
Emigration as a Pacifying Force?

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Abstract

Civil conflicts push a significant number of people out of their home countries, as the recent refugee crisis has shown. But what if emigration itself worked as a pacifying force and, by opening their borders, developed countries could alleviate conflict back home? Using a theory-driven instrumental variable approach and country level panel data of 117 developing countries for the period 1985-2010, I find that emigration to developed countries decreases civil conflict incidence in the countries of origin. The identification strategy relies on comparing conflict likelihood in countries in years after proximate developed countries become more attractive to conflict likelihood in years after these countries are less attractive. In terms of mechanisms at play, I find no evidence for the indirect effect of emigration on civil conflict through remittances. In addition, emigration of men reduces the conflict likelihood, while emigration of women has the opposite effect. Finally, I document that home political regimes do not worsen following emigration, which points to the fact that emigration is rather welfare improving. In terms of policy implications, these findings point that, by opening their borders, developed countries could contribute to saving the lives of the migrants as well as of those left home.

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