REPORT ON MASTER THESIS
CENTER FOR ECONOMIC RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES

STUDENT:	Martin Kosík
ADVISOR:	Vasily Korovkin
TITLE OF THE THESIS:	The Effect of Military Campaigns on Political Identity: Evidence from Sherman's March

OVERALL ASSESSMENT (provided in English, Czech, or Slovak):

Please provide your assessment of each of the following categories, summary and suggested questions for the discussion. The minimum length of the report is 300 words.

CONTRIBUTION:

This thesis addresses an interesting question – whether a destructive military campaign can leave a deep, lasting resentment against the antagonistic group and elevate a sense of group identity. Some of the recent work that exposure to war and violent inter-group conflict may strengthen parochial group identity and political engagement, but most of this work on conflicts studies short-term or medium term (decades) effects. In contrast, this thesis explores potential very long-term effects of war-related destruction. The context is US and the author explores whether a route of Sherman march, and the associated greater economic destruction in certain localities during the US civil war, has lasting influence on (i) how people in affected localities vote and (ii) whether they identify with "Southern" identity (measured, for example, by naming children and streets after Confederate generals). Using different identification strategies, the thesis shows that the effects of the march on voting are null or very small. For some of the proxies of Southern identity, the thesis provides suggestive evidence of positive effects, although these are sensitive to using different identification strategies. Even though the identified effects are either zero or small, this thesis provides a useful contribution to existing work. It also shows a range of talents of the author who is capable of creatively work with data to address various empirical issues.

METHODS:

The methods are appropriate, given the data at hand. Martin has assembled impressively rich data on voting behavior and shows creativity when constructing proxies of "Southern" identity. Further, he uses several identification strategies: difference-in-differences approach, instrumental variables and methods that aim to assess selection on unobservables when using OLS. He also critically assesses their relative pros and cons. It is clear he knows how to deal with data limitations and provides several thoughtful robustness tests. Overall, the data analysis is comprehensive and fairly convincing.

LITERATURE:

The author does a very good job in summarizing the related empirical literature and the historical context. The literature review is comprehensive, and shows a deep knowledge and understanding of several strands of related work.

MANUSCRIPT FORM:

The thesis reads very well. It has a logical structure. The text is easy to follow (only some of the paragraphs are a bit too long and splitting would help). The tables are clearly described and labeled. The style is comparable to standard academic papers.

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION DURING THE DEFENSE:

In summary, this is a nice piece of empirical work on an important topic, its quality is substantially above the level expected for an MA thesis. The thesis demonstrates the great research potential that Martin has. I congratulate him for producing such high-quality thesis and wish him a lot of success in his future PhD studies.

I have two questions that may be worth discussing during the defense (but they do not have to be discussed since this thesis is a clear case, in my view)

1. Given the long period since the Sherman march and some of the measured outcomes, I imagine that most of the families (resp. their descendants) who experienced the campaign migrated for various reasons (marriage, education, economic opportunities) outside of the affected counties. How does this aspect affect the way we should think about the mechanisms which this analysis can and cannot uncover? In particular, if migration is a big issue, then the a priori relevant mechanism that can lead to persistence in effects need be linked to local social norms (perhaps shifted by the conflict) or local narratives. On the other hand, if transmission of preferences and norms happens mainly within families, as some of the evidence suggests, then migration would prevent the author to observe the effects, even if they exist.

2. How shall we think about the nature of the shock caused by the Sherman march, as compared to war-related shocks studied in earlier work? From the background section, it seems to have been primarily about economic destruction, rather than causing human capital destruction, violence and killing. The Sherman march was also relatively short in duration, which arguably can cause less scope for preferences or social norms to adapt. The point is that I find the results interesting and useful, but it would help to provide some (speculative) guidance in the concluding section how to think why there is relatively little sign of systematic effects, especially since some of the existing work (from other contexts) suggests that the effects of violent conflict on identity likely exist, at

least in the short or medium run. Is it because the shock here was too small and temporary? Or because the mechanism that could lead to persistent effects (inter-generational transmission) is probably not so relevant here due to migration? Or is it due to data limitations? Put differently, how do you think these results should inform and complement the existing literature on legacies of conflict beyond the studied context?

Please indicate whether you recommend the Thesis for defense or not.

This is a great thesis, I strongly recommend it for defense and suggest grade A.

TEXT ORIGINALITY CONTROL

I confirm that I acquainted myself with the report on the originality of the text of the thesis from

[ ] Theses   [ ] Turnitin   [x] Ouriginal (Urkund)

Comments on the reported results: The Urkund analysis does not reveal signs of plagiarism.

SUMMARY OF POINTS AWARDED *(for details, please see the page 3)*

CATEGORY		POINTS
Contribution	*(max. 30 points)*	30
Methods	*(max. 30 points)*	30
Literature	*(max. 20 points)*	20
Manuscript Form	*(max. 20 points)*	20
TOTAL POINTS *(max. 100 points)*		**100**
GRADE *(A – B – C – D – E – F)*		**A**

NAME OF THE REFEREE: Michal Bauer

DATE OF EVALUATION: August 23, 2021

_____

REFEREE SIGNATURE

EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES AND SCALE:

CONTRIBUTION:
The author presents original ideas on the topic demonstrating critical thinking and ability to draw conclusions based on the knowledge of relevant theory and empirics. There is a distinct value added of the thesis.

Strong	Average	Weak
30	15	0

METHODS:

The tools used are relevant to the research question being investigated, and adequate to the author's level of studies. The thesis topic is comprehensively analyzed.

Strong	Average	Weak
30	15	0

LITERATURE REVIEW:
The thesis demonstrates author's full understanding and command of recent literature. The author quotes relevant literature in a proper way.

Strong	Average	Weak
20	10	0

MANUSCRIPT FORM:
The thesis is well structured. The student uses appropriate language and style, including academic format for graphs and tables. The text effectively refers to graphs and tables and disposes with a complete bibliography.

Strong	Average	Weak
20	10	0

OVERALL GRADING:

TOTAL	GRADE
91 – 100	A
81 – 90	B
71 – 80	C
61 – 70	D
51 – 60	E
0 – 50	F