Flexible Election Timing and International Conflict

Online Appendix

International Studies Quarterly

Laron K. Williams
Department of Political Science
University of Missouri
williamslaro@missouri.edu

Overview

In this document I discuss in greater detail two robustness checks discussed, though not presented in the manuscript.

Availability of Conflict Opportunities

One possible explanation for the pacific nature of leaders in anticipation of elections is that potential targets modify their behaviors so as to give the advanced democracy fewer opportunities to behave aggressively (Smith 1996; Leeds and Davis 1997). If this is the case, then we would expect that potential targets of military action would reduce their number of conflictive actions and instead behave more cooperatively when there is a higher risk of an election, especially when this is coupled with poor economic conditions (Russett 1990). If democratic leaders truly have an incentive to behave aggressively immediately prior to the election, then we should observe that potential targets anticipate this and respond accordingly.

One way of testing this is with the World Events/Interaction Survey data set, which codes daily events from 1966-1992 (McClelland 1971). With the use of the Goldstein (1992) weighting scheme, I create an indicator of the sum of weighted conflictive events by that potential target against the sample democracy. Despite the shorter time-frame, this should help us determine whether the lack of conflict is due to a dearth of opportunities. The dependent variable is *weighted targeted events*, which is the weighted sum of quarterly events targeted against that sample country, with larger values indicate more conflict, and thus greater opportunities for diversion. To capture the strategic environment, I include the lagged dependent variable (*weighted targeted events*$_{t-1}$), the lagged value of events by the sample democracy against the potential target (*weighted initiated events*$_{t-1}$), and the control variables utilized in the MID analysis in Table 3 in the manuscript. To directly test the strategic interaction hypothesis, I include the *future election probability* of the advanced democracy, as well as its interaction with *real GDP per capita growth*. I provide the summary statistics in Table 1.

If the strategic interaction hypothesis is correct, then we would expect to see two results: first, the marginal effect of *real GDP per capita growth* should be positive, especially when the *future election probability* is large. This would indicate that declining economic conditions, coupled with an increased risk of an election, would cause potential targets to behave less aggressively. The second result is that the marginal effect of *future election probability* should be negative when *real GDP per capita growth* is low. Given the strong connection in these sample countries between declining economic conditions and poor election results (e.g., Powell and Whitten 1993), we should expect that leaders would have the greatest diversionary incentive under these two conditions. Figure 1 shows the marginal effects for both variables across the values of the modifying variable. To get a sense of the distribution of these variables, I also include box-whisker plots.

[Figure 1 about here]

These figures show no support for either of the expectations of the strategic interaction hypotheses. First, at no times is the marginal effect of *real GDP per capita growth* statistically significant, indicating that potential targets do not change their behaviors based on the state of the economy. Second, the marginal effect of *future election probability* is not statistically significant during bad economic conditions. Thus, potential targets are not anticipating diversionary behavior on the part of these democratic executives, and are not modifying their behavior when economic conditions are poor and when the risk of an election increases. This is consistent with Leeds and Davis (1997; see also Meernik and Waterman 1996), who find no relationship between a state's electoral calendar and the behavior of other states. Contrary to the diversionary perspective, we see some evidence that increasing the risk of an election induces more cooperative behavior among potential targets when economic conditions are strong (i.e., better than about 2.5%). These are exactly the wrong times for leaders to gamble in foreign affairs, especially since the strong economic conditions most likely mean that the governing parties will benefit electorally (Williams, Brule and Koch 2010). Moreover, while this decrease may be statistically significant, it is far from being substantively important. The marginal effect of *future election probability* when *real GDP per capita growth* is 5 is about -0.02. Based on the Goldstein (1992) weighting scheme, this is the equivalent of the potential target "asking for information" one time over three months (376).

These simple empirical tests suggest that the relationship between executives' pacific behavior and upcoming elections is due to the lack of willingness on the part of the executives rather than a dearth of opportunities. In the next section I describe a robustness check to ensure that the causal arrow points from *ex post* accountability to conflict, and not vice versa.

Surfing and Rallying: Reverse Causality

A beneficial by-product for governments of flexible election timing is the ability for leaders to ride out the wave of popularity following policy success (i.e., "surf") until the next election (Chowdhury

1993; Smith 2004). In systems with endogenous election cycles, leaders have been known to call elections when the economic conditions present a favorable environment for reelection. The logic can be extended to diversionary theory, in that leaders (in endogenous systems) will be encouraged to call an election immediately following a successful foreign policy event, in order to ride the wave of popularity. If governments had an incentive to "surf" following a decisive victory, then a prime candidate for this type of behavior would be the aftermath of the British victory in the Falklands War. Government approval jumped considerably, even in the face of rising unemployment, yet PM Margaret Thatcher waited over a year before calling for new elections (Norpoth 1987).

