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MVZ489 Causes of Political Violence

Libyan Civil War

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Obsah

1 Introduction

The Arabs Spring of 2011 had different consequences for countries which took part in it. Some regimes in the affected region have managed to retain their position and power. In some countries events of the Arab Spring led to a regime change with a shift to either more liberal regime, as we can see in Tunisia, or with a shift to just another non-democratic regime as we can see in Egypt. The most unfortunate output of the Arab Spring led to a civil war. This was the case for Syria, or later Libya. In this work we would like to focus on the latter case of Libya. The interesting thing about Libya is that despite all of pessimism related to its future the country firstly started to democratize itself. Libya even managed to improve its democracy score in the generally known Freedom House index of democracy, when it moved from the worst possible option of score 7 to almost half-better score of 4,5. (Freedom House, 2014) In 2012 the newly created parliament known as General National Council started its mandate after general elections which were rated as first free elections which took place in country in 40 years. (REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, 2012, s. 1-2) However, after elections to the Constitutional Committee at the end of 2013, previous positive development was slowed down to be completely reversed in June 2014 after elections to the newly constituted House of Representatives[1]. The reverse was started by Operation Dignity launched by gen. Khalifa Hifter, formally targeted against islamists in the country. (RED24, 2014) Probably the most important incident regarding the start of Libyan civil war happened after the latest country´s parliamentary elections. Results granted a majority in a parliament to the secular block of Libyan parties. Subsequently their main opponent- the islam-based block, refused to recognize legitimacy of the newly elected HoR. Opponents of HoR have used formal procedural mistakes made during a transfer of power to a new parliament as a base for refusal of its legitimacy. They, then, announced restoration of the former parliamentary body over which they claimed control. Since that Libya have two opposing blocks, both claiming legitimacy over a country´s main legislative institution. Unfortunately, after June´s elections both blocks began to militarize and finally associated themselves with former rebel groups. (Wehrey & Lacher, 2014) What started as a political fight outgrew to a military conflict and subsequently a civil war which continues until today. Nowadays Libya can find itself stuck in a conflict which putted it very close if not exactly into the category of failed state.

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[1] Later as HoR.

The main focus of this work, as was indicated before, will therefore be the still ongoing Libyan civil war which has started in 2014. We decided that the theory of ethnic divisions should be in the main focus of the work. Work, then, is using and comparing two theoretical directions within the used general theory, specifically the classical theory of ethnic divisions (which is specified in a related section of this work) and theory of ethnic cleavages with focus on horizontal inequality. The main question of work is constituted as follows: Which theoretical direction within the theory of ethnic divisions is more accurate for explanation of causes of Libyan ongoing civil war? The main part is divided in three sections. First two sections are devoted each for one theoretical direction. At the beginning of those sections we are first explaining the usage of a particular sub-theory with an introduction to its main ideas. Subsequently we are evaluating evidence from within the Libyan case and comparing it with main hypothesis of each theory. The latest part of the work is finally devoted to a comparison of both used theories with an attempt to answer the main question of this work.

2 Classical theory of ethnic divisions

Democratization theories and conflict theories share many common arguments and ideas. That is also case for theory related to ethnic divisions. A very traditional view on ethnic divisions sees highly heterogeneous societies as very problematic for purposes of democratization and also as creating potential for intra-state conflicts. Divisions may be based on several people´s identities as ethnicity, religion or tribal or regional affiliation. A basic argument of related theories is very simple- the more heterogeneous and divided society the higher the problems for democratization or the higher the probability of conflict eruption. (Welzel, 2009, s. 78-80) For example Dahl in his well-known work "Polyarchy" presented statistical evidence showing that democracy is more often found in more homogenous countries than in more heterogeneous ones. (Dahl, 1971, s. 108) However this does not automatically mean that every country in which society is divided along several ethnic lines cannot be from its definition democratized or that those countries should automatically in some point of their development fall in a conflict. Another classical argument related to ethnic divisions is argument of ancient hatreds between groups which was elaborated in work of Kaplan. (2005) This argument was then very often used in explanations of Yugoslavian civil war. A connection of Libyan democratization process with the outbreak of its civil war led to usage of same arguments for explanation of both- the democratization failure and also the outbreak of civil war. Nowadays, many see the ongoing Libyan conflict to be the only possible outcome of Libyan heterogeneous society structure. (Benkato, 2012, s. 146) The following section should therefore first outline main division lines in Libyan society and then examines in a more depth its possible importance for ongoing conflict.

