

*Attack when the World is not Watching?*  
U.S. News and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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# Motivation: Media, Information, and Political Accountability

## ● Question

- ▶ Do policy-makers strategically time unpopular policies to minimize negative publicity?
  - ▶ Politicians are accountable only if voters are informed (Besley-Burgess 02, Besley 06, Besley-Prat 06)
  - ▶ Media informs citizens about government's actions (Stromberg 04, Snyder-Stromberg 10)
  - ▶ Newsworthy events can crowd out information that is relevant to evaluate government's actions (Eisensee-Stromberg 07)

# Our focus: Israeli-Palestinian conflict and US media

- Both sides care about how their actions are perceived abroad (e.g., *vis-à-vis* foreign donors, trade partners, political allies)
  - ▶ Since 1970s Israel places a special emphasis on projecting a positive image abroad (*Hasbara*, “explanation”)
  - ▶ Civilian victims affect most international public opinion the most
- Netanyahu commenting on the heart-wrenching images of civilians in Gaza on CNN : “[*Hamas*] wants to pile up as many civilian dead as they can... they use *telegenically dead Palestinians* for their cause.”

Are Israelis and Palestinians more likely to attack when U.S. news are dominated by other important events?’

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## Do media considerations matter for military decisions?

*“This is first and foremost a war of ideology, and as such the media factor, the psychological impact of our actions, is critical. If we understand that a photograph of a tank speaks against us on CNN, we can take this into account in our decision as to whether or not to send in the tank. We schedule helicopter operations for after dark so they cannot be photographed easily and make sure the operation is over within fifteen minutes so the photographers do not have a chance to begin filming. Such considerations are already second nature to us...”*

Moshe Ya'alon, IDF Chief of Staff (former Israel's Defense Minister)

## Do media considerations matter for military decisions?

*“Officers [...] must understand that there are strategic media considerations. The tension between the need to destroy a particular building or to use a tank or helicopter, and the manner in which the world perceives these actions, can affect the ultimate success or failure of the campaign. Even if we triumph in battle, we can lose in the media and consequently on the ideological plane.”*

Moshe Ya'alon, IDF Chief of Staff (currently Israel's Defense Minister)

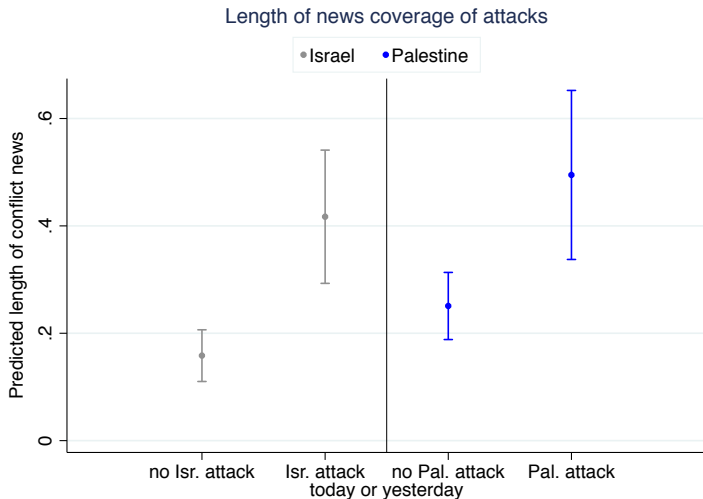
# Daily data for 2001-2011

- ① **Attacks**: number of victims and characteristics of attacks
- ② **U.S. TV evening news**: the content, length and order of each news story on ABC, NBC, and CBS
- ③ **Newsworthy events**: exogenous political and sports events with predetermined timing, that dominate the news

To measure whether the US media are dominated by other newsworthy events we use:

