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Oasis Kodila-Tedika and Sherif Khalifa

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON
College of Business and Economics, *Department of Economics*
800 N. State College Blvd., Fullerton, CA 92834-6848 / T 657-278-2228 / F 657-278-3097

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Oasis Kodila-Tedika

University of Kinshasa
Department of Economics
oasiskodila@yahoo.fr

Sherif Khalifa

California State University, Fullerton
Department of Economics
skhalifa@fullerton.edu

Abstract

This paper examines the effect of official visits to and from a country on the onset of conflict. To achieve our objective, we develop a simple theoretical framework that derives the conditions under which official visits can increase the likelihood of conflict under different political regimes. The model predicts that official visits are more likely to deter conflict in non-democratic countries than in democratic ones. To empirically test the predictions of the model, we use the number of visits of U.S. Presidents and Secretaries of State to a country, and the number of visits by the country's leader to the United States, derived from the historical archives of the U.S. State Department. To deal with potential endogeneity, we use a Three-Stage-Least-Squares estimation technique. The estimation provides evidence consistent with our model predictions that the number of official visits has a statistically significant positive effect on conflict, especially in democratic countries. This indicates that these official visits induce the insurgents to engage in conflict with an incumbent government that is perceived as a stooge of the United States.

JEL Code : D74, H11
Keywords : Conflict, Executive, Official Visits.

1. Introduction

This paper examines the effect of official visits on conflict in a country. In other words, we explore whether the number of official visits to and from a country is associated with the onset of conflict. We also investigate whether the effect of official visits on conflict depends on the political regime of the country. This is the first theoretical and empirical contribution in the literature to consider the number of official visits as a determinant of conflict.

To achieve our objective, we develop a simple theoretical framework of a host and a guest country. The model derives the conditions under which an invitation is extended by the host, and the conditions that determine whether the invitation is accepted by the guest under different political regimes. The setup shows that the official visit can induce conflict in the guest country if the concessions offered to the host to secure an invitation are such that the total cost of the trip is larger than the total benefit. This induces the opposition to accuse the incumbent government of serving the interests of the host on the expense of the entire country, which can be used as a pretext to instigate an insurgency. The model also shows that this is less likely in a non-democratic country than a democratic one, since that the conditions of accepting an invitation to a visit and the types of concessions that the guest is willing to offer the host depend on the political regime of the country. This causes the official visits to act more as a deterrent for conflict in non-democratic countries than in democratic ones.

To empirically test our theoretical findings, the paper uses novel variables that indicate the number of visits by U.S. Presidents and Secretaries of State to a country, and the number of visits of the country's leader to the United States. These variables are derived from the historical archives of the U.S. Department of State. The paper examines the association between these variables and the onset of conflict in the country. In other words, we test whether the official visits, to and from the United States, are associated with conflict in a

country using indicators derived from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset during the period 1960–2017.

However, the key difficulty in determining a causal effect is the issue of endogeneity. As much as the visits of U.S. officials can affect the likelihood of conflict, it is also possible that the occurrence of conflict in a country can entice U.S. officials to visit the country either to lend their diplomatic support to the government, to conclude agreements on weapons procurement or military training to support a government that is considered a friendly ally, to mediate between the dissident factions and the incumbent government, or to broker a peace accord between the parties embroiled in conflict. Similarly, as much as the visits of the country's leader to the United States can induce conflict, it is also possible that the occurrence of armed conflict in a country can tempt its leaders to visit the United States to seek assistance out of their predicament.

To deal with potential endogeneity, we use a Three-Stage-Least-Squares estimation approach. The 3SLS estimations show that the number of visits of U.S. Presidents and Secretaries of State to a country, and the number of visits of the country's leader to the United States, has a statistically significant positive effect on conflict. The results are robust even after the inclusion of control variables identified in the literature as determinants of conflict. When we distinguish between political regimes, the analysis shows that official visits have a positive association with conflict in democracies but an insignificant effect in non-democracies. This provides empirical evidence to support our model predictions.

In addition to causality, the paper also addresses the issue of persistence in conflict. To deal with persistence, we use the systems GMM estimation technique. The estimation confirms our previous finding that conflict displays a high level of persistence while the

leader's trips to the United States have a statistically significant positive effect on conflict, especially in democracies.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: section 2 includes the theoretical framework, section 3 discusses the literature survey, section 4 includes the description of the data, section 5 includes the empirical estimation and the robustness tests, and section 6 concludes. References, tables and figures are included thereafter.

2. Model

In this section we develop a simple theoretical framework of a host and a guest country. For the host country, inviting foreign officials is costly. The direct cost of the visit of foreign dignitaries and their entourage includes accommodations, transportation, security and others. There is also the indirect cost of the visit as the officials of the host country have to engage in activities with the foreign guests during the period of their visit. This will take them away from their daily duties, which accounts for the opportunity cost of the visit. We denote the direct cost of the visit for the host HC^D and the opportunity cost HC^O. Thus, the total cost of the visit for the host is $HC = (HC^D + HC^O)$.

For the guest, official visits are also costly. Leaders travel with a large retinue that includes security personnel, policy makers, public officials, expert advisors, private entrepreneurs, staff of the presidential cabinet, members of the press corps and others. Thus, these trips are a burden on the coffers of the state. This includes the cost of travel, lodging, transportation, security, meals and others. In addition to the direct cost of the trip, longer trips also take those officials who accompany the leaders away from their other duties for a longer period of time. We denote the direct cost of the trip for the guest GC^D and the opportunity cost GC^O. In addition, the guest may need to offer concessions to the host to secure an invitation. Thus, the total cost for the guest country is $GC = (GC^D + GC^O + k)$ where k reflect

concessions that are offered to the host. It is worth noting that these concessions can be tangible or intangible.