Though empirical evidence points toward the opposite relationship—that experiencing a conflict might force a delay in calling elections—it is important to rule out this relationship before concluding. Indeed, if conflict affects the timing of elections, then a logit model would have endogeneity bias and more appropriate estimation techniques would be necessary. To rule out reverse causality, I estimate a pooled model of election timing[1] as in Figure 1 in the manuscript, but I include a dichotomous variable representing whether the state initiated a hostile MID in that quarter and the number of quarters since the previous hostile MID.

[Table 3 about here]

Neither measure of international conflict is statistically significant, indicating that conflict has no effect in either speeding up or delaying the timing of elections. Thus, I can be confident that that relationship I uncovered above is the result of my theoretical explanation rather than the reverse relationship.

[1]The initiation of hostile MIDs is so rare that the models must be pooled. To control for unit heterogeneity, I include a number of variables measuring institutional arrangements as well as the length of the CIEP.

Tables & Figures

Table 1: Summary Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum	Mode
Strategic Interaction: Dyadic					
Future Election Probability	0.09	0.18	0	1	
Weighted Targeted Events	0.05	1.30	0	458.6	
Weighted Targeted Events$_{t-1}$	0.05	1.31	0	458.6	
Weighted Initiated Events$_{t-1}$	0.05	1.52	0	579.5	

Table 2: Dyadic Analysis of the Effects of Future Election Probability on Hostile Targeted Events

Variable	**Coefficient**	**95% C.I.**
Future Election Probability	-0.006	[-0.017, 0.01]
Real GDP Per Capita Growth Side B	0.0003	[-0.0001, 0.0006]
Election$\times$GDP Growth	-0.002	[-0.006, 0.001]
Lower Democracy Score	-0.002**	[-0.002, -0.002]
Minor Power Dyad	-0.108**	[-0.108, -0.107]
Capability Side A	3.333**	[3.330, 3.334]
Capability Side B	1.467**	[1.454, 1.482]
Non-Contiguous	-0.133**	[-0.133, -0.132]
Logged Distance	-0.003**	[-0.003, -0.003]
Alliance	0.05**	[0.049, 0.050]
Leader Tenure Side A	-0.0002**	[-0.0002, -0.0002]
Leader Tenure Side B	-0.0002**	[-0.0002, -.0002]
Government Partisanship Side A	-0.0001**	[-0.0001, -0.0001]
Real GDP Per Capita Growth Side A	-0.0003**	[-0.0003, -0.0003]
Weighted Targeted Events$_{t-1}$	0.19**	[0.191, 0.191]
Weighted Initiated Events$_{t-1}$	-0.071**	[-0.071, -0.071]
Constant	0.251**	[0.249, 0.252]
Observations		202,810
RMSE		1.29
Adjusted R^2		0.02

**: p-value $<$ .01, *: p-value $<$ .05, †: p-value $<$ .10

Note: Since this is a model of *targeted* conflict, Side B reflects the characteristics of the sample country.

Table 3: International Disputes and the Timing of Elections: Checks for Reverse Causality

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Err.
Initiated Hostile MID	-0.33	0.40
Peace Quarters	-0.003	0.002
Majority	0.32	0.76
Caretaker	2.66**	0.76
Single-Party Government	0.18	0.46
Majority×Single-Party	0.01	0.52
PM Dissolution	0.09	0.35
Constrained Dissolution	0.63†	0.38
President Dissolution	0.13	0.30
Effective No. of Parties	0.10	0.08
Time Since Call	1.73**	0.12
Real GDP Per Capita Growth	0.02	0.03
Time Left in CIEP	-4.03**	1.52
Majority×CIEP	-0.71	1.02
Government Tenure	0.16**	0.05
Majority×Tenure	-0.08†	0.05
4-Year CIEP	-0.63	0.53
5-Year CIEP	-0.50	0.55
4-Year CIEP×Time Left	-0.76	1.36
5-Year CIEP×Time Left	-0.56	1.48
Constant	-2.03*	1.01
Observations		2927
χ^2		595.3**
Pseudo R^2		0.40

Standard errors in parentheses.

**: p-value $< .01$, *: p-value $< .05$, †: p-value $< .10$, one-tailed.

References

Chowdhury, Abdur R. 1993. "Political Surfing over Economic Waves: Parliamentary Election Timing in India." *American Journal of Political Science* 37:1100–1118.

Goldstein, Joshua S. 1992. "A Conflict-Cooperation Scale for WEIS Events Data." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 36:369–385.

Leeds, Brett Ashley & David R. Davis. 1997. "Domestic Political Vulnerability and International Disputes." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41:814–834.