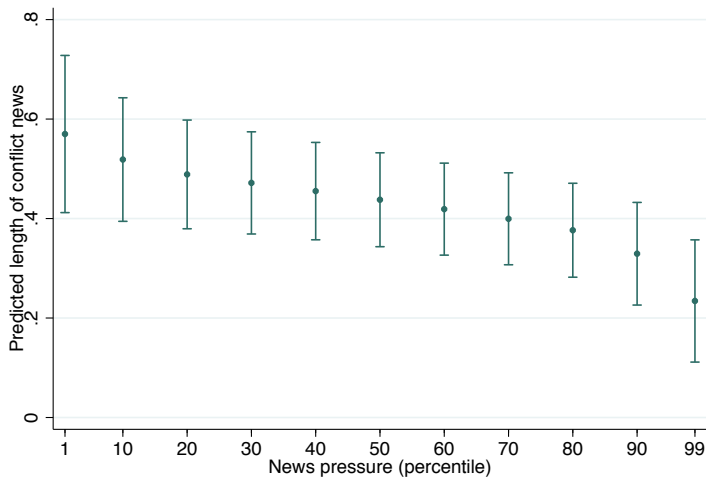
- ① News pressure: the length of top 3 non-conflict related news
- ② The timing of the actual events

# Is conflict events covered by U.S. TV news?

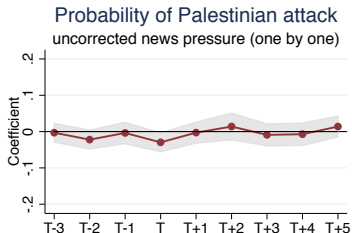
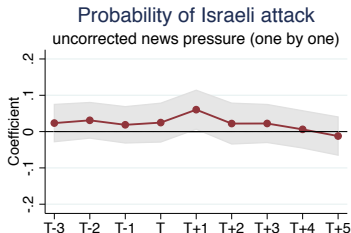
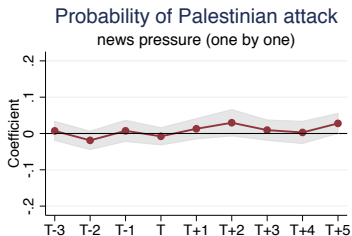
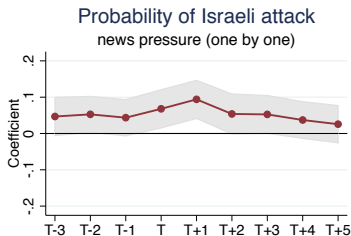




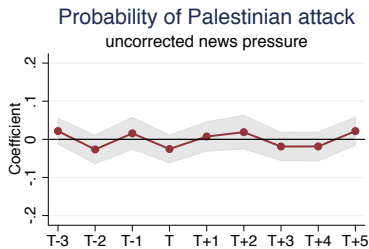
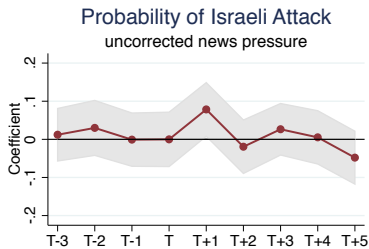
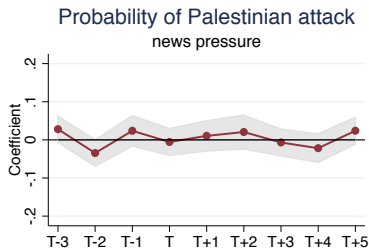
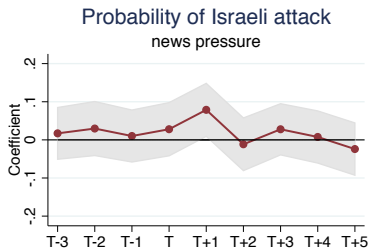
## Do other news stories crowd out coverage of the conflict?