On the other hand, the official visits are intended for both countries to reap future benefits. For the host, the benefits can be signing a trade agreement to open markets for the host country's products (Kodila-Tedika & Khalifa, 2021), facilitating the entry of the host country's firms and investors into the guest's economy (Kodila-Tedika & Khalifa, 2020a), offering aid to the guest in return for political favors (Kodila-Tedika & Khalifa, 2020b), agreeing with the officials of the guest country on how to service their debt to the host's public and private creditors (Kodila-Tedika & Khalifa, 2020c), selling weapons and armaments to the guest, and guaranteeing that the guest serves the geopolitical priorities of the host abroad (Kodila-Tedika & Khalifa, 2020d). For the guest, the benefits include increasing the value and volume of trade with the host, borrowing loans from the host, appealing for aid from the host, attracting the host's capital flows, procuring weapons from the host, or guaranteeing the host's support for the incumbent government.

In this context, we distinguish between tangible benefits in terms of bilateral flows of trade, capital, credit and aid and intangible benefits that can take the form of promoting political alliances, rendering moral support, recognizing regime legitimacy, and satisfying specific geostrategic goals. For the host, we denote the intangible benefits HB^I and for the guest GB^I. We also distinguish between tangible benefits that can benefit one country on the expense of the other, and those that can benefit both countries. For the former, we denote the tangible benefits HB^T for the host and GB^T for the guest, such that $HB^T + GB^T = 1$. For the latter, we denote the tangible benefits HB^{TX} for the host and GB^{TX} for the guest.

It is also worth noting that the concessions k by the guest can be either tangible or intangible. If the concessions by the guest are intangible, the intangible benefits of the host

increases as $\frac{\partial(HB^I)}{\partial \mathrm{k}} > 0$. If the concessions are tangible, the tangible benefits of the host increases as $\frac{\partial(HB^T)}{\partial \mathrm{k}} > 0$ and $\frac{\partial(HB^{TX})}{\partial \mathrm{k}} > 0$. This implies that $\frac{\partial(GB^T)}{\partial \mathrm{k}} < 0$, while $\frac{\partial(GB^{TX})}{\partial \mathrm{k}}$ can be positive or negative. In this context, we can derive some simple conclusions as follows:

PROPOSITION 1: *An invitation for a visit by the host to the guest will be extended if and only if the total benefit from the visit to the host is larger than or equal to the total cost of the visit to the host* $HC \leq (HB^I + HB^T + HB^{TX})$.

PROPOSITION 2: *The higher the concession k offered by the guest to the host, the more likely that an invitation to a visit will be extended to the guest.*

Proof: The higher the concession k offered by the guest, the higher the host's total benefits given that $\frac{\partial(HB^T)}{\partial \mathrm{k}} > 0$, $\frac{\partial(HB^{TX})}{\partial \mathrm{k}} > 0$, *and* $\frac{\partial(HB^I)}{\partial \mathrm{k}} > 0$. *The higher the host's total benefits the more likely the condition* $HC \leq (HB^I + HB^T + HB^{TX})$ *is satisfied, and the more likely an invitation to visit will be extended to the guest.*

PROPOSITION 3: A *non-democratic guest is more likely to accept an invitation if* $(GC + k) \leq GB^I$.

Proof: The guest will accept the invitation of the host if the benefit of the visit is more than the cost. However, this acceptance condition depends on the political regime of the guest country. A non-democratic guest government will put more weight on intangible benefits from the visit that will contribute to the regime's durability, such as the recognition of the legitimacy of the incumbent government and securing the moral support of the host versus its adversaries. Thus, non-democratic guests are more likely to accept an invitation if the intangible benefits from the visit are larger than or equal to the total cost of the visit $(GC + k) \leq GB^I$.

PROPOSITION 4: *A democratic guest is more likely to accept an invitation if* $(GC + k) \leq GB^{TX}$.

Proof: *The guest will accept the invitation of the host if the benefit of the visit is more than the cost. However, this acceptance condition will depend on the political regime of the guest country. A democratic guest government will put more weight on tangible benefits that can be presented as achievements to the electorate to be able to ensure future reelection. These benefits can be attracting more trade, capital, credit and aid flows. A democratic guest government will not put a lot of weight on intangible benefits since they do not need any recognition of regime legitimacy which is already secured through the ballot boxes, nor do they need the support of foreign entities versus their adversaries since they focus more on earning the support of domestic voters to get reelected. In this context, the guest democratic government will focus more on tangible benefits that can be mutually beneficial to the host and the guest. Thus, a democratic guest is more likely to accept an invitation if the tangible benefits of the visit are larger than or equal to the total cost of the visit* $(GC + k) \leq GB^{TX}$.

PROPOSITION 5: *The official visit is more likely to instigate conflict in the guest country if* $(GC + k) > (GB^{I} + GB^{T} + GB^{TX})$.

Proof: A visit will instigate conflict if the political opposition in the guest country observes that their government offered too many concessions to the host such that the total cost of the visit outweighs the total benefit. In this case, the opposition in the guest country can accuse the incumbent government of offering concessions that serve the interests of the host to guarantee regime durability, on the expense of the entire country. This can induce the government's adversaries to engage in armed conflict.

In the context of visits, to and from the United States, the visit can confirm to the dissenters that their government is a stooge that only serves the strategic interests of the

United States on the expense of the entire populace. This can be displayed if the country's leaders offer political or economic concessions to their American counterparts during these visits that outweigh the benefits that the country can reap by the visit. This may act as a catalyst or a pretext for the opposition to start an insurgency against a government that is not, in their opinion, serving in the people's interest.

