Shutdown policies and worldwide conflict

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Motivation

How restriction due to the spread of coronavirus affect conflict?

Anecdotal evidence of sharp decrease of violence

- Violent crime in major cities in the US
- Ending of the nationwide protests against the mistreatment of Muslims in India

But,

- Rising scapegoating of minorities (ex: India, Bangladesh)
- Authoritarian regimes take coronavirus as an opportunity to crush opposition (ex: Myanmar)
- Stifling of democratic opposition (ex: Azerbaijan)

Various mechanisms

- ◇ Raising the cost of mobilization
- ◇ Income shocks – a priori ambiguous
  - Reduce opportunity cost of violence & hampering the capacity of State
  - State are less attractive "prizes"

What we do

1. Real-time evidence on how enforcing restrictions affects conflicts globally
2. How conflict dynamics may vary across types of events and actors
3. How the effect depends on socio-economic context

We make use of two crucial information:

- Daily information on conflict (*Armed Conflict Location and Event* dataset)
  $\hookrightarrow$ Information on date, actors and type of events
- Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker
  $\hookrightarrow$ Information on policies imposing the closing of workplaces and schools, and restricting internal movements...

What we find

- Imposing a nation-wide restriction on mobility reduces the likelihood of daily conflict by 9 percentage points

Dynamic:

- Reduction is progressive: stronger three to four weeks after the policy is implemented

Type of events:

- Reduction of the # of battles, protests (strongest) and violence against civilians

Actors:

- Reduction of the # of events that involve political militias, protesters or civilians
- No effect on state forces and rebel groups

What we find

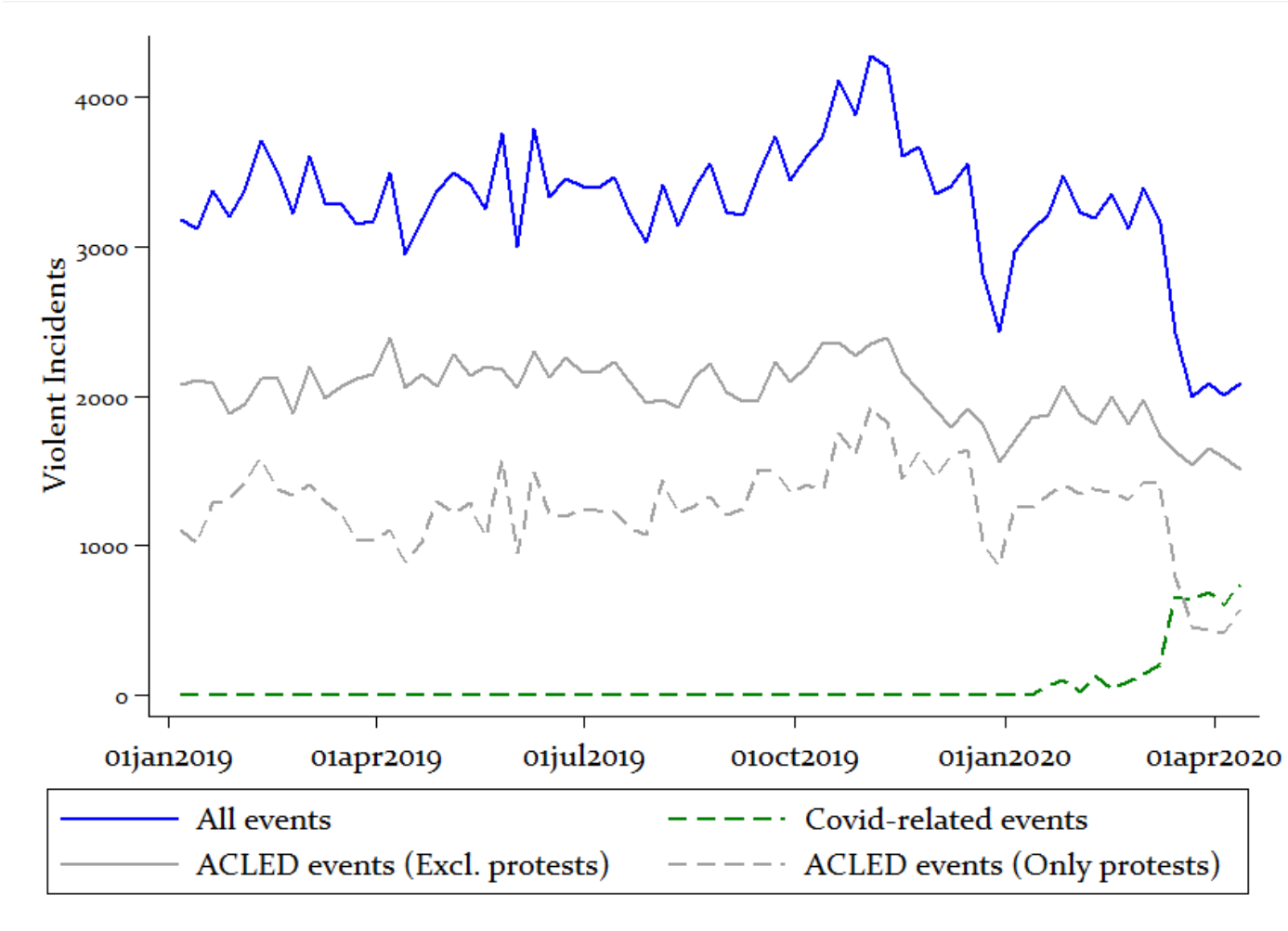
How country characteristics mediate the effectiveness of restriction policies:

