

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Marta Reynal – Querol is ICREA Research Professor at the Department of Economics and Business at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF). She holds a Ph. D. in Economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science (2001). She is member of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Conflict Resolution and the European Journal of Political Economy. She is also member of the Council of the European Economic Association (EEA). She holds an ERC-Starting grant obtained in the first call of the European Research Council. She won the Banco Herrero prize 2011 for the most outstanding Spanish economist under 40 years old. She worked at the World Bank between 2001 and 2005. She has publications in the American Economic Review, American Political Science Review, Review of Economics and Statistics, the Economic Journal, Journal of Economic Growth, Journal of Development Economics, Journal of Conflict Resolution, among others. <http://www.econ.upf.edu/~reynal/>

## **PROJECT**

### **European Research Council Starting Grant**

Project acronym:

Project full title: **PREVENTING CONFLITS**

### **Overview**

The project considers the causes and the propagation mechanisms of social conflicts. The aim is to determine the basic elements that make countries more prone to social conflicts and then identify a set of feasible policies to prevent future episodes of violence. We know that the impact of finding measures and policies to prevent conflicts, and to prevent inadequate leaders from rising to power in government, would be major.

The first part of the project overcomes some statistical pitfalls present in most of the previous literature on the determinants of civil wars and conflicts. The current consensus, which emerges from those analyses, was that poverty was the single, most important determinant of civil wars. I show that this result is an artifact of simultaneity problems: the incidence of civil wars and poverty are driven by the same determinants, some of which are historical variables.

The second line of research, which is becoming central to the project, is the study of the role of political leaders in development and social outcomes such as conflict. Since the topic is novel, this part of the project has been divided in several tasks, which include collection of data; an investigation on political selection; an investigation on the relationship between leaders and economic growth, leaders and social conflict, etc.

A first part in this line of research presents evidence that political selection with respect to education differs between autocracies and democracies. The

evidence is drawn from a wide range of countries over more than 150 years and is identified from within country variation in political institutions. The results suggest that democratically elected leaders are around 25% more likely to be highly educated than those who are picked in autocracies. The results provide convincing evidence that there is a difference between political institutions in the characteristics of those selected to be leader. Thus, a focus on selection to office is warranted. Using this new dataset of leaders between 1875 and 2004 I also investigate whether leaders matter for economic growth and whether more educated leaders generate higher growth. I exploit an expanded set of random leadership transitions due to natural death or terminal illness and first show that the individual characteristics of leaders matter for growth. I then provide evidence supporting the view that heterogeneity among leaders educational attainment is important and that growth is enhanced by having leaders who are more highly educated. This work therefore adds to the emerging literature on the importance of leaders' characteristics in explaining outcomes.

A third part of the project which is very new and preliminary, investigates the effect of the legacy of old conflicts on recent violence. This paper explores these issues in a novel way by looking at the historical experience of Africa and exploring whether there is a lasting legacy of pre-colonial conflicts. Moreover, this project explores the within country variation using the geographic location of old and contemporaneous conflict. This framework is then used to revise the effect of the traditional variables that the cross-country literature has found important to explain conflict, revealing new evidence on the local causes of civil wars. This is crucial to define policies to prevent conflict, since violence is usually concentrated in a few regions of the country.