PROPOSITION 6: *The official visit is less likely to induce conflict in a non-democratic guest if and only if* $\frac{\partial(GB^I)}{\partial k} > 1$.

Proof: *A non–democratic guest government puts more weight on intangible benefits. In this context, the government is more likely to make intangible concessions that will increase both* HB^I *(serve the strategic interests of the host) and* GB^I *(gain the recognition of the host for the legitimacy of the incumbent government and obtain their moral support against the opposition). This will increase the intangible benefits of the host from the visit and, thus, makes an invitation to visit more likely since* $\frac{\partial(HB^I)}{\partial k} > 0$. *This will also increase the intangible benefits of the guest making the acceptance of the invitation more likely if and only if* $\frac{\partial(GB^I)}{\partial k} > 1$. *This makes the acceptance condition* $(GC + k) \leq GB^I$ *more likely to be satisfied. In this context, the visit will take place but will not cause conflict since the acceptance condition ensures that the no-conflict condition* $(GC + k) \leq (GB^I + GB^T + GB^{TX})$ *is also satisfied.*

In the context of the visits, to and from the United States, the visits of U.S. officials are usually taken as a signal of moral support by the U.S. administration to the country's governing regime against the political opposition or the insurgents, or as a sign of the close ties between the incumbent government and the United States. Extending an invitation to the country's leader to visit the United States is also seen as a sign of endorsement of the

occupant of the highest office in the country. This can deter the insurgents from engaging in conflict with a government that has the backing of a super power. This is more likely to be the case in non-democratic countries whose governments need the endorsement of a super power to ensure their continued control over the political arena.

These visits are also intended to send a message to the entire world of the support of the United States for the government and its recognition of regime legitimacy before other world powers and international organizations. This undermines the allegations by its opponents of the incumbent's lack of legitimacy, which is typically used as a justification to overthrow a governing regime. This is also more likely to be the case in non-democratic countries whose governments lack the legitimacy that can otherwise be guaranteed by free and fair elections. Finally, the visits by U.S. officials also send a signal of confidence in the stability of the governing regime. This is because American officials undertake such visits only when they are confident that the U.S. will reap some future benefits. This can only be ensured if they expect the incumbent government to continue in power for a long time, which is more likely in non-democracies where leaders stay for life unless their term is terminated through a coup or assassination.

PROPOSITION 7: *The visit can act as a deterrent against insurgency if the non-democratic guest government uses the visit to secure weapons and armaments from the host.*

Proof: Weapons procurement by the guest from the host increases the tangible benefits of the host HB^{TX} *and makes the invitation to an official visit more likely. This also increases the tangible benefits of the guest* GB^{TX}*. Given that this exchange does not entail any concessions from the guest, accepting the invitation is more likely. The lack of concessions from the guest also makes the no-conflict condition* $(GC + k) \leq (GB^{I} + GB^{T} + GB^{TX})$ *more likely to be satisfied. Given that non-democratic governments are more likely to have a higher*

level of defense spending especially on procuring weapons and armaments that can be used domestically against their adversaries, official visits are more likely to act as a deterrent of conflict in a non-democratic country.

The visits of U.S. officials to the country and the visits of the country's leader to the United States are usually taken as an opportunity for the country's regime to appeal for military support from the United States in terms of armaments procurement and military training. Military contracts can be signed during these visits for countries to secure American weapons, to take advantage of American military training opportunities and to share intelligence. These can deter the insurgents from engaging in conflict with a heavily armed government.

PROPOSITION 8: *The official visit can induce conflict in a democratic guest country if and only if* $\frac{\partial(GB^{TX})}{\partial k} > 1$ *and* $\frac{\partial(HB^{T})}{\partial k} > \frac{\partial(HB^{TX})}{\partial k}$.

Proof: A democratic guest government puts more weight on tangible benefits that can be presented to the electorate as achievements to ensure future reelection. These include attracting more trade, capital, credit and aid flows. Thus, if the guest government makes tangible concessions that will increase the host's tangible benefits, an invitation will be extended. If this increases the tangible benefits of the guest GB^{TX}*, the invitation will be accepted if* $\frac{\partial(GB^{TX})}{\partial k} > 1$ *since this makes the acceptance condition* $(GC + k) \leq GB^{TX}$ *more likely to be satisfied. On the other hand, if these tangible concessions increase* HB^{T} *on the expense of* GB^{T} *given that* $HB^{T} + GB^{T} = 1$*, the visit will cause an increase in* GB^{TX} *and a decrease in* GB^{T}*. This can cause conflict if and only if* $\frac{\partial(HB^{T})}{\partial k} > \frac{\partial(HB^{TX})}{\partial k}$ *since the decrease in* GB^{T} *will be larger than the increase in* GB^{TX} *due to the concessions. This makes the conflict*

condition $(GC + k) > (GB^I + GB^T + GB^{TX})$ *more likely to be satisfied. Thus, official visits are more likely to induce conflict in democracies.*

3. Literature

This paper comes at the intersection of two streams of literature: the first explores the determinants of conflict, while the other investigates the causes and consequences of leader's foreign visits. The contribution of this paper is that it is the first to consider the official visits as a determinant of conflict, which was largely ignored by the previous literature.

