

1.

DEVELOPMENT AND CONFLICTS IN TWENTY FIRST CENTURY INDIA, UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERNS OF RIOTS IN KERALA AND BIHAR

Rahul V Kumar¹

Conflicts and Social Change

The world we live in is a complex of unequal relationships, having a general tendency to constantly replicate itself. Historically this tendency has been punctuated by conflicts which greatly influenced the course of development. Dominant groups were continuously replaced and new actors came to the fore in determining the trajectory of the development process. Goals differed for each of these actors and even between the subordinated groups. Inequalities never seemed to narrow. Across all social units-be it the world at large, or nations, or regions within them, or at the very bottom, between individuals-hostilities and resentments played a crucial role in developmental outcomes. These hostilities sometimes took the shape of violent conflicts in which loss of life and property was huge. Such incidents brought to the fore questions on the need to understand and analyse conflicts and its outcome, manage them, and to prevent relapse. The World Development Report 2011 was an attempt in this direction to recommend essential changes that could help countries and regions within them to move beyond conflicts. The present paper broadly attempts to understand such conflicts by examining its trend among Indian states and specifically understanding the nature of riots in the state of Kerala and Bihar.

There is a popular perception that for the world as a whole and for the various regions constituting it development has proceeded with a decline in violent conflicts. Decline in violence could thus be both an indicator of the efficient institutional mechanism of the state as well as a factor that could usher in the development process. This paper tries to put these claims in perspective by understanding the nature of conflicts in two states of India which stand at opposite poles of developmental achievements. What emerges is a

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, NSS College Ottapalam

picture which indicates that the theoretical conditions for conflicts to decline could be independent of the presence or absence of a strong welfare state. Rather the degree and strength of capitalist development in the selected regions could be a better indicator of the nature of conflicts prevailing in these states.

We proceed by defining the following terms used in the paper. Conflict is an “action which is oriented intentionally to carrying out the actor’s will against the resistance of the other party or parties” (Weber 1968, 38). Although the literature on conflicts tends to use conflicts, struggles and tensions synonymously, we understand that it is the nature and degree of violence that classifies these terms.

Data from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) is used to present the incidents of riots in selected states across the country. There are different types of crimes and IPC offences that are reported in the NCRB data. There are two broad ways in which conflicts can be understood in any society. Conflicts can occur between individuals in the society or between the individual and the state. In the present study we have considered murder as a proxy of conflicts between individuals and riots as a proxy for conflicts between the individuals and the state. In other words ‘riots’ are considered as a proxy for citizen-state conflicts. The second proxy in our analysis is ‘murder’ which largely reflects citizen-citizen conflicts in the state. While it is not possible to check the causes or consequences of riots from our selected data source, we have taken it as a measure to understand the efficiency of the state to hold the monopoly over violence.² This also helps in categorizing the state on its stage of development. The hypothesis is that large number of incidents of riots in the state is a possible indication of a ‘growing state’ and also of the vulnerable institutional mechanism to deal with such situations.

² I have used the term monopoly of violence based on the Max Weber’s concept of the “monopoly of legitimate use of physical force” within a given territory as a defining concept of the state. The use of force, according to Weber, is a specific means of the state and that violence and state have an “intimate” relation with each other (Weber, 1919, 1). The idea was first discussed in Max Weber’s essay *Politics as a Vocation* (1919).

