

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

DOI: 10.19266/1829-4286-2018-02-59-78

The Classification of Variables in Comparative Study of Conflicts

MARGARIT PETROSYAN

Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, Armenia

The article analyzes the problem of selection of a set of variables in comparative study of conflicts since it is important not only to clarify the methods used in the study, but also to select the set of variables which mostly depends on the research problem. The right choice of the variables is of crucial importance as the wrong choice may often lead to wrong conclusions and the wrong policy formulation; the research can present a completely different picture. For comparative analysis of conflicts, different sets of variables are distinguished each of which is applicable only to a particular case. The article attempts to form a set of variables applicable not only to a specific case, but also to a comparative analysis of conflicts in general by increasing the effectiveness of comparative studies of conflicts.

Keywords

variables, database, comparative analysis, model, conflicts

The short-term optimism on the effectiveness of conflict resolution processes in the late 1980s and early 1990s was based on the belief that the end of controversies between superpowers will lead to the establishment of new world order simultaneously stimulating and initiating "economic globalization". There was an opinion¹ that the establishment of free market relations, the elimination of economic barriers, and the process of privatization will strengthen the interconnection between states and will facilitate the process of interstate relations development. All this was expected to undermine the substantial basis of ethnic disputes, and these conflicts would no

¹ Collier P., Elliot V., Hegre H., Hoeffler A., Reynal-Querol M., Sambanis N., *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*, World Bank, Oxford University Press, Washington, 2003.

longer turn into civil wars². However, further processes came to prove that the number of international conflicts will not be reduced in the near future, and will in some cases lead to the emergence of new clashes in the most active parts of the Eurasian Center, i.e. the Middle East, the South Caucasus, the Balkans, etc. The analysis of the conflict settlement processes and the forecasts based on it can have a serious impact on preventing further confrontations or at least the development of conflict towards the military stage. That is why more and more importance is being attached to the comparative analysis of conflicts to reveal the processes that have a positive or negative impact on the settlement process, the possibilities of raising the effectiveness of mediation, etc. Different mechanisms and models have been proposed for comparative studies of international conflicts, but it is not always possible to predict the rise and development of conflicts drawing upon these models. This is due to an inadequate formalization of the problem, and in particular, the formation of a non-complete range of variables used in the analysis. These models sometimes lack a series of factors, processes and events having a direct or indirect impact on conflict development. This distorts not only the real picture, but also the conclusions derived.

Changes in Conflict Regulation Field after Cold War

The main goal of peaceful regulation of conflicts is to avoid violence and to prevent further clashes between parties to the conflict. Negotiations between parties are used as a tool serving not merely for the purpose of conflict resolution. It covers a range of other aspects, among which education, inter-agency meetings, intercultural contacts, etc³. The low level of confidence leads the regulation process to a deadlock. It brings forth the following dilemma: parties to the conflict

² **Tiryakian E.**, Introduction: Comparative Perspectives on Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 2004, 45 (3–4), 147–159.

³ **Babbitt E.**, The Evolution of International Conflict Resolution: From Cold War to Peacebuilding, *Negotiation Journal*, Fall 2009, 539-549.

can not start the reconciliation process without certain degree of mutual trust, but they can not trust the other party before engaging in peace process⁴.

Geopolitical shifts after the Cold War require the "change and clarification" of the knowledge accumulated in conflict regulation field, as the "international conflict" is no longer an interstate conflict. Conflicts between states and non-state groups are more frequent nowadays, and these internal contradictions are viewed as a threat to global security. In addition, the international community starts to intervene in internal conflicts in which one or more parties to the conflict violate such "universal norms" as the right of people's to self-determination, human rights, principles of democratic governance, etc⁵. In that case, international groups and committees interfere; they study the history of the conflict, i.e. the causes of the conflict, and the key factors affecting its development. Those groups can promote the conflict regulation process by establishing a peaceful atmosphere, mitigating contradictions through reconciliation, and raise the effectiveness of conflict settlement process. The work of such structures can only succeed in case the local authorities are willing to fulfill the agreements reached, civil society is well developed, and it supports the implementation of the decisions made. The support of international community to reconciliation group is also important, but, definitely, a key importance is attached to a "strong mandate" of that group and the availability of appropriate resources⁶. Sometimes, the biased stance of mediators, due to the geopolitical interests in the region, the lack of political will, the "indirect" statements, etc. may cause the failure of conflict regulation process. The conflict of

⁴ **Kelman H.**, Building Trust Among Enemies: Building Central Challenge for International Conflict Resolution, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 2005, 5, 639-650.