- Countries with a low level of GDP/cap: no significant decrease
- High religious fractionalization: no significant decrease
- (former) effect is mostly driven by events involving civilians, political militias and state forces (scapegoating narrative)

Data on conflict

From January 1st 2016 to April 18th 2020

1. Daily incidence – Total # of events
2. Events related to battles, remote violence, protests, riots, strategic development, and violence against civilians
3. Events involving State forces, rebel groups, political militias, identity militias, rioters, protesters, and civilians



Mid-March 2020: 25% lower than the number of events at the same period of the previous year (30 to 35% in the first half of April 2020 wrt April 2019)

Covid-19-related Policies

Eight measures of public policies:

- Closings of school
- Workplaces and public transport
- Travel restrictions (internal and international)
- Limitations of public gatherings (*incomplete measure*)
- Stay-at-home requirements (*incomplete measure*)

Emphasis on measure that restrict mobility, we build three measures:

1. Binary restriction: 1 if closing of school & workplace, and restriction internal movements (*Shutdown*)
2. Same measures, but take into account degree of requirement and geographical scope (*Narrow Index*)
3. All measures (*Broad Index*)

Empirical strategy

How restriction policies in country i at day t contemporaneously affect conflict:

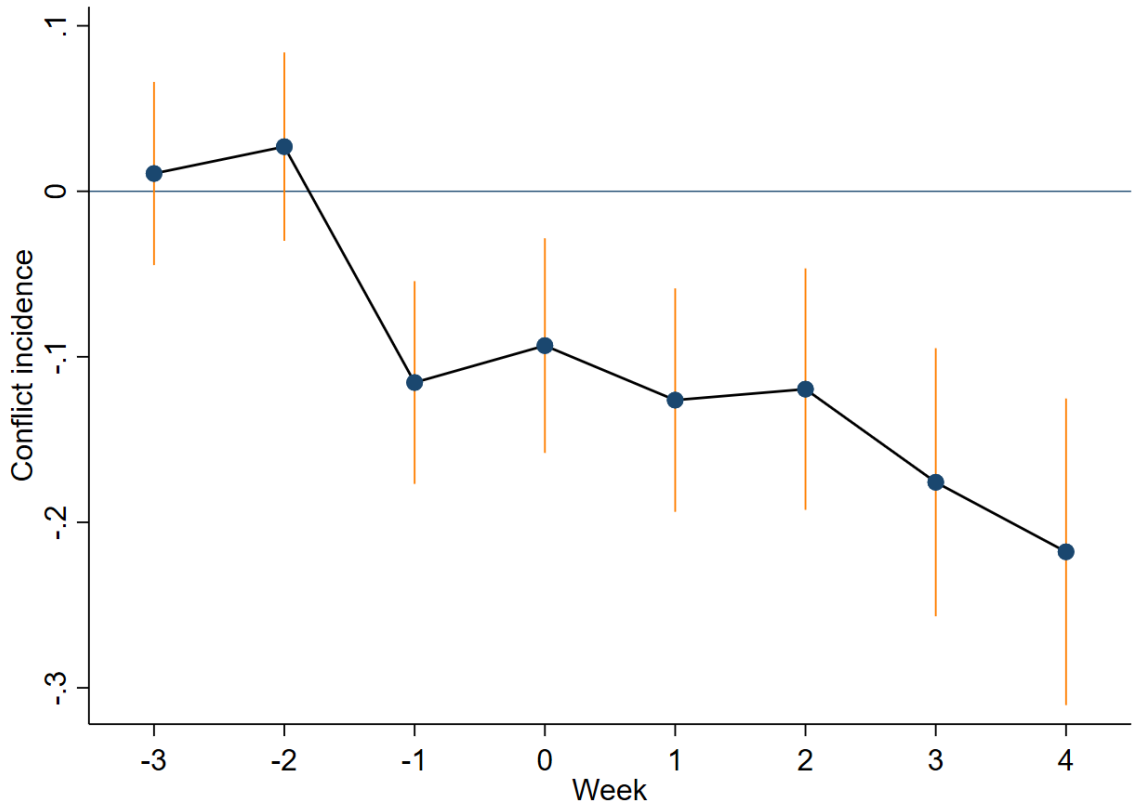
$$\text{Conflict}_{it} = \beta \text{Restrictions}_{it} + \eta_c + \mu_{ym} + \varepsilon_{it}, \tag{1}$$

- η_c and μ_{ym} are country and year-month fixed effects
- Linear probablity model (and Poisson pseudo maximum likelihood estimator with # of events)

