THE IMPACT OF INTERNET CONNECTIVITY ON CONFLICT: EVIDENCE FROM THE PHILIPPINES

Richel Soncados Arrogancia

Abstract

This study examines the relationship between the internet and conflict using municipal-level data from the 2010 Census of Population and Housing, The Global Terrorism Database, and geographic information system data of the Philippines with a sample size of 1,585. To deal with endogeneity, we employ Two-Stage Least Squares using distance from municipality to provincial capital towns, percentage of households with access to electricity, and average elevation as instrument variables. The high correlation of these variables with the internet and uncorrelation with conflict, except for electricity, makes them valid instruments. The instrumental variables provide inconsistent estimates when used individually, but jointly, coefficients become stable; the F-statistic of 78.16 indicates that the three variables are strong. The p-values for overidentification and endogeneity tests are insignificant.

This study aims to contribute to the literature that provides evidence explaining the relationship between the internet and conflict. With the vast number of available resources, specifically related to the internet and war or domestic terrorism, minimal studies have been conducted using municipal-level data. Our findings suggest that an improvement in the accessibility to the internet will increase conflict incidents and deaths. In municipalities with literacy above the average, the increase on the internet will reduce conflict, bombing, armed assault, and deaths. While the improvement in literacy will decrease the impact of the internet on conflict and bombing during the same year and the next. The internet is more likely to increase conflict in municipalities with unemployment equal to or lower than the mean. And, conflict tends to increase in low-income municipalities even if its unemployment is low. Our conclusions do not entail that increasing internet accessibility in the municipalities primarily causes conflict to rise. Rather, our study suggests that the internet could be an effective tool to radicalize and spread conflict-promoting propaganda and allow rebel groups to connect locally and possibly with international organizations. Access to electricity, education, road accessibility, job opportunities are among the important services that should be provided to lessen the vulnerability of the municipalities to conflict.