

On Target? Sanctions and the Economic Interests of Elite Policymakers in Iran

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Abstract

How successful are sanctions at targeting the economic interests of political elites in affected countries? We study the case of Iran, using information on the stock exchange-listed assets of two specific political entities with significant influence over the direction of Iran’s nuclear program. Our identification strategy focuses on the process of negotiations for sanctions removal, examining which interests benefit most from news about diplomatic progress. The results indicate the ‘bluntness’ of sanctions on Iran, but also provide evidence of their effectiveness in generating substantial economic incentives for elite policymakers to negotiate a deal for sanctions relief.

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1 Introduction

Economic sanctions are an important tool of foreign policy, providing an instrument by which states may attempt to influence policies abroad without resorting to military force or covert action. In recent years, sanctions have been at the forefront of international responses to Russia’s foreign policy decisions regarding the Ukraine and to Iran’s program for the development of nuclear technology. Other prominent recent examples of sanctions have included measures leveled against Burma, Iraq, North Korea and Syria, among many others.

Once imposed, sanctions act as a ‘carrot’ for policymakers in the sanctioned country, as the actors imposing sanctions offer to remove them in exchange for policy reform. But if imposing sanctions is costly for the senders, then they will prefer to design this incentive as efficiently as possible. In theory, sanctions should therefore be focused on the sources of income most valued by those responsible for the key policy decisions, rather than the economy of the receiving country as a whole. In line with this logic, a central principle underlying the design of modern sanctions regimes is that they should be targeted as much as possible to the economic interests of elite decisionmakers.¹

In practice, however, it may be difficult to design sanctions that stay ‘on target’. This might be because the targeted group is particularly well placed to avoid even carefully designed sanctions, or is able to redistribute the effects of sanctions to less powerful groups within the sanctioned country.² Alternatively, the policy instruments used by the sender could be too blunt to target any particular group within the sanctioned country. While states are increasingly employing ‘smart sanctions’ instruments designed to affect only particular firms or individuals, many sanctions regimes also incorporate more comprehensive trade and financial restrictions, which may be difficult to selectively ‘switch on and off’ across different agents in a receiving country.³

In this paper, we consider the case of Iran, which was subject to multilateral sanctions related to its nuclear program until early 2016. Over several years of diplomatic negotiations

¹For example, the European Commission (2008) asserts the principle that “[a]s a general rule, sanctions should target as closely as possible the individuals and entities responsible for the undesirable policies and actions, thus minimising adverse effects on others.” An alternative form of targeting focuses on particular industries, as with arms embargoes (DellaVigna and La Ferrara 2010).

²For example, the UN’s Oil-for-Food program in Iraq was designed to maintain an oil embargo on Iraq while still providing the country with access to humanitarian supplies, but there is strong evidence that the policy was circumvented, presumably to the benefit of Iraq’s political elite (Hsieh and Moretti 2006).

³Such a problem of ‘bluntness’ leading to unintended consequences is not unique to sanctions policy and may also be present in strategies involving armed intervention (Dell and Querubin 2018) or military assistance (Dube and Naidu 2015).

ending in July 2015, Iran and its sanctioners came to an agreement in which Iran consented to changes in its nuclear policies in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. If these sanctions were successfully targeted, their removal should have benefited the policymaking elite, rewarding them for changing the policy for which sanctions were imposed.

We therefore examine the effects of the lifting of sanctions on Iran, in order to test for the effectiveness of targeting in terms of the incentives faced by Iranian policymakers. We consider two key actors who were targeted by the senders of sanctions because of their important roles in decisions about Iran’s nuclear program: the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. Both of these actors reportedly control large conglomerates, and we check whether certain observable assets of those conglomerates – specifically, their holdings in firms listed on the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) – were positively affected by diplomatic progress towards a multilateral sanctions deal. We also compare the TSE returns of these ‘target firms’ to those of a set of unrelated firms with no known connection to the targeted conglomerates, so as to better understand the relative impact of sanctions relief across these two (TSE-listed) parts of the Iranian economy.

To accomplish this, we identify ‘information shocks’ regarding the progress of diplomatic negotiations, and compare contemporaneous shifts in firm-level TSE returns across target and unrelated firms. This research design based on sanctions *removal*, in addition to being motivated by theory, has key advantages for identification. First, it allows us to estimate the impact of the full suite of Iran sanctions rather than individual measures, because news about diplomatic progress relates to the lifting of the entire sanctions regime. In contrast, designs focusing on the introduction of individual sanctions measures are subject to the heterogeneity of these measures, both in terms of the exact targets (for example, different entities are targeted by different policy instruments) and the size of the specific effects (some measures may be more effective than others). Second, it allows us to exploit unexpected and precisely timed progress in diplomatic negotiations.

We first explore a compelling case study: the stock market reaction to a breakthrough in multilateral negotiations in Geneva between Iran and the main sanctioning countries in November 2013. This ‘big bang’ event is conveniently timed, with much information about the progress of negotiations accruing over the TSE’s weekend break. Because of this, we are able to cleanly capture the TSE market response to the most important turning point in the negotiations for sanctions removal.

We then use high-frequency text-based measures of news about sanctions negotiations to capture information shocks covering the full period from the re-opening of serious nego-

tiations in 2012 to agreement on a final deal in 2015. This allows us to test the sensitivity of different types of firms to news about possible progress towards the lifting of sanctions using a large collection of events. The measures we use – derived from the Factiva and GDELT (Global Database of Events, Language and Tone) databases – provide quantitative information on coverage based on an extensive library of news sources.⁴

Our results show a consistent pattern of responses by the two sets of firms to these information shocks. Specifically, in each of our empirical exercises, we find that the stock returns of firms owned by targeted political groups (our target portfolio) and companies unrelated to these groups (our non-target portfolio) both react positively to information indicating progress in diplomatic negotiations. However, the effects are significantly larger for the target portfolio. This pattern is compatible with a scenario in which sanctions rely on ‘blunt instruments’ and so affect the economy of the receiving country more widely than intended. But it also suggests that the economic interests of Iran’s political elite – of which we observe a set of listed assets constituting 10% of the TSE’s total market capitalization – were indeed affected by sanctions, and differentially so when compared with other listed firms.

Moreover, we find that these impacts were economically significant. The November 2013 breakthrough in Geneva resulted in a rise of 3.8 percentage points in stock returns for elite-owned firms over two days, and so is estimated to have increased the value of IRGC and Setad assets by approximately \$465 million in total. Furthermore, both the ‘Geneva effect’ and the average impacts of multiple discrete shocks we identify from the news coverage data are of a similar magnitude to the upper tail of average firm returns. These shocks are also large as compared to the shifts in returns induced by movements in oil prices.

We also show that a later negative shock in expectations of the sanctions deal’s continuation, provided by Donald Trump’s surprise election victory, is similarly associated with large differential stock returns (negative in this case) for target firms. Subsequent developments, again captured using daily news coverage measures, show no additional sensitivity for target portfolio returns, possibly implying that sanctions policies went ‘off target’ after Trump took power. However, the events captured by our coverage measures during the period after the US election (such as new sanctions in response to Iranian missile tests) are quite different from the diplomatic negotiations underlying our main results.

Finally, we show evidence that our main results are not driven by a potential alternative

⁴This aspect of our study builds on recent contributions that have incorporated text-based information on salient news shocks into stock market studies (e.g. Baker, Bloom and Davis 2016, Loughran and McDonald 2011, Tetlock 2007).

explanation: that diplomatic progress also changes the likelihood of conflict between Iran and other countries, which could itself have heterogeneous effects on target and non-target firms. We first observe that while both portfolios are sensitive to a political betting market measure of Iran’s probability of direct military conflict with the US or Israel, the target portfolio is not differentially responsive to this information. We then find that the returns of arms industry firms listed on stock markets outside Iran show no significant comovement with news of diplomatic progress towards a deal on Iran sanctions.

Overall, our finding of systematic comovement between target firm returns and events relating to sanctions removal provides evidence that multilateral sanctions against Iran succeeded in inducing some degree of ‘income targeting’ of the political elite. Even though we cannot say whether decisionmakers were explicitly driven by this incentive when negotiating the removal of sanctions, our empirical evidence suggests that such an incentive existed.

Related Literature. Our study makes a novel contribution to the substantial literature on the economics of sanctions. A large body of empirical work has studied the question of whether, and under what circumstances, sanctions accomplish the stated goals of the sender. Much of this work builds on the cross-country analysis and dataset of Hufbauer, Schott and Elliott (1990) and focuses on whether the offending policies of sanctioned countries are actually altered after sanctions are imposed. Very few papers zoom in to consider whether the incidence of sanctions within a given country is in line with the intentions of the sender.

Recent firm-level research by Ahn and Ludema (2019, 2020) finds that US and EU ‘smart sanctions’ on specific Russian companies, and their shareholders, managers and directors, have had substantial negative effects on those firms’ performance. Their identification strategy is based on the timing of the introduction of sanctions and uses outcomes from annual firm accounts. Our paper chiefly differs in its focus on the economic interests of elite policymakers as an incentive central to the operation of modern sanctions regimes.⁵ Also, our research design based on the lifting of sanctions allows us to assess impacts across the full set of sanctions imposed on Iran, including both ‘smart’ and comprehensive measures. Finally, we take advantage of daily stock price data in order to use high-frequency variation for identification.

⁵Some studies have considered the impact of sanctions on political outcomes (rather than regime assets): Marinov (2005) finds that leaders of countries subject to economic sanctions are more likely to lose power, while Allen (2008) notes a positive relationship between sanctions and antigovernment activity. Another paper considering the economic impact of sanctions on subgroups within a country is that of Neuenkirch and Neumeier (2016), who argue that US sanctions have led to an increase in poverty in sanctioned countries. Haidar (2017) finds heterogeneous effects of sanctions on Iran on exporting firms depending on characteristics such as exporter size.

Within the wider political economy literature, our paper is one of a number of recent studies exploiting variation in stock market returns within an event study framework. This methodology has been applied to topics such as the private benefits of civil conflict (Guidolin and La Ferrara 2007), the economic implications of covert foreign intervention (Dube, Kaplan and Naidu 2011) and the value of political connections (Fisman 2001, Faccio 2006, Knight 2006, Coulomb and Sangnier 2014, Acemoglu, Hassan and Tahoun 2018). We also contribute to a growing literature on the political economy of the Middle East (e.g. Jaeger and Paserman 2008, Berman, Shapiro and Felter 2011, Durante and Zhuravskaya 2018).

Structure. The paper is organized in the typical way. Section 2 presents a conceptual framework to motivate our study and its research design. Section 3 provides background information on the history of sanctions on Iran and the political entities targeted by these sanctions. Section 4 describes the data we use, and Section 5 then presents our empirical analysis. Section 6 assesses the possible alternative interpretation of our results in terms of changes in the risk of conflict. Section 7 offers concluding remarks.

2 Conceptual Framework

In this section, we first set out a simple static framework to clarify why countries might want to target the economic interests of elite policymakers, and why the effectiveness of such targeting is an important economic question. As part of this, we frame the effects of sanctions as creating an incentive (‘carrot’) for policy changes in a sanctions-receiving country, distinguishing between targeted and non-targeted sub-groups within the receiver. We then discuss the effect of ‘blunt instruments’ on the realized incidence of sanctions and show that the cost of sanctions tends to increase under this scenario, due to the wider distribution of impacts across these sub-groups. Finally, we consider the implications of time-varying progress in negotiations towards sanctions relief, in order to motivate our empirical strategy and aid in the interpretation of our results.

For simplicity, we assume in this framework that the costs imposed by the sanctions to the receiver at the point of introduction are symmetric with the benefits of removing the sanctions. This necessarily abstracts from more complex scenarios where the size and incidence of costs that arise when sanctions first hit are different from the benefits when sanctions are lifted. In practice, the main focus of our study is on the latter, since our goal is to investigate the economic incentives for elite policymakers to negotiate sanctions relief.⁶

⁶Note that we also abstract from the stage in which sanctions are threatened but not yet imposed; see

2.1 Setup

We consider a scenario in which sanctions are imposed in order to induce changes in a particular policy in the sanctioned country, since this was the usual publicly stated goal of multilateral sanctions on Iran.⁷ Consider two countries, a sender S of sanctions and a receiver R . Within R , a group p (the ‘political elite’) has control over a policy that, if in place, benefits p but imposes a cost on S . In response, S imposes economic sanctions on R , offering to lift these sanctions if R ends the policy. While sanctions may also be costly to the sender S (because of lost trade, transactions costs, or political considerations), we assume for simplicity that these costs are lower than the cost to S of the offending policy in place in receiver R .

Once sanctions are imposed, they work as a carrot rather than a stick: as long as the group p within R benefits from sanctions relief, the removal of sanctions is effectively a reward for ending the policy that harms S . Say that Y_R represents the aggregate income of R , an amount Y_p of which accrues to the political elite p , with all others in R (group o) receiving the remainder, Y_o . Also assume that group p has a welfare function consisting of three additive terms: b_p , the benefit to p from the policy being in place; national income Y_R ; and an additional weight $\alpha - 1$ on the group’s own income Y_p . Then welfare of p is equal to $b_p + \alpha Y_p + Y_o$. The relevance of Y_o to the welfare of p might be due to altruism or ‘good governance’ by group p , or because of the need for support from the population as a whole in order to sustain the political regime. But as long as $\alpha > 1$, group p values increases in its own income more highly than similar increases in the income of the rest of the population. Finally, say that sanctions incur a cost to R that manifests as lost income y , and that this cost is spread additively across group p and group o , so that $y = y_p + y_o$.

To understand the potential attractiveness of targeting to S , assume that the cost of sanctions to S also rises in y , so that increasing the cost of sanctions in the receiving country also increases the cost to the sender.⁸ Then consider the scenario in which S has complete control over their incidence across o and p . In this case, S solves the problem:

$$\min_{y_p, y_o} y_p + y_o \quad \text{subject to} \quad \alpha y_p + y_o \geq b_p, \quad y_p \geq 0, \quad y_o \geq 0$$

Eaton and Engers (1992) for a model that incorporates this stage.

⁷The framework in this section can easily be extended to accommodate other scenarios; for example, to show that the targeting of sanctions may also be desirable if the sanctioners’ goal is to alter the balance of power between different actors within the sanctioned country, as in Kaempfer and Lowenberg (1988).

⁸A sanctions regime of higher intensity might, for example, lead to greater foregone gains from trade or increased transactions costs for the sender.

The sender must assure that the benefit to group p if the sanctions are lifted is at least as large as the cost of ending the policy, while minimizing the cost of sanctions to S itself. Given that $\alpha > 1$, the solution to this problem is to set $y_p = \frac{1}{\alpha}b_p$, $y_o = 0$. In other words, as long as each additional unit of income lost by p has a greater effect on the welfare of p than a unit of income lost by others in R , the minimum-cost sanctions policy is to target sanctions so that they affect the income of p exclusively.

2.2 ‘Blunt Instruments’

A fully targeted sanctions regime might not be available to the sender in practice. One possibility is that the sender might have to resort to instruments with some direct effects on group o . This could be due to the unavailability of precisely targeted instruments whose direct effects accrue only to group p , or the fact that the full suite of precisely targeted instruments is insufficiently strong to push policymakers in the receiver to change the policy of interest. Alternatively, even if the sender is able to construct a regime such that the direct effects of sanctions entirely accrue to group p , there might be spillovers within the economy of the receiver. These might include input-output relationships between the groups, or might be due to the ability of group p to shift some of the costs of sanctions to group o . We can summarize all of these possibilities as the ‘blunt instruments’ problem.

Say that due to blunt instruments, the ‘maximally targeted’ sanctions regime of cost y actually leads to incidence $y_p = \beta y$, $y_o = (1 - \beta)y$ for some $\beta \in [0, 1]$. The β parameter can therefore be seen as the share of income costs borne by the political elite group p within the receiver country. In simple terms, $\beta = 0$ corresponds to the elite group p escaping all of the income costs of sanctions, while $\beta = 1$ implies that the full income costs fall on the political elite only.

In the ‘bluntness’ case where $\beta < 1$, the chosen sanctions regime will be costlier than in the scenario where S can control sanctions incidence. In particular, the solution for S is now to set $y = \frac{1}{\alpha\beta + (1-\beta)}b_p$, which is a greater total cost than under the targeted regime, where $y = \frac{1}{\alpha}b_p$. In this model, both S and R (in aggregate) therefore benefit from the ability of S to target sanctions. The effectiveness of targeting – here quantified as the magnitude of β – is thus an interesting economic question.

2.3 Negotiations for Sanctions Removal

Once a given sanctions regime is imposed, the above static framework requires that a cost-benefit analysis by group p should lead to an immediate decision to remove or continue the policy. In practice, however, a sender and receiver of sanctions can engage in a period of negotiations over the actual concessions to be made by the receiver, and the sender might escalate or ease the sanctions regime during this period. Based on the progress of negotiations, the expected discounted costs of sanctions and benefits from the offending policy may therefore evolve over time, due to changes to the current situation as well as expected future events. For example, if S and R take a step towards a deal to exchange policy reform for sanctions relief, this will lead to a decrease in the expected (discounted) future costs of sanctions to both p and o and the expected future benefit of the policy to p . Therefore, if we are interested in learning about β using information from progress in political negotiations, we need an empirical strategy that separates the effects of these negotiations on the costs of sanctions to the targeted political elite p and to the non-elite o .