On one hand, this paper contributes to the literature on the determinants of conflict which focuses on the effect of factors such as climate variability, abundance of natural wealth, ethnolinguistic diversity, and democratic governance. In this context, there are several studies that attempt to examine the effect of climate change on conflict such as Burke et al. (2015), Burke et al. (2013), Hsiang et al. (2011), Miguel et al. (2004) and Miguel and Satyanath (2011). There are other studies that argues that the abundance of natural endowments can cause conflict such as Rohner et al. (2017), Rohner et al. (2015), Rohner and Morelli (2015), Lei and Michaels (2014) and Tsui and Cotet (2013). Other studies examine the effect of ethnolinguistic diversity on conflict as in Collier and Hoeffler (1998), Collier and Hoeffler (2004), Fearon and Laitin (2003), Fearon et al. (2007), Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2010) and Reynal-Querol (2002). Finally, some studies investigate the effect of democratic governance on the likelihood of conflict such as Sunde and Cervellati (2014) Collier and Rohner (2008), and Hegre (2014). Our paper contributes to this literature by adding official visits as a potential factor that can induce conflict.

This paper also contributes to the literature on the determinants and the effects of official visits. For instance, Lebovic and Saunders (2016) examine whether high level U.S. diplomatic visits are determined by strategic factors, domestic considerations or diplomatic

routines. The authors find that the travels of the President and the Secretary of State serve a set of priorities that promote national interests or adhere to diplomatic routine, but little evidence of domestic influence on diplomacy. Ostrander and Rider (2019) use data on more than 750 presidential trips of leaders of one hundred countries and spanning a century to show that domestic political factors influence presidential travel more than other factors. Darcy and Richman (1988) examine whether presidential trips are motivated by enhancing domestic support and increasing presidential popularity in public opinion. The authors find that presidential travel is not always associated with changes in popularity, and that approval ratings of the presidents depend on the destination and the duration of the president's visits.

There are also other studies that focus on the political and economic consequences of leader's visits. For instance, Nitsch (2007) examines the effect of state visits on international trade. The author finds that state and official visits are positively correlated with exports, and that there is a strong short-lived effect of visits on bilateral exports growth. Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2009) examine whether U.S. high-level visits to foreign countries affect public opinion in those countries. The authors find that the effect of these visits is initially large and positive, but eventually "exhibited a backlash effect."

The contribution that is closest to ours is Malis and Smith (20121) who propose a setup in which a foreign leader visits an incumbent in order to reap future concessions, which is guaranteed only if the incumbent remains in power long enough to deliver. Thus, the diplomatic visit serves as a strong signal of the visitor's confidence in the incumbent's stability in office. Domestic opponents observe the signal and are deterred from mounting a challenge. The authors find empirical support that a visit of the U.S. president substantially diminishes the likelihood of a leader's removal from office. Malis and Smith (2019) examine the association between diplomatic visits and leader's survival. The model predicts that the foreign leader chooses to visit incumbents who are secure in office, and given this signal

citizens are discouraged from any act of defiance. The authors conclude that their findings explain why leaders are so eager to receive state visits from major world powers. Our paper contributes to this literature by examining theoretically and empirically the effect of official visits on conflict under different political regimes.

5. Data

The countries included in the analysis are: Austria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo. Rep., Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt. Arab Rep., El Salvador, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gambia. The, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea , Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Korea. Rep., Lesotho, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Nepal, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Rwanda, Senegal, Serbia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for all the variables used in the analysis.

The dependent variable in our analysis is an indicator of civil conflict derived from UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. In this dataset, an armed conflict is defined as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year.” We follow Arbatli et al. (2020) in defining conflict as “an internal armed conflict between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s), without any interference from other states as independent actors or intervention from other states to support either side of the conflict.” The conflict variable

used is the log number of new PRIO25 civil conflict onsets per year during the period 1960–2017.

The variables of interest are the number of visits by U.S. Presidents and Secretaries of State to the country, and the number of visits by a country's leader to the United States, during the period from 1960-2017. These include state visits, official working visits, summits, private visits, informal visits, meetings, and working visits. This data is derived from the Office of the Historian, which is affiliated to the Department of Sate of the United States of America.[1] Figures 1-3 show world maps of the total number of visits of U.S. Presidents to each country, the total number of visits of U.S. Secretaries of State to each country, and the total number of each country's leader's visits to the United States, respectively.

We include some control variables that are identified by the literature as critical determinants of conflict. The first is the level of economic development captured by the logarithm of Gross Domestic Product per capita, PPP (constant 2011 international $) which is derived from the World Development Indicators. Developed countries are less likely to be embroiled in civil conflict.

We also include the ethnic fractionalization indicator derived from Alesina et al. (2003). Fractionalization measures the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a country are from different ethnic groups. Several studies in the literature discuss the association between diversity and the likelihood of conflict.

We use the Polity score which is extracted from the Polity IV Project. The Polity score captures a country's political regime on a 21-point scale ranging from -10 (strongly autocratic) to +10 (strongly democratic). The paper uses the Polity2 variable which is a modified version of the Polity variable by applying a simple treatment to convert instances of "standardized

[1] https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory.

authority scores" (-66,-77,-88) to conventional polity scores within the range -10 to +10. Some studies in the literature find an association between democratic governance and conflict.

We include some geographic factors such as the average level of the Terrain Ruggedness Index from Nunn and Puga (2012). The ruggedness of the terrain in a country is a natural barrier that can protect the insurgents from the heavy handedness of the central government, and accordingly can instigate conflict. We also include oil rent as a percentage of GDP, derived from the World Development Indicators. Some studies in the literature find an association between the abundance of oil and conflict. Finally, we include a dummy variable indicating if the land is a "small island" or a "very small island" as reported in the World Countries geographical dataset. Islands are more isolated and this may limit the ability of the rebels to use the territories of neighboring countries to escape from the government's forces.