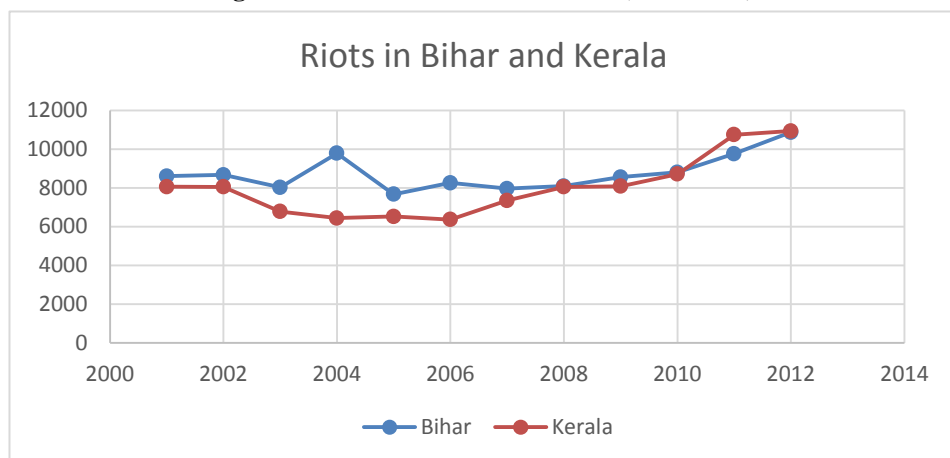
Nature of Riots in Kerala

Kerala is unique among the Indian states not only for its better development indicators but also with a comparatively higher number of riots.³ In fact it is one among the three states (the other two being Bihar and Maharashtra for data until 2012) which reports the largest number of riot incidents in the country. The questions raised in this context are important to expand our idea of development. Including violent conflicts to understand the process of development helps us to critically examine the path and pattern of the development process. Would development without violent conflicts raise our potential to a higher terrain than the current one? What have we missed amidst these increasing numbers of conflicts in Kerala?

Unlike Bihar, the total number of murders reported in Kerala is much lower. For the period 2001 to 2012, across all districts of Kerala 4733 incidents were reported. However, the situation in Kerala seems to have changed since the beginning of the new century with a rapid increase in the number of reported riots. The number of these incidents has converged towards the figures in Bihar (Figure 1). Total number of incidents reported during the period in Bihar was 105096 and in Kerala it was 96116.

From the year 2011 Kerala has overtook Bihar in the number of reported incidents of riots. In the year 2012, Kerala (10935) had more number of reported incidents than in Bihar (10871).

³ Crime in India Annual Series, 1954-2006 Published by the Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Electronic Dataset and Codebook Compiled by Monty G. Marshall and Donna Ramsey Marshall Center for Systemic Peace December, 2008. Riot are defined by the NCRB as those incidents involving 5 or more people; this includes crimes reported under Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section 143-145, 147-151, 153, 153 A, 153 B, 157, 158, and 160.

Figure 1: Riots in Bihar and Kerala (2001-2012)

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

During the period 2001 to 2012, across all the fourteen districts of Kerala, an average of 573 riots were reported. From 2001 to 2006 the average number of incidents across these districts showed a decline. But since 2006 until 2012, these incidents have steadily increased. The average number of riots across districts during 2012 was approximately 781. However, it is seen that the number is primarily due to five selected districts in Kerala which contributes to approximately 50 per cent of these incidents (Table 2). We have noted selected development indicators of these districts in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Development Indicators in Selected Districts of Kerala

Selected Districts of Kerala	Decadal Growth in Population (2001-2011)	Population % to Total	Sex Ratio	Population Density	Literacy Rate (LR)	Male LR	Female LR	Urban Population %	Rural Population %
Kannur	4.84	7.56	1133	852	95.41	97.54	93.57	65.05	34.95
Kollam	1.72	7.88	1113	1056	93.77	95.83	91.95	45.11	54.89
Kozhikode	7.31	9.25	1097	1318	95.24	97.57	93.16	67.15	32.85

Thrissur	4.58	9.32	1109	1026	95.32	96.98	93.85	67.19	32.81
Trivandrum	2.25	9.91	1088	1509	92.66	94.6	90.89	46.2	53.8

Source: Census 2011

The indicators in the case of these districts are very different from the districts of Bihar. These districts across Kerala have lower population growth, better sex ratios, much higher literacy rates and a greater percentage of the population living in urban areas. The only comparable feature is that these districts have a very high population density as in the case of Bihar.

