research design will enable comparative analysis between cases, as well as within cases where there is significant constitutional change over time. Suggestions were made for an additional thematic analysis across cases, perhaps as an introductory or concluding chapter. Some participants suggested that the researchers might benefit from utilizing a shared set of standard indicators on stability and conflict. Others countered that due to the small number of cases, narrative description of specific circumstances and relevant factors in each case would provide better measures than standard indicators. It was decided that the project would provide the researchers access to such indicators, as a reference, but that the case studies would entail their own finer-grained analyses.

In discussion of specific case assignments there was a suggestion by some participants to include at least one case without any violence (where "the dog didn't bark"). Participants also discussed potential cases that represented outlier positions or provided "interesting" examples of constitutional design interacting with societal stresses. Cases that were discussed but not selected included the following: Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, South Africa, and Tanzania. The final selection of cases comprised the following: Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, and Zimbabwe.

To ensure a uniform approach across the case studies, the project leader directed each of the seven researchers to submit for approval within one month a proposal outlining the timeframe and specific societal shocks to be studied in each case.

Participants

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Justin O. Frosini	Bocconi University, Milan (ITALY)
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Alan J. Kuperman	University of Texas at Austin (USA)
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