6. Estimation

In this section, we attempt to empirically test the predictions of our model. Therefore, we conduct an estimation of the effect of the number of official visits by U.S. Presidents and Secretaries of State to the country, and the number of visits by the country's leader to the United States, on the onset of conflict during the period 1960-2017.

4.1. Three-Stage-Least-Squares

In this context, the problem of potential endogeneity cannot be ignored. First, the association may be spurious due to the failure to account for an unobserved factor which is affecting both the onset of conflict and official visits. Second, as much as the visits of U.S. officials can affect the likelihood of conflict, it is also possible that the occurrence of conflict in a country can entice U.S. officials to visit the country either to lend their support for the government or to mediate between the parties engaged in conflict. Conflict can also induce the country's leader to visit the United States to seek assistance in their struggle.

To deal with potential endogeneity, we use a system of simultaneous equations that can be jointly estimated using Three-Stage-Least-Squares (3SLS). Simultaneous equations are a statistical model in which the dependent variables are functions of other dependent variables, rather than just independent variables. In our context, both the conflict and the official visits indicators can be determined jointly as follows

$$Conflict_{it} = \theta + \delta \ \ OfficialVisits_{it-1} + X_{it-1}\gamma + \mu_{it} \quad (1)$$

$$OfficialVisits_i = \alpha + \beta \ \ Conflict_{it-1} + Z_{it-1}\sigma \quad + e_{it} \ (2)$$

$Conflict_{it}$ is our measure of civil conflict in country i in period t. $OfficialVisits_{it}$ is the number of official visits to and from country i in period t. X_{it} is a vector of control variables identified by the literature as determinants of conflict in country i in year t. Thus, we control for the logarithm of GDP per capita as countries that enjoy higher living standards are less likely to engage in a conflict that will cause deterioration in the existing living conditions. We also control for ethnic fractionalization, democratic governance, and oil abundance. In our literature survey, we have identified several studies that found that ethnolinguistic diversity, democratic governance and the abundance of natural wealth are factors that can affect the likelihood of conflict. We also include the terrain ruggedness index and a dummy if the country is an island. These are geographic features of a country that can affect the onset of conflict as well.

Z_{it} is a vector of determinants of official visits to and from country i in year t. This vector includes a dummy if the country has a free trade agreement with the United States[2]. Countries that are major trading partners of the United States are more likely to have more bilateral official visits than others. Another variable is a dummy equals to 1 if the country has a common language with the United States, or if the country‘s official language is English. Common language and cultural proximity facilitate communication and exchange.

[2] https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements

We also include capital distance, which is the distance in kilometers from Washington D.C. to the official place of the leader's residence in every country around the world. We use different sources for the distance calculations[3] to ensure robustness, reliability, and to check the conformity of the observations. The inclusion of this variable is based on the intuition that American officials are more likely to visit countries whose capital cities are closer to that of the United States, and that U.S. administrations are more likely to invite leaders of countries in close proximity to visit Washington DC. This proximity usually implies that the country is more likely to be within the sphere of influence of the United States and to be particularly of strategic significance to American administrations. For instance, Latin America in closest proximity to the United States has been labeled as "America's Backyard" and was off limits to other powers. In this context, the "Monroe doctrine" stated that any efforts by European powers to take control of any state in North or South America would be viewed as "the manifestation of an unfriendly disposition toward the United States." The close distance between the country and the United States also reflects lower transportation costs and thus a higher level of bilateral trade and commercial exchange. These factors cause the United States to be more interested in strengthening bilateral ties with these countries through frequent official visits to and from the country. The proximity of the two capitals also decreases the cost of the trip.

We also include a dummy if the country was a British colony. In this case, we expect a former British colony to have similar political, economic, legal, and cultural institutions to those in the United States. This strengthens bilateral ties, and thus increases the level of official visits between the country and the United States. Finally, we include the Polity score. American officials are more likely to visit democratic countries who are usually considered as

[3] https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/gccalc.shtml, and https://gps-coordinates.org/distance-between-coordinates.php; https://www.movable-type.co.uk/scripts/latlong.html

political allies, or otherwise visit undemocratic countries to induce a process of democratic transition.

Table 2 shows the 3SLS estimation results of the effect of the number of official visits on conflict. Column I shows the effect of the number of visits of the country's leader to the United States. Column II shows the effect of the number of visits of U.S. Presidents to the country, while column III shows the effect of the number of visits of U.S. Secretaries of State to the country. In each case, column 1 shows the results where conflict is the dependent variable, while column 2 shows the results where the number of official visits is the dependent variable.

The 3SLS shows that the number of visits has a statistically significant positive effect on conflict, while conflict has a statistically significant negative effect on the number of visits. This is the case with all types of official visits. These results imply that the visits by U.S. officials to the country, and by the country's leader to the United States, reaffirm the view held by the opposition or by the rebels that the incumbent government is a stooge of the United States. This justifies their decision to engage in armed conflict with the government. The negative coefficient of conflict in the second equation also shows that conflict deters official visits to and from the country due to safety concerns.

The estimations also show that the level of economic development, captured by the logarithm of GDP per capita, has a statistically significant negative effect on conflict. On the other hand, ethnic fractionalization, terrain ruggedness and the island dummy have a statistically significant positive effect. The results also show that the free trade agreement dummy, the common language dummy, and the Polity score have statistically significant positive effects on the number of official visits. This is consistent with intuition.

In table 3, we distinguish between democracies and non-democracies to test our model predictions. The former are defined as those with a Polity score higher than 6 as is standard in

the literature. As shown in the model, official visits are more likely to deter conflict in non-democracies compared to democracies. The results show that the leader's trips to the United States and the visits of U.S. Secretaries of States to the country have a statistically significant positive effect on conflict in democracies, while the official visits have no significant effect in non-democracies. This is consistent with our model predictions.