Table 2: Riots Reported for Selected States in Kerala

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Kannur	831	567	505	519	616	737	867	872	1016	935	1065	1277
Kollam	575	778	712	575	544	624	546	474	693	894	1062	762
Kozhikode	1127	973	857	802	702	712	864	1194	1074	1103	1443	1455
Thrissur	577	642	658	685	563	602	596	708	699	791	959	1033
Trivandrum	892	964	799	765	927	838	980	964	1099	1087	1384	1455
Total	4002	3924	3531	3346	3352	3513	3853	4212	4581	4810	5913	5982
Total Kerala	8063	8052	6780	6444	6520	6364	7353	8056	8083	8718	10748	10935
Percent of Total	49.6	48.7	52.0	51.9	51.4	55.2	52.4	52.2	56.7	55.2	55.0	54.7

Source: Compilation from National Crime Records Bureau

The five districts shown in Table 2 contribute towards approximately 50 per cent of the reported incidents of riots in Kerala. From the data we see that on an average these incidents have been rising across these districts from approximately 50 per cent in 2001

to approximately 55 per cent in 2012. Two northern districts of Kozhikode and Kannur and two southern districts of Kollam and Trivandrum have reported the maximum number of incidents.

Nature of Riots in Bihar

We have attempted to compare the reported incidents of riots in the northern and southern districts of Bihar, based on their historic trend. Seven districts each from the North and South of the Ganges in Bihar are selected for comparison. These districts have been the hotbeds of violent conflicts during the pre-liberalization period. Results are noted in Table 4 and Table 5. Before that a brief profile of these districts would indicate certain characteristics (Table 3).

Table 3: Characteristics of the Selected Districts of Bihar

South	Decadal growth in population (2001-2011)	Population % to total	Sex ratio	Population density	Literacy rate (LR)	Male LR	Female LR	Rural population %	Urban population %
Arwal	19.01	0.67	927	1099	69.54	81.27	56.85	92.64	7.36
Aurangabad	24.75	2.42	916	760	72.77	82.52	62.05	90.62	9.38
Bhojpur	21.27	2.62	900	1136	72.79	84.08	60.2	85.71	14.29
Gaya	26.08	4.22	932	880	66.35	76.02	55.9	86.86	13.14
Jehanabad	21.34	1.08	918	1206	68.27	79.3	56.24	88.05	11.95
Patna	22.34	5.56	892	1803	72.47	80.28	63.72	56.52	43.48
Rohtas	20.22	2.85	914	763	75.59	85.29	64.95	85.57	14.43
North	Decadal growth in population (2001-2011)	Population % to total	Sex ratio	Population density	Literacy rate (LR)	Male LR	Female LR	Rural population %	Urban population %
Darbhanga	19	3.78	910	1721	58.26	68.58	46.88	90.31	9.69
Muzaffarpur	27.54	4.6	898	1506	65.68	73.61	56.82	90.17	9.83
Purnea	28.66	3.15	930	1014	52.49	61.09	43.19	89.59	10.41

Saran	21.37	3.8	949	1493	68.57	79.71	56.89	91.07	8.93
Siwan	22.25	3.2	984	1495	71.59	82.77	60.35	94.51	5.49
Bettiah (pashchim champan)	28.89	3.78	906	750	58.06	68.19	46.79	89.96	10.04
Motihari (purba champan)	29.01	4.9	901	1281	58.26	68.02	47.36	92.15	7.85

Source: Census 2011

The northern districts of Bihar are relatively poor in its development indicators. They have a relatively high population growth and a larger share in the total population. The literacy rates are lower especially for women when compared to the south and they have a higher share of the population living in the rural areas. The northern districts of Bihar also have a higher density of population than the south. It is noted that as far as these selected development indicators are concerned there are not much significant differences between the north and the south although the south is slightly ahead of the north.

Table 4: Reported Riot Incidents in Selected Northern Districts

Year riots (north)	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Darbhanga	142	244	240	420	211	191	55	50	481	319	489	812
Muzaffarpur	241	393	460	819	407	413	402	316	356	419	445	427
Purnea	269	316	189	202	152	136	175	187	150	145	178	175
Saran	309	265	240	330	170	228	331	266	298	344	428	370
Siwan	239	217	186	223	182	173	121	125	164	251	295	379
Bettiah	340	436	455	682	304	238	202	261	198	304	245	483
Motihari	365	418	386	365	366	368	348	323	486	450	641	728