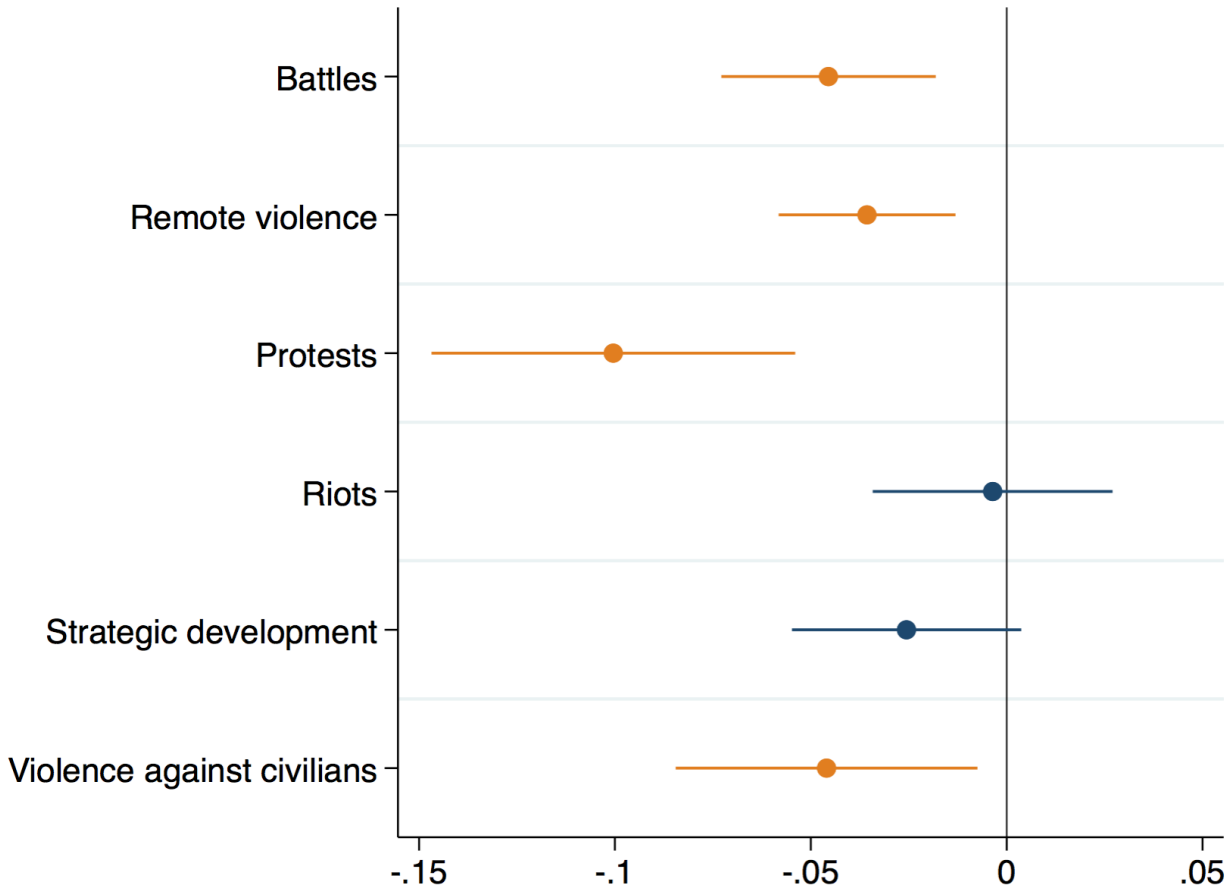
Main Result

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Dep. var. (conflict)	Incidence	Intensity	———	Incidence ———	
Policy restrictions measure	Shutdown	(binary)	Narrow index	Broad index	Shutdown
Policy restriction	-0.093***	-0.273*	-0.185***	-0.201***	-0.149**
	(0.030)	(0.165)	(0.034)	(0.036)	(0.074)
× Press Freedom Index					-0.001
					(0.002)
Observations	122,099	122,099	122,099	122,099	117,794
R-squared	0.482		0.482	0.482	0.478
Model	OLS	PPML	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FE			——— Yes ———		
Month-year FE			——— Yes ———		