In table 4, we distinguish between oil producers and non-oil producers. The hypothesis is that the official visits are more likely to induce conflict in oil producing countries than others. This is because these visits affirm the view held by the opposition that the incumbent government is only serving the interests of the United States by ensuring a non-intermittent supply of oil and preventing unwelcome price spikes to American consumers. This may act as a catalyst or a pretext for the opposition to engage in armed conflict against the government in order to protect their national wealth from foreign influence. The results in table 4 show that the leader's trips to the United States and the visits by U.S. Secretaries of State have a positive association with conflict in oil producing countries, while none of the official visits variables have a significant effect in non-oil producing countries.

4.2. Persistence

We also consider the possibility of persistence in conflict. Countries embroiled in conflict in one period are likely to continue being mired in warfare in subsequent years. Therefore, we estimate the following equation

$$Conflict_{it} = \theta + \delta_i OfficialVisits_{it-1} + v_i Conflict_{it-1} + X_{it-1}\gamma + e_{it} \qquad (3)$$

The standard techniques that can be employed for panel estimation, such as fixed effects and random effects, cannot be used in this case. The problem with these techniques is that the equation contains a lagged endogenous variable, which is the lagged conflict indicator. In this case, estimation by fixed effects and random effects is not consistent. In addition, we also have the problem of endogeneity. To deal with potential endogeneity and the lagged

dependent variable, we use the Arellano and Bond (1991) estimation technique. This GMM estimator first-differences each variable so as to eliminate the country specific effect and then uses all possible lagged values of each of the variables as instruments. This not only corrects for the bias introduced by the lagged endogenous variable but also allows for a certain degree of endogeneity in the other explanatory variables. In this context, when the variance of the individual effect term across individual observations is high, then the Arellano–Bond (1991) estimator may perform poorly in finite samples. Blundell and Bond (1998) derived a condition under which it is possible to use an additional set of moment conditions. These additional moment conditions can be used to improve the small sample performance of the Arellano–Bond (1991) estimator. This method is referred to as systems GMM.

Table 5 includes the results of the systems GMM estimation. The table shows that the number of visits by a country's leader to the United States has a statistically significant positive effect on conflict. The estimation results also show that conflict shows a high level of persistence, given the positive and statistically significant coefficient of lagged conflict. In table 6, we distinguish between the effects of official visits on conflict in democracies versus non-democracies. The results show that the leaders trips to the United States have a statistically significant positive effect on conflict in democracies, while the visits of U.S. Presidents to the country has a significant negative effect in non-democracies. This is consistent with the predictions of the model where the visits act as a deterrent to conflict in non-democracies. In table 7, we distinguish between the effects of official visits on conflict in oil producing countries versus non-oil producing countries. The estimation results do not show any significant effect for any of the visit variables.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines the effect of official visits on conflict. We develop a theoretical framework that derives the conditions under which official visits can increase the likelihood

of conflict given a country's regime type. The model predicts that official visits are more likely to deter conflict in non-democratic countries than in democratic ones. To empirically test the model predictions, the paper examines the effect on conflict of the number of visits by U.S. Presidents and Secretaries of State to a country, and the number of visits by the country's leader to the United States. To deal with potential endogeneity, we use a 3SLS estimation technique. The estimation results show that the number of official visits has a statistically significant positive effect on conflict, especially in democracies. This indicates that these visits induce the opposition to engage in armed conflict with an incumbent government that is perceived as a stooge of the United States. The paper also addresses the issue of persistence in conflict. The systems GMM estimation shows that the number of visits by a country's leader to the United States has a statistically significant positive effect on conflict in democracies, and that conflict shows a high level of persistence.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Leaders' Trips to U.S.	2,101	1.159448	1.915051	0	17
Visits of U.S. Secretary of State	2,101	1.107568	2.536748	0	25
GDP per capita	1,698	8.223898	1.486319	5.032804	11.5757
Democracy - Polity2	1,605	0.9680685	7.182261	-10	10
Free trade agreements with US	2,101	0.0994764	0.2993719	0	1
Common language with US	2,101	0.3089005	0.46215	0	1
British Colony dummy	2,101	0.3141361	0.4642814	0	1
Distance with US Capital	2,068	8875.135	3651.443	734.4	16360
Visits of U.S. President	2,101	0.2679676	0.7138541	0	5
Island dummy	2,101	0.1989529	0.3993076	0	1
Ethnic fractionalization	1,463	0.4400585	0.280903	0.009962	.958587
Oil rent (% of GDP)	1,505	4.14926	10.30008	0	65.39636
Number of new PRIO25 civil conflict onsets per year	2,101	1.122799	3.488233	0	40
Ruggedness	1,243	1.264918	1.105828	0.03605	5.47406

