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Electoral Cycles, Conflict, Crime, and Pro-environmental Behavior

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Introduction

This thesis consists of three self-contained chapters. The first two focus on violent conflicts: international collective action to mitigate them and their violent and international spill-over effects. The third chapter focus on climate change and examines efforts of individual consumers to mitigate their own impact on it. What follows is a short introduction and summary of each chapter.

Studying violent conflicts is not hard to motivate. Apart from causing tremendous human suffering, violent conflicts are an important impediment to economic development and poverty reduction, and increasingly so when looking ahead. Although global poverty is expected to decline, it has been projected that by 2030, two-thirds of the world's poor will live in countries affected by conflict and fragility (Corral et al., 2020). In addition, violent conflicts can be spatially contagious and have increasingly global ramifications. This makes political stability and law enforcement capability at the domestic or regional level an ever more important global public good, offering partially nonrival and nonexcludable benefits to a large swath of the planet (Buchholz and Sandler, 2021). The first two chapters relate to these international dimensions of violent conflicts.

In the first chapter, Electoral Cycles, Foreign Policy, and Conflict Mitigation: Evidence from Contributors to UN Peacekeeping Operations, focus is on UN peacekeeping operations, a primary vehicle through which the global community can act collectively to curb conflicts. Absent a standing army, the UN relies on voluntary and timely troop contributions from member states to each mission. Operation success therefore depends importantly on countries' willingness to supply troops and the efficacy of those troops to mitigate conflict. Because of the difficulty for researchers in this field to disentangle correlation from causation, conclusive evidence is lacking on both the determinants of troop contributions and the efficacy of deployed troops to mitigate conflict. By exploiting how domestic electoral concerns affect deployment decisions in troop-sending countries and overall mission implementation, I can shed new light on both of these aspects.

The main idea underlying the empirical analyses stems from the political economy literature on electoral cycles, or political business cycles, that studies the tendency of incumbent politicians to time policy implementation to maximize chances of reelection. One theoretical rationale commonly proposed for this behavior, formulated in seminal papers by Nordhaus (1975) and MacRae (1977), is that voters tend to be short-sighted and uninformed about the full consequences of different policy alternatives. Hence, when the incumbent politician is approaching election, she will tend to avoid policies associated with short-term costs and long-term gains, and instead focus on policies with this inter-temporal trade-off reversed. While electoral cycles are well-known and studied mainly with regard to domestic and fiscal policy, it is a conceptual framework less applied in the foreign policy context. I apply it to countries' contributions to UN peacekeeping operations based on a simple observation of contributor incentives: in cases where the conflict addressed is not imposing an immediate and salient threat to the contributing country, troop contributions are primarily associated with short-term salient costs or risks, while offering benefits that are mainly longterm and uncertain.

I document electoral cycles in troop contributions to UN peacekeeping operations and examine their consequences for mission and conflict outcomes. Using monthly data on all countries' contributions to UN missions between 1990 and 2019 that operate in the midst of fighting, I find that a national election substantially decreases the probability of having any troops deployed and the expected number of troops on the ground. For the most important troop-contributors, defined as contributing in the top quartile in my sample (\geq 915 troops), national elections also decrease deployments from other contributors, decrease overall mission capacity, and seem to severely hamper conflict mitigation in that increases battle-related fatalities. These results suggest that domestic electoral concerns can severely hamper international collective action to mitigate conflict.

In the second chapter, Echoes of Violent Conflict: the Effect of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict on Hate Crimes in the United States, which is co-authored with Love Christensen, I shift my focus to the consequences of conflict, studying violent and criminal spill-over effects. Specifically, we ask if social identity ties, such as ethnic ties, facilitate the spread of violent conflict. Since 2010, 31 countries have experienced ethnic civil conflicts, with more than 25 battle-related deaths per year in each of these countries. We estimate that up to almost half a billion people have ethnic ties to these conflicts but reside in countries not involved in the conflicts. Past research has shown that conflicts are more likely to spill over into other regions or countries when ethnic ties exist (e.g. Black, 2013).

One explanation is that violent conflict abroad generates animosity and induces violence at home towards groups with identity ties to the conflict. We provide novel causal evidence for this specific transmission channel by focusing on one of the most long-standing and divisive violent conflicts fought along ethnic and religious lines in the postwar era: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We assess whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict causes hate crime towards associated ethno-religious groups in the United States, American Jews and Muslims. Since the groups associated with conflict actors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict map onto distinct hate crime categories, anti-Jewish and anti-Islamic hate crime, this makes the conflict well suited for examining social identities as a channel of conflict spillover. Using daily data between 2000-2016, we measure the timing, intensity and instigator in the conflict using the number of conflict fatalities and U.S. mass media coverage of the conflict. Analyses using both conflict measures find that conflict events trigger hate crimes in the following days following a retaliatory pattern: Anti-Jewish hate crimes increase after Israeli attacks and anti-Islamic hate crimes increase after Palestinian attacks.

Our findings show that victimization transcends the locality of the conflict, implying that violent conflict may be more costly than existing research suggests. We, thus, also emphasize a largely overlooked consequence of violent conflict: its potential to induce violent criminal behavior in settings far beyond its vicinity.

In the third chapter, **Individual Carbon Footprint Reduction: Evidence from Pro-environmental Users of a Carbon Calculator**, which is co-authored with David Andersson and Fredrik Carlsson, focus is on climate change and efforts of pro-environmental individuals to reduce their impact on it. To reach national and multinational goals such as the Paris Accord or Agenda 2030, extensive changes in behavior are needed. There is a large consensus, particularly among economists, that in a first-best world most of these changes would result from internationally coordinated economic policies such as a carbon tax coupled with technological development. However, because standard policies have not been stringent enough attention has been given to alternative approaches to influence the behavior of consumers. These often rely on the assumption that consumers have prosocial or pro-environmental preferences (Andreoni, 1990; Kotchen and Moore, 2007), and are willing to make costly sacrifices to reduce the environmental impact of their consumption.

We provide the first estimates of how pro-environmental consumers reduce their total carbon footprint using a carbon calculator that covers all financial transactions. We use data from users of a carbon calculator that includes weekly estimates of users' consumption-based carbon-equivalent emissions based on detailed financial statements, official registers, and self-reported life-style factors. The calculator is designed to induce behavioral change and gives users detailed information about their footprint, and includes social comparisons, and goal-setting options. By using a robust difference-in-differences analysis with staggered adoption of the calculator, we estimate that users decrease their carbon footprint by around 10 percent in the first few weeks, but over the next few weeks, the reduction fades. Further analysis suggests that the carbon footprint reduction is driven by a combination of a shift from high- to low-emitting consumption categories and a temporary decrease in overall spending, and not by changes in any specific consumption category.

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