Total	1905	2289	2156	3041	1792	1747	1634	1528	2133	2232	2721	3374
Total (All Districts)	8606	8675	8029	9793	7671	8259	7962	8099	8554	8809	9768	10871
Percent of Total	22.1	26.3	26.8	31.0	23.3	21.1	20.5	18.9	24.9	25.3	27.9	31.0

Source: Compilation from National Crime Records Bureau

Table 5: Riots Reported from the Southern States

Year riots (south)	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Arwal	76	61	59	31	30	45	30	26	44	26	49	32
Aurangabad	155	195	145	235	193	208	216	445	364	283	334	320
Bhojpur	240	124	164	232	194	254	222	191	184	234	140	137
Gaya	417	319	311	391	405	326	316	544	374	319	262	397
Jehanabad	170	169	79	98	95	71	87	127	127	149	135	103
Patna	506	489	494	562	484	440	497	428	476	516	534	522
Rohtas	391	401	254	204	137	136	124	154	219	228	249	222
Total	1955	1758	1506	1753	1538	1480	1492	1915	1788	1755	1703	1733
Total Bihar	8606	8675	8029	9793	7671	8259	7962	8099	8554	8809	9768	10871
Percent of Total	22.7	20.3	18.8	17.9	20.0	17.9	18.7	23.6	20.9	19.9	17.4	15.9

Source: Compilation from National Crime Records Bureau

Comparing the data of the northern and southern districts of Bihar we note the following:

- a) Approximately 20 percent of the riot incidents during the period 2001 to 2012 across all districts in Bihar are contributed by the 7 southern districts. The total numbers of incidents reported from all these districts are 20376.

- b) Patna and Gaya are the most riot prone districts in the south contributing 4586 and 1422 incidents during the period 2001-2012.
- c) Approximately 25 percent of the riot incidents during the period 2001 to 2012, across all districts in Bihar, are contributed by the selected 7 northern districts. The total numbers of incidents reported from these districts are 26552.
- d) At least three districts in the north are riot prone with number of incidents much higher than the southern districts. These include Motihari (5244), Muzaffarpur (5098) and Bettiah (4148).
- e) For the southern districts we notice a considerable decline in the incidents from 22.7 per cent in 2001 to 15.9 per cent in 2012. The only year which shows a diversion is year 2008 which contributed to 23.6 per cent of the total reported incidents in the state of Bihar.
- f) For the northern districts we notice a reverse trend from the south with increasing number of incidents from 22.1 per cent in 2001 to 31 per cent in 2012. Period 2006-2008 showed a general decline in riots in these districts.

A feature that is observed is that the nature of riots in the south and north could be characteristic of the development of these regions. This could indirectly mean that political economy of development of these sites could reflect the pattern of violent conflicts between the citizens and the state. Some observables are that the absolute number of riot incidents in the north of the Ganges is much higher than that in the south (except for the exception of Patna and Gaya which have relatively high figures). This could also indicate that the reported incidents in Patna and Gaya could be having more urban centric features than in the north.