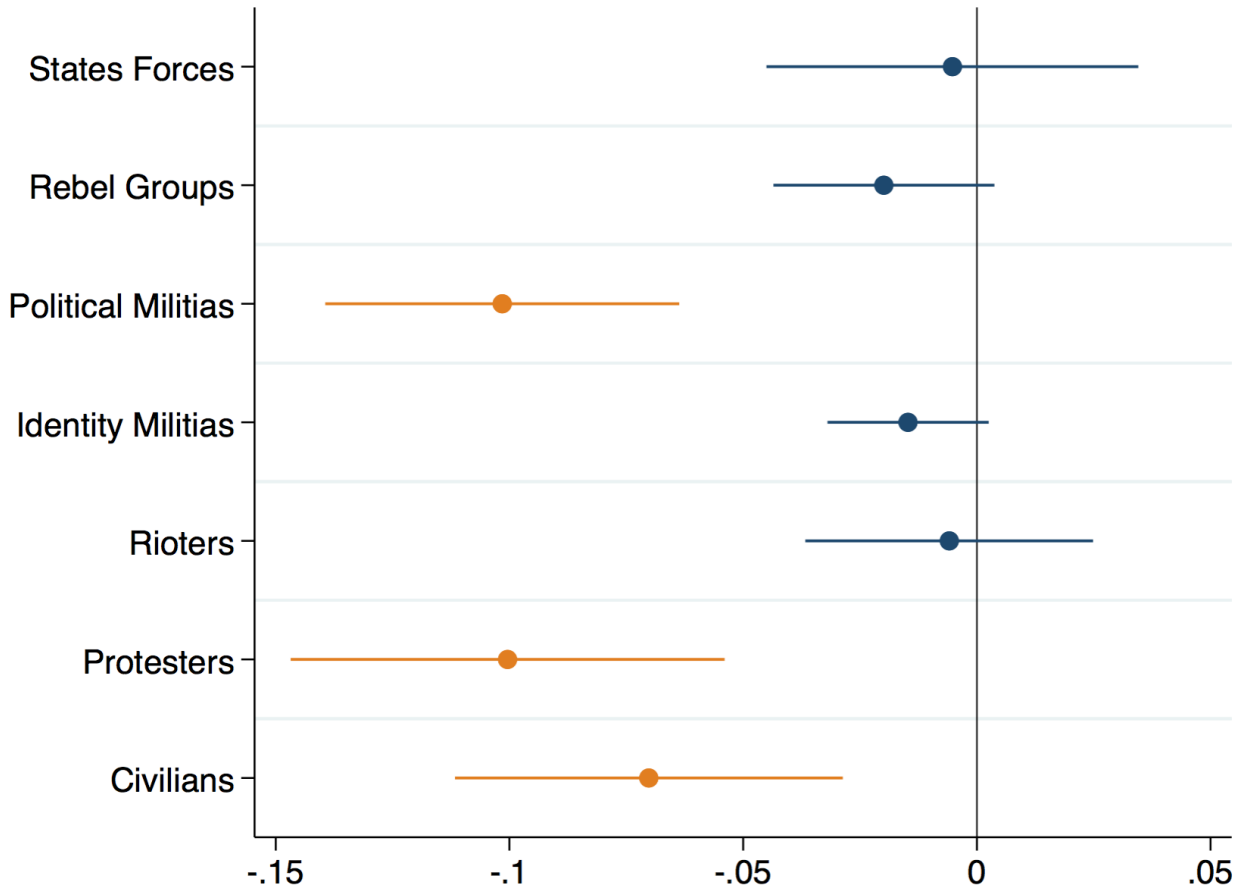
Dynamics



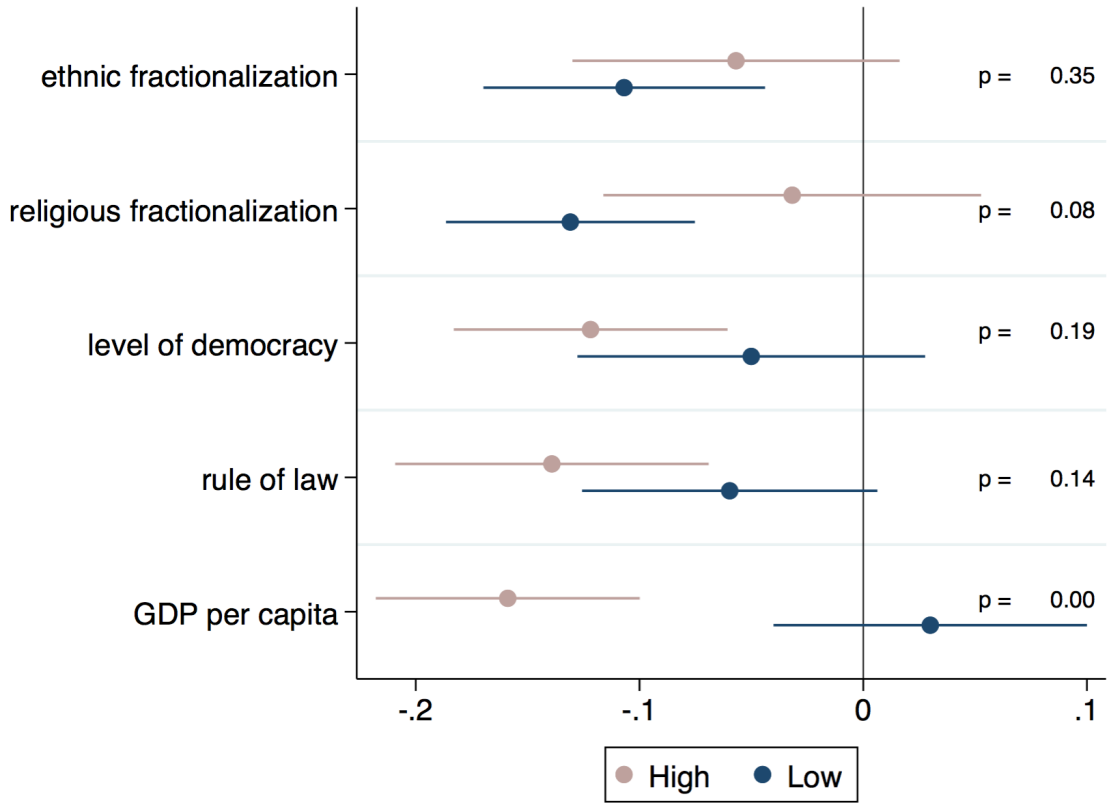
Event types


Battles
Remote violence
Protests
Riots
Strategic development
Violence against civilians
-.15
-.1
-.05
0
.05

Actors


States Forces
Rebel Groups
Political Militias
Identity Militias
Rioters
Protesters
Civilians
-.15
-.1
-.05
0
.05

Country characteristics



Further results

How restriction policies have a heterogeneous effect across countries depending on the nature of event or of the actors involved.

- Countries with high level of religious fractionalization do not experience a reduction in violence against civilians
- Countries with low levels of religious fractionalization experience a significant decline in violence against civilians
  - ◇ Effect mostly driven by events involving civilians, political militias and state forces
  - ◇ heterogeneity of conflict responses with respect to income (GDP per capita) is mostly driven by the dynamics of protests

Discussion and interpretation

Results points to several potential mechanisms:

- By reducing mobility, such restrictions impact individual mobilization capacity, which explains the decline in the protests worldwide.
  $\hookrightarrow$ not observed in countries with very low income: economic effect of shut- and lockdown policies might trigger additional (mostly peaceful) conflict
  $\hookrightarrow$ shutdown policies limit the capacity of low-income states to fight against the opposition