In this study, we use stock returns data to examine the evolution of the asset values of groups corresponding to p and o during negotiations between Iran and its sanctioners. If the values of assets of p comove positively with news of progress in negotiations, and these asset values are unrelated to any benefits from the policy itself, then we interpret this comovement as evidence that $\beta \neq 0$. Practically, this implies that the group p benefits from expected sanctions relief because it has not escaped bearing an income cost from the sanctions.

Though our main focus below will be on the assets of elite policymakers, we also provide a broad empirical assessment of the bluntness of sanctions across the publicly listed firms we study. Specifically, we derive further information about β within this context by comparing the relative magnitudes of changes in the values of the two groups' assets. If the values of assets of the non-elite group o are moved by progress towards sanctions relief, we consider this to be evidence that $\beta \neq 1$; that is, the elite group does not bear the full costs and there is some sharing of costs between p and o . We further discuss the mapping between β and our empirical difference-in-difference model in Section 5.1.

3 Background

3.1 Sanctions on Iran and Political Negotiations

While the United States has maintained economic sanctions on Iran since soon after its 1979 revolution, robust multilateral sanctions prompted by Iran’s nuclear program were imposed only from the mid-2000s.⁹ The United Nations Security Council first passed a resolution threatening Iran with sanctions in July 2006, in reference to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports stating that the IAEA was unable to determine that Iran’s nuclear program had no military dimension. The resolution called for Iran to suspend enrichment and reprocessing activities associated with its nuclear program. Sanctions were then imposed in December 2006 and tightened in two subsequent resolutions in 2007 and 2008, with these resolutions specifying that the sanctions would be removed once Iran met requirements set by the IAEA and the Security Council itself.

The sanctions put in place during this period constituted both narrowly focused ‘smart sanctions’ and more comprehensive measures. For instance, the Security Council resolutions asked states to freeze the assets of specific firms, individuals and other organizations directly involved in Iran’s nuclear program, and also to “exercise vigilance” over the foreign activities of Iranian financial institutions in general. Sanctions were publicly portrayed as targeting the economic interests of actors with political influence inside Iran, by cutting Iran off on margins that would specifically affect those interests.¹⁰ However, some observers argued that sanctions were ineffective, or even strengthened defenders of the nuclear program within Iran: for example, the Wall Street Journal suggested in 2006 that US pressure on Iranian banks “ended up boosting the very hard-line forces there that the US wants to curb.”¹¹

Several rounds of international negotiations were held alongside this gradual tightening of sanctions in the wake of the initial 2006 Security Council resolution. The talks with Iran were led by the ‘P5+1’ group of countries: the five permanent members of the UN Security

⁹US sanctions on Iran have included a variety of measures relating not only to weapons proliferation, but also to other issues such as human rights. Our study focuses only on sanctions related to Iran’s nuclear program.

¹⁰For example, after the US ended access to the American financial system for a major Iranian bank, the US Treasury’s Undersecretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence argued that “[w]hile those who are currently benefitting from Iranian integration into the global economy are the ones who will feel this isolation the most, they are also in the best position to persuade the regime that its current track will undermine the future of the Iranian people.” (Wall Street Journal 2006)

¹¹The article suggests that financial sanctions negatively affected firms unconnected to the regime, creating opportunities for hard-liners to purchase such companies; this could be interpreted as an especially problematic case of the ‘blunt instruments’ issue we have outlined.

Council (China, France, Russia, the UK and the US) as well as Germany. This process failed to reach agreement on sanctions relief in exchange for policy changes in Iran.

From 2010 through early 2012, the sanctions regime was greatly intensified, both due to a new UN Security Council resolution in mid-2010 and through various additional measures taken by individual actors including the US and EU. These new sanctions imposed severe limitations on Iran's international financial access; for example, the Belgium-based organization in charge of international banking transactions (SWIFT) removed a number of Iranian banks from its system in early 2012, after pressure from the EU. At the same time, new restrictions were placed on imports of various goods from Iran, including oil, by the EU and others. Meanwhile, the pace of diplomatic negotiations slowed; the only round of high-level multilateral talks during this period, in late 2010 and early 2011, did not produce a breakthrough.

After a hiatus of more than a year, the P5+1 negotiations on Iran's nuclear program resumed with a meeting in Istanbul in April 2012, and were characterized as successful by both sides (BBC 2012). After a series of meetings over the following months, the first major diplomatic breakthrough occurred in Geneva in November 2013, when the parties agreed to a framework agreement. This deal was followed by lengthy negotiations on a final agreement to lift sanctions in exchange for concessions related to Iran's nuclear program. The interim agreement reached at Geneva, which was originally due to expire in July 2014, was extended twice, with an eventual final deadline of June 2015. The framework of a final agreement was reached during high-level negotiations in Lausanne in April 2015, and the details of this deal were eventually concluded on July 14, 2015.

Importantly for our identification strategy, diplomatic progress towards a final agreement from 2012 to 2015 was uneven and fraught with uncertainty. Media reports from various points of the timeframe we study document unexpected breakthroughs (e.g. Washington Post 2013a) as well as long periods of slow progress (e.g. Reuters 2014) and doubts in advance of negotiated deadlines (e.g. Guardian 2015). Moreover, the eventual success of the process was far from certain in the early part of this period, when there were reports of "long odds" of ever reaching a deal (Washington Post 2013b).

After the agreement was officially approved by all parties and the IAEA reported that Iran had met its commitments under the deal, multilateral sanctions were lifted in January 2016. However, the situation changed when in November 2016, an opponent of the agreement, Donald Trump, won the US presidential election. While the other members of the P5+1 group maintained their support for the accord, the US withdrew from the deal and began

reimposing sanctions in May 2018. US nuclear-related sanctions on Iran were fully restored in November 2018. These new US sanctions were not accompanied by high-level political negotiations with Iran over conditions for their removal.

3.2 Targeted Political Entities

Throughout the development of multilateral sanctions on Iran, the UN, EU and US have publicly linked sanctions policies to specific entities who have a major political influence over the direction of Iran’s nuclear strategy, but also hold substantial economic assets. We discuss the nature of each of these actors’ influence over the nuclear program and the structure of their economic interests in turn.

3.2.1 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)

The IRGC is a military organization with the explicit political role of guarding the 1979 Islamic revolution and promoting it outside Iran. The IRGC therefore officially functions as a branch of Iran’s armed forces alongside its regular military, but is also known to be influential in politics, and former IRGC members such as Mahmoud Ahmedinejad (president of Iran between 2005 and 2013) frequently serve in prominent political roles.

The US, EU and the UN Security Council have all claimed the existence of close links between the IRGC and Iran’s nuclear program in official documents. For example, in the 2010 resolution mentioned earlier, the UN Security Council noted “with serious concern the role of elements of the [IRGC] ... in Iran’s proliferation sensitive nuclear activities and the development of nuclear weapon delivery systems” (UN 2010). In a document from the same year, the EU characterized the IRGC as “responsible for Iran’s nuclear program” (EU 2010).

As noted above, the multilateral sanctions regime included instruments intended to influence political actors through comprehensive restrictions (e.g. on financial transactions), as well as smart sanctions incident on specific entities. The IRGC’s extensive economic presence in Iran – originating from its participation in military industries and provision of services for current personnel and veterans, but now covering a wide range of industries – makes it potentially vulnerable to sanctions of both types. Indeed, beginning with the first UN Security Council resolution imposing sanctions in 2006, individuals and firms associated with the IRGC have been the subject of a large number of smart sanctions. For instance, the Fordow fuel enrichment plant became a focus of nuclear diplomacy after its disclosure in September 2009, and the UN Security Council’s 2010 resolution on Iran included the im-

position of smart sanctions on a group of IRGC-owned firms that had been involved in its construction.

3.2.2 Supreme Leader and Setad

While Iran’s political system includes an elected president as well as a parliament, it is the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who is effectively its most powerful figure. This includes ultimate political control of its nuclear program, as recognized by Wendy Sherman, the lead negotiator for the US in the Iran talks, in a Congressional hearing in December 2013: “The Supreme Leader is the only one who really holds the nuclear file, [and] makes the final decisions about whether Iran will reach a comprehensive agreement to forgo much of what it has created in return for the economic relief it seeks” (Kerr 2018).

As with the IRGC, the Supreme Leader’s economic interests have been recognized and targeted by the senders of sanctions on Iran. The EU imposed sanctions on Mohammad Mokhber in 2010, characterizing him as “President of the Setad Ejraie Foundation, an investment fund linked to Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader” (EU 2010). In June 2013, the United States Treasury announced sanctions on “a major network of front companies controlled by Iran’s leadership” (US Treasury 2013). The Treasury identified 37 firms in a network associated with the organization EIKO (the Execution of Imam Khomeini’s Order), also known as Setad, which it claimed were “generating billions of dollars in profits for the Iranian regime each year”. While the US Treasury did not provide further details on Setad’s political ties, a Reuters investigative report on Setad later in 2013 identified it as a conglomerate controlled by Supreme Leader Khamenei, and noted that Setad’s revenues allowed for Khamenei’s financial independence from Iran’s parliament and national budget process (Reuters 2013a).

A report in 2015 revealed that the targeting of the Supreme Leader’s economic base in Setad was an explicit political strategy on the part of sanctioners. Officials quoted by Reuters (2015) indicated that the organization was hit with smart sanctions in 2013 because the US “saw it as close to Khamenei and believed that the sanctions might induce him back to serious nuclear negotiations”. Another official also noted that at that time, nuclear talks were deadlocked and action was felt to be needed: “The reason why we dropped the hammer on them when we did is because we were attempting to put pressure on the Supreme Leader (to agree to a deal)” (Reuters 2015). This report also suggested that the lifting of sanctions yielded tangible economic benefits for the conglomerate, such as the facilitation of international business deals. In Section 5.2, we take a closer look at the potential relevance

to Setad of the 2013 US smart sanctions relative to other (more comprehensive) sanctions instruments that were already in place.

4 Data

4.1 Stock Returns Data

We collect information on stock returns of listed Iranian firms by web scraping daily data from the web site of the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE). As background, it should be noted that while the TSE is not as deep and sophisticated as many North American and Western European stock exchanges, it provides a suitable setting for conducting an event study. According to the World Bank’s Global Financial Development database (see Čihák et al. 2012), the TSE puts Iran in the second (from top) quartile of financial access (share of companies outside the top 10 in market capitalization), the third quartile of financial depth (market capitalization as a share of GDP) and the second quartile of financial efficiency (shares traded as a proportion of total market capitalization), relative to other countries.¹² The TSE trades for three hours per day (9:00 to noon), five days per week (Saturday through Wednesday).

Our main sample period covers the revived multilateral negotiations leading up to the final deal. The sample therefore begins with the first day of negotiations in Istanbul (which happened to fall on the first day of the TSE’s trading week) on Saturday, April 14, 2012, and ends on Wednesday, July 15, 2015 (the last day of the TSE’s trading week), the day after a final agreement was reached in Vienna. In brief, we choose this window because April 2012 represents the beginning of an uninterrupted phase of negotiations (that is, a period when there was no major breakdown or hiatus in talks) and because the majority of sanctions were in place by early 2012. As we outline in Section 5.2, this latter point facilitates an event study research design centered on the effects of fully lifting sanctions.

As of the beginning of our sample period, there were 325 firms listed on the TSE. As discussed in the next subsection, our baseline sample is made up of two firm portfolios, which together include 138 of these 325 firms. Daily returns for each firm are calculated by subtracting a stock’s closing price for the previous day on which the stock was traded from

¹²The TSE ranks very similarly to Egypt – the context studied by Acemoglu, Hassan and Tahoun (2018) – by these measures, based on data from the Egyptian Exchange. A study of market efficiency (Jahan-Parvar and Mohammadi 2013) indicates that the TSE is CAPM-efficient at the monthly level and displays patterns of international integration comparable to Middle Eastern markets that are considered to be open, such as Bahrain, Israel and Turkey.

its closing price for the current day and dividing by the closing price for the previous day. We multiply daily returns by 100 so that they are expressed as percentages. We also exclude the top and bottom 1% of all observed returns from our sample, so that our results are not driven by outliers due to measurement error or very large positive or negative returns.¹³

For our exercises relating to the 2016 US election and subsequent events, we instead work with a sample period beginning sixty trading days before the US election and ending on the day when news of the US withdrawal from the deal reached the TSE. This period covers August 13, 2016 to May 9, 2018. As with our main sample period, we drop the top and bottom 1% of observed returns over this time.

4.2 Ownership Data

Our goal is to assemble a portfolio of firms listed on the TSE that were assets of the IRGC and/or Setad during the sample period in order to gather evidence on whether the political actors controlling these conglomerates may have gained from evolving progress towards sanctions relief. In our preferred approach, we use information on firms explicitly identified as IRGC and Setad assets by the main ‘senders’ of sanctions (the US, UN and EU). We then identify the TSE-listed assets of these members of the IRGC and Setad conglomerates.

As we discuss below, another feature of our strategy is that we identify not only the set of assets on the TSE that are most closely linked to the key targeted conglomerates, but also the TSE firms that are most removed from these conglomerates with no known affiliation via ownership. This is useful for our research design since this set of ‘most removed’ firms are likely those that the senders of sanctions were least interested in targeting. Hence they provide the cleanest possible comparison group for an assessment of the bluntness of sanctions across publicly listed firms.

We now proceed to provide details of our baseline procedure for classifying firms, a graphical summary of which is displayed in Appendix Figure A1. In Section 5, we also suggest several alternative approaches to the construction of our firm portfolios, and present results of robustness checks using these alternative portfolio definitions.

¹³Our main results are similar if we instead take the less conservative approach of dropping the top and bottom 0.1% of returns, or alternatively if the data is winsorized. In practice, especially large calculated returns tend to be preceded by periods where we do not observe trading in a given stock, implying that these cases do not represent actual day-to-day returns. Our main results also remain similar when we only drop firm-days preceded by at least one trading day (or alternatively at least two trading days or one week) where we do not observe that firm’s stock being traded. The main results are also robust to dropping the bottom 25% of thinly traded stocks, and to controlling for the number of TSE-wide days off before a trading day.

4.2.1 Target Portfolio

The initial ‘universe’ of firms that we consider are those that were listed on the TSE at the start of our main sample period on April 14, 2012, representing a total of 325 firms. As a first step, we exclude firms with business operations directly relating to Iran’s nuclear program, as identified by the senders of sanctions, with prominent examples being Iran’s national maritime carrier, IRISL Shipping Lines, and several large banks. These firms are dropped in order to avoid confounding the expected effects of sanctions relief with anticipated changes in the business of supplying goods or services for the nuclear program.¹⁴

In the second step, we begin defining the target group of firms. This is challenging because to do so, we require reliable information on the assets of the IRGC and Setad conglomerates, which is not available on a systematic basis in documents such as annual reports. However, as discussed in Section 3.2, Iran’s sanctioners have often imposed smart sanctions on individual entities linked with the IRGC or Iran’s Supreme Leader. In each case, the rationale for the imposition of sanctions has been laid out in an official document produced by the sanctioner. We can therefore use these documents to identify entities that the UN, EU or US have explicitly stated are owned or controlled by the IRGC or Setad.

Entities on which US smart sanctions were imposed due to their links with the IRGC may be found using the Department of the Treasury’s Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons list (SDN list), in which these organizations are assigned a specific ‘IRGC’ identifier. We draft a list of all entities that have been tagged with this identifier and subsequently cross-check these with US Treasury press releases that provide further details on the reasons for their inclusion in the SDN list. We add entities into our target group only if the relevant press release states that the entity is owned or controlled by the IRGC.¹⁵ On the other hand, entities sanctioned by the US due to their links with Setad do not have a separate identifier on the SDN list. However, US smart sanctions on Setad assets were imposed in a single episode in June 2013, and so we use a detailed US Treasury press release from this episode to identify these firms.

Similarly, European Council decision 2010/413/CFSP and its amendments provide lists

¹⁴We define this set of firms using a similar approach to the one we use to identify IRGC and Setad assets, discussed in the next paragraph. Specifically, we exclude any firm on which smart sanctions were imposed by the US, EU and UN for involvement in supplying the nuclear program, according to official documents. In terms of the conceptual framework, we do this so as to isolate changes in asset values that are unrelated to any benefits from the policy itself; see Section 2.3.

¹⁵Sanctions have been imposed on some entities for providing support or services to the IRGC. For example, Iran’s national air carrier, Iran Air, was sanctioned for the transportation of military-related equipment on behalf of the IRGC.

of EU-sanctioned entities, while UN Security Council resolutions identify organizations designated for smart sanctions by the UN. Both sets of documents provide rationales for these decisions. Again, we only include entities that these records state are owned or controlled by the IRGC or Setad.¹⁶

The third step in defining the target portfolio involves identifying all TSE-listed assets of the IRGC and Setad entities defined in the process just outlined. Both the IRGC and Setad conglomerates are comprised of a mixture of stock market listed and private, unlisted companies. Thus, although information from the US, EU and UN allows us to identify 75 firms and other entities partly or fully owned by the IRGC and/or Setad, only six of these are themselves listed on the TSE as of the beginning of the sample. These six companies represent approximately 5.5% of the total market capitalization of the TSE, or \$6.3 billion.

To deepen our coverage of IRGC and Setad assets, we also use shareholder information as of the beginning of the sample period, extracted from the TSE website, to identify firms in which at least one of the 75 targeted entities is a shareholder. In this step, we identify an additional 44 TSE-listed firms in which the IRGC and/or Setad have ownership stakes, resulting in a target portfolio of 50 firms in total. This set of 44 companies makes up about 16.1% of the TSE's market capitalization, a total of \$18.5 billion. The observed share of ownership of these firms by the IRGC and Setad represents about a third of this amount, approximately \$5.9 billion. Including the six firms discussed above, we therefore link listed assets constituting 10% of the TSE's total market capitalization to the IRGC and Setad conglomerates.