2.1 Structure of Libyan society

Libyan society is historically connected with tribes. Affiliation to mainly Berber and Arab tribes is seen as the main identity base for Libyan citizens. Nowadays, most tribes are connected with particular cities and regions. (Gombár, Kmeny a klany v arabském Maghribu, 2007, s. 19-20) Second important division line is affiliation to one of three Libyan regions, namely Tripolitan, Fezzan and Cyrenaica. (Nydell, 2012, s. 158) The region of Cyrenaica is most known for its longstanding requests for higher autonomy within the country with some groups trying to reach the complete federalization. There were also groups trying to acquire the complete independence for region of Cyrenaica, however, they constitute only a negligible

minority within this discourse without any considerable support from Cyrenaica´s public or high officials. (Al Jazeera, 2014)

Islam, contrary, does not present a division line in Libya, since vast majority of Libyan citizens define themselves as Sunni Muslims. (CIA, n.d.) The most problematic part of Islam is its radical version of jihadism. During the actual civil war, Libya is becoming a home for rising number of radical groups. Situation before 2011, though, was completely different. Qaddhaffi, contrary to some of his neighbours, was not trying to create a secular regime in Libya. Even though groups like Muslim Brotherhood as a political force were suppressed, Islam as a religion was present in all aspects of life of Libyan citizens with strong state support for it. Therefore the need for supporting organized Islam-based groups in spite of fight for religion was never very strong in Libya. (Lacher, 2014, s. 16-17) At the same time, Islam groups never formed the main base for regime opposition as it was again the case for more secular neighbouring regimes as Egypt. At the end, the need for supporting even the radical Islam groups was very low. During the first Libyan civil war which started in 2011 and during the subsequent transition period, the number of Islamists radical groups operating in Libya increased.[2] However, the number of those groups in time from 2011 to 2014 was rather low and what is most important without any considerable support from Libyan citizens. For regions where such groups were operating were much more common civilian protests against those groups than demonstrations of support.[3] (Urquhart, 2012) Therefore, we can conclude, that even though the number of radical Islam groups increased during the ongoing civil war, in time before its outbreak there was no considerable division line between more moderate and radical version of Islam in Libya.

The next potential division line can be found between different ethnics in Libya. The country has three main ethnic minorities, specifically Tebo, Amazigh and Tuareg. But again, the overall number of its members is very low compared to the number of all Libyan citizens with no considerable power for threatening state institutions. (Minority Rights Group International, 2011) Even though, the officials of those groups were politically very active after 2011, calling for recognition of their rights and corresponding power in state institutions, they were using rather political means as boycott of elections, than more radical means such as threat of violence. (REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, 2014)

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[2] One of the typical places in Libya with continuous presence of such radical islam groups is city of Derma. (Chivvis & Martini, 2014, s. 28)
[3] An example of such group operating in Libya is radical group Ansar al-Sharia which was also one of the most common target of anti-radical prostest.

Therefore we can conclude that before the start of the latest civil war the most important divisions in Libyan society could be found in tribal and regional identities with smaller importance of divisions along ethnic lines and with almost no importance of divisions along religion lines.

2.2   Analysis of conditions in Libya

The main question of this section is whether the simple fact of heterogeneity of Libyan society can be sufficient explanation for the latest conflict outbreak. Before we can answer this question we need to examine the evidence from Libyan society.

When looking for the most popular explanation of Libyan ongoing civil war, one will definitely come to the arguments based on Libyan high fractionalization due to tribal structure of its society. Such explanations are very popular not only for the majority of non-academic public but they are also used or mentioned in news articles about Libya and they were used ever since the revolution in 2011. (Benkato, 2012, s. 146) However the role of the tribal identity should not be overestimated. Some authors as Benkato (2012, s. 148) or Gelvin (2012, s. 77-78) are stressing that people are not basing their identity exclusively on affiliation to one particular tribe, but contrary that identity of Libyan people is based on several affiliations not rarely consisting of affiliation to more than just one tribe. Thus people tend to consider themselves to be a member of one or more tribes, city and region and so on. Nevertheless, tribes in Libya are not as much organized and politically active as we tend to see them. They are much more important in a people´s social sphere rather than in a political one. (Gelvin, 2012, s. 78)

The second important thing to stress is that national feeling in Libya is not on a negligible level. As we wrote earlier, the most visible regional identity can be found in the east region-Cyrenaica. Officials of Cyrenaica even announced its autonomy and named themselves as an interim government of the region. However, the public support for this move was rather low not only in other parts of Libya, but also in Cyrenaica. Opinion polls conducted in Libya in years 2012 and 2013 showed that around 65% of people of Cyrenaica did not agree with this move. Similarly, results of mentioned polls showed very low support for such moves made in other parts of country within all of countries regions. (National Democratic Institute, 2014, s. 10-11)

Using the same opinion polls we can find evidence that tribal identity is not as important in political life as it is sometimes presented. Question on making preferences in deciding for a political party showed that the most important element in decision-making is whether a party can assure a strong role for Libya in international community and whether a party represents a clear break with the previous Qaddhaffi regime. On the other hand, the least important factor in decision-making showed to be party´s affiliation to a specific tribe or family or presence of candidates from the same tribe or village in a party-list. (National Democratic Institute, 2013, s. 36)

Presented evidence is therefore showing that society in Libya is not very sharply divided along its main divisive lines of tribal and regional affiliation. Moreover we showed that identity of people in Libya is created on several bases and that it is not necessarily based on affiliation to a one particular family, tribe or city. Based on the evidence from Libyan society we can conclude that the basic fact of heterogeneity of Libyan society does not provide sufficient evidence for explanation of the outbreak of the latest civil war.