- Ambiguous effect on violence against civilians in more fractionalized countries
  $\hookrightarrow$ The effect could be tempered by a rise in inter-religious and inter-ethnic violence.
  $\hookrightarrow$ Epidemics can intensify underlying ethnic or religious tensions and lead to scapegoating of minorities

Controlling the timing of Covid-19 Outbreak

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dep. var. (conflict)	Incidence	Intensity	——— Incidence ———	
Policy restrictions measure	Shutdown	(binary)	Narrow index	Broad index
Policy restriction	-0.093***	-0.274*	-0.185***	-0.202***
	(0.030)	(0.165)	(0.034)	(0.036)
COVID-19 outbreak	0.035	-0.040	0.035	0.035
	(0.033)	(0.102)	(0.033)	(0.033)
Observations	122,099	122,099	122,099	122,099
R-squared	0.482		0.482	0.482
Model	OLS	PPML	OLS	OLS
Country FE	——— Yes ———			
Month-year FE	——— Yes ———			

Country Specific Time Trends

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Dep. var. (conflict)	Incidence	Intensity	———	Incidence ———	
Policy restrictions measure	Shutdown	(binary)	Narrow index	Broad index	Shutdown
Policy restriction	-0.070**	-0.229	-0.163***	-0.169***	-0.212***
	(0.030)	(0.176)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.075)
× Press Freedom Index					-0.004**
					(0.002)
Observations	122,099	122,099	122,099	122,099	117,794
R-squared	0.503		0.504	0.503	0.500
Model	OLS	PPML	OLS	OLS	OLS
Country FE			——— Yes ———		
Month-year FE			——— Yes ———		
Country × time trends			——— Yes ———		