4.2.2 Non-Target Portfolio

We next construct a portfolio composed of the listed firms that we can most confidently assume are not assets of either the IRGC or Setad. Our starting point is the 260 listed firms that were not identified by the classification procedure documented in the previous subsection. However, while this excludes the 50 firms with the most direct known ownership connection to the IRGC or Setad, there are two additional groups of firms with more tenuous or less certain connections to these two conglomerates, and we drop each of these from the non-target portfolio.

¹⁶In 2010, the European Union also sanctioned Sina Bank, with the rationale that it was “very close to the interests of the Daftar (Office of the Supreme Leader). It contributes in this way to funding the regime’s strategic interests” (EU 2010). Because Sina Bank was not described as a Setad asset, we have not included it in the target portfolio. However, the main results are robust to adding Sina Bank and its TSE-listed assets as target firms.

The first group of companies that we drop are those with what could be termed ‘second-degree’ connections to the IRGC or Setad. These are the 144 listed firms that are two or more ownership layers below the 75 entities identified as IRGC or Setad assets by the US, EU and UN. We then eliminate a second group of firms that sources other than the US, EU or UN suggest might be assets of the IRGC or Setad. These sources are a 2013 Reuters investigative report on Setad (Reuters 2013a) and a 2010 American Enterprise Institute report on the IRGC’s involvement in the Iranian economy (Alfoneh 2010).¹⁷ This eliminates another 28 firms from the initial pool, leaving 88 firms in our non-target portfolio.

Table 1 shows summary statistics for firms in the target and non-target portfolios. According to data from the TSE, these two groups of firms make up a similar share of total TSE market capitalization: between one fifth and one quarter in each case. The mean and standard deviation of the daily return variable by firm-day are also very similar across the two portfolios. Accounting data from Orbis for 2012, which is available for only a subset of these firms, suggests that there are no statistically significant differences between the mean turnover, assets and labour force of the firms in each portfolio. The industrial composition of the two groups is somewhat different: for instance, a larger proportion of target firms operate in the financial sector.¹⁸ We account for these differences in sectoral composition in some of our empirical specifications below.

4.3 News Coverage and Event Data

As part of our research design, we construct daily measures of news coverage of sanctions-related negotiations involving Iran. The main aim of these coverage variables is to provide consistent measures of sanctions-related events that may be salient to TSE market actors during this period of diplomatic progress towards a sanctions deal.

Factiva Measure. The first measure we construct is derived from the Factiva news archive database, a business information tool marketed by Dow Jones and Company. Factiva covers

¹⁷We begin by dropping listed firms that are identified in these sources but are not in our target portfolio. We then use the TSE shareholder data again to construct layers of ownership below each of the entities named in these additional sources, and remove all firms within this ownership structure from the non-target portfolio.

¹⁸We use a listing of firms by sector in TSE (2011) to classify firms into industries. This provides 37 sectors, mostly corresponding to industries in the NACE classification at various levels of aggregation. Many of these sectors are sparsely populated, so to allow for within-industry comparisons of firms, we amalgamate sectors that are adjacent in the NACE classification until there is at least one target and one non-target firm in each industry. This procedure results in fifteen industries (see Table 1), as well as two additional sectors with no target or non-target firms.

Table 1: Summary Statistics – Sample Firms

	Target firms	Non-target firms
Number of firms	50	88
Daily return	0.134 (2.01)	0.136 (2.05)
Market capitalization	12,357.47 (31,273.68)	7,908.29 (22,461.24)
Share of TSE market capitalization	21.53	24.26
Share of firms by industry:		
Mining	2.0	4.6
Food products	4.0	6.8
Wood/paper/textiles	2.0	3.4
Refined petroleum	4.0	1.1
Chemicals	2.0	10.2
Pharmaceuticals	6.0	10.2
Rubber/plastic/mineral products	28.0	18.2
Basic metals	10.0	10.2
Metal products	2.0	1.1
Electronics/electrical equipment	4.0	8.0
Machinery	4.0	2.3
Motor vehicles	12.0	8.0
Transportation/telecom	2.0	1.1
Finance	16.0	8.0
Construction/real estate	2.0	6.8
Orbis data:		
Number of firms	32	57
Turnover	3,566.48 (8,899.41)	5,034.33 (23,743.09)
Assets	5,674.74 (16,403.98)	3,482.93 (9,583.67)
Employees	1,679.71 (3,451.24)	785.21 (1,269.74)

Daily stock return is in percent; its mean and standard deviation (in parentheses) are by firm-day, omitting the top and bottom 1% of observed returns. Market capitalization, turnover and assets are in billion rial. Market capitalization (from TSE data) is as of March 10, 2014. Total TSE market capitalization is calculated for firms listed on the TSE as of April 14, 2012, omitting two firms for which data is unavailable. Data from Orbis on turnover, assets and employees is from 2012, and is only available for a subset of firms. The number of firms with available data on turnover and assets is listed in the table; employee data is missing for an additional nine firms (four target firms and five non-target firms).

around 33,000 global media sources, including most leading newspapers as well as influential multimedia content. We perform a full-text search on Factiva’s media archives and retrieve all English-language articles which mention Iran and at least one of the P5+1 countries alongside the word ‘sanctions’.¹⁹ The output retrieved from this query is used to create a daily index of sanctions-related news calculated as the total raw article count, standardized within the sample period. Because our goal is to measure the reactions of TSE investors to the events covered in these articles, we assign all articles published over the TSE’s weekend (Thursday and Friday) or during holidays to the subsequent trading day.²⁰

GDELT Measure. Our second event measure is derived from the Global Data on Events, Location and Tone (GDELT) database. The GDELT initiative uses machine learning and natural language processing (NLP) tools to create a high-frequency open-source database of political events based on the text of news articles covering more than 37,000 online news sources in multiple languages (including Persian). A key innovation of GDELT, compared to other news databases, is that it provides information at the event level, where the events are automatically defined via NLP algorithms.²¹

GDELT defines an event as an action undertaken by an actor upon another actor. Actors can be national, subnational (e.g. rebel groups) or transnational (e.g. United Nations). Any event recorded with exactly the same date, subject actor, object actor and event type is treated as a single event and given the same unique event identifier in the GDELT database. This allows a given event to be tracked over multiple articles and days. To measure how much coverage a certain event receives, GDELT reports a count of all source articles mentioning the event and attributes this to the calendar date on which the event first appeared in the news. Each event is also classified into a four-digit category (e.g. ‘0341 - Express intent to change policy’) based on another NLP procedure (Schrodt 2012).

For our analysis, we extract all political events stored in GDELT for which one of the actors is Iran and the other actor is one of the P5+1 countries. We condition further on events that lie in the two-digit categories that are most likely to contain diplomatic negotiation episodes: ‘03 - Express intent to cooperate’, ‘04 - Consult’ and ‘05 - Engage in

¹⁹More specifically, the Boolean query we use is as follows: (Iran) and (US or USA or United States or Russia or China or France or UK or United Kingdom or Germany) and (sanctions).

²⁰Baker, Bloom and Davis (2016) use a similar approach to construct a monthly measure of economic policy uncertainty by calculating the frequency of articles containing a combination of three words related to uncertainty, drawing on a sample of ten leading US newspapers. In an extensive audit study, they evaluate the performance of this simple text retrieval algorithm by comparing its results with a human-coded index and find the two indices to be highly correlated.

²¹See Manacorda and Tesei (2020) for a recent study that makes extensive use of GDELT data.

diplomatic negotiations’. In line with our news coverage variable sourced from Factiva, we measure events on an intensive margin using GDELT’s count of source articles that mention a certain event, which can be interpreted as a proxy for the event’s importance. Again, we assign all events occurring over the TSE’s weekend or during holidays to the following trading day.

After calculating the total number of relevant articles for each day, we standardize this measure across all of the days in our sample. Before standardizing, we drop all events in February to August 2013, during which time there was a steep drop in the number of articles collected by GDELT, due to technical issues associated with a transition between article collection systems.²²

Evolution of News Coverage. Figure 1 displays the variation in both of our event measures over the course of the main sample period.²³ The top six distinct events identified by each measure, highlighted in the time-series plots in Figure 1, are all related to the sanctions negotiations. Both measures spike at the times when the final framework agreement and final official agreement were completed in Lausanne and Vienna respectively, when the Geneva deal was reached and when US president Obama made a call to Iran’s president, Hassan Rouhani. Our Factiva event measure also clearly identifies a round of negotiations in Vienna that ended in agreement to extend the deadline for a final deal, as well as the release of an International Atomic Energy Agency report in 2012. The GDELT measure instead places more importance on early negotiations in Istanbul and Moscow. This suggests that these measures vary similarly but not identically over time; indeed, the correlation coefficient between the two is 0.72.²⁴

4.4 Other Data

In order to gain insight into the drivers of sanctions’ effects on the non-target portfolio (i.e. their ‘bluntness’), we identify the set of Iranian industries subject to sector-specific sanctions. We accomplish this through inspection of the final agreement between Iran and the P5+1

²²For each of the two measures discussed in this section, we also create similar measures that are standardized within the alternative sample period used for the analysis of post-deal events in Section 5.3. During this 2016-2018 period, when many of the key sanctions-related events did not involve diplomatic negotiations, we also include articles in the GDELT categories ‘10 - Demand’, ‘11 - Disapprove’, ‘12 - Reject’ and ‘13 - Threaten’, along with ‘16 - Reduce relations’ (which includes the subcategory ‘Impose embargo, boycott or sanctions’).

²³Variation in news coverage measures for our 2016-2018 sample period is discussed in Section 5.3.

²⁴The top fifteen days by each measure may be found in Appendix Table A1; eight of these are shared across the two measures.

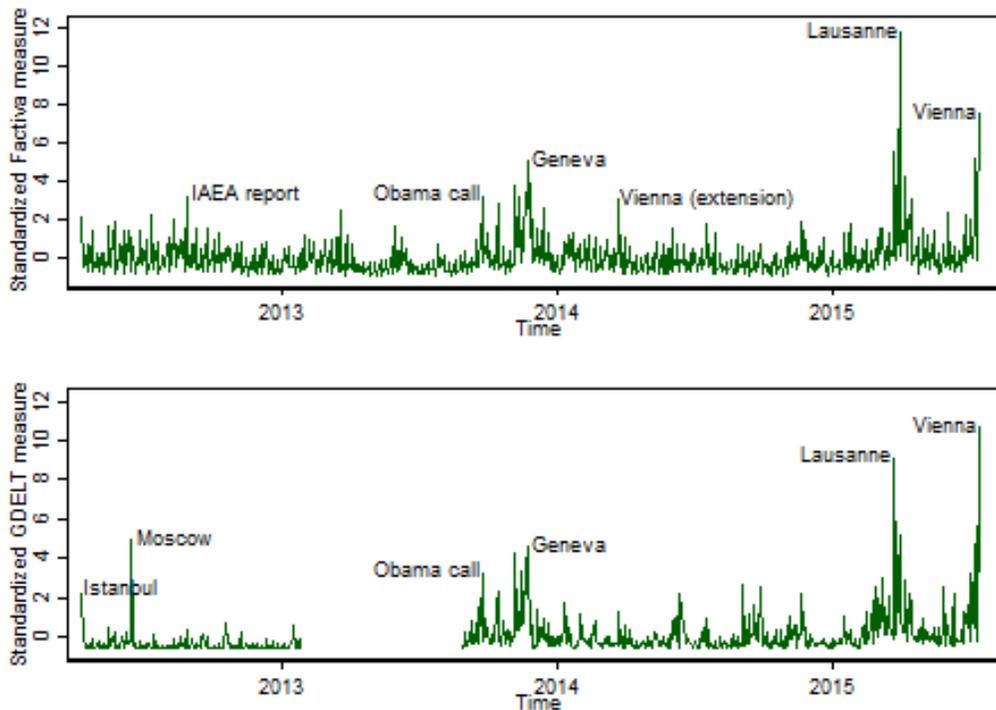


Figure 1: Value of Daily News Coverage Measures, April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015

This figure shows the evolution, over the sample period April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015 (excluding February to August 2013 for the GDELT measure), of a standardized count of the number of articles on relevant events identified in the Factiva and GDELT datasets, as discussed in Section 4.3. The standardized Factiva measure is displayed in the top panel and the standardized GDELT measure is shown in the bottom panel.

countries (JCPOA 2015). Annex II of this document (‘Sanctions-Related Commitments’) provides a list of US and EU sanctions to be removed, along with assurances that these constitute the full set of US and EU sanctions related to Iran’s nuclear program. We check whether each of the measures listed in this annex pertains to a particular Iranian industry or industries, according to the industrial classification used in our paper.

Also, in order to test whether our main results could be driven by an alternative war-related explanation (since diplomatic negotiations may also have changed the likelihood of conflict between Iran and other countries), we rely on two additional data sources. First, we extract price data for betting contracts from Intrade, a large online betting market, in order to construct a measure of the probability of military conflict between Iran and Israel or the United States.²⁵ The betting contract we use for this exercise is specified as “US

²⁵Intrade was an online futures exchange where predictions about events ranging from Oscar nominations

and/or Israel execute an overt airstrike against Iran by December 31, 2012". The contract was to have paid \$10 if an airstrike occurred before December 31, 2012, and zero otherwise. During the trading period, the contract traded in the range of 0 to 100, where 1 point equals \$0.10. We use the contract price to calculate the daily arrival probability of an airstrike that is implied by the contract, under a set of simple assumptions about the conditions in this market.²⁶ Appendix Figure A2 shows the evolution of the contract's daily price and the implied daily arrival probability of an airstrike from the beginning of the sample period (April 14, 2012) through the end of 2012.²⁷

Second, we use the Datastream database to extract stock price data for a set of firms for which profit expectations were likely to be sensitive to the odds of war in the Middle East. In particular, we include all publicly traded firms in the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2012 Arms Industry Database. The SIPRI database identifies the world's hundred largest arms-producing and military services companies in 2012, but since some of these firms are privately owned, we observe stock price data for 66 of the companies on this list as of the beginning of our sample period.

5 Empirical Analysis

5.1 Case Study: Geneva Deal

To more clearly introduce our empirical strategy and interpretation of our results, we begin by studying the effects of a single major event: the interim agreement negotiated in Geneva in November 2013. We examine this event both because the Geneva deal was perhaps the largest breakthrough in Iran's negotiations with the P5+1 countries, and because the

to presidential election outcomes were traded as futures contracts. Trading volumes on Intrade reached over one million annually in 2012. Intrade was established in 1999, but in the context of a conflict with the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission, suspended the accounts of its US members in December 2012 and ended trading in early 2013.

²⁶Specifically, let $strike_t$ be the number of times an airstrike occurs between day t and December 31, 2012 (which we call day T). On any given day t , investors can buy a contract at price p_t that will be worth \$10 if $strike_t > 0$ and \$0 if $strike_t = 0$. Assume that the process is Poisson, investors are risk-neutral and do not discount the future, and the Poisson parameter λ_t prevailing at a given moment is known but can change over time due to information shocks. Then we can back out λ_t from the closing price of the contract, since this price should be equal to $\$10 * P(strike_t > 0)$, and $P(strike_t > 0) = 1 - e^{-\lambda_t(T-t)}$. Therefore, we can calculate $\lambda_t = (-1/(T-t)) \ln(1 - (p_t/10))$. We multiply λ_t by 100 so that it represents a probability in percentage terms.

²⁷We do not display data from Intrade after December 22, 2012, since US trading on Intrade was suspended as of December 23. Our regressions using this data similarly use a sample period before the suspension of US trading.

timeline of this agreement (displayed in Figure 2) delivers some useful advantages for our analysis. The final round of negotiations leading to the interim agreement began at 17:00 on Wednesday November 20, after the TSE closed at noon on the same day. The TSE was then closed for two days as per the usual structure of the Iranian working week.

Media reports in advance of the meetings indicated uncertainty about whether a deal would be reached, though also some optimism among negotiators that an agreement was possible.²⁸ During the TSE’s weekend break, several encouraging reports emerged about the progress of talks, which continued in Geneva over both Thursday and Friday.²⁹ When the TSE re-opened at 9:00 on Saturday November 23, there was thus a large amount of information on which the market could act. A final agreement was then officially announced at 5:30 on Sunday November 24, in advance of the TSE opening again at 9:00 on the same day.

The positive information shocks before each of these two trading days provide us with an opportunity to use this progress in political negotiations to study the impact of sanctions relief. Specifically, we formulate a difference-in-difference model based on our definitions of the target and non-target portfolios and the timing of news from Geneva. Our baseline model is structured as follows:

$$R_{ijt} = \alpha_i + \phi Geneva_t + \theta Target_i * Geneva_t + u_{ijt} \quad (1)$$

where i indexes firms, j represents industries and the time index t is at the day level. Here, R_{ijt} represents raw returns, $Target_i$ is a indicator variable for firms identified as IRGC and/or Setad assets, and $Geneva_t$ is a dummy for the two days November 23 and 24, 2013.

We argue that the good news about progress towards a sanctions deal in Geneva should imply greater future benefits for firms that benefit from sanctions relief, because the expected future duration of sanctions falls. If investors hold this belief, then the stock prices of these firms should be bid up upon the arrival of this news. Meanwhile, firms unaffected by sanctions

²⁸Before the negotiations, a senior US official was reported by Reuters (2013b) to have said that “I don’t know if we will reach an agreement. I think it is quite possible that we can, but there are still tough issues to negotiate.” In the same report, Iran’s deputy foreign minister was cited as saying in the Persian-language media that “[t]he expectation is that we will have tough talks, and unless the rights of the Iranian people are guaranteed, an agreement will not be reached.” (Reuters 2013b) According to Agence France Presse (2013), the assessment of an analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies was that “a deal may be possible”.