Table 2. Three-Stage-Least-Squares

	I		II		III	
	Equation 1	**Equation 2**	**Equation 1**	**Equation 2**	**Equation 1**	**Equation 2**
Dependent Variable: Conflict						
Leaders' Trips to U.S.	0.846***					
	(0.201)					
Visits of the U.S. President			5.490***			
			(1.958)			
Visits of the U.S. Secretary of State					1.752***	
					(0.481)	
Ruggedness	0.466***		0.389**		0.304	
	(0.124)		(0.197)		(0.192)	
Island	1.005**		1.462**		2.507***	
	(0.459)		(0.728)		(0.782)	
Fractionalization	3.375***		3.801***		3.011***	
	(0.569)		(0.870)		(0.916)	
Logarithm of GDP per capita	-1.058***		-1.613***		-2.111***	
	(0.160)		(0.488)		(0.542)	
Polity	0.074***		0.036		0.103***	
	(0.027)		(0.043)		(0.040)	
Oil rents (% of GDP)	0.023		0.050		0.044	
	(0.030)		(0.048)		(0.048)	
Constant	6.069***		9.479***		12.886***	
	(1.153)		(3.160)		(3.652)	
Dependent Variable: Official Visits						
Conflict		-0.532***		-0.220***		-0.877***
		(0.129)		(0.045)		(0.186)
Free trade agreements with U.S.		2.730***		0.618***		2.565***
		(0.442)		(0.155)		(0.635)
Common Language		0.717**		0.366***		1.271**
		(0.359)		(0.130)		(0.528)
Capital Distance		0.000*		0.000**		0.000***
		(0.000)		(0.000)		(0.000)
British Colony		-0.191		-0.211**		-0.522
		(0.258)		(0.094)		(0.381)
Polity		0.142***		0.050***		0.158***
		(0.019)		(0.007)		(0.027)
Constant		0.992**		0.157		0.550
		(0.443)		(0.160)		(0.657)
Number of observations	768		768		768	

note: 0.01 - ***; 0.05 - **; 0.1 - *;

Table 3. Three-Stage-Least-Squares in Democracies and Non-Democracies

	Democracy		Non-Democracy		Democracy		Non-Democracy		Democracy		Non-Democracy	
	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II
Dependent Variable: Conflict												
Leaders' Trips to U.S.	0.576***		0.134									
	(0.201)		(0.217)									
Visits of the U.S. President					0.988		0.153					
					(0.757)		(1.470)					
Visits of the U.S. Secretary of State									0.741***		0.131	
									(0.241)		(0.277)	
Constant	2.894		5.807***		3.480		7.008***		6.327**		5.877***	
	(1.859)		(1.410)		(2.310)		(1.930)		(3.059)		(1.386)	
Dependent Variable: Official Visits												
Conflict		-0.362***		-0.102		-0.065		-0.071*		0.1318		-0.396**
		(0.129)		(0.098)		(0.044)		(0.036)		(0.160)		(0.160)
Constant		-2.133		0.674**		-1.779***		0.173*		-5.135**		0.745
		(1.687)		(0.290)		(0.579)		(0.101)		(2.080)		(0.452)
Number of observations	373		395		373		395		373		395	

note: 0.01 - ***; 0.05 - **; 0.1 - *; All control variables in table 2 are included.

Table 4. Three-Stage-Least-Squares in Oil Producers and Non-Oil Producers

	Oil		Non-Oil		Oil		Non-Oil		Oil		Non-Oil	
	I	**II**	**I**	**II**	**I**	**II**	**I**	**II**	**I**	**II**	**I**	**II**
Dependent Variable: Conflict												
Leaders' Trips to U.S.	0.603***		-0.325									
	(0.179)		(0.304)									
Visits of the U.S. President					0.987		-1.000					
					(0.671)		(2.559)					
Visits of the U.S. Secretary of State									0.846***		-0.532	
									(0.208)		(0.416)	
Constant	8.632***		3.674***		8.467***		4.584**		10.306***		4.766*	
	(1.927)		(.906)		(2.260)		(2.056)		(2.520)		(2.797)	
Dependent Variable: Official Visits												
Conflict		-0.639***		-0.287**		-0.197***		-0.166***		-1.072***		-0.7105***
		(0.147)		(0.127)		(0.050)		(0.058)		(0.236)		(0.254)
Constant		0.267		1.777***		0.388		0.359***		0.495		1.923***
		(0.727)		(0.233)		(0.249)		(0.105)		(1.206)		(0.3331)
Number of observations	400		368		400		368		400		368	

note: 0.01 - ***; 0.05 - **; 0.1 - *; All control variables in table 2 are included.

Table 5. Systems GMM Estimation.

	I	II	III
Lagged conflict	0.782***	0.801***	0.796***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.028)
Lagged Leaders' Trips to U.S.	0.214**		
	(0.087)		
Lagged Visits of U.S.Secretary of State		0.020	
		(0.076)	
Lagged Visits of U.S. President			-0.285
			(0.330)
Lagged logarithm of GDP per capita	-0.288***	-0.169	-0.086
	(0.091)	(0.107)	(0.106)
Lagged Oil rent (% GDP)	0.001	-0.003	-0.003
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Lagged Polity	0.033*	0.037**	0.039**
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Ruggedness	0.097	0.068	0.064
	(0.071)	(0.070)	(0.070)
Island	0.267	0.282	0.285
	(0.266)	(0.271)	(0.266)
Fractionalization	1.037***	0.836**	0.832**
	(0.337)	(0.328)	(0.328)
Constant	2.155***	1.443	0.898
	(0.808)	(0.890)	(0.900)
Number of observations	681	681	681
Sargan test (p-value)	0.000	0.000	0.000
AR(2)	0.006	0.015	0.015

note: 0.01 - ***; 0.05 - **; 0.1 - *;

