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## Research Statement

I am an applied microeconomist with an interest in understanding violence. My research employs historical and administrative data to explore the causes and consequences of crime and political repression.

The first chapter of my dissertation studies the long-term effects of large-scale temporary violence on homicide rates. I analyze the relationship between Guatemala's civil war massacres (1982)<sup>1</sup> and assemble data on their locations and homicides between 2016-2019. I find that highly victimized municipalities have fewer homicides today. Using precipitation as an instrument for massacres, I provide evidence that the relationship is causal. Generalized trust is also higher in municipalities with more massacres, suggesting a mechanism connecting past violence and current peace through increased local cohesion.

This finding sheds new light on the origins of Central America's high homicide rates. Currently, some of the main theories regarding this process (e.g. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2007)) blame the authoritarian and turbulent past for a significant part of the high homicide rates of the region. Although the previous academic literature has found that early exposure to civil war violence increases the likelihood of criminal behavior later in life at the level of the individual (e.g. Miguel et al. (2011)), other studies find that exposure to civil war violence can increase prosocial behavior (e.g. Bauer et al. (2016)). My results indicate that the second type of effects dominate, highlighting the importance of social norms in the determination of crime rates.

The second chapter of my dissertation explores police records generated at a time when Guatemala had an authoritarian government fighting a leftist insurrection. These documents were not intended to be made public, and were hence not redacted. The records document a wide variety of police work and internal communication (repressive operations against political dissidents, human resources management, etc.), providing a unique window to observe the actions of a police force in a repressive environment.

The main challenge is that these documents were stored as scanned images of the original files, with separate records related to the same case not linked in the archive's catalogue. They thus could not be used as a regular dataset without extensive previous treatment. I am leveraging recent machine learning developments to convert the entire archival corpus into machine-readable form, organize it, and describe and quantify its contents in an automated and easily replicable way. Over the coming months I will investigate how much police effort was directed to different goals, like combating robbery or repressing political dissent. Additionally, I will research how this effort varied with time and space, and whether this variation was correlated with the political changes Guatemala went through in the period under study (1980-1990).

This project contributes to the fields of political economy and economic history. The final data set will be publicly available, making it the first text source with near-universal coverage of police-generated documentation. Previous archival works (e.g. Sullivan (2016)) often transcribe only core text fragments and transform it into quantitative data using hand-coding, a process not amenable to replication. I expect the data to become a valuable tool for academic researchers, as well as for human rights advocates and relatives of persecuted individuals. This project has received funding from the CIDER Small Grants in Innovative Data.

In the third chapter of my dissertation I study the impact of cultural and political practices of indigenous peoples of Mexico on their resilience to the effects of the country's drug war. Following a policy of increased repression to drug trade, Mexico experienced a large increase in violence (drug war) since 2007. I show that the presence of an indigenous majority prevented a increase in homicide rates. Municipalities with that characteristic were less likely

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<sup>1</sup>The civil war lasted from 1960 to 1996, but most massacres happened in 1982.

to have the presence of a major Drug Trade Organization and their inhabitants were less likely to be imprisoned by drug-trade related crimes. Finally, I show that within indigenous majority municipalities, the ones with autonomous institutions are the ones with less homicides, less DTO presence and less imprisonment for drug-trade related offenses. In earlier projects, I studied the impact of marijuana legalization and pedestrian density on crime frequency.

My research agenda will remain focused on the determinants and consequences of violence. I expect the police archives project to yield both descriptive and causal papers. I further intend to explore when and how state actors decide to use of force, and how these decisions shape state formation, institutions, and economic outcomes.

## References

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