Nature of Development and Riots

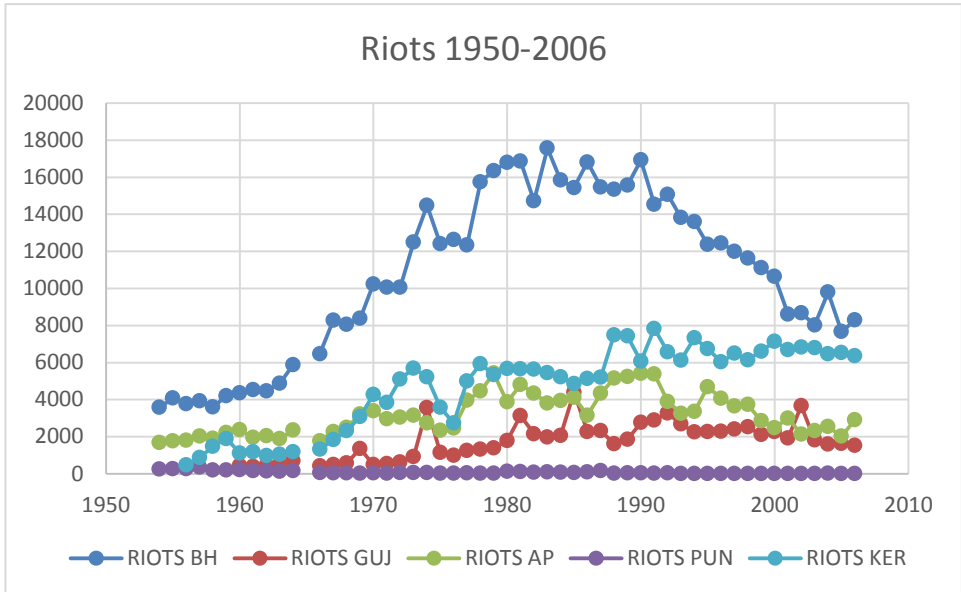
We observe that two states which stand at two extreme poles of developmental achievements exhibit one particular feature of similar number of riots. The question that confronts the researcher is on the issue of development itself. Does not development alter the conflict between the state and the individuals? If such conflicts proceed irrespective of the nature of development what is the cost borne by the development process due to these conflicts? That is, would Kerala have moved closer to potential development targets if such conflicts were contained? In a larger sense do such increased incidents of riots reflect intolerance of individuals to the political regimes in social democracies? At both stages of development, comparing Bihar and Kerala, we find that the nature of this relation between the state and the individual remains fragile. The period since mid-2005 in Bihar has been characterised with a revival of efforts to

improve the governance structure of the state. Kerala on the other hand has been noted for its decentralized government measures much earlier. Better government machinery and a strong social democratic structure in Kerala makes institutions effective in monitoring and controlling conflicts. Even at the level of reporting such incidents awareness among citizens play a crucial role.

State's Monopoly over Violence: Indian Scenario

At what point of development does the state lose its monopoly over violence? Kohli (2012) has attempted to understand the states in India based on their "political tendencies". He identifies three political tendencies competing for ascendancy in Indian states': the neo-patrimonial, the social democratic and the developmental. He says that in the neo-patrimonial states "the state level governments simply lack public purpose. Instead of using state authority and resources to pursue the public good, ruling elites in these settings use their power for personal and sectional gains" (Kohli 2012, 15). States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are categorized under neo-patrimonial states. On the other hand while in a social democratic environment, democratic pressure keep politics from follies; and in a developmental state, government tends to work closely with businesses. West Bengal and Kerala are examples that he sites for the former and Gujarat (in manufacturing), Karnataka and A.P (in services), Punjab and Haryana (in agriculture) are examples of the latter (Kohli 2012, 15).

Using Kohli's classification five states are selected for a comparative analysis. The state of Bihar is compared with these states. The selected states are Kerala, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Maharashtra.

Figure 2: A Picture of Riots in the Selected States

Source: National Crime Records Bureau

Figure 2 provides the trajectory of riots in selected states based on Kohli's classification. We see that since the early years post-independence the number of riots is relatively high for the state of Bihar, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. Incidents of riots were relatively low for states like Gujarat and Punjab. Year on year growth rates show that these riots have fluctuated for all the state. Highest growth rates have been noticed for the state of Kerala especially during its nascent years. Bihar has witnessed steady growth in the number of riots, experiencing negative growths only for three years. On the other hand Punjab has been experiencing a steady decline except for 1964.

The period 1967-1977 saw a major break in the number of riots in the states, which indicates weakening state control over violence during this period. The period is specifically noted for the change in political dominance of the Congress replaced by other coalitions in Bihar. As far as the states are concerned, we see dramatic increase for Bihar, which was at the pinnacle of political conflicts during the period. In addition, we also note that states like Kerala starts showing tendency to move towards a 'stable riot equilibrium' during the period. However, for states where new experiments in

agriculture were progressing rapidly (Punjab), the state seems to be in control over its monopoly over violence.

Since 1978 and until 1992 we see an increase in the average number of riots experienced by all these selected states. Even for a state like Punjab where the average numbers of riots were small, we see that during this particular period there has been an increase. However, Bihar still remained more riot-prone than other states. For states like Kerala we see that a possible saturation in the maximum number of riots was reached during this period moving around the 7000 number mark. For Bihar a similar trend is witnessed with maximum number of incidents fluctuating around the 17,000. The case of Gujarat is interesting as there has been a more than two fold increase in the number of incidents.