²⁹For example, as shown in Figure 2, an English-language live blog from Nasim Online news agency cited several positive quotes from parties to the negotiations (“positive atmosphere”, “talking details”, “room for optimism”), and reported agreement on the issue of nuclear enrichment, during the TSE’s weekend break (Nasim Online 2013).

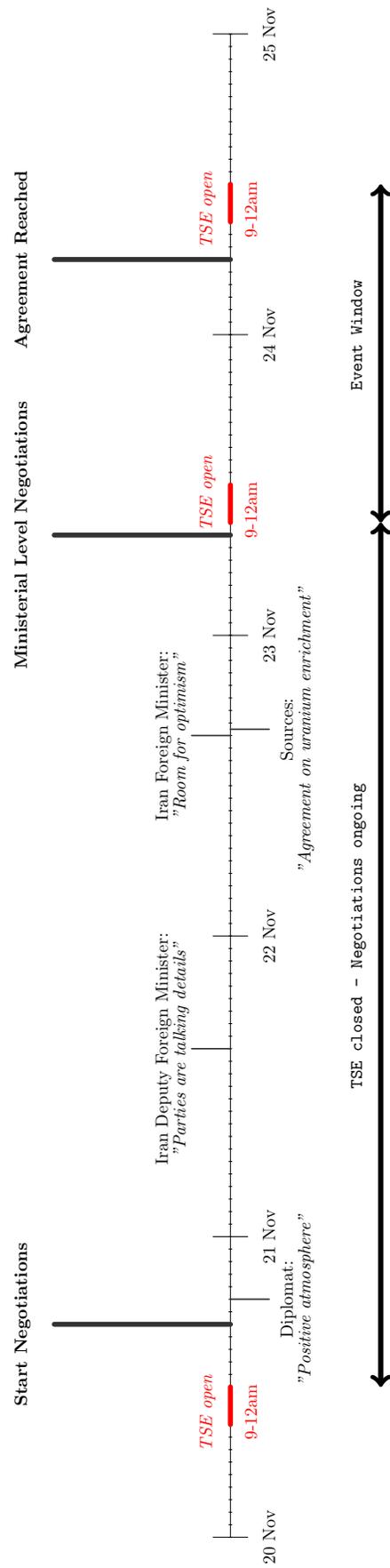


Figure 2: Timeline of November 2013 Geneva Event (With Quotes from Nasim Online (2013) Live Blog)

removal should not see abnormal returns associated with this event.

The estimated values of θ and ϕ are then informative about the success of sanctions in targeting elite assets within our sample of publicly listed firms. If $\phi + \theta = 0$, the elite assets in our sample escape all of the effects of sanctions, mapping to full bluntness $\beta = 0$ in our conceptual framework. On the other hand, if $\phi = 0$ but the target group interaction coefficient $\theta > 0$, elite assets would be affected without any implied effects for non-target firms. The rejection of both of these hypotheses would provide evidence in favour of the third scenario, in which both the targeted elite group as well as non-elite interests in the sample benefit from sanctions relief. This would imply that the costs of sanctions were shared as a result of the ‘blunt instruments’ problem.

Baseline Results. With these interpretations in mind, we present the results of estimating equation (1) for a sample period that includes the two days November 23 and 24, 2013 and the sixty trading days beforehand. We use a sixty-day pre-period for our baseline estimates because this is a standard estimation window used in the event study literature.³⁰ We report standard errors clustered by firm, in line with our firm-level definition of ‘treatment’ as a desired target of sanctions.³¹ As shown in column (1) of Table 2, we find that for non-target firms, the Geneva deal was associated with a daily return that was 0.648 percentage points above the mean return for those firms, with an additional effect of 1.256 percentage points for target firms. Both of these estimates are statistically significant.

We next check whether the effects we estimate are concentrated in either of the two trading days in which the market was hit by positive news about negotiations in Geneva. Column (2) of Table 2 displays the results of regressions in which dummies and interactions for November 23 (‘day 1’) and November 24 (‘day 2’) are included separately. The estimated impact is similar across the two days for both the target and non-target groups. Because November 23 and 24 are at the beginning of the trading week, when stock returns might differ systematically from other days, we also rerun our baseline regression substituting firm-day-of-week fixed effects for firm fixed effects, and find very similar results (see column (3)).³²

Another potential issue with our baseline specification is that firms in the target and

³⁰Our results are robust to using other windows, including thirty-day or ninety-day periods.

³¹For each of our main tables of results, we also include appendix tables displaying wild bootstrapped p-values based on the much stricter strategy of clustering by the 15 industries in our sample; see footnotes 33, 45 and 63.

³²Note that because we drop singletons, the number of observations in our regressions sometimes changes when we include different sets of fixed effects.

Table 2: Baseline Results – Geneva Deal

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Firm FEs	Day-by-day estimates	Firm-day-of-week FEs	Industry controls	Market cap controls	Size data subsample	All size controls
Geneva	0.648 (0.277)		0.731 (0.286)		0.649 (0.279)	0.212 (0.356)	0.221 (0.353)
Day 1		0.548 (0.303)					
Day 2		0.748 (0.342)					
Target * Geneva	1.256 (0.364)		1.212 (0.383)	1.306 (0.415)	1.260 (0.373)	1.962 (0.466)	1.927 (0.483)
Target * Day 1		1.415 (0.417)					
Target * Day 2		1.099 (0.445)					
Observations	6,586	6,586	6,580	6,497	6,586	4,017	4,017
Number of firms	128	128	127	127	128	77	77

This table displays estimated effects of the Geneva deal on returns of target and non-target firms. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. ‘Geneva’ is defined as the two days Saturday November 23 and Sunday November 24, 2013. In column (2), ‘day 1’ is November 23, 2013 and ‘day 2’ is November 24, 2013. The sample period is Geneva and the previous sixty trading days. All columns except column (3) include firm fixed effects; column (3) includes firm-day-of-week fixed effects. Column (4) includes interactions of industry dummies with dummies for each day of the sample period. Column (5) includes interactions of de-meaned log market capitalization as of March 10, 2014 with dummies for each day of the sample period. Column (6) reproduces the baseline estimate in column (1) for the subsample of firms (those with available data on turnover, assets and employees in 2012) used in column (7), for purposes of comparison. Column (7) includes interactions of log market capitalization as of March 10, 2014, and log turnover, log assets and log employees from 2012 (if this data is available from Orbis), all de-meaned, with dummies for each day of the sample period. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

non-target groups are somewhat unevenly distributed across industries (see Table 1). Along with the promise of potential changes in the future evolution of sanctions, the Geneva deal also suspended some industry-specific sanctions (on crude oil, petrochemicals, the automotive industry and precious metals). Our results might thus be capturing an asymmetric industry-level effect of the Geneva deal itself rather than the impact of the multilateral sanctions regime as a whole. In Table 2 column (4), we add interactions between industry dummies and dummies for each day in the sample period to our baseline specification, in order to control for industry-specific effects of this event. We find that our estimate of the differential impact of Geneva on firms in the target portfolio is almost unchanged.

We next allow for the possibility that the effects of new information, including good news about sanctions relief, are different for firms with different characteristics (such as firm size). In column (5) of Table 2, we augment the regression of column (1) by controlling for the interaction of the logarithm of market capitalization (de-measured) with dummies for each day in our sample period. This has very little effect on our main results.

As noted in our discussion of summary statistics, we also have 2012 data from Orbis on turnover, assets and employees for a subsample of firms. For purposes of comparison, we first reproduce our baseline specification for this subgroup of companies only (see column (6)). While the total effect of Geneva on target firms is similar for this subsample, its impact on non-target firms is smaller than for the full sample (0.212 percentage points) and not statistically significant. In column (7), we add controls interacting log turnover, log assets and log employees (again de-measured), as well as log market capitalization, with dummies for each day in the sample period. Our estimates remain very similar to those in column (6), suggesting that these firm characteristics probably do not have an important influence on our full-sample results.³³

Alternative Portfolio Definitions. In Table 3, we check the sensitivity of our results to different firm portfolio definitions. We first divide the target portfolio into two parts, consisting of the six firms identified directly from US, EU and UN smart sanctions documents, and the 44 firms in which targeted entities have a direct ownership stake.³⁴ Column (1) of

³³Appendix Table A2 displays wild bootstrapped p-values based on clustering by industry for each of the specifications in Table 2. Despite the reduction in power due to the small number of industries, the estimated coefficients on the target interaction term remain statistically significant at conventional levels (along with one p-value of 0.1001). For the estimated effects on the full portfolio of non-target firms in columns (1) to (5), p-values vary between 0.15 and 0.21.

³⁴All discussions in the text refer to the full sample of TSE-listed firms as of the beginning of the sample period. In practice, not all firms are present in all regressions, due to firm exit from the TSE and/or thin trading. The number of firms in each regression is noted in the tables, and Table 3 also identifies the number

Table 3 shows that both sets of firms accrue similar average returns on the Geneva event days. Directly targeted firms have daily returns that are 1.502 percentage points higher than non-target firms, while for other firms in the target portfolio, this difference is 1.227 percentage points. A test of equality between the two coefficients is not rejected. We discuss this finding further in Section 5.2.2, with the aim of understanding the relative importance of smart sanctions and more comprehensive sanctions instruments in driving the main results.

We next insert the 172 firms with more tenuous or less certain connections to the IRGC or Setad into the sample as a separate portfolio. As shown in Table 3 column (2), we find that their returns respond to the Geneva deal very similarly to firms in the non-target portfolio. Specifically, the estimated coefficient on the interaction term for this portfolio is small (0.049) and not statistically significant.

As discussed in Section 4.2.2, these firms were excluded from our baseline sample for two reasons: they were two or more ownership layers below the 75 entities identified in US, EU or UN smart sanctions documents, and/or they were identified as possible assets of the IRGC or Setad by other sources. In columns (3) and (4), we integrate these two types of firms into our sample in turn. We first set aside our information on shareholdings from the TSE, and instead define the target portfolio as the set of firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets by any other source. This still includes the six TSE-listed firms mentioned in US, EU and UN documents, but the remainder of our new target portfolio consists of 45 additional firms mentioned in Alfoneh (2010) or Reuters (2013), only 25 of which were in our baseline target group. Our findings are robust to using this alternative definition, with the estimated differential effect of Geneva on target firms rising slightly to 1.370 percentage points (column (3)).

Next, we instead redefine our baseline specification so that firm-level variation is captured using ownership shares rather than dummy variables for portfolio membership. Specifically, we calculate the total share of ownership of entities identified in US, EU or UN smart sanctions documents in each of their 44 direct TSE-listed assets, as well as the 144 indirect assets that were excluded from our baseline sample of firms.³⁵ We also assign ownership shares of one to the six directly targeted firms in our sample, and zero to the 88 non-target firms. We then run a regression with a Geneva dummy and its interaction with this ownership

of target and non-target firms.

³⁵We observe much smaller ownership shares by this measure for most of the indirectly owned firms. While IRGC and Setad shares are below 3% for only nine of the 44 directly owned assets, this is the case for 133 of the other 144 firms. However, it is important to note that our data on the size of IRGC and Setad ownership shares is likely to be very conservative due to our narrow definition of firms owned directly by these two conglomerates (i.e. identification as such by the US, EU or UN).

Table 3: Alternative Portfolio Definitions – Geneva Deal

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Direct targets and assets	Portfolio of other firms	Other sources	Ownership shares	Matched sample	All firms
Geneva	0.648 (0.277)	0.648 (0.276)	0.645 (0.277)	0.757 (0.141)	0.426 (0.324)	0.762 (0.144)
Target * Geneva		1.256 (0.363)	1.370 (0.344)	2.034 (0.522)	2.043 (0.450)	1.192 (0.267)
Direct target * Geneva	1.502 (0.540)					
Target asset * Geneva	1.227 (0.379)					
Other * Geneva		0.049 (0.326)				
Observations	6,586	14,842	6,606	13,477	6,920	15,635
Target firms	49	49	50	N/A	23	52
Non-target firms	79	79	79	N/A	108	246
Total number of firms	128	283	129	257	131	298

This table displays estimated effects of the Geneva deal on returns of various firm portfolios. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. ‘Geneva’ is defined as the two days Saturday November 23 and Sunday November 24, 2013. Column (1) separates the target portfolio into two parts: firms identified directly from smart sanctions documents (‘direct target’) and firms in which targeted entities have a direct ownership stake (‘target asset’). There are six direct target firms and 43 target asset firms in this regression. Column (2) includes firms dropped from the baseline sample, excluding firms involved in the nuclear program, as a separate portfolio (‘other’); 155 of these other firms are included in this regression. Column (3) defines the target portfolio as the set of firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets in smart sanctions documents, Alfoneh (2010) or Reuters (2013). This adds 19 additional target firms to the regression, while dropping 18 firms from the baseline target portfolio. In column (4), the variable ‘target’ is the observed share of a firm that is owned by firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets in smart sanctions documents, rather than a dummy variable for portfolio membership. In column (5), the sample of firms is selected using coarsened exact matching on industry, market capitalization, turnover, assets and employees, among firms for which this data is available. In column (6), the sample of firms is widened to include all firms listed on the TSE as of April 14, 2012, and all firms not satisfying the baseline target definition are classified into the non-target portfolio. This also adds three target firms that had been dropped due to involvement in Iran’s nuclear program. The sample period is Geneva and the previous sixty trading days. All columns include firm fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

variable, along with the usual firm fixed effects. As shown in column (4), we find that firms with no ownership by IRGC and Setad entities have a daily return that is 0.757 percentage points higher on the Geneva event days, and that wholly-owned firms see an additional daily return of 2.034 percentage points.

Finally, in columns (5) and (6) of Table 3, we retain our usual definition of targeted entities, but change how we select our sample of firms. In column (5), rather than selecting a non-target portfolio based on our level of certainty about firms' connections to targeted entities, we instead aim to maximize balance between characteristics of firms in the target portfolio and the other firms in the sample. We first take all 325 firms and apply our usual target definition to define a subset of these as 'treated'. We then retain the 193 firms (including 30 target firms and 163 others) with available Orbis data on firm characteristics as of 2012, and employ the method of coarsened exact matching (Iacus, King and Porro 2012) to construct a sample that is balanced by industry, market capitalization, turnover, assets and employees. Our final sample includes 23 target firms and 111 other firms. Using this matching method, we find an estimated difference due to Geneva of 2.043 percentage points between the average daily returns of target firms and our control group. This estimate is similar to those in columns (6) and (7) of Table 2, which also only included firms with available data on turnover, assets and employees.

In column (6), we instead impose no requirements for sample selection, and simply include all firms listed on the TSE as of the beginning of our sample period. Our target portfolio is defined as usual, but all other firms now serve as the comparison group.³⁶ This again yields a similar set of results to those in our baseline regression in Table 2 column (1).

Magnitude of Effects. These results suggest that both target and non-target firms benefited from sanctions relief, but that the impact on target firms was significantly larger. We now consider whether these effects are economically significant. We first note that the total effect for target group firms of approximately 1.9 percentage points for each day (Table 2 column (1)) is large as compared to the aggregate movements in stock prices usually observed on the TSE. Across our full 2012-2015 sample period, the 95th percentile of average daily returns across all firms in the sample is 1.40%, while the 99th percentile is 2.11%.³⁷

³⁶Note that our usual target definition now classifies 53 firms into the target portfolio, including three firms that had been dropped from the baseline sample due to involvement in Iran's nuclear program.

³⁷Note that the size of our point estimates is realistic when compared to results based on other types of major economy-wide policy shifts, such as changes of government. A useful benchmark here is the study by Snowberg, Wolfers and Zitwewitz (2007). They provide a two to three percentage point estimate of the impact of a Republican presidency on stock prices across historical elections.

Moreover, the gap in returns between the target and non-target portfolios was also unusually large during the two-day Geneva event, as we show in more detail in a placebo analysis below.

Another useful benchmark is a comparison with the average stock market movements associated with oil price changes. We estimate that a \$1 increase in the price of crude oil is associated with a 0.042 percentage point increase in returns on average among the firms in our sample.³⁸ This suggests that a \$45 increase in oil prices would be needed to induce a shift in average returns equivalent to the one-day Geneva effect on target firms of 1.9 percentage points. Such daily movements in oil prices are unknown – the largest one-day change during our sample period is approximately \$8.

We can also use a back-of-the-envelope calculation to put the ‘Geneva effect’ on the IRGC and Setad conglomerates into dollar terms. Multiplying total market capitalization by the sum of the estimates in Table 2 column (1) suggests two-day gains of approximately \$240 million for the six firms directly linked to the IRGC and Setad by the US, EU and UN, and \$225 million for the shares of the IRGC and Setad in the 44 other target portfolio firms.

Finally, the impact of Geneva might also be amplified by its impacts on subsequent firm decisions. Although we do not directly observe these effects, we can apply the Tobin’s q theory of investment to our estimates in order to assess potential consequences for investment behaviour. To do this, we estimate the magnitude of capital adjustment costs using annual panel data from Orbis on realized investment, capital stock and the market-to-book ratio for a subset of the firms in our sample.³⁹ For the median firm among the 37 target firms for which data is available, our analysis suggests that higher returns to capital due to the two-day Geneva event increased investment growth in 2014 by 0.8 to 2.1 percentage points.⁴⁰

³⁸This result is based on the two calendar years immediately prior to our main sample period (2010 and 2011) and is robust across various benchmark prices, as shown in Appendix Table A3. The estimated coefficient of 0.042 is from a specification using the West Texas Intermediate price and including firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects.