McClelland, Charles. 1971. "The Management and Analysis of International Event Data." Working Paper, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

Meernik, James & Peter Waterman. 1996. "The Myth of the Diversionary Use of Force by American Presidents." *Political Research Quarterly* 49:573–590.

Norpoth, Helmut. 1987. "Guns and Butter and Government Popularity in Britain." *American Political Science Review* 81:949–959.

Smith, Alastair. 1996. "Diversionary Foreign Policy in Democratic Systems." *International Studies Quarterly* 40:133–153.

Smith, Alastair. 2004. *Election Timing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Williams, Laron K., David J. Brule & Michael T. Koch. 2010. "War Voting: Interstate Disputes, the Economy, and Electoral Outcomes." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* .
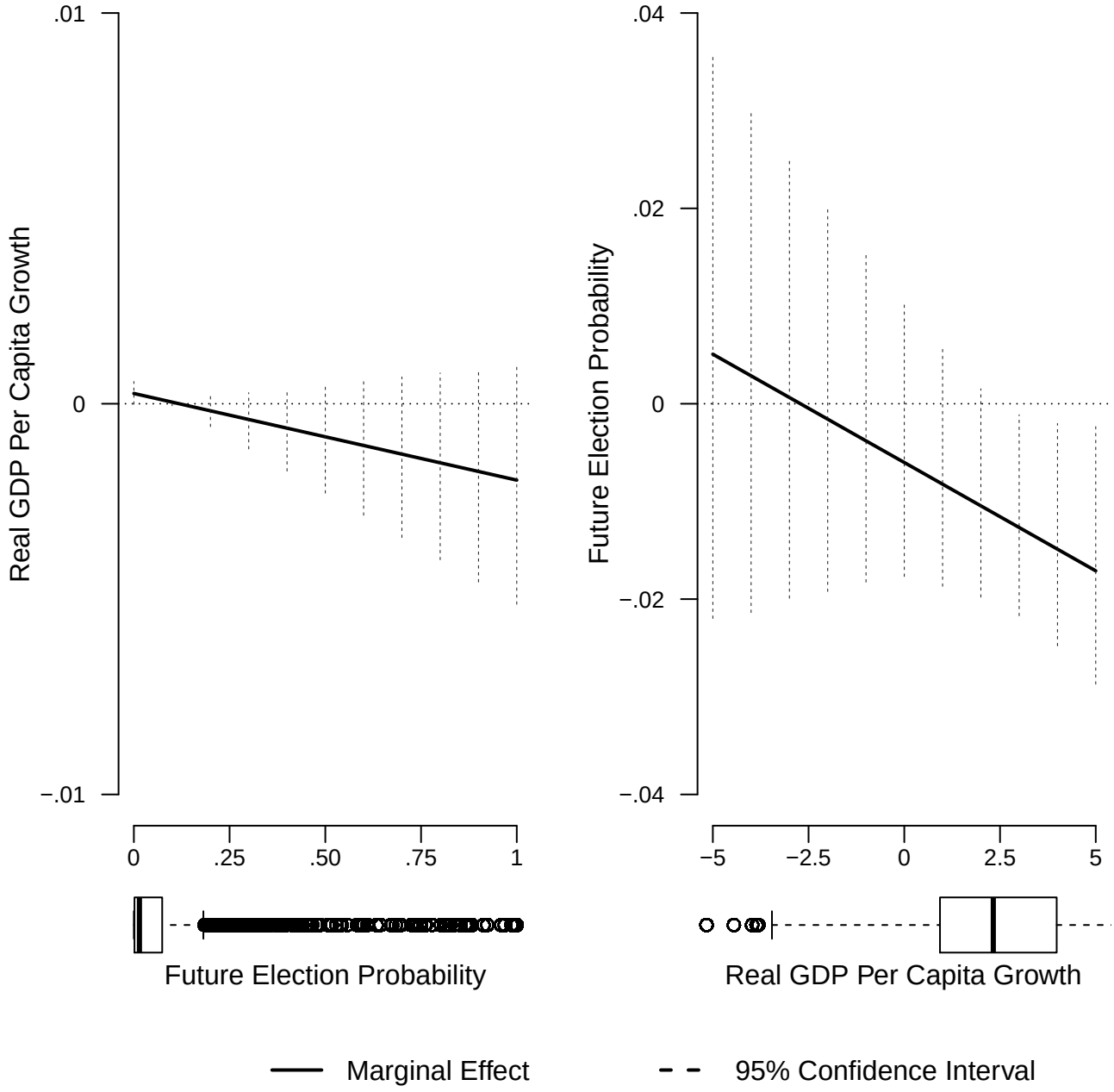
Figure 1: Marginal Effects of the Interactive Relationship between Economic Conditions, Future Election Probability, and Opportunities for Conflict