A prominent feature of riots since 1990s is that the average number of riots has decreased for all states during this period except for the state of Kerala. In Kerala, however, the reported incidents of riots have grown steadily since 1990s. Bihar and Andhra Pradesh seems to be moving towards its late 1960s position, while in Gujarat the figures were slightly below the peak it attained during the decade 1980 to 1990. In Punjab the falling trend in the number of riot incidents seems to be continuing.

Controlling Riots; Suggestions and Conclusion

This classification by Kohli when compared with the theoretical framework of North et.al (2013) a picture develops on the nature of violence and the different stages of economic growth of the region. North et.al (2013) provides a conceptual framework to understand violence as a factor shaping societies at various stages of development. Four factors are considered crucial in understanding societies in this framework: beliefs, time, culture and institutions. Culture and beliefs are inherited from the past and limits the choices available in the present. Institutions are the basic structures which facilitate all kinds of interactions in the society. Institutions are regulated by formal rules (property rights, government regulations etc.) or by informal enforcement measures. These fundamental features of a society determine how human beings organize themselves. North, et.al (2013) suggests that historically there are three ways in which the society was ordered: primitive society, natural state (limited access society) and open access societies. The performance of such societies is determined by the incentive structures. For a society in the natural state their study observes that different groups of elites (political, economic, cultural or social) attempt to reach a consensus to ensure minimum conflicts and thereby maximizing their returns. However, the natural state

itself reaches this stage of maturity after going through a fragile and a stable period. For North et.al (2013), the fragile period is one where the threat of violence is the highest. All these stages of the natural society are characterized by the existence of limited competition and high rent seeking by the various elite groups. A change from the natural state is difficult as the elites conspire among themselves to preserve and maximize the rent seeking structure.

States like Bihar where violence was a feature of its development process can be placed in one of these stages of the natural society. The movement of Bihar during the post - independence period can be traced from a 'fragile natural state' to a 'stable one'. Post 2000 the state seems to have entered a mature natural state. The framework however looks at possibilities where such violence in the natural state can be controlled. Such a control over violence is marked by the entry into the third stage or the open access society. An open access society reflects a classical liberal view of society where there is competition marked in both the economy as well as the polity. Rule of law, an effective judicial system, low cost of transaction and a free economy for capitalist development are the key features. North et.al (2013) mentions some necessary conditions for the transformation of the society from its natural state to an open access state. The transition requires that the entire rent accumulated under the natural state is wiped out or that the elites voluntarily accept that there are incentives for them in terms of increasing their wealth if such a process is facilitated. Extending property rights, creating institutions with a degree of autonomy and military under civilian control would mark this transition. This primarily indicates the conditions necessary for capitalist development.

Controlling the conflicts between the state and individuals (in this case riots) thus involves movement towards an open access society. However, adding to the prescriptions of North et.al (2013) the condition also demands that the state restrict its activities to specific areas rather than expand indefinitely. In the case of the India controlling conflicts between state and individuals in Kerala and Bihar faces this contradictory outcome. Movement towards an open access society faces the hurdle of a growing state. This stifles the individual centric capitalist development process which theoretically predicts declining violence as a feature of development. While the theory need not necessarily hold, it logically follows that to reduce conflicts between individuals and states it requires that the state be limited in its ever expansionary role.

References

1. Kohli, Atul (2012), *Poverty amid Plenty in New India*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
2. Max Weber (1968), *Economy and Society*, Vol. 1, Bedminster Press, New York.
3. Max Weber (1919), "Politics as a Vocation" [Online: Web] Accessed 22 April, 2016 <http://anthropos-lab.net/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Weber-Politics-as-a-Vocation.pdf> Accessed on 22/04/2017
4. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), *Crime in India Annual Series, 1954-2006*, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi.
5. North, Douglass C., John Joseph Wallis and Barry R. Weighast (2013), *Violence and Social Orders A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
6. Rex, John (1981), *Social Conflict, A Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis*, Longman: London.
7. World Bank (2011), *World Development Report: Conflict, Security and Development*, World Bank: Washington DC