³⁹See Appendix Table A4. We first run a regression with the ratio of current investment in fixed assets to total fixed assets as of the previous year on the left-hand side, and the previous year’s market-to-book ratio on the right-hand side, along with firm and year fixed effects. Another specification adds the ratio of current cashflow to lagged fixed assets as a control variable (Abel and Panageas 2020). Due to our small sample of firms, we attempt two alternative winsorization strategies (top and bottom 1% or 5%) and also run regressions including all Iranian firms with available data.

⁴⁰This is in the same range as the forecast effect of US-China tariff policy announcements on 2020 US investment growth in Amiti, Kong and Weinstein (2020). To reach these results, we use a simplified version of the method suggested by that paper. For each firm, we first use the estimated two-day Geneva effect on market capitalization to project the change in the market-to-book ratio. We then multiply this by the level of fixed assets in 2013, as well as estimated capital adjustment costs, and divide by 2013 investment in fixed assets. The range of effects cited in the text is based on the smallest and largest estimates of adjustment

It is important to note that these figures should not be interpreted as capturing the *total* magnitude of the impact of sanctions relief on elite policymakers. In relying on high-frequency stock price movements for identification, we have necessarily excluded the IRGC and Setad conglomerates' substantial (but less readily observable) privately held assets, which could also have been affected by sanctions.⁴¹ But importantly, this exercise does provide evidence that multilateral sanctions against Iran succeeded in inducing some degree of 'income targeting' of the political elite through their publicly listed holdings.

Placebo Analysis. The substantial difference between the returns of target and non-target firms is a key driver of the estimated effect of Geneva on elite assets. The statistical significance of this estimate suggests that such a difference between the two portfolios is an unusual occurrence. However, one common concern in stock market event studies is the fact that daily returns do not tend to be normally distributed. Although we have dropped large outliers, we might nonetheless question whether our p-values underestimate the probability that we would observe such a large difference even if the interaction term coefficient $\theta = 0$.

To address this issue, we estimate a series of regressions, each with a dummy for a different two-day period, an interaction of this two-day dummy with our target variable, and firm fixed effects. The two-day dummies cover our entire sample period, from April 14-15, 2012 to July 14-15, 2015. We then plot the distribution of the estimated coefficient on the interaction term from each of these 388 regressions in Figure 3, highlighting the 'true' Geneva result. It is apparent from this figure that our estimate of the differential effect of the Geneva deal on target firms is in the far right tail of this empirical distribution. In other words, over the time period around Geneva, it was highly unusual for the two-day returns of target and non-target firms, conditional on firm fixed effects, to differ from one another to the extent we observe in Table 2.

Daily Effects - Geneva Sample Period. We next take a closer look at day-by-day differences between the returns of target and non-target firms in the period around the Geneva deal. To do this, we return to the sample period from our baseline regression, but add the eight trading days after the end of our two-day Geneva event, so that we may also observe information on the full two weeks after the Geneva shock. We then estimate a series of regressions as described in the previous paragraph, this time instead using one-day dummies for each day in the six TSE trading weeks from Saturday, October 26 to Wednesday, Decem-

costs in Appendix Table A4.

⁴¹Reuters (2013a) estimates that Setad's real estate holdings alone were worth \$52 billion as of 2008.

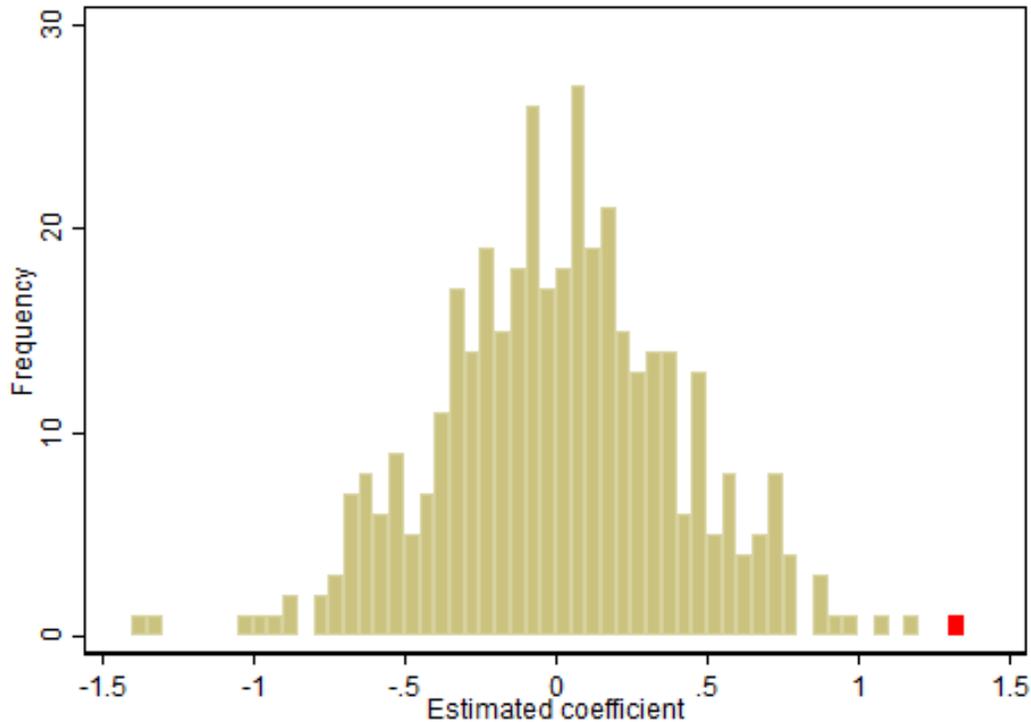


Figure 3: Distribution of Estimates Across Two-Day Periods (Geneva Deal Highlighted)

In this figure, we use data for the period from April 14-15, 2012 until July 14-15, 2015 to estimate a series of models, each with a dummy for a different two-day interval, the interaction of this with our target portfolio dummy, and firm fixed effects. Implementation of this procedure for the full set of consecutive two-day intervals corresponds to 388 regressions, and the histogram reports the distribution of estimated coefficients on the interaction term. The two-day Geneva event (November 23-24, 2013) is highlighted (the largest estimated coefficient).

ber 4, 2013. We plot the estimated coefficients on the target * one-day dummy interactions, along with their 95% confidence intervals, in Figure 4.

Throughout the two-week period starting November 23 (to the right of the vertical line in Figure 4), the difference-in-difference coefficient for each day is positive, though not always statistically significant. This implies that the differential effect of Geneva on target firms was not eliminated by movement in the other direction soon after the deal was reached. At the same time, there is a noticeable dip in the coefficients in the weeks preceding the deal, including three days with statistically significant negative estimates. This might have been due to a temporary surge of pessimism about the potential future incidence of sanctions

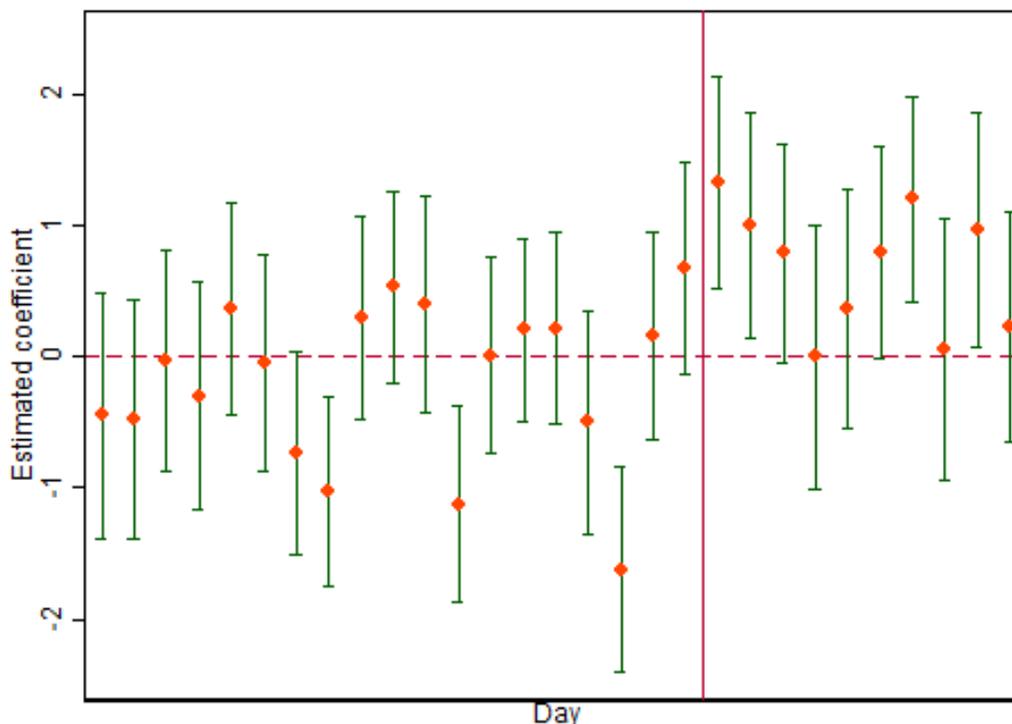


Figure 4: Daily Estimated Target-Day Interaction Coefficients Around Geneva Deal

In this figure, we use data for the 60-day estimation window used in Table 2 and the subsequent two weeks to estimate a series of models, each with a dummy for a different day, the interaction of this day dummy with our target portfolio dummy, and firm fixed effects. The figure reports the estimated coefficient on the interaction term and its 95% confidence interval for each trading day in the last four weeks of the 60-day estimation window and the following two weeks. The vertical line is drawn immediately to the left of the first day of the Geneva event (November 23, 2013). Standard errors are clustered by firm.

during the pre-deal negotiations.⁴²

However, it is also possible that our positive difference-in-difference estimate of the impact of Geneva is instead driven by mean reversion for target firms after an unrelated negative shock. This uncertainty about interpretation is a limitation of our analysis of a single event. Our next empirical strategy is therefore to use a continuous measure of information shocks,

⁴²There is also the possibility of early movement in returns due to insider knowledge of the negotiations. We consider this by running similar daily regressions focused on the firms that are most closely connected to elite policymakers. When we separately include an interaction term for the six firms directly linked to the IRGC and Setad (as in Table 3 column (1)), we observe a positive and significant differential return (coefficient 2.131, standard error 0.706) for these firms on the last trading day before the event. We also observe a positive and significant coefficient (2.209, s.e. 0.568) on this day if we define the target variable in terms of ownership shares, as in Table 3 column (4). This might lead us to underestimate the total returns to listed IRGC and Setad assets from progress in Geneva.

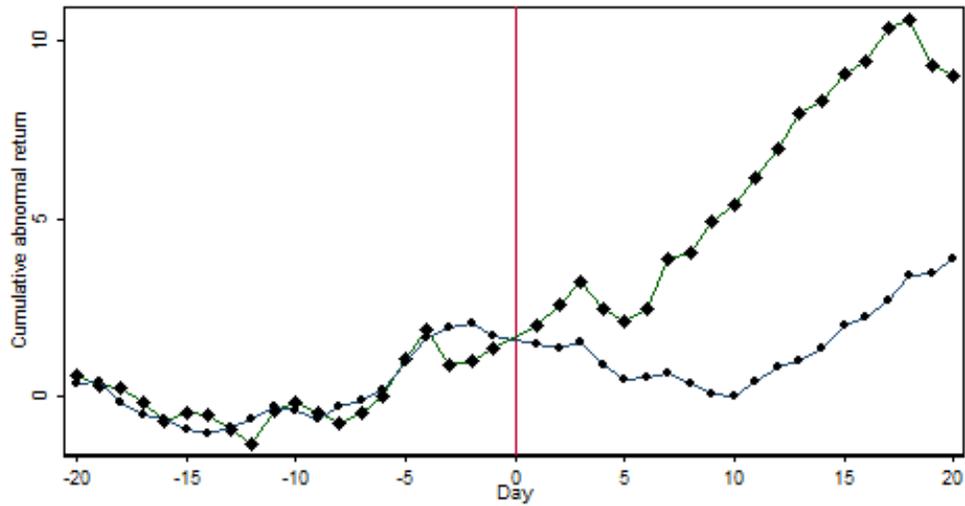
defined over a much longer time period, as outlined in the next section.

Cumulative Abnormal Returns. As a final exercise, we conduct our event study using a standard approach from the finance literature, by plotting cumulative abnormal returns (CARs) around the event date. We calculate abnormal returns using a standard four-factor model based on Fama and French (1993) and Carhart (1997). Note that we have not used this method as our baseline approach because it purges co-movement between firms' raw returns and market-wide variation, while we use the market-level response to the Geneva event to help measure sanctions' bluntness. However, it is an important robustness check of our finding of differential returns between the target portfolio and other listed firms.

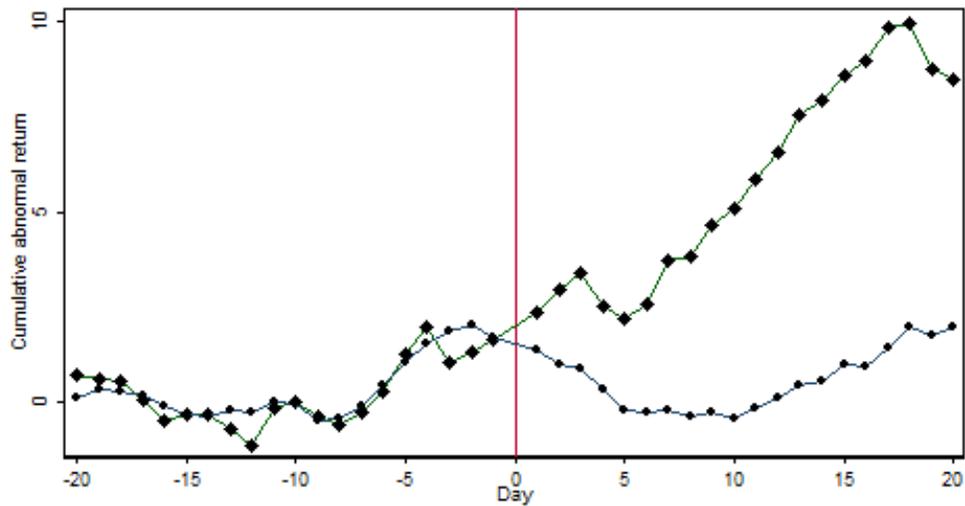
We use the method presented in MacKinlay (1997) to create our CAR figures. We define a forty-day event window, encompassing the twenty trading days preceding the event, as well as twenty days from the first event day onwards. For each firm, we run a regression of raw returns on an intercept and the four factors, using the sixty trading days before the event window as our sample period.⁴³ We then calculate predicted returns for each firm-day during the event window using the estimated coefficients from these regressions. Cumulative abnormal returns for a firm portfolio are defined as the difference between actual and predicted returns, averaged across firms and then cumulated from the beginning of the event window.

Panel A of Figure 5 displays cumulative abnormal returns for our usual target and non-target portfolios, while Panel B instead retains all listed firms in the sample, as in the final column of Table 3. The vertical line in the center of each figure separates the pre-event period (ending on day -1) from the days during and after the event (starting on day 1). In both panels, it is apparent that the CARs accruing to the target portfolio co-move quite closely with those of other firms before the event. During this period, any gaps that appear between the two series are soon closed by movement in the opposite direction. However, following the breakthrough in negotiations in Geneva, the divergence in CARs – favouring target firms – is immediate and persists for the remainder of the event window.

⁴³We calculate factors – market excess return, small minus big (SMB), high minus low (HML) and daily momentum – according to the variable descriptions provided on Kenneth French's web site. Excess return is the value-weighted market return (i.e. returns of all TSE firms weighted by market capitalization) relative to the one-month Treasury bill rate (sourced from the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis FRED dataset). The value-weighted portfolios used to construct the SMB and HML factors include the 180 of 325 firms for which 2012 book-to-market equity data is available in Orbis. The prior returns used to construct the daily momentum factor are calculated by compounding each firm's daily returns from one year before to one month before each date, excluding the top and bottom 1% of daily returns in the full sample.



Panel A - Target and non-target portfolios



Panel B - Target portfolio and all other firms

Figure 5: Cumulative Abnormal Returns Around Geneva Deal

In this figure, we plot cumulative abnormal returns (CARs) over forty days, starting twenty days before the Geneva event. The vertical line is drawn immediately to the left of the first day of the Geneva event (November 23, 2013). Each line represents the CAR for a portfolio of firms, calculated from the difference between actual and predicted returns, averaged across firms. Predicted returns are based on a four-factor model, estimated using the sixty trading days before the event window. In Panel A, we use the baseline target and non-target portfolio definitions. In Panel B, we include all firms listed on the TSE as of the beginning of our sample period. Large diamonds represent target firms and small circles represent other firms.

5.2 News Coverage Analysis

5.2.1 Basic News Coverage Model

For our main empirical exercise, we extend our sample period to the full range of dates discussed in Section 4.1: April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015.⁴⁴ Our period of study begins with the April 2012 Istanbul meeting between Iran and the P5+1 for two main reasons. First, this was the beginning of a diplomatic process with no long-term breakdowns, unlike the several-month gap in talks that preceded Istanbul. Because relevant events occurred throughout the sample, we have sufficient power to identify our parameters of interest using comparisons within shorter subperiods (quarters). Second, significant changes were made to the multilateral sanctions regime over the several months before April 2012, but the majority of sanctions were in place by the time of the Istanbul meeting. This facilitates an identification strategy based on progress towards full sanctions relief instead of the imposition or removal of particular instruments, allowing us to relate our estimated effects to the sanctions regime as a whole rather than any single sanctions instrument. We end our sample period on July 15, 2015, the day after the final agreement was reached in Vienna.