⁵ **Stern P., Druckman D.**, International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War, Washington, DC, National Academy Press, 2000.

⁶ Ibid.

interests can also contribute to the intractability of conflicts⁷ (Middle East, Kashmir, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, etc.).

The beginning of key transformations in the field of international conflict regulation, which was marked by the end of the Cold War, brought about changes in three main directions:

1. The superpowers focused their attention on expanding the negotiating strategies to define a new agenda for the peace process.
2. The influence of non-governmental actors in international conflicts both as "conflicting parties" and as a third party (mediator) was significantly increased.
3. The issue of individual security appeared in parallel with the problems of national security, creating not only new opportunities for the cooperation between governmental and non-governmental bodies, but also great tension.⁸

To facilitate the solution of the problem, new theories have been introduced. The "Democratic peace theory"⁹, put forward by the end of the 20th century, was one of many theories that backs the empirical conclusions on the fact that states with a democratic system are rarely involved in conflicts with military outcome. The theory is based on two key ideas: 1) democratic states share common democratic values, and prevent the emergence of conflicts, 2) the existence of democratic institutions hampers leaders' involvement in conflicts.

Nevertheless, as further processes have shown, many criticisms of the theory are based on the conflicts that emerged in the 21st century (domestic, international, interregional, etc.), and undermined international political stability; moreover, they were often viewed as processes involving elements of the Third World War. The last stage of the formation of a new world order has seriously exacerbated the

⁷ **Torosyan T.**, To the Resolution of Intractable Conflicts: Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo, *Iran and Caucasus*, 2013, 17, 427-441.

⁸ **Babbit E.**, Op. cit.

⁹ **Ray J.**, Does democracy cause peace?, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 1998, 1, 27-46.

situation, since even the "frozen" conflicts (five-day war of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, four-day war of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2016) have turned to important leverages for the influential states.

The above-mentioned issues further complicate the process of conflict resolution. In this context, primary importance is attached to the comparative analysis of conflicts in terms of identifying the basic patterns and factors affecting the settlement process.

The Peculiarities of Comparative Studies of Conflicts

The overwhelming majority of the analyses in social sciences are comparative. Comparative analysis is the main description and explanation of the similarities and differences between the social units (community, nation, society, culture), conditions and outcomes. Such definition of comparative analysis reflects the traditions that have been formed within anthropology (intercultural analysis), sociology (societies), history (comparative history) and psychology (comparative psychology)¹⁰. Several other sciences can also be included in this list and, in particular, political science, one of the three main subdivisions of which is comparative political science¹¹.

In fact, all empirical social researches include some element of comparison since the cases under study are compared with the theoretically derived model cases, and they compare the case values with the reference values of the corresponding variables to evaluate the equivalence.

Despite large number of data collection and the existence of a variety of qualitative, quantitative, expert assessments and analysis, the disclosures on international conflicts are often insufficient in quantitative analytical literature. There are significant differences between statistical data in various scientific articles or reports. This is largely due to specific features, particularly in terms of indexing and

¹⁰ **Smelser N.**, On Comparative Analysis, Interdisciplinarity and Internationalization in Sociology, *International Sociology*, 2003, 18(4), 643–657.

¹¹ **Caramani D.**, *Comparative Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 2.

data collection. Instead of uncovering new, durable, systematic patterns, as is the case in most other quantitative subfields of political science, specialists involved in international conflict research are facing a huge database, which, in its turn, complicates the process of revealing these patterns¹². The main shortcomings in various models are conditioned by the incompleteness of large-scale data processing algorithms, sometimes by the political stance of experts, and, as a consequence, not accurate forecasting. Recently, an attempt has been made to ensure the reliability of research results through their reproducibility by publishing extensive appendices of database. But the credibility can not be increased in such a way.

Political scientists have long eschewed forecasting by focusing on causal relationship, and it is quite natural that any proposed new method must allow for causal interpretation as well as improved forecasting. But causal theories are considerably harder to verify than forecasts, and forecasts have the advantage of being observable implications of the same theories than as the causal hypotheses. This means that accurate forecasts can be used at least partly to verify claims about causal relationship¹³.

