

Decision Letter (CMPS-21-0042)

From: niki.marinov@gmail.com

To: francisco.villamil@uc3m.es

CC:

Subject: Conflict Management and Peace Science - Decision on Manuscript ID CMPS-21-0042

Body: 28-Apr-2021

Dear Dr. Villamil:

I have received 3 reviews of your paper, "Violence, co-optation, and postwar voting in Guatemala," (Manuscript ID CMPS-21-0042), which you submitted for consideration to Conflict Management and Peace Science. The reviewers' comments are included at the bottom of this letter or can be found attached to the letter.

I believe the literature connecting civil war violence to post-war democratic variables is some of the most exciting research done in political science at present - and some of the most important, in terms of the settings and lives it touches. The reviewers in this case seem to concur, in the sense of seeing significant promise in your work.

However, the also see a number of issues, best summed up by R2's assessment: ``this article had some intriguing empirical findings that could have real value to the literature on the legacy of conflict and violence. As currently constructed, it is however marred by two issues: (1) some substantial slippage between its theory and empirics, and (2) a related lack of qualitative (or quantitative) evidence to nail down the mechanisms at work here." R1 puts this as lack of accounting for alternative explanations - and R3 requests a number of clarifications. The good news is that all three reviewers point to concrete steps you can take to significantly mitigate these concerns. I am, therefore, granting you an opportunity to revise your work and hope you do so in line with the reviewers' suggestions and recommendations.

Should you decide to revise the manuscript and to resubmit it to us, please include a memo with the revised version. The memo should respond to the points made by the editor and each of the reviewers. Please note the changes that you have made to the manuscript in response to the reviewers' and editor's suggestions. In those instances in which you opt not to follow a recommendation that has been made, please briefly explain why you have chosen not to do so.

We will likely return the revised manuscript - should you provide one - to a proper subset of the current reviewers and may call upon a new reviewer. Should we bring a new reviewer into the process, we will inform her/him of the manuscript's revised status.

To revise your manuscript, log into <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/cmeps> and enter your Author Center, where you will find your manuscript title listed under "Manuscripts with Decisions." Under "Actions," click on "Create a Revision." Your manuscript number has been appended to denote a revision.

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You will be unable to make your revisions on the originally submitted version of the manuscript. Instead, revise your manuscript using a word processing program and save it on your computer. Once the revised manuscript is prepared, you can upload it and submit it through your Author Center.

IMPORTANT: Your original files are available to you when you upload your revised manuscript. Please delete any redundant files before completing the submission.

CMPS has committed to implementing the Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) initiative. Manuscripts must now comply with the following set of instructions (these can also be found under the submission guidelines on CMPS's SAGE website):

Conflict Management and Peace Science supports the Data Access and Research Transparency (DA-RT) statement and, as such, endorses policies requiring authors to make accessible the empirical foundation and logic of inquiry of evidence-based research. Conflict Management and Peace Science requires authors to delineate clearly the analytic procedures upon which their published claims rely and, where possible, provide access to all relevant analytic materials. If such materials are not published with the article, they should be included with replication materials posted to the journal's website (see below).

For contributions based on quantitative data, Conflict Management and Peace Science requires authors to submit their data set and all other relevant replication materials. The replication materials provided must make it feasible for others to replicate the results for all tables and figures printed in the article and in any online appendices submitted as part of the article. Conflict Management and Peace Science asks authors to use data citation practices

that identify a dataset's author(s), title, date, version, and a persistent identifier. In sum, data should be referenced and cited, where possible, as an intellectual product of value.

Authors or manuscripts submitted to Conflict Management and Peace Science are expected to conform to norms regarding the protection of human subjects. Authors of articles submitted for review may be asked by the editor to provide certification of appropriate institutional review. If cited data is restricted (e.g. classified, require confidentiality protections, were obtained under a non-disclosure agreement, or have inherent logistical constraints), authors should notify the editor at the time of submission. The editor shall have full discretion to follow the journal's policy on restricted data, including declining to review the manuscript or granting an exemption or without conditions. The editor shall inform the author of this decision prior to review.