To capture progress in diplomatic negotiations over the course of this period, we alternately use the daily event measures sourced from the Factiva and GDELT datasets. In both cases, our baseline measure of progress is a standardized variable based on the number of news articles about relevant events, as described in Section 4.3. We amend the model of equation (1) by replacing our Geneva dummy with this continuous news coverage variable as follows:

$$R_{ijt} = \alpha_i + \phi Coverage_t + \theta Target_i * Coverage_t + u_{ijt} \quad (2)$$

where again, i represents firms, j indexes industries and t indexes days, and the return and target variables are as above.

Column (1) of Table 4 Panels A and B displays the results of estimating this specification using the Factiva and GDELT measures, respectively. The Factiva estimates imply that an increase in our news coverage measure by one standard deviation is associated with a return that was 0.055 percentage points above the mean return for non-target firms, and an additional 0.065 percentage points above the mean for target firms. Both of these estimates are statistically significant at the 1% level. Our results using the GDELT measure are similar in magnitude and statistical significance: in this case, when news coverage is higher

⁴⁴As discussed in Section 4.3, we exclude February to August 2013 for the GDELT news coverage measure because of a technical issue with GDELT article collection during this period.

Table 4: Baseline Results – News Coverage

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Continuous measure		Top 10%	2 SD	Spaced	Negotiations	Positive
	Firm	Firm-qtr-day-	dummy	dummy	2 SD	only	negotiations
	FEs	of-week			dummy	dummy	dummy
	FEs	FEs					
Panel A - Factiva measure							
Coverage	0.055 (0.010)	0.077 (0.013)	0.145 (0.041)	0.405 (0.066)	0.439 (0.069)	0.483 (0.092)	0.679 (0.122)
Target * coverage	0.065 (0.014)	0.092 (0.019)	0.196 (0.062)	0.418 (0.103)	0.363 (0.104)	0.654 (0.129)	0.856 (0.180)
Observations	75,021	74,775	74,775	74,775	74,094	73,335	72,853
Number of firms	138	136	136	136	136	136	136
Panel B - GDELT measure							
Coverage	0.069 (0.011)	0.065 (0.013)	0.072 (0.033)	0.256 (0.048)	0.235 (0.060)	0.340 (0.072)	0.679 (0.120)
Target * coverage	0.064 (0.016)	0.066 (0.017)	0.153 (0.050)	0.282 (0.081)	0.303 (0.099)	0.352 (0.115)	0.594 (0.178)
Observations	62,128	61,843	61,843	61,843	60,763	60,266	59,597
Number of firms	137	136	136	136	136	136	136

This table displays estimated effects on returns of target and non-target firms from specifications that include a daily measure of news coverage related to diplomatic progress between Iran and the P5+1 countries. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. In all columns, the variable ‘coverage’ is based on the number of articles on a relevant event identified in the Factiva (Panel A) or GDELT (Panel B) data. In columns (1) and (2), this is a standardized count. In column (3), this is a dummy for the top 10% of observed values. In column (4), this is a dummy for values that are at least two standard deviations greater than the mean. Column (5) excludes event days from column (4) that are within one week of larger peaks in news coverage, as explained in Section 5.2.1. Column (6) drops event days from column (5) except for when these are episodes of direct negotiations between Iran and P5+1 countries. Column (7) excludes event days from column (6) except for episodes where progress in negotiations is apparent from media articles. Column (1) includes firm fixed effects, and columns (2) through (7) include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects. Here, ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. The sample period is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015 (excluding February to August 2013 in Panel B). Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

by one standard deviation, we see average abnormal returns of 0.069 percentage points in the non-target portfolio and 0.064 percentage points in addition to this for the target portfolio.⁴⁵

In column (2), we refine our specification to deal with two potential issues. First, it is possible that our news coverage measure tends to rise over the course of our three-year sample period for reasons other than progress in negotiations (such as better measurement), which could bias our estimates upward if average stock returns also increase. Second, both news coverage measures and stock returns may differ systematically between different days of the week. We thus instead use fixed effects at the firm-quarter-day-of-week level, so that we are, for example, making comparisons between the returns of each firm on Saturdays in the fourth quarter of 2012 with higher and lower values of our coverage variable.⁴⁶ This is our preferred specification, and we continue to use firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects in all subsequent regressions. Results using the GDELT measure are similar to those in column (1), and for the Factiva measure, our coefficient estimates rise to 0.077 for the coverage variable and 0.092 for its interaction with the target portfolio dummy.

Coverage-Based Events. The continuous news coverage variables used above are our favoured measures because they are able to capture variation in the relative importance of episodes of diplomatic progress. Indeed, the most important sample days by these measures correspond to the achievement of agreements between Iran and the P5+1 negotiators (see Appendix Table A1). However, an alternative possibility is to use the Factiva or GDELT data to define a set of event days, each of which is treated with equal importance in the estimates, i.e. a dummy variable measure. In columns (3) to (7) of Table 4, we present the results of taking such an approach, using a set of increasingly strict definitions of relevant event days.

We begin with a fairly coarse measure in which we assign a value of one to the top 10% of days and zero otherwise. This corresponds (for both Factiva and GDELT) approximately to a dummy for days with a number of relevant news articles at least one standard deviation above the mean. The estimates reported in column (3) show that returns of non-target firms are 0.072 or 0.145 percentage points higher on these event days, and those of target firms are an additional 0.153 or 0.196 percentage points larger, using GDELT and Factiva respectively; all of these estimated coefficients are statistically significant.

⁴⁵The statistical significance of the results in Table 4 is robust to clustering by industry; see Appendix Table A5.

⁴⁶'Quarter' henceforth refers to a unique quarter and year. Our sample ends on July 15, 2015 and thus includes only ten trading days from the third quarter of 2015. In our regressions, we include these ten days in the second quarter of 2015.

We next narrow our definition to encompass only days at least two standard deviations above the mean. This reduces the number of event days in our sample period to 27 when we use the Factiva data and 31 for GDELT. As shown in column (4) of Table 4, our estimates increase substantially in size, to 0.256 (GDELT) or 0.405 (Factiva) percentage points for non-target firms, with a differential effect of 0.282 (GDELT) or 0.418 (Factiva) percentage points for the target portfolio.

A potential issue with this approach is that news coverage may rise in intensity for multiple days around a single event. Progress in diplomatic negotiations may be preceded by speculation about potential meeting outcomes, and followed by news analysis. We therefore sharpen our two standard deviation measure by pruning our sample in order to ‘space’ or ‘isolate’ individual event days.

To do so, we begin from the event day with the largest number of news articles, and drop other event days within one week of this date from the sample. We then proceed to the day with the next highest number of articles (if this has survived the previous step), and repeat the procedure, continuing until we have reached the end of the list of 27 (for Factiva) or 31 (for GDELT) days identified above. In terms of the time-series variation visible in Figure 1, this retains the highest peaks within ‘clusters’ of news coverage as event days, while excluding smaller peaks immediately to the left or right of each of these. As shown in column (5), the results remain similar after the sample is narrowed in this way, even though we have now removed an additional seven event days from our Factiva measure and eleven from GDELT, so that only twenty event days remain in each case.

All of the days identified by this analysis can be linked to sanctions-related events, confirming that the Factiva and GDELT data is very successful in capturing relevant events during our main sample period; a timeline may be found in Appendix Table A6.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, we again reduce the number of event days by keeping only episodes that can be unambiguously characterized as direct discussions between Iran and P5+1 countries, so as to focus as closely as possible on the returns to diplomatic progress. This leads to the exclusion from the sample of other types of relevant events, such as the release of an IAEA report or a press conference by a key player. We are now left with twelve event days for the Factiva measure and fifteen days for GDELT.⁴⁸ Column (6) of Table 4 shows that all of our point estimates increase in size, as compared to column (5), when we impose this restriction.

⁴⁷This includes thirty event days in total, because of partial overlap between the two sets of twenty days identified using our two data sources. A regression pooling all thirty events produces similar results to those in Table 4 column (5).

⁴⁸See Appendix Table A7 for a timeline of these diplomatic negotiations.

As discussed in Section 3.1, our sample period began with much doubt about whether a deal could ever be reached, and ended with a deal actually agreed. However, some of the individual rounds of negotiations that we have identified as events may not have resulted in substantial forward progress. We therefore estimate a final specification in which we only use events involving a deal being reached, or where diplomatic negotiations were clearly characterized by media reports as leading to progress towards a deal.⁴⁹ This further narrows our set of events to seven for Factiva and eight for GDELT; other event days from the previous exercise are dropped from the sample. As expected, the estimated coefficients increase when we focus only on these clear cases of progress, as can be seen in column (7).⁵⁰

Appendix Figures A3 and A4 reproduce the Geneva day-by-day plot (Figure 4) for the other seven events (excluding Geneva) in Table 4 column (7). The first figure pools all of these events, displaying the daily differences between target and non-target portfolio returns for the days before and after each episode, averaged across the seven event windows. Although there is visible movement in differential returns in advance of these events, there is nonetheless a clear jump on the event day identified by our dummy variable.

The same procedure is applied to each event separately in Appendix Figure A4, revealing the idiosyncratic variation underlying these movements in returns. For example, September 2013 saw a multi-day period of openly thawing US-Iran relations, including UN General Assembly speeches by the Iranian and US presidents, culminating in a phone call between the two leaders (Panel B). The various news coverage measures in Table 4 each capture different slices of this daily variation: our continuous news coverage measure in column (2) incorporates all of these days, while the dummy variable in column (7) distills the market reaction to the historic phone call.

Magnitude of Effects. We now assess the economic significance of the events captured by our news coverage measures. The results for our continuous measure in Table 4 column (2) imply that relative to the median day during our sample period, news coverage at the maximum observed level (i.e. its level on the day of most intensive coverage) is estimated to

⁴⁹We based this assessment on reports from media organizations based in each of the negotiating countries: Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France Presse, Deutsche Welle, ITAR-TASS, Xinhua, Fars News Agency and Mehr News Agency. See Appendix Table A7 for a timeline of headlines from Reuters articles about each set of negotiations.

⁵⁰In Appendix Tables A8 and A9, we break down the estimates in Table 4 column (5), by running regressions with separate dummy variables for each ‘spaced’ event identified by Factiva and GDELT respectively. The tables indicate that the rise in our point estimates between columns (5) and (7) is due to some smaller positive coefficients and some negative coefficients associated with the dropped events. More generally, although our specifications including a wider set of events tend to capture more episodes of progress towards a deal, they are also likely to capture some setbacks.

have had a large impact on returns.⁵¹ The estimated total effect on target firms of 1.44 to 2.04 percentage points (using the GDELT and Factiva measures respectively) is of a similar magnitude to the result of our Geneva event study above. This is equal to the estimated impact of an oil price rise in a range from \$35-\$49.

When we consider the several episodes of positive diplomatic negotiations captured in our specifications in column (7), we find that the average impact on target firms across the seven event days studied in Panel A is 1.53 percentage points, and for the eight days in Panel B, this is 1.27 percentage points.⁵² If we multiply these estimates by the market capitalization of IRGC and Setad assets and cumulate across days, we find total gains from these seven or eight events of approximately \$640-\$675 million for the firms directly linked to the IRGC or Setad and \$600-\$640 million for their shares in other target portfolio firms. These figures are approximately five times as large as the daily effects we calculated for the Geneva event.⁵³ This suggests that Geneva was not a one-off phenomenon: IRGC and Setad assets were repeatedly subject to relevant and economically significant shocks during the sample period, as captured by our news coverage measures.

Of course, because we use daily variation in coverage throughout our sample period, we can also zoom out further to evaluate the effects of a wider range of days. We next use the results of Table 3 column (4), so as to include all days when the intensity of news coverage is at least two standard deviations above the mean. This augments the numbers in the previous paragraph by around 50% to 100%, suggesting total gains from news on these days of \$1.05-\$1.4 billion for directly linked firms and \$1.0-\$1.3 billion for IRGC and Setad shares in other target firms, depending on whether we use the Factiva or GDELT measure.

5.2.2 Robustness and Heterogeneity

We next provide a number of robustness checks of our results using the Factiva and GDELT news coverage measures. We begin with an exercise intended to further establish that IRGC and Setad assets were affected by relevant events other than the Geneva deal. Specifically, we rerun our regression using the continuous news coverage measure, from Table 4 column (2), for a period that excludes the entire sample frame used in Section 5.1 (the two Geneva

⁵¹As shown in Appendix Table A1, our two news coverage measures are maximized on two different days, corresponding to the achievement of the framework agreement in April 2015 (Factiva) or the final agreement in July 2015 (GDELT).

⁵²As noted during our discussion of the effect of the Geneva deal, the 95th percentile of average daily returns across sample firms during the period of study is 1.40%.

⁵³Recall that the figures of \$240 million and \$225 million cited in the previous subsection represented a two-day accumulation.

event days and the sixty previous trading days). The results, displayed in column (1) of Appendix Table A10, are highly reassuring: our estimated coefficients are unsurprisingly somewhat smaller in magnitude, but they remain positive and statistically significant.⁵⁴

Second, as noted above, one key advantage of beginning our sample frame in April 2012 is that the full sanctions regime was essentially in place in its final form by this time, after significant changes over the two preceding years. However, a formal freeze on nuclear-related sanctions by the UN, EU and US was not in place until November 2013, when it was agreed as part of the Geneva deal. The ‘cleanest’ test of the effects of diplomatic progress towards comprehensive sanctions relief might therefore exclusively use post-Geneva variation in sanctions-related news.⁵⁵ In Appendix Table A10 column (2), we find that the relationship between each news measure and returns is again statistically significant for non-target firms and significantly larger for target firms in the period between Geneva and the negotiation of a final agreement.⁵⁶

We also run a further set of regressions based on our earlier robustness checks of the Geneva event study results. We first reproduce the specifications of columns (4) to (7) of Table 2, controlling for daily variation in returns by industry and according to firm characteristics (market capitalization, turnover, assets and employees). We then consider various alternative portfolio definitions, as in Table 3. These exercises may be found in Appendix Tables A10 and A11, using the continuous news coverage measure from Table 4 column (2). We also run the same robustness checks using the positive negotiations dummy from Table 4 column (7): see Appendix Tables A12 and A13. We find both sets of results to be robust to all of these alternative specifications.

Potential Role of Smart Sanctions. We now briefly explore the role of ‘smart sanctions’ instruments, as opposed to more comprehensive instruments such as restrictions on Iran’s entire financial sector, in driving the targeting effects we observe.⁵⁷ Although most sanctions

⁵⁴The results in column (7) of Table 4 are also not driven by any particular event, as they are robust to dropping any one event day at a time.

⁵⁵Note that the United States continued to impose economic penalties on non-Iranian companies violating the existing sanctions regime, for example in December 2013 (see Appendix Table A6).

⁵⁶Recall that to construct the target and non-target portfolios, we use shareholder data from April 14, 2012, the first day of our sample period. To explore the implications of potential changes in ownership over time, we re-estimate the regression in Appendix Table A10 column (2) using target and non-target portfolios that are instead constructed via TSE shareholder data from November 20, 2013 (the final trading day before the Geneva deal). Results using the Factiva measure remain of similar magnitude and statistical significance, but in the case of the GDELT measure, the estimated coefficient on the interaction term is smaller by half and has a p-value of 0.19.

⁵⁷Note that even in the absence of smart sanctions, more comprehensive instruments could generate the results we observe if their impacts on IRGC and Setad assets were stronger than their effects on other firms.

instruments were already in place before the beginning of our main sample period, the imposition of smart sanctions on Setad assets by the US Treasury in June 2013 (see Section 3.2.2) may have had an important effect. In Appendix Table A14, we look at sensitivity to sanctions news measures separately by conglomerate, before and after mid-2013. While returns of IRGC assets are more responsive to sanctions-related news than returns of non-target firms throughout the sample period, analogous effects for Setad-owned firms are apparent only after smart sanctions were imposed. This is suggestive evidence of the efficacy of these particular sanctions instruments.⁵⁸

We next compare the target firms that were directly subject to smart sanctions with the other IRGC and Setad assets in the target portfolio. As already reported in column (1) of Table 3 and Appendix Tables A11 and A13, the estimated impact of progress towards a diplomatic agreement is generally very similar for each of these subgroups.⁵⁹ The only exception is the finding in Appendix Table A13 Panel B, where the effect of the episodes of diplomatic progress identified by GDELT is estimated to be significantly larger for directly targeted firms. But even in this specification, IRGC and Setad assets that are not subject to smart sanctions still see significantly larger returns than non-target firms.

Rather than providing evidence against smart sanctions' effectiveness, this finding might instead suggest that their impacts spill over to other related firms. The study of sanctions on Russia by Ahn and Ludema (2020) notes the phenomenon of 'de-risking', in which potential business partners shy away from transactions with even an indirect connection to a firm subject to smart sanctions. If we measure the strength of this connection in terms of the ownership share of parents subject to IRGC or Setad-related smart sanctions, our earlier results in column (4) of Table 3 and Appendix Tables A11 and A13 suggest that firms with stronger connections to these parents are significantly more sensitive to sanctions news.⁶⁰ Overall, these exercises suggest that smart sanctions might have been an important driver of our main results, but the evidence is not conclusive.

