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Conflict, Minorities and Well-Being

We assess the effect of the Russo-Georgian conflict of 2008 and the Ukrainian-Russian conflict of 2014 on the well-being of minorities in Russia. Using the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS), we find that the well-being of Georgians in Russia suffered negatively from the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict. In comparison, we find no general effect of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict of 2014 on the Ukrainian nationals' happiness. However, the life satisfaction of Ukrainians who reside in the southern regions of Russia in close proximity to Ukraine is negatively affected. We also show that the negative effect of conflict is short-lived with no long-term legacy. Additionally, we analyze the spillover effect of conflict on other minorities in Russia. We find that while the well-being of non-Slavic and migrant minorities who have recently moved to Russia is negatively affected, there is no effect on local minorities who have been living in Russia for at least ten years.

Militarized conflict affects a myriad of socioeconomic outcomes, such as the level of GDP (Bove et al. 2016), household welfare (Justino 2011), generalized trust and trust in central institutions (Grosjean 2014), social capital (Guriev and Melnikov 2016), and election turnout (Coupe and Obrizan 2016). Importantly, conflict has also been found to directly affect individual well-being (Frey 2012, Welsch 2008).

However, previous research studying individual well-being in transition countries largely abstracts from heightened political instability and conflict proneness, while this has been particularly pertinent in transition countries. Examples of transition countries facing various types of conflicts are abound, such as Yugoslavia, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, and so on. Therefore, it is imperative to explore how conflict shapes well-being in transition countries.

In a new paper (Gokmen and Yakovlev, forthcoming), we add to our understanding of well-being in transition in relation to conflict. We focus on the effect of Russo-Georgian conflict of 2008 and the Ukrainian-Russian conflict of 2014 on the well-being of minorities in Russia. The results suggest that the well-being of Georgians in Russia suffered negatively from the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict. However, we find no general effect of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict of 2014 on the Ukrainian nationals' happiness, while the life satisfaction of Ukrainians who reside in the southern regions of Russia in close proximity to Ukraine is negatively affected. Additionally, we analyze the spillover effect of conflict on other minorities in Russia. We find that while the well-being of non-slavic and migrant minorities who have recently moved to Russia is negatively affected, there is no effect on local minorities who have been living in Russia for at least ten years.

Data and Results

We employ the Russian Longitudinal Monitoring Survey (RLMS) which contains data on small neighborhoods where respondents live. Starting from 1992, the RLMS provides nationally-representative annual surveys that cover more than 4000 households with 10000 to 22000 individual respondents. The RLMS surveys comprise a broad set of questions, including a variety of individual demographic characteristics, health status, and well-being. Our study utilizes rounds 9 through 24 of the RLMS from 2000 to 2015.

In this survey, we identify minorities with the question of “What nationality do you consider yourself?” Accordingly, anybody who answers this question with a non-Russian nationality is assigned to that minority group.

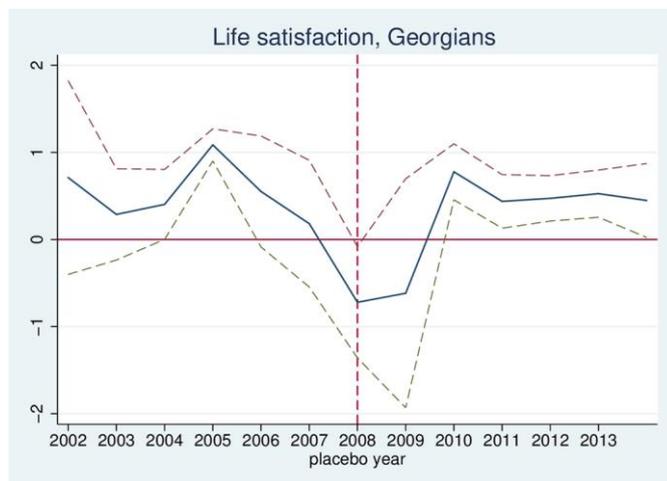
We employ three measures of well-being. Our main outcome variable is “life satisfaction.” The life satisfaction question is as follows: “To what extent are you satisfied with your life in general at the present time?”, and evaluated on a 1-5 scale from not at all satisfied to fully satisfied. Additionally, we use “job satisfaction” and “health evaluation” as outcomes of well-being.