# Israeli and Palestinian attacks and US news pressure lags and leads of news pressure – one by one

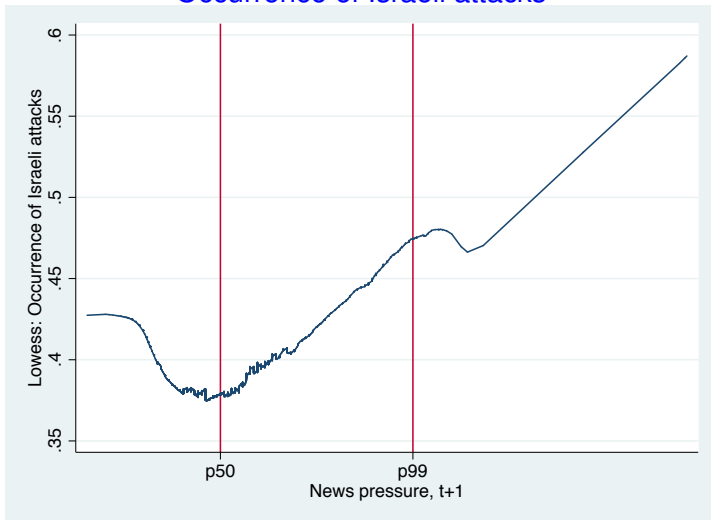


# Israeli and Palestinian attacks and US news pressure lags and leads of news pressure – together



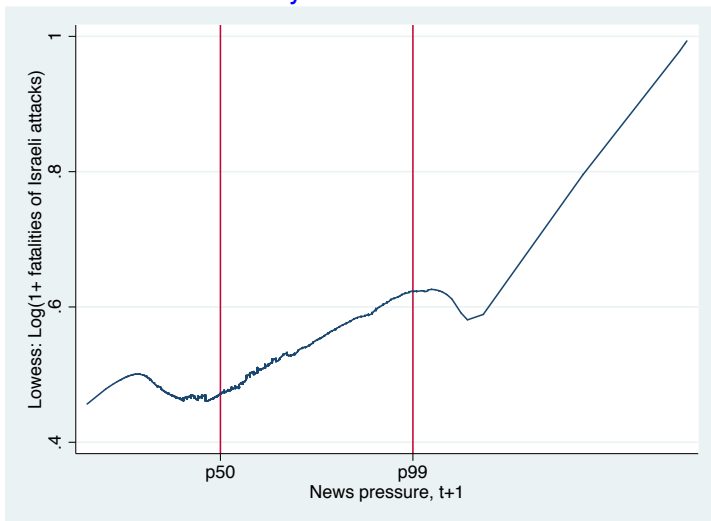
# Israeli attacks and news pressure: non-parametric relation

## Occurrence of Israeli attacks

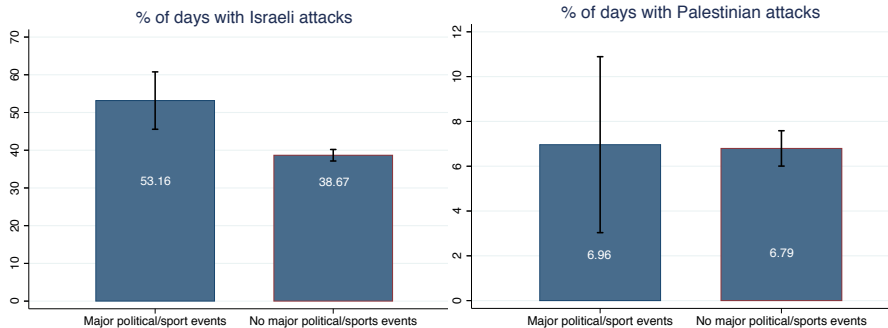


# Israeli attacks and news pressure: non-parametric relation

## Severity of Israeli attacks

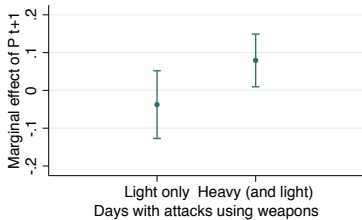
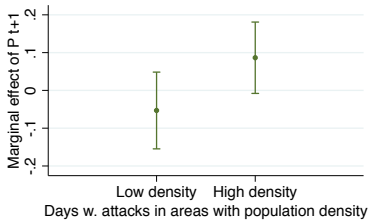
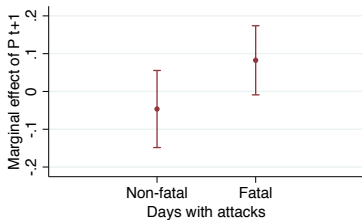
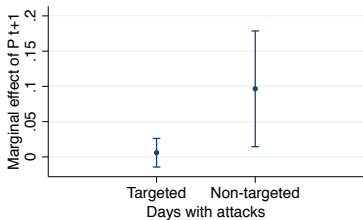


# Israeli vs. Palestinian attacks and predictable events



# Which attacks are more likely to be timed strategically to news pressure?

The effect on the probability of an attack of a certain type  
Days without an attack is the baseline outcome