Bluntness of Sanctions. A related question is the reason behind the responsiveness of

⁵⁸An event study using the date of announcement of the Setad sanctions does not turn up significant related short-run movements in returns. This might be because the sanctions were anticipated by investors, but unfortunately, we are not aware of whether information about these sanctions became available before they were officially announced.

⁵⁹For the continuous news coverage measures, this conclusion is based on the full sample period, but also holds when we consider only the period after the US imposed smart sanctions on Setad.

⁶⁰These specifications included directly targeted and non-target firms, but the results also hold when we limit the sample to firms with indirect ownership by parents subject to IRGC or Setad-related smart sanctions.

other firms to sanctions-related news. Our results suggest that despite having a larger impact on assets of the IRGC and Setad, the sanctions are nonetheless ‘blunt’, as they also affect TSE-listed firms outside the target portfolio. That is, in terms of our conceptual framework, we have found evidence that $\beta < 1$.

We now consider a possible mechanism behind the bluntness of sanctions in the context of the firms we study. As discussed in Section 2.2, this might be a direct consequence of elements of the sanctions themselves, or occur indirectly due to spillovers from the parts of the Iranian economy that were subject to sanctions. Here, we test for the direct incidence of sanctions on firms outside the target portfolio, to check if at least some of the ‘blunt instruments’ problem is a direct effect of the instruments used in the Iran sanctions regime.

To do so, we take advantage of the fact that many of the comprehensive instruments used in the sanctions regime were sector-specific, such as US sanctions on Iran’s automotive industry. In particular, we check whether non-target firms in Iranian industries subject to sanctions are more responsive to progress towards a diplomatic agreement. As discussed in Section 4.4, we identify these industries through inspection of the final deal between Iran and the P5+1 countries (JCPOA 2015), which provides a full list of the sanctions to be removed.⁶¹

In Appendix Table A15, we reproduce each of our main specifications – the Geneva event study regression from Table 2 column (1), and our news coverage regressions from Table 4 columns (2) and (7) – but replace the target portfolio dummy in the interaction term with a dummy for industries subject to sanctions. Our sample consists only of the firms in the non-target portfolio. Because the variable identifying affected firms is now determined at the industry level, we report wild bootstrapped p-values based on clustering by industry.

Our estimates of the coefficient on the interaction term are consistently positive and large, suggesting that firms in sanctioned industries are substantially more responsive to sanctions-related news. Moreover, despite limited statistical power due to the coarseness of our industrial classification, these results are statistically significant in two of our five regressions (columns (4) and (5)), and the relevant p-values fall between 0.1 and 0.2 in the other three specifications. So although our previous results indicate that target firms experience larger effects than non-target firms – even within the same industry – we also observe evidence of direct impacts of sanctions on non-target firms in sanctioned industries.⁶²

⁶¹According to the industrial classification used in our paper, the sanctioned Iranian industries are mining (which includes oil extraction), food products, wood/paper/textiles, refined petroleum, chemicals (which includes petrochemicals), motor vehicles, transportation/telecom and finance. Of the 88 firms in our non-target portfolio, 38 belong to these industries.

⁶²Notably, the gap between the estimated effects for firms in targeted and non-targeted industries is largest

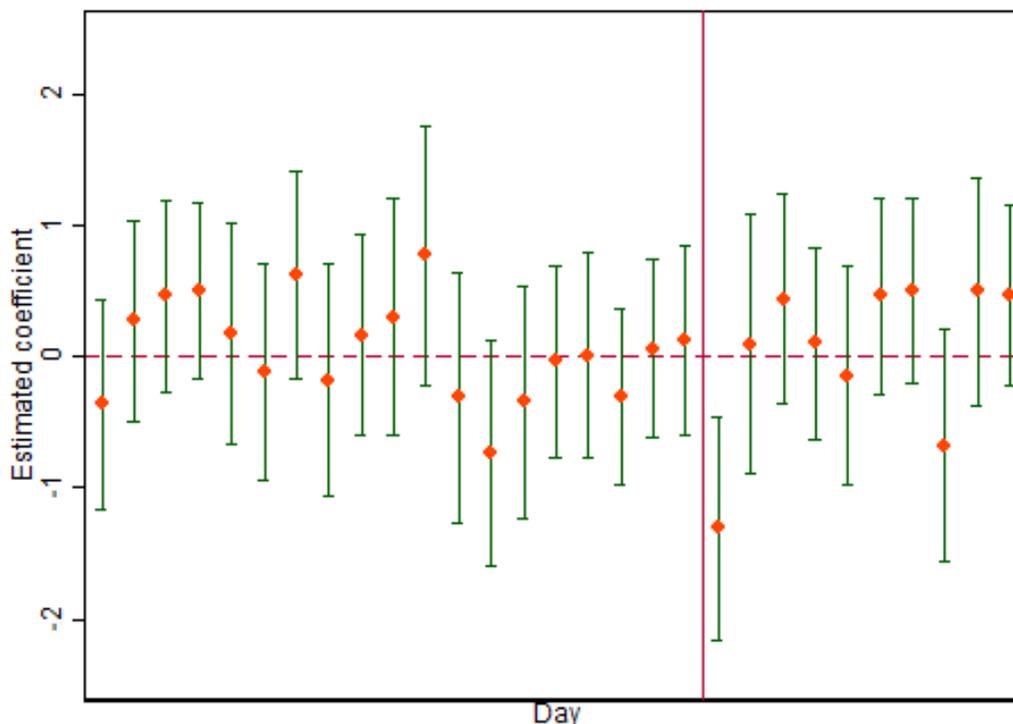


Figure 6: Daily Estimated Target-Day Interaction Coefficients Around 2016 US Election

In this figure, we use data for a period including the 60-day estimation window used in Table 5 column (1) and the subsequent two weeks to estimate a series of models, each with a dummy for a different day, the interaction of this day dummy with our target portfolio dummy, and firm fixed effects. The figure reports the estimated coefficient on the interaction term and its 95% confidence interval for each trading day in the last four weeks of the 60-day estimation window and the following two weeks. The vertical line is drawn immediately to the left of the US election event (November 9, 2016). Standard errors are clustered by firm.

5.3 2016 US Election and Subsequent Events

We next consider a relevant and unexpected event outside our main sample period: the 2016 US election. When the TSE opened on November 9, 2016, it was apparent that Donald Trump had very likely been elected US president, a surprising shift from the probabilities prevailing at the time of the market's closure on the previous day.⁶³ Because Trump had

when we focus on the Geneva deal (column (1)). Given our lack of statistical power throughout Appendix Table A15, this finding should be treated cautiously. But it is consistent with the observation that the Geneva deal may have been especially important for firms in sanctioned industries, because it included a clause suspending some industry-specific sanctions (as discussed in Section 5.1).

⁶³See Silver (2016) for a discussion of expectations and predictions ahead of the 2016 US election. Silver's FiveThirtyEight model had the highest (29%) probability of Trump winning amongst a range of polling-based predictions, typically in the 1% to 15% band. In addition, Silver notes that betting markets put Trump's

signaled his opposition to the Iran deal during the 2016 election campaign, while Hillary Clinton was a supporter of the agreement, this event provides us with an opportunity to study a sudden, unanticipated rise in the probability of sanctions being reimposed by at least one of the deal's signatories.

As shown in column (1) of Table 5, the TSE's response to this shock is a mirror image of the estimated impact of the Geneva deal in column (1) of Table 2 (from which we reproduce the same specification, including a sixty-day pre-period and firm fixed effects). Average returns for non-target firms are 1.667 percentage points below their mean, while the abnormal return for target firms is even more negative: an additional 1.296 percentage points below average.⁶⁴ Figure 6 presents daily event study evidence similar to that in Figure 4, with the day of the election standing out as displaying significant negative effects for target group firms relative to the non-target portfolio. This response to the US election surprise is consistent with our earlier conclusions regarding the targeting of nuclear-related sanctions across listed firms in Iran.⁶⁵

Changes in Probability of Sanctions Relief. Because of the availability of time-varying estimates of the probability of Trump's election, we can use this event to generate estimates of changes in the probability of sanctions relief due to other events we have studied, and the Geneva deal in particular. While this exercise requires some strong assumptions, it allows us to assess whether the implied movements in probability are broadly reasonable, and to make further conjectures about the economic magnitude of our estimates.

According to betting markets, the probability of a Trump victory rose by approximately 80 percentage points between the TSE's closing times on November 8 and 9 (see footnote 62). We make the simple assumptions that Trump's defeat of Clinton increased the probability of unilateral restoration of sanctions by 50 percentage points, that US sanctions constitute 50% of the economic costs of multilateral sanctions, and that sanctions imposition and relief can be treated as symmetric. Then we can reach an estimate of the impact of full multilateral sanctions relief on returns by scaling the election estimate by a factor of five, to approximately 15 percentage points for the target portfolio.⁶⁶

odds at 18% on the eve of the election.

⁶⁴Appendix Table A16 shows that the statistical significance of the results in Table 5 is robust to clustering by industry. Appendix Tables A17 and A18 present robustness checks of the result in Table 5 column (1), based on the specifications in Table 2 columns (3) to (7) and Table 3.

⁶⁵Of course, the election of Trump rather than Clinton represents a choice between a whole suite of likely policies, and we cannot separate the effect of a possible shift in US sanctions policy from impacts of other potential changes – though we consider one key factor, conflict risk, in Section 6.

⁶⁶This is the sum of the two estimates in Table 5 column (1), divided by the change in probability of

Table 5: Post-Deal Events – Potential Restoration of US Sanctions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	US election Nov 2016	Factiva measure post-election	GDELT measure post-election	
Election	-1.667 (0.305)			
Target * election	-1.296 (0.434)			
Coverage		0.040 (0.017)	0.051 (0.016)	
Target * coverage		-0.031 (0.021)	-0.036 (0.023)	
US coverage				0.015 (0.016)
Target * US coverage				-0.007 (0.023)
P4+1 coverage				0.044 (0.019)
Target * P4+1 coverage				-0.035 (0.027)
Observations	6,346	36,484	36,484	36,484
Number of firms	120	123	123	123

This table displays estimated effects of the 2016 US election and subsequent sanctions-related events on returns of target and non-target firms. ‘Election’ is defined as the event day Wednesday November 9, 2016. ‘Coverage’ is a standardized count of the number of articles on a relevant event identified in the Factiva (column (2)) or GDELT (columns (3) and (4)) data. ‘US coverage’ is a standardized count of the number of articles on a relevant event in the GDELT data in which the US is the country other than Iran identified by the GDELT dataset, while ‘P4+1 coverage’ is an analogous measure for the other members of the P5+1 group. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. In column (1), the sample period is the election event day and the previous sixty trading days. In columns (2), (3) and (4), the sample period is from November 12, 2016 to May 9, 2018. Column (1) includes firm fixed effects and columns (2), (3) and (4) include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

This is four times the size of the two-day Geneva effect on target firms (3.8 percentage points), calculated from Table 2 column (1). The implication is that the successful conclusion of the Geneva deal raised the probability of multilateral sanctions relief by around 25 percentage points, a realistic possibility. If our estimates of rises in the value of IRGC and Setad assets are scaled accordingly, we arrive at an estimated return from full sanctions relief of approximately \$1.8 billion.

Post-Election Events. We also attempt to investigate the responses of target and non-target firms to later sanctions-related events, using our Factiva and GDELT news coverage measures. We study a sample period starting on the first trading day after the election event (November 12, 2016) and ending with the US withdrawal from the Iran deal (May 9, 2018). In columns (2) and (3) of Table 5, we see that the estimated coefficient for non-target firms is positive; as shown in column (4), this is driven by news involving the non-US signatories to the sanctions agreement, who maintained support for the deal despite US opposition.⁶⁷ However, there is no longer a differential effect on target firms: the response of their stocks to these events is not statistically different from that of the non-target portfolio.

In contrast to the previous result, this suggests that senders' sanctions policy changes drifted 'off target' at some point after the election. However, the post-2015 variation in our news coverage measures does not isolate shocks related to the multilateral nuclear deal as cleanly as before. As seen in Appendix Table A20, which lists the top fifteen event days for each measure during this period, we now also capture events such as Iranian missile tests and a confrontation at sea between the US and Iran. We therefore cannot interpret the findings in Table 5 columns (2) to (4) as relating to the expected incidence of sanctions as confidently as in Section 5.2.⁶⁸

restoration of US sanctions (0.8×0.5), divided by the share of US sanctions in total economic costs (0.5).

⁶⁷To define separate regressors for news involving the US and other countries in the P5+1 group, we use the fact that in the GDELT data, each event is identified with only one country other than Iran.

⁶⁸In Appendix Table A19, we instead study a set of events based on the requirement for the US president to renew a waiver on most US sanctions every 120 days. This waiver, which was first signed by Barack Obama for the implementation of the 2015 Iran deal, was renewed by Donald Trump in May and September 2017 and January 2018, but not in May 2018, when Trump instead withdrew from the deal. Unfortunately, news reports suggest that each of these decisions was expected in advance. Nonetheless, we show the results of event studies based on Trump's three renewals (columns (1) to (4)) and the US withdrawal (column (5)). We observe impacts of both sets of events on non-target firms – positive when the waiver was renewed and negative when it was not – but again see no differential impact on target firms.

6 Alternative Interpretation: Conflict Risk

We now look more deeply into the assumption that the content of our event dummies and news coverage measures consists of ‘clean’ information that is predominantly about sanctions. Progress in diplomatic negotiations may have had other implications for the foreign policy environment faced by Iran, specifically the probability of military conflict between Iran and other countries. We perform two exercises to assess the potential implications of this issue for the interpretation of our results, focusing alternatively on Iranian and non-Iranian firms.

6.1 TSE Firm Returns and Conflict Risk

Our first exercise looks at the relative sensitivity of target and non-target firms to the risk of direct conflict. In order to measure the probability of conflict, we use political betting market prices for a contract regarding the likelihood that the US and/or Israel would “execute an overt airstrike against Iran by December 31, 2012”, as discussed in Section 4.4. We then estimate the relationship of the stock returns of firms in each portfolio with the change in the daily arrival probability of an airstrike implied by these contract prices. To do this, we apply our specification from Table 4 column (2), with the day-to-day change in the probability of conflict replacing our news coverage measure, using data from the first day of our sample period to the end of 2012.⁶⁹

The results indicate that increases in conflict probability, inferred from rises in contract prices, negatively affect stock returns for firms in our sample. In Table 6 column (1), we find that an increase in the daily arrival probability of an airstrike that is higher by 0.1 percentage points (which is approximately three times the standard deviation of this variable) is associated with a statistically significant fall in returns of 0.158 percentage points. However, there is no differential sensitivity between the two portfolios, since the estimated coefficient on the interaction of our target group dummy with the change in arrival probability is statistically insignificant. In short, while conflict risk appears to have a negative effect on firm returns across the TSE, there is no indication that the target group is more economically vulnerable to this risk.

⁶⁹Ideally, we would also like to use information from similar contracts later in our sample period. However, as noted earlier, Intrade suspended its US accounts in late December 2012, and all of its activities in early 2013.

Table 6: Alternative Explanation – Conflict Risk

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Intrade probability	Arms industry firms			
		Factiva measure	GDELT measure		
Change in arrival probability	-1.580 (0.606)				
Target * change in arrival probability	-0.783 (0.845)				
Coverage		-0.00005 (0.007)	-0.012 (0.014)	0.008 (0.006)	0.009 (0.014)
Sensitivity rank * coverage			0.0004 (0.0004)		-0.00003 (0.0004)
Observations	13,885	50,586	50,586	41,514	41,514
Number of firms	133	66	66	66	66

This table displays the results of regressions exploring the possibility that the main results are driven by changes in conflict risk. Column (1) displays correlations between returns of target and non-target firms and the day-to-day change in the arrival probability of a US or Israeli airstrike against Iran, calculated from the price of the Intrade contract “US and/or Israel to execute an overt airstrike against Iran by December 31, 2012”. Columns (2) to (5) display estimated effects on returns of non-Iranian firms in the arms industry from specifications that include a daily measure of news coverage related to diplomatic progress between Iran and the P5+1 countries. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. ‘Change in arrival probability’ represents the change in the arrival probability of a US or Israeli airstrike against Iran, during the same day, in percent. ‘Coverage’ is a standardized count of the number of articles on a relevant event identified in the Factiva (columns (2) and (3)) or GDELT (columns (4) and (5)) data. ‘Sensitivity rank’ is the rank of each firm based on the responsiveness of its stock return to the change in the airstrike arrival probability in the first quarter of 2012, as discussed in Section 6.2. All columns include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects. Here, ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. In column (1), the sample period is from April 14, 2012 to December 22, 2012, and in columns (2) to (5), it is from April 16, 2012 to July 15, 2015. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

6.2 Information Content of Sanctions-Related News Measures

In our second exercise, we examine the possibility that our news coverage measures contain confounding information about the probability of direct military conflict. The ideal sample for this exercise would be a group of firms that are ‘war-sensitive’ but not exposed to the effects of sanctions relief. Our approach to approximating this ‘ideal set’ of firms is to identify a group of companies on stock markets outside Iran who are sensitive to conflict risk (benefiting from increased odds of conflict) but, as non-Iranian firms, are not directly exposed to the local effects of sanctions.

As discussed in Section 4.4, we use a group of 66 firms from the 2012 SIPRI Arms Industry Database, which identifies the world’s largest arms-producing and military services

companies. We first confirm that this portfolio is sensitive to the odds of Iran-related conflict, since these firms' daily stock returns are strongly related to the change in the daily arrival probability of an airstrike implied by Intrade contract prices.⁷⁰ This allows us to use them as a placebo group to investigate whether conflict risk and sanctions news are confounded.

