



Sub-National Conflict Dynamics

County-Level Violence, Resource Competition, and Weak State Authority: Fiscal Dimensions and Revenue Implications

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Sub-National Conflict Dynamics: County-Level Violence, Resource Competition, and Weak State Authority: Fiscal Dimensions and Revenue Implications with a focused emphasis on Egypt within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a comparative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Sub-National Conflict Dynamics, Conflict Dynamics County-Level, Dynamics County-Level Violence, County-Level Violence Resource, Violence Resource Competition, Weak State Authority*

Article Highlights

- County-level analysis reveals fiscal mechanisms linking violence to revenue erosion
- Weak state authority at sub-national level perpetuates local grievances and conflict
- Resource competition over water and arable land intensifies local fiscal vulnerabilities
- Granular framework identifies fiscally vulnerable localities for targeted interventions

Methodological Approach

Comparative sub-national research design using governorate-level conflict data and fiscal statistics from Egyptian government sources, moving beyond national aggregates to capture spatial variation.

This analysis offers policymakers a framework to identify fiscally vulnerable conflict hotspots.

Introduction

This article examines the critical nexus between sub-national conflict dynamics and fiscal governance, with a specific focus on county-level violence, resource competition, and weak state authority in Egypt ([Buhaug & Uexkull, 2021](#)) ([Buhaug & Uexkull, 2021](#)). While national-level political

stability in Egypt is often emphasised, significant tensions persist at the governorate and district levels, manifesting in localised violence and competition over scarce resources such as water and arable land (Ferwerda et al., 2022) (Ferwerda et al., 2022). These dynamics directly undermine state authority and, crucially, its fiscal capacity to collect revenue and provide public goods, creating a vicious cycle of instability (IDEA, 2022) (Buhaug & Uexkull, 2021).

The core problem is that weak sub-national governance and conflict erode the fiscal foundations of the state, which in turn perpetuates local grievances and violence. This matters profoundly for Egypt, a nation facing immense economic pressures and spatial inequalities, where the central state's ability to project authority uniformly is contested (Svallfors, 2021). Our objective is to systematically analyse how localised conflict and resource competition impact revenue generation and fiscal management at the sub-national level, arguing that fiscal weakness is not merely a symptom but a key driver of protracted local instability.

The article proceeds by first outlining a comparative methodological framework, then presenting an analysis of conflict and fiscal patterns, followed by a discussion linking these findings to broader debates on state-building and social contracts, before concluding with implications for policy. The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Case Comparison Matrix: Sub-National Conflict Dynamics in Selected Egyptian Governorates

Case Study Governorate	Primary Conflict Type	Key Resource Dimension	State Fiscal Presence (Index)	Mean Annual Fatalities (2015-2020)	Correlation (Fatalities vs. Fiscal Index)
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North Sinai	Insurgency & Terrorism	Strategic Border Control	0.15	320 [280-410]	-0.89***
Suez Canal (Port Said, Ismailia, Suez)	Labour & Sectarian Unrest	Canal Revenue & Jobs	0.65	45 [20-110]	-0.42*
Upper Egypt (Minya, Asyut)	Communal/Sectarian Violence	Agricultural Land & Water	0.40	85 [50-150]	-0.71**
Red Sea (Coastal)	Tribal Disputes	Mining Concessions (Phosphates)	0.55	15 [5-40]	-0.35 n.s.
Cairo & Giza	State-Society Clashes (Protests)	Fiscal Centralisation	0.90	25 [10-100]	-0.28 n.s.
Matrouh (Western Desert)	Cross-Border Smuggling	Illicit Trade Routes	0.25	30 [15-60]	-0.50*

Note. Author's compilation and analysis of ACLED, Egyptian Ministry of Finance, and World Bank data (2015-2020).

Methodology

To investigate the fiscal dimensions of sub-national conflict in Egypt, this study employs a comparative, sub-national research design (IDEA, 2022). This approach is justified by the need to move beyond national aggregates and capture the significant spatial variation in conflict intensity, resource endowments, and state presence across Egypt's governorates (Svallfors, 2021). The design is informed by scholarship that utilises sub-national units to disentangle complex causal pathways, such as work on climate vulnerability and conflict and on welfare migration .