Within the study of international conflicts, many authors have touched upon the database, forecasting, selected variables and their impact on the results of the research, but the problem has been viewed from different perspectives. The most widely-accepted version is the "improvement" of database on international conflicts and the study of interconnection between data¹⁴. Others have modified the existing statistical models to take into account the peculiarities of the conflict¹⁵.

¹² **Beck N., King G., Zeng L.**, Improving Quantitative Studies of International Conflict: A Conjecture, *American Political Science Review*, 2000, 94(1), 21-35.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ **Jones D., Bremer S., Singer J.**, Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816-1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 1996, № 15 (2), pp. 163-213.

¹⁵ **Beck N., Tucker R.**, Democracy and Peace: General Law or Limited Phenomenon?, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, 1998, April; **King G.**, Event Count Models for

There are also studies that have attempted to formulate statistical models drawing upon the theory of rational choice that is based on the motives of states, political leaders or other internal actors¹⁶. The method of case study is often used in the comparative studies of conflicts. The advantage of this method is that it allows ensuring a high level of accuracy or measuring the indexes for a specific case study, which in its turn best represents theoretical concept, the characteristics of which need be "measured". Many variables subject to research are quite difficult to make measurable, among them democracy, power, or political culture, etc¹⁷.

It is important to coordinate the context of comparisons within comparative analysis, while maintaining both the variables (indexes) and the principles of interpretation of similarities and differences. Coordination of context is not an end in itself. The attempts to reduce the problems of equivalence are based on two methodological principles: first, researchers in the field of social sciences rarely choose the same criteria in several comparative studies. However, there are cases when the same criteria are used, in particular, when the participation of people in the elections is monitored to make a general assessment of political participation. This is in case when the countries included in the survey are "similar" or "comparable". Accordingly, the researcher can compare participation rate in different regions making part of the same constitutional system, to ensure the most effective outcome¹⁸. A similar approach can also be used when the subject of research are electoral and party systems, political

International Relations: Generalizations and Applications, *International Studies Quarterly*, 1989, 33 (2), 123-147; **King G., Zeng L.**, Logistic Regression in Rare Events Data, Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, 1999, September.

¹⁶ **Signorino C.**, Strategic Interaction and the Statistical Analysis of International Conflict., *American Political Science Review*, 1999, 93, 279-298, **Smith A.**, A Summary of Political Selection: The Effect of Strategic Choice on the Escalation of International Crises, *American Journal of Political Science*, 1998, 42, 698-701.

¹⁷ **Bennett A.**, Case Study Methods: Design, Use and Comparative Advantages, Models, Numbers, and Cases: Methods for Studying International Relations, Ed. Nahmias-Wolinsky Y., Sprinz D., 2007, pp. 19-55.

¹⁸ **Smelser N.**, Op. cit.

culture, etc. For instance, the above-mentioned approach can be used to study the peculiarities of the formation of political parties and multiparty systems in non-recognized states. In this case, the cases compared are quite close in terms of preceding processes; they have passed through the war, not all institutions of the political system function properly and one can speak of their institutionalization with great reservation. It is also advisable to take into account the previous political regime. For instance, while studying this issue, it would be effective to compare similar variables of states emerged on the basis of self-determination principle after the collapse of the communist regime.

According to the second principle, the process of searching for adequate indicators, in itself, should be independent from comparative research. The process of political participation, for instance, is the result of many complex political processes that differ significantly in their context. Thus, it is first necessary to clarify in theory and practice what is meant by political participation, then to determine what different forms the process of political participation can take, participation in voting, civilian impact on political life, informal forms of influence, etc. Additionally, a comprehensive survey of political participation should be carried out for systematic research and development. The paradox is that the equivalence of indices on the same phenomenon is achieved more efficiently in the process of selecting them under different conditions. Again referring to the case of multi-party system formation in non-recognized states, one can definitely state that during the analysis of multi-party system formation, the processes of recognition and the peculiarities conditioned by them, as well as the path of stateness are quite different. Thus, the factors affecting political participation may vary as well. In this case, it is possible to reach a more complete and effective level of indices equivalence.

According to Smelser¹⁹, the identification and harmonization of the context of both outcomes and determinants might yield more

¹⁹ Smelser N., Op. cit.

adequate comparative classifications than those with which the researchers currently work. Based on the running example of political participation, one line of classifying would be to produce a multidimensional grid of types according to the level of repressiveness of political regimes in the context of which political participation occurs – ranging from extremely totalitarian to extremely democratic, with a variety of intermediate types; stability of political regime; and organizational context of participation – elections, institutionalized parties, informal parties, open social movements, clandestine social movements, informal influence, etc.

