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Violence and political outcomes in Ukraine—Evidence from Sloviansk and Kramatorsk

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ABSTRACT

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In this paper, we study the effects of violence on political outcomes using a survey of respondents in Sloviansk and Kramatorsk – two cities that were affected heavily by the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. We show that experiencing physical damage goes together with lower turnout, a higher probability of considering elections irrelevant and a lower probability of knowing one's local representatives. We also find that property damage is associated with greater support for pro-Western parties, lower support for keeping Donbas in Ukraine and lower support for compromise as a way to stop the conflict. Our paper thus shows the importance of investigating the impact of different kinds of victimization, as different degrees of victimization can have different, sometimes even conflicting outcomes. Our paper also suggests that one of the more optimistic conclusions of previous studies, that victimization can increase political participation, does not necessarily carry over to Ukraine, which illustrates the importance of country and context-specific studies. *Journal of Comparative Economics* 000 () (2015) 1–12. Kyiv School of Economics Kyiv, Ukraine; University of Duisburg-Essen and CINCH Essen, Germany .

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1. Introduction

Armed conflicts affect societies in many different ways. In a recent literature review, [Blattman and Miguel \(2010\)](#) distinguish between the impact of wars on physical capital and investment, on life, labor and human capital and on institutions and society. While the impact on physical and human capital most often is found to be negative, the impact of violence on norms and institutions is much more controversial.

Indeed, a number of recent studies suggest that the experience of violence can raise rather than decrease the civic and political engagement of people. For example, in a study of the effect of the 1991–2002 Sierra Leone civil war on civic and political participation, [Bellows and Miguel \(2009\)](#) find that respondents from households who directly experienced war are more likely to attend community meetings, more likely to join local political and community groups, and more likely to vote. In a similar spirit, [Voors et al. \(2012\)](#) find that people in Burundi who are living in communities that have been violently attacked or who have experienced violence themselves display more altruistic behavior.

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Studies for former Communist countries confirm that some positive effects are possible: Grosjean (2014) shows that victimization in recent civil wars goes together with a higher likelihood of active participation in groups, or in collective actions and of membership in political parties. At the same time, victimization goes together with reduced trust in central institutions, their perceived effectiveness and generalized trust in other people. Hence, Grosjean (2014) argues that this increased civil participation may be of a 'dark' nature consistent, for example, with Cassar et al. (2013) who show that victims of the Tajik civil war, willing to participate in groups, are exactly those who trust state and people less.

In this paper, we investigate the effect of personally experiencing the consequences of violence on political participation, views and knowledge, using individual level data from the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. After the Maidan revolution that replaced the then-president, Victor Yanukovich, in February 2014, pro-Russian militants in the East of Ukraine started to take control of government buildings in several cities in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions during the first two weeks of April 2014. On 15 April 2014, the Ukrainian government launched a counter-offensive, deploying government troops in the East of Ukraine. Initially, this counter-offensive had limited success and the Ukrainian army only made major advances after separatist forces pulled out from the city of Sloviansk on 5 July 2014.

We use a survey carried out at the end of November 2014 in Sloviansk and the neighboring Kramatorsk, to investigate how personally experiencing violence affects political participation (voter turnout), political knowledge (of one's political representative) and political views (whom to vote for and how to solve the conflict). Studying the impact of violence on these political outcomes is important, as these outcomes will affect both the chance of reaching a stable peace (see for example, Bigombe et al., 2000) as well as the speed of the post-war economic recovery (see for example, Flores and Nooruddin, 2009). If violence turns people away from the formal democratic political process or stimulates the views that war is the only solution to solve the conflict, then the conflict is more likely to last longer and less likely to be solved in a non-violent way. If violence affects whom people vote for, pro-Western or pro-Russian parties in the Ukrainian case, then violence will influence the kind of institutions that will develop in this region, given the vastly different and even opposing world-view these parties adhere to.

This paper adds to the existing literature in several ways. First, we show that how violence is defined matters: when we create an overall measure of personally experiencing the consequences of violence, we find no effect on political participation. But when we differentiate between different degrees of experiencing violence (various inconveniences, property damage, physical damage), we find that physical damage goes together with decreased participation, while other types of damage do not seem related to turnout. At the same time, we find that political views are more often related to property damage than to physical damage.

Second, our findings suggest that context matters and that the results of studies for one country do not necessarily extrapolate easily to other countries. While results for Sierra Leone (Bellows and Miguel, 2009) suggest people who experienced violence are more likely to turn out, and results for Uganda (De Luca and Verpoorten, 2015) suggest there is no relationship between violence and turnout, our study of two Ukrainian cities finds a substantial negative relation between experiencing violence and turnout. Similarly, while Bellows and Miguel (2009) found some evidence of a positive relation between victimization and knowledge of local political figures in Sierra Leone, we find the effect depends on the extent of victimization, with inconveniences having a positive effect while property damage or physical damage has a negative effect.

Third, for the case of the two cities in Ukraine investigated here, we present evidence that property damage is unrelated to voter turnout but is associated with greater support for pro-Western parties. In addition, those who suffered from their property being stolen or destroyed are also less likely to support compromising with Russia or keeping Donbas part of Ukraine.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of relevant literature and gives additional background to the conflict and the experience of the two cities studied in this paper. Section 3 describes the data, while section 4 presents the analysis. Section 5 concludes.

2. Background

2.1. Existing literature

Several previous studies have considered the effects of victimization on political participation to study the legacy of conflict on post-war economic, social and political recovery. Bellows and Miguel (2009) find that an index of whether a respondent's household members had been injured, killed or made refugees during the war in Sierra Leone is positively related to the probability that the respondent voted or registered to vote, and to whether or not a respondent can correctly name their local representative. In contrast, De Luca and Verpoorten (2015) find that respondents in Uganda in districts where there was more violence (measured by the number of days of violence) during the war were not more likely to vote. They do find a positive effect on the frequency of discussing politics and the frequency of attending public meetings, although the size of these positive effects decreases over time. Similarly, using data from several transition countries, Grosjean (2014) finds that respondents who had family members killed or injured in recent conflicts, are more likely to be members of a political party and more likely to participate in strikes or sign a petition.

This paper adds to this literature by using data from Ukraine to study the impact of victimization on voter turnout, on whether or not voters are discouraged and on whether voters know their local representative.

While some studies focus on voter turnout, more studies focus on how violence relates to voter support. In a study on Turkey, for example, Kibris (2011) finds that burials of police and soldiers killed by the PKK reduced the vote for government parties

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