Our results suggest that our primary indicator of well-being, life satisfaction, for Georgian nationals has gone down in the Russo-Georgian conflict year of 2008 compared to the Russian majority (see Figure 1). The magnitude of the drop in life satisfaction is about 39 percent of the mean life satisfaction. Our estimates for the other two well-being indicators, job satisfaction and health evaluation, also indicate a dip in the conflict year of 2008. Lastly, our estimates show that the negative impact of the conflict does not last long. Although there is a reduction in the well-being of Georgians both on impact in 2008 and in the



immediate aftermath in 2009, the rest of the period until 2015 is no different from the pre-2008 period.

Figure 1. Life Satisfaction of Georgian Nationals in Russia



Source: Authors' own construction based on RLMS data and diff-in-diff estimates.

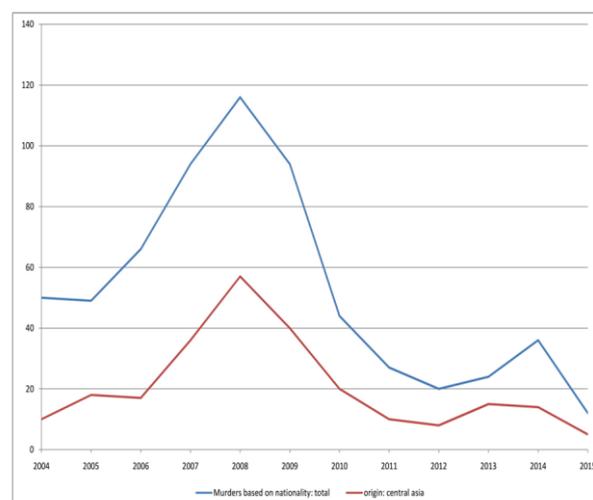
Furthermore, when we investigate the effect of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict of 2014, we find no negative effect on the life satisfaction of Ukrainians. One explanation for why the happiness of Ukrainians in Russia does not seem to be negatively affected in 2014 is that the degree of integration of Ukrainians into the Russian society is much stronger than the degree of integration of Georgians. On the other hand, our heterogeneity analysis reveals that in the southern parts of Russia closer to the Ukrainian border, where there are more Ukrainians who have ties to Ukraine, Ukrainian nationals are differentially more negatively affected by the 2014 conflict. The differential reduction in the happiness of Ukrainians is about 19 percent of the mean life satisfaction.

Moreover, we also look into whether there is any spillover effects of the Russo-Georgian and the Ukrainian-Russian conflicts on the well-being of other minorities. We first carry out a simple exercise on non-Slavic minorities of Russia. We

pick the sample of non-Slavic ex-USSR nationals that are similar to Georgians in their somatic characteristics, such as hair color and complexion. This group of people include the nationals of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. We treat this group as “the countries with predominantly non-Slavic population” as their predominant populations are somatically different from the majority Russians, and thus, might either have been subject to discrimination or might have feared a minority backlash to themselves during the times of conflict. This conjecture finds some support below in Figure 2 in terms of violence against minorities. We observe in Figure 2 that hate crimes and murders based on nationality and race peak in 2008.

Our estimates also support the above hypothesis and propose that there is some negative effect of the 2008 conflict on non-slavic minorities' happiness as well as their job satisfaction, whereas 2014 conflict has no effect.

Figure 2. Hate Murders in Russia over Time



Source: [Sova Center](#)

Next, we investigate the spillover effects of conflict on Migrant Minorities. Migrant minorities are



minorities who have been living in their residents in Russia for less than 10 years. We conjecture that these minorities, as opposed to the minorities who have been in place for a long time, could be more susceptible to any internal or external conflict between Russia and some other minority group for fear that they themselves could also be affected. Whereas other types of longer-term resident minorities, which we call Local Minorities, are probably less vulnerable since they have had more time to establish their networks, job security, and most likely also have Russian citizenship. Our estimates back up the above conjecture and demonstrate that migrant minorities suffer negatively from the spillover effects of the 2008 conflict onto their well-being captured by any of the three measures, and not from the 2014 conflict, whereas there is no negative impact on local minorities.

Conclusion

In this paper, instead of focusing on the direct impact of conflict on happiness in war-torn areas, we contribute to the discussion on conflict and well-being by scrutinizing the well-being of people whose country of origin experiences conflict, but they themselves are not in the war zone. Additionally, we show that some other minority groups also suffer from such negative spillovers of conflict. Being aware of such negative indirect effects of conflict on well-being is essential for policy makers, politicians and researchers. Most policy analyses ignore such indirect costs of conflict, and this study highlights the bleak fact that the cost of conflict on well-being is probably larger than it has been previously estimated.

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