Types of Variables and the Evaluation of Their Interconnection

The variable (index) is an important concept in the methods used in social sciences. It is a superordinated feature, characteristic or product. Cases (in some instances, individuals) may differ depending on the category of variables they belong to. Very often, these cases are individuals, members of this or that organization, region, nation, etc.; in some cases they can be conceptualized²⁰. The examples are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of cases and groups²¹

Case (=individual)	Examples for specific cases	Possible population
Person	Ramil Safarov	All participants of NATO's "Partnership for Peace" programme (2006)
Country	Hungary, Romania	World population
Software program	SPSS, Stata	All statistical package

²⁰ Baur N., Lamnek S., Variables, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, 2007, pp. 1-7.

²¹ The table was drawn up on the example of that presented in the work of Baur N. and S. Lamnek.

Article	Scientific article in the “Armenian Journal of Political Science”	All articles of the Armenian scientific journals
Conflict situation	Conflict in Ukraine/ 2013	Behavior, conflict situation in post-Soviet space
Film	Interstellar	Scientific films
Organization	Freedom House, Transparency International	Non-governmental organizations

In general, variables are considered as units of analysis that have different interpretations. In the field of social sciences, variables are of enormous significance in terms of hypothesis formulation; they provide the clarity of research problem by the accurate choice, as well as facilitate the selection of measurement scale. Variables help to avoid subjectivity and present the real picture of events, phenomena and behaviors. Sometimes, the wrong choice of variables may lead to wrong conclusion, wrong policy formation and implementation; survey may present a completely different picture that does not correspond to that society (case)²².

Variables can take different values, can be speculated, measured and monitored²³. Accurate measurement is of key importance since every statistical process implies that the data are not distorted. Valid data can be obtained only if that assumption is true. Typically, three types of variables are distinguished in statistical analysis, namely dependent, independent, and intervening variables.

Independent variables: Variables that explain and justify other variables and are antecedent to dependent variables. Thus, they are explanatory, predictor or manipulated variables. The explanatory

²² **Raiphea Y.**, Variable: Classification, Measurement and Importance in Social Science Research, *Journal of Business Management & Social Sciences Research*, 2015, 4, 6, 435-438.

²³ **Kerlinger F.**, Foundations of Behavioral Research, (3rd Edition), New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986.

variable is, in its turn, divided into “key causal variable” also called “cause” and the “control variables”²⁴. Depending on the research problem, the researcher has control over the independent variable and can choose to alter or change them thereby affecting dependent variables²⁵.

Dependent variables: Variable that bears the influence of independent variables. It is the variable explained by other variables. The outcome or changes are brought by the introduction of an independent variable. It shows the effect of manipulating or introducing the independent variable. Dependent variable changes or reacts to the state of the independent variable.

Intervening variable: Variable that is not directly observable but links the independent and dependent variable is called intervening variable. In some instances, the relationship between an independent and a dependent variable cannot be established without the intervention of another variable, which is achieved by intervening variable.

Given the above-mentioned, there is a need to address the differences between concepts and variables. Measurability is the main difference between a concept and a variable. Concepts are mental image or perception and therefore they are highly subjective. On the other hand, variable is a value which varies. A concept cannot be measured whereas a variable can be measured. In order to measure it, a concept has to be converted into variable. For instance ‘Democracy’ is a concept. In order to measure it, democracy has to be converted into variables like elections, voting, etc²⁶.

Variables may vary according to the level of case analysis. If the above-mentioned is viewed for individuals, then the following characteristics can be singled out:

1. Variables can describe individuals’ “genuine characteristics”;

²⁴ **King G., Keohane R., Verba S.**, *Designing Social Inquiry- Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp 77.

²⁵ **Raiphea Y.**, *Op. cit.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

2. Relational variables describe a case's interrelationship to other cases;
3. Contextual variables capture a case's embeddedness in a collective.²⁷

In distinguishing the problem according to the level of case analysis within the comparative analysis of conflicts, the following can be stated:

1. Variables cover the whole information on conflicts, and therefore, are genuine characteristics.
2. The analysis based on relational variables allows comparing a particular case with similar cases, make parallels, check out the relationship and possible links with other cases.
3. Contextual variables represent a more complete picture, in particular with regard to regional conflict analysis, since the place of a particular case in a particular group (region) is specified.