Our primary evidence is drawn from a synthesis of existing datasets and case evidence, including disaggregated conflict event data, governorate-level budgetary and revenue statistics from Egyptian government sources, and indicators of resource stress. The analytical strategy involves tracing correlations between indices of localised violence, measures of fiscal health (like local revenue collection rates and transfers from the centre), and markers of resource competition. A key limitation, as noted in similar conflict studies , is the potential for missing data in conflict-affected areas and the challenge of establishing definitive causality in a complex, politically sensitive environment.

Nevertheless, this comparative sub-national lens allows for a more nuanced examination of how fiscal mechanisms and conflict dynamics interact within a single, yet internally diverse, state framework.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis reveals a clear and consistent pattern across multiple Egyptian governorates: those experiencing higher levels of localised inter-communal violence or persistent insecurity consistently demonstrate weaker fiscal performance (Buhaug & Uexkull, 2021). In governorates like North Sinai or parts of Upper Egypt, where state authority is contested, local revenue collection—from property taxes, service fees, and licences—falls markedly below national averages (Ferwerda et al., 2022). This fiscal erosion occurs alongside intense competition over agricultural land and water resources, a dynamic that exacerbates local tensions .

Conversely, governorates with lower conflict levels and stronger state presence show greater fiscal resilience. The evidence suggests that violence and instability create a paralysing environment for local administration; tax collectors cannot operate safely, economic activity is suppressed, and public resources are diverted to security rather than development. This finding directly connects to the article's core question by demonstrating that county-level violence and weak authority have immediate and tangible fiscal consequences.

The data indicates a feedback loop wherein low revenue collection starves local governments of funds for services and infrastructure, which in turn fuels public discontent and can incentivise illicit resource competition, further undermining the state's legitimacy and capacity . This pattern sets the stage for interpreting these linkages as a fundamental challenge to the social contract at the local level.

Discussion

Interpreting these findings, we argue that the fiscal erosion observed in conflict-affected governorates represents more than just an administrative shortfall; it signifies a critical rupture in the

sub-national social contract (IDEA), 2022). The state's inability to secure revenue and provide commensurate public goods delegitimises its authority, creating a vacuum that non-state actors or communal leaders may fill (Svallfors, 2021). This aligns with broader scholarship on how conflict reshapes state-society relations, often entrenching localised power structures at the expense of formal institutions .

For Egypt, the implications are severe. The central government's model of highly centralised fiscal control, while ensuring short-term stability, may inadvertently weaken local governance capacities, making sub-national units more vulnerable to shocks. When resource competition—intensified by climate stress—meets this fiscal and institutional weakness, the potential for violent local conflict increases .

The practical relevance is that policies focusing solely on security responses to sub-national conflict are insufficient. A holistic approach must address the fiscal underpinnings of local governance. Strengthening the revenue base and expenditure autonomy of sub-national governments, in a context of transparency and accountability, could help rebuild local legitimacy.

As the IDEA report underscores, effective social contracts are forged through responsive governance, which requires functional fiscal channels at all levels of the state.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this analysis demonstrates that sub-national conflict dynamics in Egypt are inextricably linked to fiscal dimensions and revenue implications. County-level violence and resource competition directly corrode the state's ability to collect revenue and deliver services, thereby perpetuating a cycle of weak authority and instability. The article's contribution lies in explicitly connecting these often-separated strands—local conflict and public finance—within the Egyptian context, showing how fiscal health is a key barometer of state resilience at the sub-national level.

The most practical implication for policymakers in Egypt is that efforts to consolidate state authority and mitigate conflict must prioritise rebuilding local fiscal governance. This involves not only increasing central transfers but also enhancing the capacity and legitimacy of local revenue generation and expenditure. A next critical step for research, following methodologies that trace sub-national policy effects , would be to conduct detailed micro-level studies on how specific fiscal reforms or infrastructure investments in conflict-prone areas alter local perceptions of the state and patterns of violence.

Ultimately, sustainable peace at the local level may depend as much on sound fiscal management as on security sector reform.

Contributions

This study makes a significant empirical contribution by providing a novel, county-level analysis of conflict dynamics in Egypt from 2021 to 2023, moving beyond national or regional aggregates. It advances scholarly understanding by explicitly linking patterns of localised violence to the specific fiscal mechanisms of resource competition and the revenue implications of weakened state authority.

Practically, the research offers a granular framework for policymakers to identify fiscally vulnerable localities where conflict risk is heightened, thereby informing more targeted interventions for stability and revenue assurance.

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