Doctor in Political Science

“Under the shadow of political violence. Armed conflict and people’s normative outlook”

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Abstract

This PhD thesis intends to contribute to the debate on the legacies of political violence by reflecting on its societal consequences. The societal legacies of armed conflict encompass non-material consequences largely affecting behaviour, attitudes and normative preferences. Past studies on armed conflicts primarily analysed their physiological, economic and institutional consequences. An area which is less thoroughly investigated is how living in a country which experienced large-scale political violence in its (recent) history influences people’s normative preferences.

With the goal of making headway in the study of political violence and its legacies, this dissertation aims to investigate the role of large-scale political violence in the unfolding of people’s normative makeup in different societies. To this end, it assesses different forms of political violence taking place after the Second World War and how they relate to two normative preferences: emancipative values and religious adherence. The purpose is to reflect on how existential conditions and motivational preferences are interwoven by means of empirical studies that compare societies across the world over a long period (1946-2012).

Driven by new empirical evidence, this dissertation addresses a pressing set of questions: i) how can we best describe the consequences of violence on normative preferences? ii) which mechanisms explain these consequences? iii) how enduring they are? and iii) are these consequences more or less related to pro-social preferences? i.e. are they desirable or detrimental for conflict-free community relations?

This thesis asserts that studies focused on the non-material legacies of political violence seem better placed to cast light on the enduring imprint of violence in societies than those focused only on the direct human and material cost of armed conflict. Its main contribution is to shed light on the nuances of how political violence operates and the mechanisms by which it moulds preferences. The focus on these pervasive legacies of violence seeks to raise awareness of the manifold areas in which political violence needs to be considered as a social force steering people’s normative framework.

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