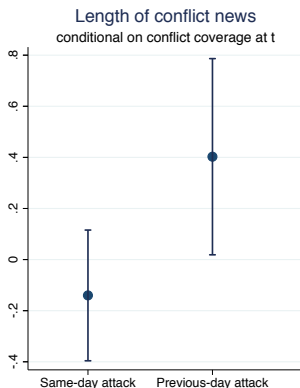
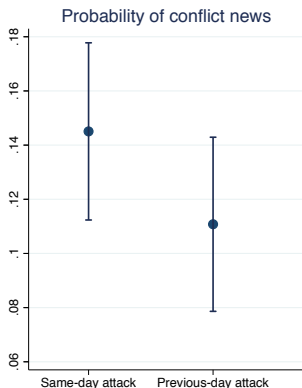
# Why does Israel times its attacks to the following day?

- 1 **Hypothesis 1:** US news are slow and stories appear on the next day
- 2 **Hypothesis 2:** Next-day coverage is less favourable to Israel



# Hypothesis 1 rejected: conflict news air both on the same and on the next day; the next-day news stories are longer

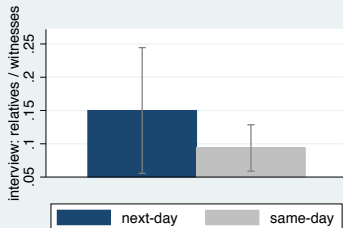
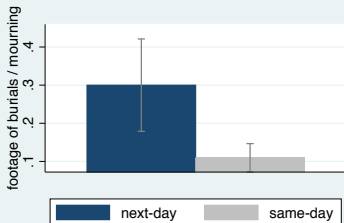
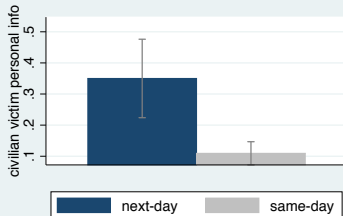
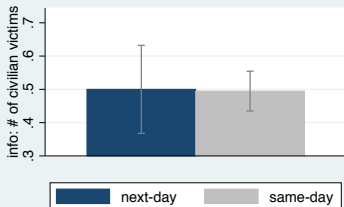
The effect on probability and length of conflict news at  $t$  of an Israeli attack on the same day ( $t$ ) or previous day ( $t-1$ )



Hypothesis 2 supported by the data:

Content is different b/w same-day & next-day reporting

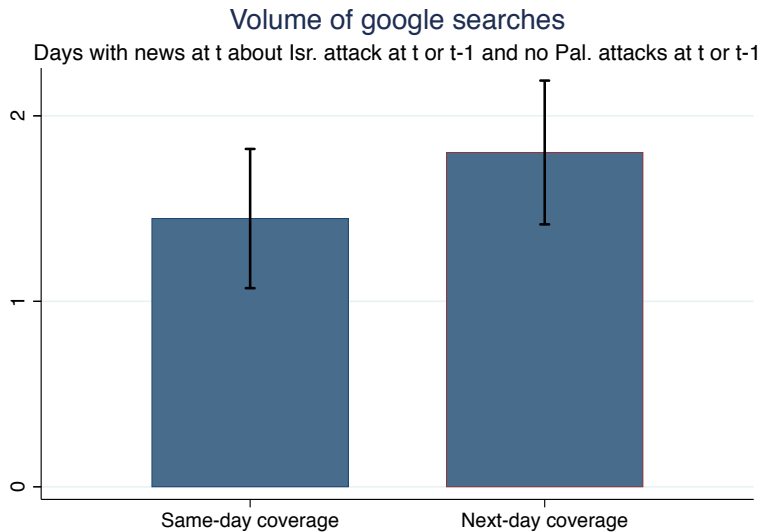
Content of newscasts about Israeli attacks  
when covered on the same and on the next day (frequency)



# Why is there a difference b/w same-day & next-day news coverage?

- Next day provides an opportunity to:
  - ▶ collect information about the victims
  - ▶ film emotionally charged scenes of burials and mourning
  - ▶ stay safe, as Israel does not strike when many people are on the street
- Israel is more concerned about next-day coverage because:
  - ▶ Personal stories more powerful than dry numbers
  - ▶ Images more powerful than words
    - ★ Both consistent with findings from cognitive and social psychology