3   Horizontal inequality theory

The second theory elaborated in this work is theory considering the horizontal inequality between different ethnic groups within a country. The theory is focusing on cleavages and inequalities on a group level saying that inequality from the point of individuals does not provide sufficient evidence for explanation of outbreak of ethnic conflicts. Researches within this theory are saying that groups that are most probable to take part in a civil war are those groups that are under or above the country´s average income and not surprisingly those groups that are to a large extent excluded from state power and resources. (Cederman, Weidmann, & Gleditsch, 2011) Moreover, the theory is saying that a probability of such ethnic conflict is also increasing when some group experience a considerable decrease of power. A probability of an ethnic conflict is according to this theory rising when an exclusion of some large groups is a long-lasting phenomenon. (Cederman, Wimmer, & Min, 2010) The main question of this section is whether we can find evidence of a long-lasting exclusion of some groups or evidence of major power-shifts in power of some ethnic groups in Libya in time before 2014.

3.1   Analysis of conditions in Libya

To answer the section´s main question we need to look at the nature of Gadhafi's regime. Gadhafi created 40-years lasting sultanistic regime which similarly as many other sultanistic regimes had one of its bases on a policy of "divide and rule". In practice this meant that the most privileged and the most important positions within a state were granted to the members of Gadhafi´s closest tribes.[4] (Gombár, 2001, s. 88) Privileged tribes were mostly based in the west part of country. Contrary to that, tribes from the east part of country were systematically neglected for a long time, often suffering from lack of resources. If there were tribal conflicts in the time after Gadhafi´s fall, they were mainly between tribes of former Gadhafi´ supporters (therefore mainly from privileged tribes) and tribes of Gadhafi´s long-term opponents (therefore mainly from neglected tribes). (International Crisis Group, 2012, s. 3-6) Of course, we are not trying to say that there were no conflicts related to tribal rivalries however the fact is that most of those rivalries were created by the nature of Gadhafi´s regime. Naturally, after the fall of Gadhafi´s regime, those formerly privileged groups have lost their power to be subsequently called traitors and oppressed by members of other groups. Thus we can find several tribes, together constituting a non-negligible part of society, which were for a long time excluded from state resources and power and several tribes which went through the considerable loss of power.

Fall of Gadhafi´s regime have dramatically changed the Libya´s environment. As we outlined earlier the period of time after 2011 created a space for major power-shifts within the country. One of those previously oppressed groups was offshoot of Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. After 2011 the group have created a political party named as "Justice and Construction Party". However the party did not managed to won a majority against more secular party block in any parliamentary elections that took place in the country since 2011. (REPORTS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL, 2012, s. 2) Even though the Justice and Construction Party was involved in the government, the results of both elections have created a gap between its expectations and political reality. This fact can be seen as one of the several bases creating a very conflicting potential in the country, leading to the final refusal of legitimacy of HoR dominated by its rival party National Forces Alliance, which were events standing at the beginning of the actual civil war.

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[4] Such privileged tribes were e.g. Gadhdhafa, Maghara or Warfala.

4   Conclusion

This work was focused on utilization of two sub-theories within the general theory of ethnic divisions. The first utilized theory was a classical theory of ethnic division consisting of several arguments trying to explain the outbreak of civil wars. The theory sees the basic fact of high fractionalization as problematic and as creating a potential for ethnic conflicts sometimes operating with an argument of ancient hatreds between groups within one state. The second utilized theory is focused on examination of horizontal inequalities that means on examination of inequalities and relations between groups, not individuals. The main question of this work was asking which one of those theories can be considered as more accurate for explanation of causes of Libyan civil war started in 2014.

As was examined in the second chapter, Libyan society is organised along several division lines with the highest importance of tribal and regional identity. The detailed examination of Libyan conditions however showed that Libya´s society is not as sharply divided along its main division lines as use to be sometimes presented. All of its regions are, even despite their autonomous claims, supporting the national unity. Moreover, identities in Libya tend to be interconnected thus lowering the possibility for strong reserving of groups against each other. The basic fact of heterogeneity of Libya´s society is thus not sufficient for explanation of the outbreak of 2014´s civil war.

The second examined sub-theory showed much higher suitability for explanations of causes of the civil war. We have managed to find   several facts in Libya´s environment, prior to the outbreak of war, which are very similar to arguments of the related theory. To briefly mention the main parts- some tribes and regions in Libya were victims of a long-lasting political oppression which was changed only after the fall of Gadhafi´s regime. However the regime change did not presented only an end of such oppression but it also caused a considerable loss of power of formerly privileged tribes and regions. Even though we showed that Islam does not constitute a significant division line in Libya´s society, a gap between expectations and reality of acquired power for Islam-based Justice and Construction Party and its supporters created one of few bases for an outbreak of the latest Libya´s civil war.

To conclude on this work we can say, that the theory of horizontal inequalities looks to be more sufficient for explanation of the causes of the ongoing civil war in Libya. However we are not trying to present this theory as a one and only suitable and satisfactory explanation.

We are aware that lots of other factors should be involved into such explanation, however in comparison of in this work utilized theories the theory of horizontal inequalities showed higher explanatory potential for Libyan case.

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