Authors are expected to make their data and replication materials available through the SAGE Conflict Management and Peace Science website. Data will be hosted on the website as a supplementary data file. If your paper is accepted for publication, you will be asked to add a note at the beginning of the manuscript stating that data and replication materials can be accessed via a supplementary data file hosted on SAGE's CMPS website.

When uploading your revised manuscript, please upload your DA-RT materials using the DA-RT Material file designation.

Because we are trying to facilitate timely publication of manuscripts submitted to Conflict Management and Peace Science, your revised manuscript should be uploaded as soon as possible. If it is not possible for you to submit your revision in a reasonable amount of time, we may have to consider your paper as a new submission.

Once again, thank you for submitting your manuscript to Conflict Management and Peace Science and I look forward to receiving your revision.

Sincerely,
Editor, Conflict Management and Peace Science

Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:

Reviewer: 1

Comments to the Author
(There are no comments.)

Reviewer: 2

Comments to the Author

This article examines the impact of wartime victimization on post-war political preferences. The authors argue that the impact of violence on preferences is moderated by prewar social mobilization which they proxy with the accessibility of civilian communities to major prewar road networks. The authors use data on voting patterns from 1999-2015 in Guatemala combined with violence data from the 1980s civil war and road networks data to test the argument.

Overall, I thought this article had some intriguing empirical findings that could have real value to the literature on the legacy of conflict and violence. As currently constructed, it is however marred by two issues: (1) some substantial slippage between its theory and empirics, and (2) a related lack of qualitative (or quantitative) evidence to nail down the mechanisms at work here. While these issues are not trivial, I think they can perhaps be addressed or at least significantly mitigated and so I think an R&R opportunity at CMPS would be possible.

I now elaborate on these in turn:

1) Theory vs. empirics: in a nutshell, the authors argue that violent events can be interpreted in different ways by different groups of people based on their ability to resist combatant propaganda. In particular, they argue that combatants (here, primarily the state) try to manipulate perceptions of the harm they inflict by denying it or blaming it on their opponents, and are often successful in doing so. However, these efforts can be resisted by those with sufficient "ideological capital" that makes them skeptical of the manipulation.

While this is an interesting theory, it isn't really well tested by the analysis. The results indicate that the impact of violence on voting depends on prewar leftist mobilization (proxied by roads). There is no measurement of state propaganda about the conflict and people's belief in it, so it is hard to know whether that is really what's driving the observed effects. In contrast, it could just be an ideological story in which those with a more leftist worldview judge the state's intentions as more hostile and punish it more for harm inflicted (a la Lyall, Blair, and Imai 2013). In other words, it's hard to know whether this is due to propaganda and its spread at all.

So where does this leave us? Well, if the authors can test the state propaganda mechanism more directly by looking at, say, survey evidence from the conflict setting, that would be one thing – but, if not, a broader framing that does not lean as much on this one specific mechanism would help. The authors should reframe the argument so that it is just suggesting that ideology shapes the effect of violence on postwar political preferences, building on studies like Lyall, Blair, and Imai 2013 and Silverman 2019 but extending them into the arena of longer-run dynamics and postwar voting behavior. Ideologically-driven resistance to combatant propaganda could be one potential mechanism behind the results, but not the only one – and it shouldn't be such a central or essential part of the story since it can't really be directly demonstrated.

2) Mechanisms: relatedly, it's hard to pin down the mechanism here more broadly, because there isn't much direct evidence about many of the links in the rich causal story that is told – prewar social mobilization (proxied by roads, as noted in the piece), leftist ideological penetration (besides the voting behavior DV), and the state propaganda dimension (as discussed above). There is really a desperate need for rich qualitative evidence here. I think an "identifying the mechanisms" section after the main results would help. Can it be qualitatively shown or at least strongly suggested that liberal priests and activists spread via the road network? Can it be shown that the areas they reached then became sites of leftist agitation? Is there evidence of political activism after the war in these areas to commemorate the violence, define it ideologically, etc.? If there is any available survey evidence from one

of the Latin American regional survey projects that could speak to the causal links in these chains (conflict attitudes would be ideal of course, but even leftist ideology, distrust of state media, etc. would be helpful).