Numerous researchers involved in comparative studies, especially those focusing on qualitative research, are interested in specific historical consequences, results, and the reasons behind them within the context of other similar cases. Historical outcomes often require complicated explanations, and it is rather difficult to prove how well these explanations comply with the prevailing quantitative norms of social science. When the causal arguments are comparable, then the limited multitude rather than the number of case leads to strong restrictions²⁸. In general, the quantitative/qualitative split in social sciences is clearly visible in comparative social science. In contrast to other subdisciplines, the basics of qualitative research are stronger here. Moreover, these studies tend to be case-oriented (as opposed to variable-oriented approach) and "historical" (as opposed to abstractly causal)²⁹.

²⁷ **Baur N., Lamnek S.**, *Op. cit.*, pp. 1-7.

²⁸ **Ragin Ch.**, *The Comparative Method, Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*, University of California Press, California, 2014, p. 44

²⁹ **Ragin Ch.**, *Op. cit.*, p.8.

The popularity of the variable-oriented approach has been maintained over the last two and a half decades by the rise of interest in macro-social theory. In a variable-oriented study, the researcher examines relationships between general features of social structures conceived as variables. The model of causation central to this strategy is structural. Social units, such as states, have structural features which interact in the sense that changes in some features produce changes in other features, which in turn may produce changes in others. Features of social structure are viewed as more or less permanent attributes (elements) as they are very slow in changing³⁰. Abbott³¹ strongly criticizes variable-oriented methods of analysis because researchers often forget that they deal not only with variables, but also with people and human lives. Moreover, the latter are formulated as "cases" in the study. The above-mentioned refers to the vast majority of comparative studies on conflicts where displaced persons, refugees, victims and injured persons, or the entire population of the area are considered as variables.

Within the study of Huntington's "Clash of Civilization" (based on three empirical assumptions: 1) in the post-Cold War era, states of different civilizations have been more likely to fight each other; 2) during the Cold War era, the superpowers constrained intercivilizational conflict; 3) throughout history states of different civilizations have been more likely to fight each other than have those that share a common civilization), the researchers single out "non-civilization-based" factors or control variables, among which geographical location (geographically, the wars between non-neighboring countries are less likely to happen), regime-type (democracy decreases the possibility of harsh confrontation), and relative capability (military capabilities)³². The results of a

³⁰ **Ragin Ch.**, Op. cit., p. 85.

³¹ **Abbott A.**, Time Matters. On Theory and Method, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2001, p. 296.

³² **Henderson E., Tucker R.**, Clear and Present Strangers: The Clash of Civilizations and International Conflict, *International Studies Quarterly*, 2001, 45, 317-338.

comparative analysis based on independent and dependent variables as well as those based on the ignorance of manipulated variables (geographical location, geopolitical significance of the region, regime-type, etc.) will represent a totally different picture and will limit the possibilities of obtaining complete data and explaining all causal relationships. Thus, the article focuses more on the problem of forming a set of independent, dependent, and intervening variables which will be free from objective perceptions, and will enable to identify all causal links, meanwhile not distorting the existing information model on the conflict.

Formation of a Set of Variables for the Comparative Analysis of Conflicts

In the comparative analysis of ethno-political conflicts, based on a case study method with a small number of cases, i.e. a very important tool for studying complex macro-level phenomena (wars, revolutions, changes of the regime, including the collective units of analysis, such as cities, regions, organizations, states, etc.), one can observe two similar states different from each other on the level of ethnic pressure or conflict development. For instance, the two states may have the same political history, economic development, or demographic level, but different ethnic composition or different extent and depth of contradictions. In case of a small number of explanatory variables, researchers can easily explain different ethnic relations. Within the framework of addressing such problems, an attempt has been made to study the hostilities during the Chechen conflict, while the clashes in neighboring Dagestan were not so intense, despite the large number of similarities (even similarities of dissatisfaction and complaints)³³. Almost the same has been registered in Georgia, when Ajaria avoided military actions, unlike South Ossetia and Abkhazia that chose

³³ **Zurcher Ch., Baev P., Koehler J.**, Civil war in the Caucasus, *Understanding civil war: Evidence and analysis*, Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2005, pp. 259–298.

secession. Moreover, the military confrontation took place in two stages, in the 1990s and in August 2008. In both cases, the existence or absence of a conflict (clashes, hostilities) has been chosen as dependent variable.