Table 6. Systems GMM Estimation in Democracies and Non-Democracies

	Democracy			Non-Democracy		
	I	**II**	**III**	**IV**	**V**	**VI**
Lagged conflict	0.844***	0.897***	0.899***	0.645***	0.615***	0.633***
	(0.035)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.059)
Lagged Leaders' Trips to U.S.	0.305***			0.279*		
	(0.080)			(0.161)		
Lagged Visits of U.S.Secretary of State		0.081			-1.599**	
		(0.285)			(0.708)	
Lagged Visits of U.S. President			0.022			0.011
			(0.057)			(0.222)
Lagged logarithm of GDP per capita	-0.233**	-0.074	-0.085	-0.261*	0.067	-0.175
	(0.103)	(0.116)	(0.123)	(0.145)	(0.173)	(0.171)
Lagged Oil rent (% GDP)	0.073	0.090	0.092	-0.018	-0.005	-0.015
	(0.062)	(0.062)	(0.063)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.023)
Lagged Polity	0.002	0.013	0.015	0.045*	0.035	0.044
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.028)
Ruggedness	0.097	0.019	0.017	0.055	0.130	0.056
	(0.086)	(0.084)	(0.084)	(0.117)	(0.123)	(0.119)
Island	0.062	0.150	0.162	0.931*	1.073**	0.840*
	(0.304)	(0.300)	(0.307)	(0.489)	(0.503)	(0.485)
Fractionalization	1.658***	1.041**	0.964*	0.571	0.426	0.512
	(0.511)	(0.481)	(0.495)	(0.461)	(0.466)	(0.548)
Constant	1.849*	0.853	0.929	2.085	0.039	1.644
	(0.966)	(1.062)	(1.087)	(1.274)	(1.441)	(1.313)
Number of observations	347	347	347	334	334	334
AR(2)	0.165	0.335	0.307	0.159	0.491	0.294

note: .01 - ***; .05 - **; .1 - *;

Table 7. Systems GMM Estimation in Oil Producers and Non-Oil Producers

	Oil			Non-Oil		
	I	**II**	**III**	**IV**	**V**	**VI**
Lagged conflict	0.852***	0.866***	0.865***	0.546***	0.562***	0.558***
	(0.035)	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.044)
Lagged Leaders' Trips to U.S.	0.146			0.151		
	(0.109)			(0.174)		
Lagged Visits of U.S.Secretary of State		0.049			-0.600	
		(0.325)			(0.659)	
Lagged Visits of U.S. President			0.049			-0.125
			(0.086)			(0.175)
Lagged logarithm of GDP per capita	-0.410***	-0.299*	-0.327**	-0.274***	-0.171	-0.148
	(0.156)	(0.156)	(0.153)	(0.091)	(0.117)	(0.159)
Lagged Oil rent (% GDP)	-0.002	-0.008	-0.008	-3.552	-3.946	-4.277
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(10.885)	(10.943)	(10.946)
Lagged Polity	0.049*	0.051**	0.052**	0.019	0.026	0.026
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Ruggedness	0.193	0.167	0.183	0.015	0.009	0.017
	(0.135)	(0.137)	(0.140)	(0.074)	(0.072)	(0.076)
Island	0.194	0.246	0.235	0.163	0.073	0.056
	(0.438)	(0.465)	(0.440)	(0.307)	(0.327)	(0.346)
ETHFRAC	0.796	0.694	0.758	0.675	0.464	0.712
	(0.546)	(0.544)	(0.570)	(0.420)	(0.365)	(0.477)
Constant	3.340**	2.601*	2.706**	2.185**	1.726*	1.480
	(1.360)	(1.363)	(1.295)	(0.888)	(1.006)	(1.292)
Number of observations	367	367	367	314	314	314
AR(2)	0.072	0.112	0.099	0.171	0.158	0.192

note: .01 - ***; .05 - **; .1 - *;

Figure 1. World Map of the number of Visits of U.S. Presidents

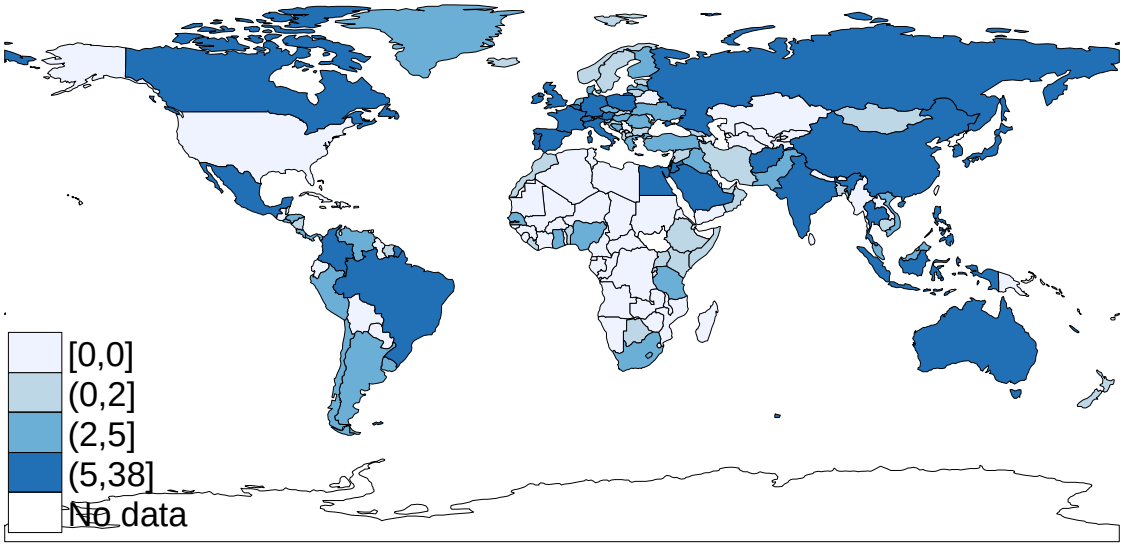

Figure 2. World Map of the number of Visits of U.S. Secretaries of State

Figure 3. World Map of Leader's Trips to the United States