Other issues:

-economic development: can you control for economic development across different municipalities? It is possible that with your measure of unpaved roads you're picking up something like this. It could be that poorer people (and/or poorer areas) are more vulnerable to state coercion in this case, as has been shown elsewhere for example in the electoral violence literature.

-placebo test: can you get data on the leftist vote across areas from the prior democratic period of 1944-54? Since you're trying to measure the effect of the liberalization through the road network that occurred in the 1960s-70s, controlling for this shouldn't impact your results and would show that they weren't due to the areas near the roads having already been more leftist in outlook.

-other parties: what about voting for other parties in the 1999-2015 elections? I noticed that the 2 parties in question weren't very popular, especially after 1999. So you're really looking at a very small slice of the vote and trying to predict it. Can the other parties not be sorted ideologically in a way that would allow them to be included in the analysis? And relatedly, if leftist areas were so effective at creating collective memories of victimization which led them to support URNG, how come this support dissipated so rapidly after the first election? This should be at least addressed somewhere in the piece.

-time decay: related to the last point, we can also see in the Appendix that the effects are pretty robust but in many cases (e.g. Figure A3) seem to fade significantly with time. Is this evidence that supports the argument, since it shows that they are strongest where we'd expect – right after the war? And later on voting happens more for other reasons? Or does it get at the weakness and limited duration of the results? Again, this should at least be engaged with somewhere, possibly in the conclusion.

Reviewer: 3

Comments to the Author

Guatemala has a long history of crime and violence. This article has a unique perspective on an important topic. Scholars, like Javier Osorio, have written on this issue in other countries. This article seeks to make an important contribution to the literature on conflict. I congratulate the author for this important piece.

This paper is empirically sound and has a strong methodology.

There is good discussion of the historical context.

Below are a few things for the author to consider:

What about corruption? This is not mentioned once in the article. Recent events, including the expulsion of CICIG by the Jimmy Morales administration, demonstrate this troubling trend. I would argue that it is important to understand the notion of state fragility that has plagued Guatemala over decades, including the period analyzed in this article. Adriana Beltrán and other scholars have written about corruption and impunity. Some surveys (e.g., LAPOP) ask about perceptions of corruption and bribes from different government actors.

While this is not the focus of this article, it is worth mentioning, even if in a footnote, that Guatemala has an intricate relationship between the state, gangs (MS-13 and the 18th Street), and organized crime (see the work of José Miguel Cruz). Scholars like Steven Dudley have referred to Guatemala as a mafia state. There are zones in Guatemala ("red zones") that are controlled by street gangs.

One may question whether people vote for parties or leaders. In Central America, politicians have formed their own political parties (e.g., Bukele and the New Ideas party). There have been dozens of parties in Guatemala during the political election cycle. Today, for instance, there are 28 parties registered in Guatemala.

This article does not mention the issue of the police once. Does police corruption and ungoverned spaces impact your analysis? Perhaps this is worth mentioning, even if in a footnote.

The author uses pooled OLS regressions. A reader might want to know if the author tested for heteroskedasticity or multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF).

In your pooled OLS model, a reader may wonder why the author did not include several variables (e.g., income, education, corruption measures, and trust in institutions like the military or police). This could be something worth addressing, even if in a footnote.

I would also recommend citing/ reviewing the work of Deborah T. Levenson, Anthony W. Fontes, Adriana Beltrán, Christine Wade, and José Miguel Cruz.


Overall, I think that this article has important theoretical contributions and policy implications and can help set a future research agenda.

Date Sent: 28-Apr-2021

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