Alternatively, a researcher could select the independent variable, or look for two cases alike in many aspects but different in the value of the hypothesized explanatory variable. Any subsequent differences, observed in ethnic conflict, could perhaps be attributed to differences in the independent variable. For instance, we can observe two countries similar in terms of economic wealth, regime type, but one of them unlike the other has adopted electoral rules designed to ease ethnic tensions. Thus, if we observe the differences in the level of ethnic tensions, these may be due to the electoral rules³⁴.

Not all the variables used in the research can be free of measurement errors. Sometimes, even the links between variables are being questioned. Lacking variables can affect both explanatory and dependent variables. Selectivity can generally lead to the ignorance of variable values, including their zeroing³⁵. The dependent, independent, and intervening variables may constitute the formation basis of a set of variables used for the comparative conflict analysis. The ignorance of any of them may lead to the distortion of information about the conflict. Moreover, the selective or discretionary approach to the choice of variables is not a scientific approach, and it runs contrary to the principles of objective analysis and forecast.

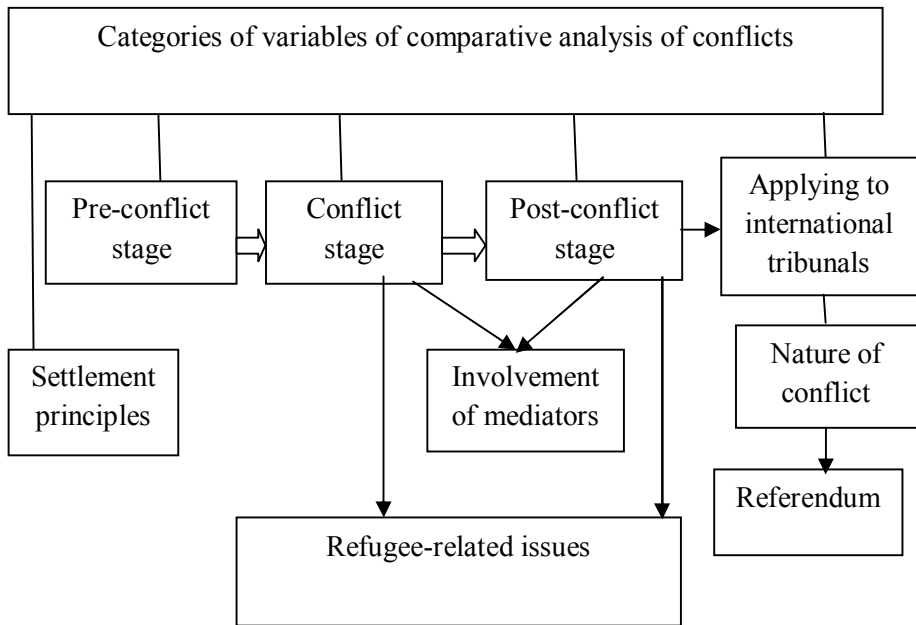
In general, the choice of variables for the analysis is specific to a particular conflict, and in each case the choice of a set of variables depends on the research problem. At the same time, the outcome of each study depends not only on the research strategy and research problem, but also on the correct choice of the variables used. For

³⁴ **Barakso M., Sabet D., Schaffner B.**, Understanding Political Science Research Methods, The Challenge of Inference, Taylor & Francis, New York, 2014, pp. 180-181.

³⁵ **Bollen K.**, Instrumental Variables in Sociology and the Social Sciences, *The Annual Review of Sociology*, 2012, 38, 22-58.

comparative analysis of different cases, different sets of variables are distinguished, each of which is very often applicable to a particular case³⁶. Therefore, in the comparative analysis of conflicts, it is important to form a set of variables, each of which applicable to the cases belonging to this or that class of variables. The set of variables of each class must meet the conditions of being necessary and sufficient. The first condition requires the existence of all variables necessary to prevent the distortion of the phenomenon under study. The second requires a minimum number of variables sufficient to exclude such distortion. Figure 1 below introduces the classes that are decisive in the comparative analysis of conflicts.