# Google searches following news about Israeli attacks



# Conclusions

- First systematic evidence that policy-makers strategically time their actions to minimize public scrutiny
- In the case of Israel: this strategy takes into account the technological constraints of war reporting and the social psychology of mass media
- The phenomenon is more general: Examples of unpopular policies characterized by suspicious timing abound
  - ▶ In 1994, on the day Italy qualified to the final of the FIFA World Cup, the government of Silvio Berlusconi passed an emergency decree that freed hundreds of corrupt politicians from jail.
  - ▶ Political spin doctors often advise to release potentially harmful information in coincidence with other important events so that it gets “buried.”
  - ▶ Russia stormed into Georgia on the day of the opening ceremony of Beijing Olympics

# Suspicious timing characterises many other policies

## Example: FIFA World cup and "Save the Thief" Decree

**LA STAMPA**  
ANNO LXX N. 130- GIOVEDÌ 14 LUGLIO 1994

**F' slittato il condono edilizio**  
**Fisco, da oggi si patteggia**

**COME SARANNO TASSATI GLI AUTONOMI**

MINIMA FAX	ABOLITA
PARTICIPAZIONE IN SOCIETÀ	PER 4 MILIONI DI GIORNATE
SETTICI 34 PREVIDI	800 MILIONI
SETTICI ANNO PREVISTO	10-15 MILIARDI

**COME SARANNO PACE CON LE FINANZE**

MINIMO	MINIMO
MINI 127 MILIAR	150 MILI LIRE
DA 2 A 5 MILIARDI	6,70 PER CENTO
DA 5 A 10 MILIARDI	CONTRIBUTI
DA 10 A 20 MILIARDI	1 MILIARDI 500 MILI
DA 20 A 50 MILIARDI	100 MILIARDI

**ROMA.** Il governo ha varato oggi la sua grande voce riformista: il condono edilizio. Il condono edilizio è un provvedimento che si applica a tutti i titolari di immobili non autorizzati. Al suo seguito, al giorno stesso, il governo ha varato il decreto di proroga del condono edilizio. Il condono edilizio è un provvedimento che si applica a tutti i titolari di immobili non autorizzati. Il decreto di proroga del condono edilizio è un provvedimento che si applica a tutti i titolari di immobili non autorizzati.

**Batuta la Bulgaria (2-1). A fine gara Roberto in lacrime portato in trionfo dai compagni**  
**Esplode Baggio, azzurri in finale**  
**Due gol-favola, domenica la sfida col Brasile**



**NEW YORK.** Con una doppietta di Pelissier e Baggio l'Italia ha battuto la Bulgaria (2-1) e si è qualificata per la semifinale di calcio. L'azione decisiva è stata quella di Roberto Baggio, che ha segnato il secondo gol. Il risultato è stato raggiunto con un tempo di gioco di 90 minuti. Il match è stato giocato al Campione di calcio di New York.

**NEW YORK.** Il Condor di Roberto Baggio è venuto fuori dalla semifinale di calcio. Il Condor è un aereo che è stato usato per trasportare i giocatori della nazionale italiana. Il Condor è un aereo che è stato usato per trasportare i giocatori della nazionale italiana.

**IL POETA DELL'ARRIGO**

**PROFETTI**

**CONTRALFA E. B. SPURTA COLONA**

**Avvisi di garanzia, obbligo di segreto per i giornali. Escono in duemila, fuori anche Di Donato e De Lorenzo**  
**Scatta il decreto contro le manette facili**  
**Il carcere preventivo resta in vigore solo per i reati più gravi**

**Finanziari, un altro suicidio**  
**Si spara il generale Cloggia**  
**Borrelli: «Non era indagato»**

**Letizia Moratti presidente Rai**  
**È insediato il nuovo consiglio**  
**Oggi la scelta del direttore**

**Torna la pace sull'Alitalia**  
**L'azienda non farà licenziamenti**  
**Gli autonomi scioperano ancora**

**AUGUSTO MINZOLINI**  
**Uno-stop ai giudici**

**LA FINE DELLA RIVOLUZIONE**