Figure 1



Combining the variables used in the comparative study of conflicts, the following model has been drawn up. The included variables operate in different dimensions; therefore, the measurement is different. In particular, the variables show the presence or absence

³⁶ **Torosyan T., Petrosyan M.**, Comparative Analysis of Conflicts: Modeling Problems, *Armenian Journal of Political Science*, 2015, 2, 121-138.

of a phenomenon, the sequence, and eventually the number of it³⁷. These variables have been grouped into classes (Table 1) first of all according to the stages of conflict development with an aim to clarify the key events of each stage, as well as to identify the factors that can have direct or indirect impact on conflict settlement process as well as in terms of identification and solution of the problems at the post-conflict stage. Subsequently, the model presents the nature of the conflict, the issues related to referendum, the principles of settlement (international law), mediators, international courts and the refugee-related variables. The variables included in the table are necessary to clarify the factors affecting the process of conflict development, and they are sufficient to identify the peculiarities and constraints of the settlement process.

Table 1

Classes of variables	Variables
Pre-conflict stage	Status before conflict
	Dissolution of status
	Predominant nation
	Protests
	Initiator of the first manifestations of protests
	Asymmetrical use of force by the metropolis
	Unilateral declaration of independence
Conflict stage	Hostilities
	Boundaries of conflict expansion
	Foreign military intervention
Post-conflict stage	Special status
	Involvement of peacekeeping forces
	International territorial administration/format

³⁷ **Caramani D.**, Introduction to the Comparative Method with Boolean Algebra, Sage Publications, 2009, p. 2.

	Opportunities to hold democratic elections
	Declaration of independence after the failure of negotiations
	Recognition of independence
	Membership in international organizations
	Choice of government system (democracy/authoritarianism)
	Resurgence of military clashes
Nature of conflict	Self-determination/non self-determination conflict
Referendum	Referendum held
	Population's participation in the referendum
	Conditions for holding a referendum
	The initiator of hostilities during the referendum
Principles of settlement / international law	Clarification of the principles of settlement (documents they are enshrined in)
	Holding of a (new) referendum
	The issue of independence on the agenda
Involvement of mediators	International organizations/states/individuals involved in the settlement process
	Formation of special structures/groups/coalitions dealing with settlement
	Involvement of superpowers in the settlement process
	Involvement of international non-governmental organizations
	Involvement of all parties to the conflict in the negotiations
	Clarification of final status
	Resolutions adopted by international organizations
	Involvement of civil society

International tribunals	Opinion of International Court of Justice
Refugee-related problems	Refugee-related problems
	International organizations dealing with refugee-related problems
	The problem of internally displaced persons
	Involvement of organizations engaged in the protection of refugee rights

The use of this model enables to define the nature of conflicts, the possibilities and the conditions for holding a referendum, the limits of the impact of hostilities on the final outcome of the referendum. It will become possible to clearly distinguish the use of the fundamental principles of international law in the process of peaceful settlement of conflicts. The study of resolutions adopted by international organizations that were the most active in the conflict settlement process will give the answer to the following question: How do the resolutions adopted by the international organizations affect the international community's opinion and the process of peaceful settlement of conflicts? The problems of the final determination of the status can also be resolved in the case of a clear and impartial interpretation of resolutions. The solution of refugee-related issues also becomes possible as the effectiveness of the activities of international organizations dealing with the protection of refugee rights and the range of key factors hindering this process are clarified. Comparative analysis of conflicts based on this set of variables will greatly increase the effectiveness of comparative studies of conflicts. It may enable to clarify the scope of the phenomena under study, combine events to conduct a comprehensive survey, identify the nature of factors directly or indirectly affecting the settlement process, as well as to predict the prospect of it.

Conclusion

- Within the comparative analyses, it is important to coordinate the context of comparisons while maintaining both the variables and the principles of interpretation of similarities and differences.
- The independent, dependent and intervening variables are in the core of the formation of a set of variables for the comparative analysis of conflicts. The ignorance of each of them may lead to the distortion of information on conflict, and consequently have negative implications for the conflict settlement process. The discretionary approach to the choice of variables contradicts the principles of objective analysis and forecasting.
- Various variables, mechanisms for their analysis and models have been put forward for the study of international conflicts. Nevertheless, variables included in these models are not always necessary or sufficient to analyze the whole database related to every component of the conflict given the decisive factors in all stages of the conflict development as well as the additional challenges arising in the settlement process.
- The analysis based on the classification of the variables and the set of variables proposed in the article allows not only to dramatically reduce the number of variables required for effective analysis of this or that component of the conflict, but also not to exclude those variables the lack of which could distort the real picture and question the accuracy of the conclusions.
- The proposed classification of the variables and the formation of a set of variables based on these classes can be applied not only for a specific case, but within the study of conflicts in general, ensuring the bases for objective and comprehensive analysis.