In columns (2) and (4) of Table 6, we regress the daily returns of arms industry firms on each of our news coverage measures and firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, as in the specification in column (2) of Table 4, using data from the full 2012-2015 sample period. The estimated coefficient on the coverage variable is statistically insignificant in each case. We then refine our exercise to check whether firms that are more sensitive to the odds of conflict between Iran and other countries respond differently to these news shocks. For each of the firms in the sample, we run a regression of daily returns in the quarter before the sample period (January to March 2012) on changes in airstrike arrival probability. We then rank the firms according to the size of the estimated coefficient on airstrike arrival probability (from most positive to most negative) and add the interaction between this variable and our sanctions news measure to our regressions. This again yields statistically insignificant results.

In Appendix Table A21 Panel A, we repeat this exercise using a Geneva event dummy rather than our news coverage measures, and similarly find no evidence that the returns of our sample of arms industry firms were affected by this sanctions-related event. In the same table, we show that the 2016 US election was followed by a surge in the stock market returns of these firms. Gains in defense stocks after Trump's victory were well-documented in media reports at the time, which cited expected rises in military spending under Trump (e.g. Forbes 2016, Washington Post 2016). However, we do not find evidence that this post-election bump was linked to heightened risk of conflict with Iran in particular, as firms ranking more highly in the sensitivity measure introduced above did not experience differential gains.⁷¹

⁷⁰More specifically, we find that a specification with daily return as the dependent variable and the change in the daily arrival probability of an airstrike implied by Intrade contract prices as the regressor, along with firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, yields an estimated coefficient of 2.813 and a standard error of 0.372.

⁷¹In contrast, the interaction of each of our 2016-2018 news coverage measures with this firm-specific measure of sensitivity to Iran-related conflict does have a statistically significant estimated coefficient (see Appendix Table A21 Panel B). This again suggests that the 2016-2018 versions of our Factiva and GDELT measures may be capturing additional information other than sanctions news.

7 Conclusion

In this study, we test a central plank of international sanctions policy: the efficacy of the targeting of elite decision-makers within a sanctioned country. We consider the case of Iran, examining the response of its stock market to information indicating progress in diplomatic negotiations towards an agreement on sanctions removal. We find evidence that listed firms owned by key groups within Iran’s political system were differentially sensitive to news about potential sanctions relief leading up to the final deal. Importantly, this sensitivity suggests that political elites within Iran faced a tangible economic incentive to negotiate the removal of sanctions.

The change in US policy towards Iran after the 2016 election raises the question of whether the response of Iranian firms to sanctions-related news has continued to follow a pattern consistent with successful targeting. Our analysis indicates that while target firms responded more sharply to Donald Trump’s election, such differential returns are not evident for later events leading up to the 2018 US withdrawal from the Iran deal. However, news about sanctions policy is more difficult to interpret from 2016 onwards relative to the 2012-2015 period, when members of the P5+1 presented a unified front and news coverage was a reasonable proxy for forward progress in negotiations.

It should also be noted that while our focus on listed firms has made our study possible by allowing us to use high-frequency news shocks for identification, there are other important dimensions of the Iranian economy that we do not measure here. First, our findings exclude the costs from sanctions that were incurred by households. These are likely to have been considerable: in 2012, when the intensity of the sanctions regime reached its peak, Iranian GDP declined by 7.4%, while inflation exceeded 25% (World Bank 2019). Our results for listed firms therefore need to be put into the context of other likely economic and social costs. Second, we do not observe assets of the IRGC and Setad that are not listed on the TSE. Our results do, however, provide evidence that sanctions were ‘on target’ in the sense that sources of income for elite policymakers were positively affected by their removal. The evidence we present here therefore indicates that a ‘complete policy failure’ scenario – where Iran’s political elites fully escaped direct negative income effects from sanctions – can be ruled out.

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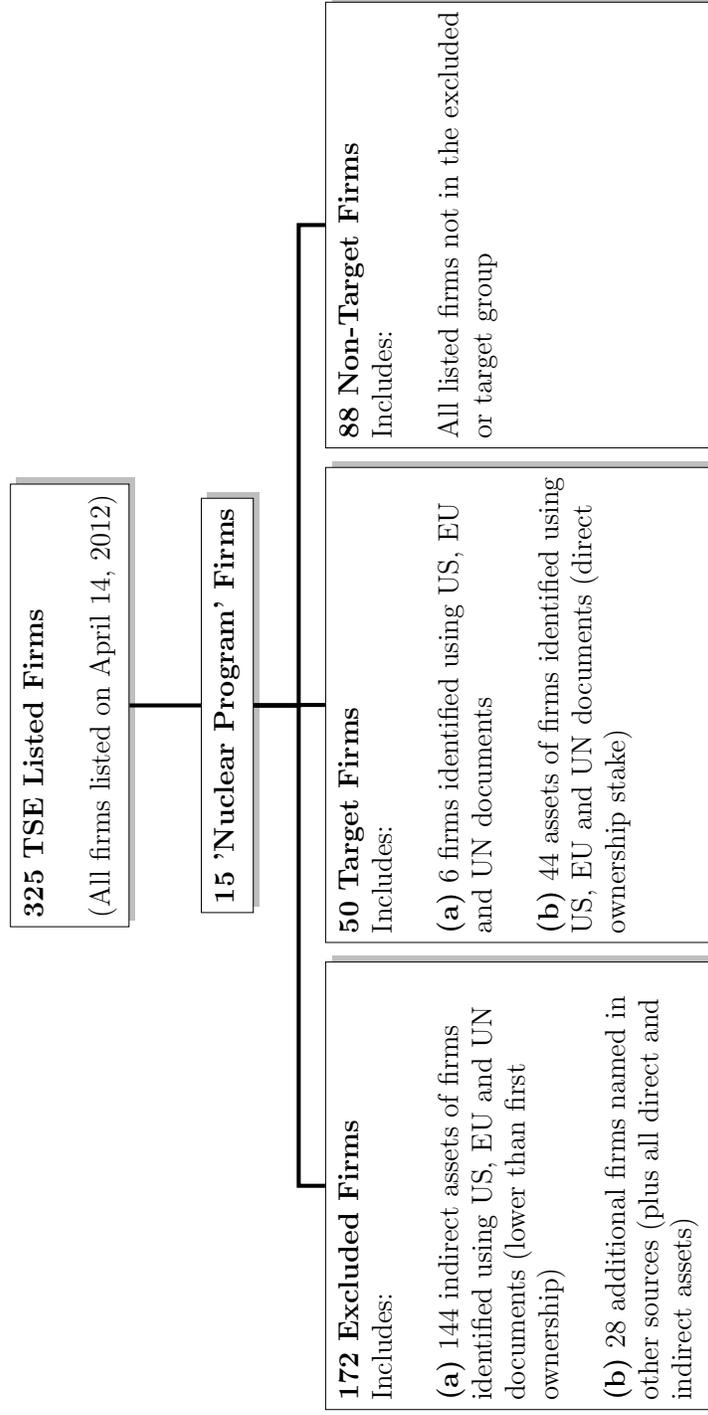


FIGURE A1: Outline of Firm Classification Procedure

This diagram outlines our procedure for classifying listed firms into the target and non-target portfolios used in our empirical analysis.

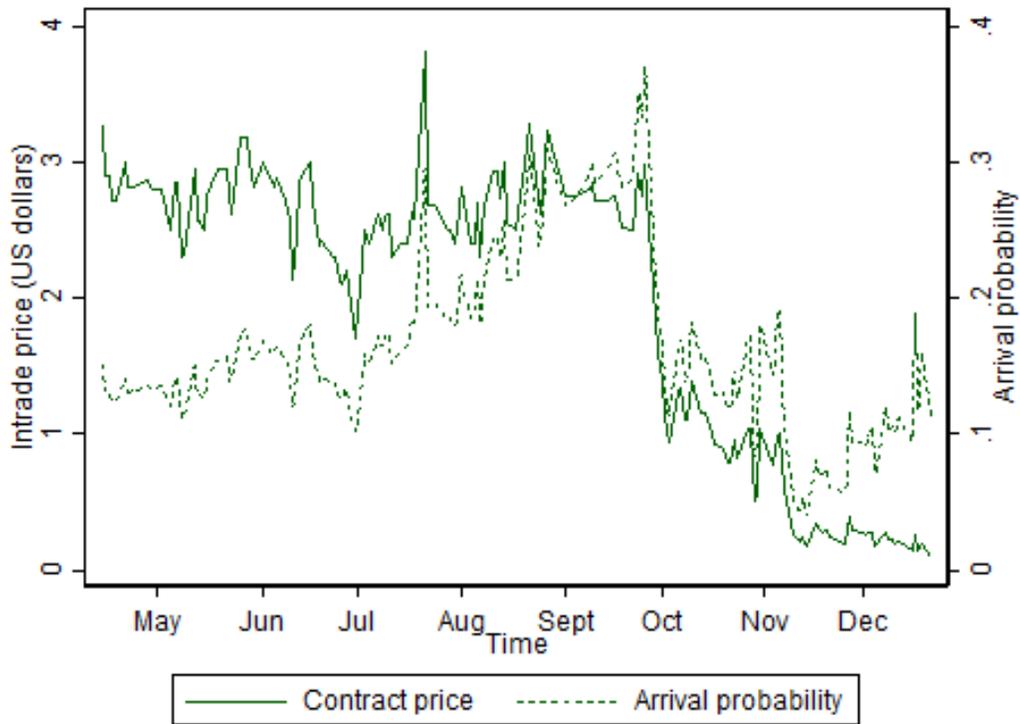


Figure A2: Daily Price of Intrade Contract and Implied Airstrike Arrival Probability, April 14, 2012 to December 22, 2012

This figure shows the evolution of Intrade contract prices (in current US dollars) for the betting contract specified as “US and/or Israel execute an overt airstrike against Iran by December 31, 2012”, and the implied daily arrival probability (in percent) of an airstrike, as discussed in Section 4.4. The contract was to have paid \$10 if an airstrike occurred before December 31, 2012, and zero otherwise. The period plotted is April 14, 2012 to December 22, 2012 (the day before US Intrade trading was suspended).

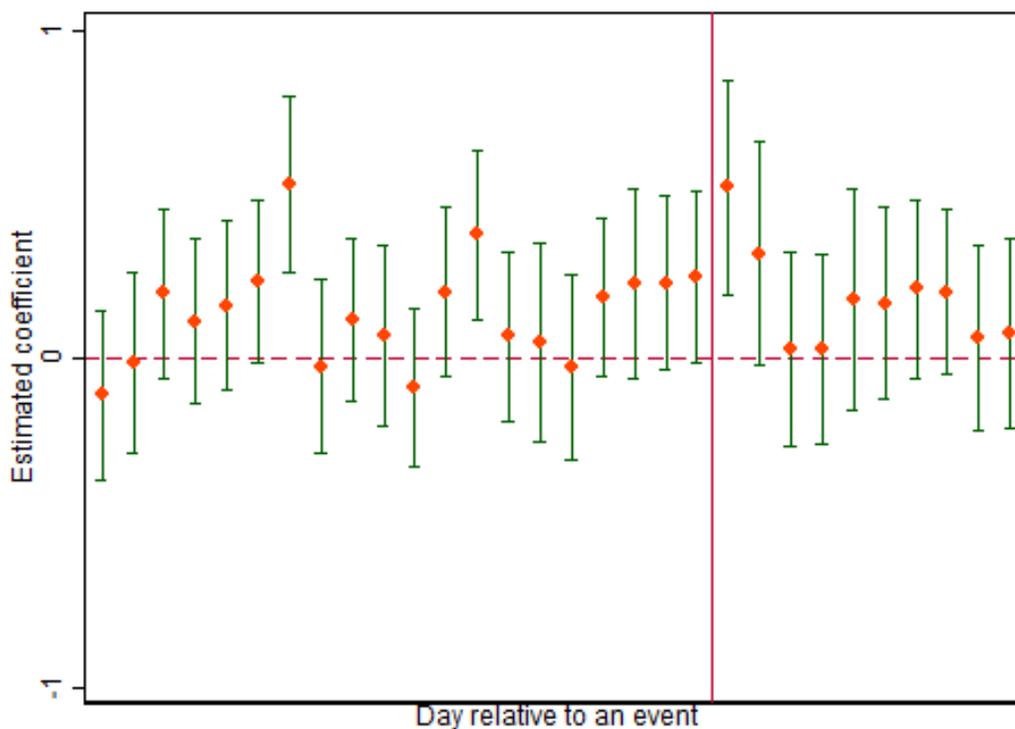


Figure A3: Daily Estimated Target-Day Interaction Coefficients for Other Events – Pooled

This figure relates to the seven events of diplomatic progress used in the specifications of Table 4 column (7), other than the Geneva deal. We pool data from estimation windows of 60 trading days before each event and the subsequent ten trading days to estimate a series of models. Each model includes a dummy for a different day relative to an event (e.g. a dummy for the last trading day before each event), the interaction of this dummy with our target portfolio dummy, and firm fixed effects. The figure reports the estimated coefficient on the interaction term and its 95% confidence interval for the last twenty pre-event days and the ten subsequent days. A vertical line is drawn immediately to the left of the estimate for the pooled event days. Standard errors are clustered by firm.

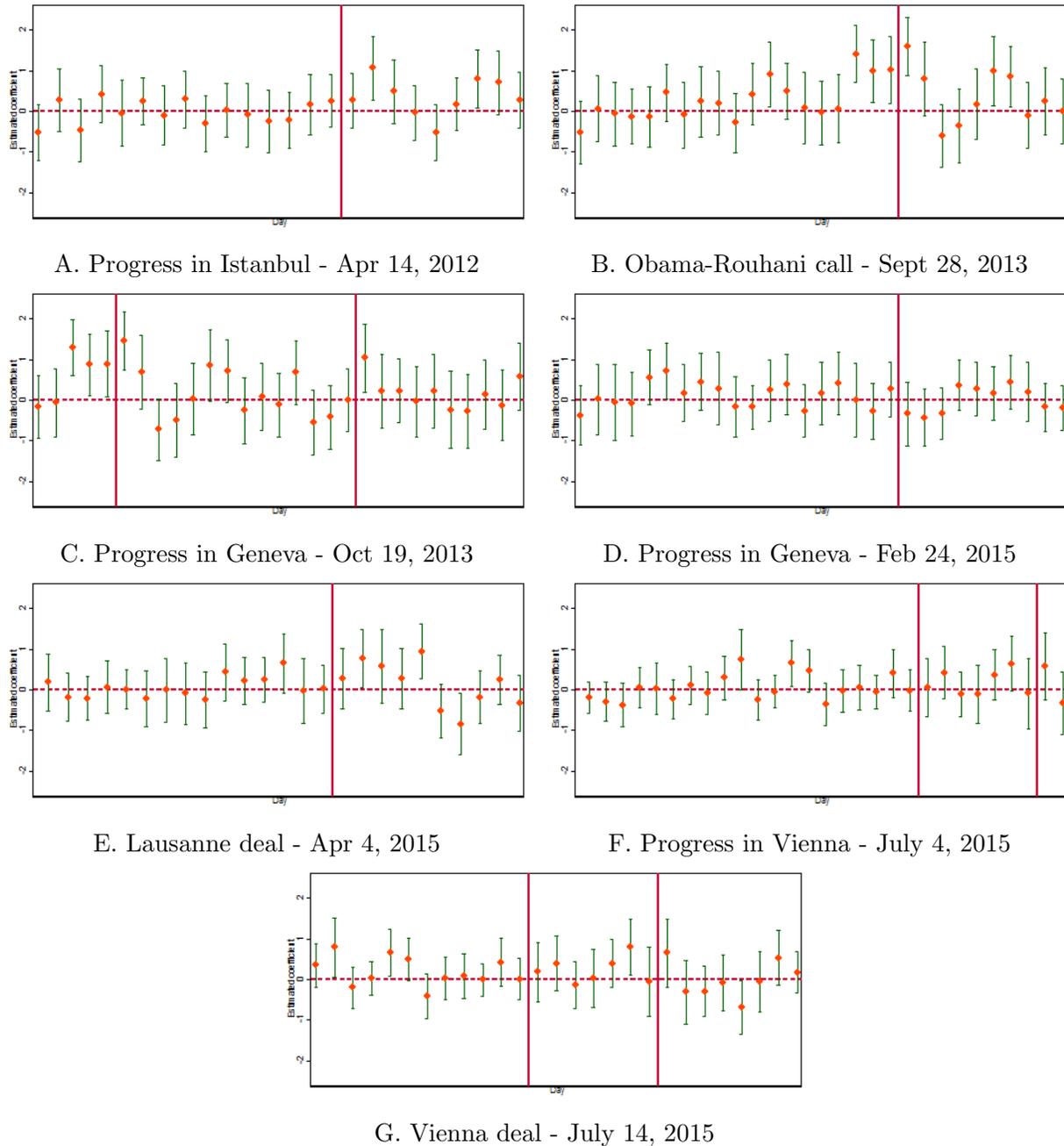


Figure A4: Daily Estimated Target-Day Interaction Coefficients for Other Events

Each panel of this figure relates to one of the seven events of diplomatic progress used in the specifications of Table 4 column (7), other than the Geneva deal. In each panel, we use data for an estimation window of 60 days before the event and the subsequent two weeks to estimate a series of models. Each model includes a dummy for a different day, the interaction of this day dummy with our target portfolio dummy, and firm fixed effects. The figure reports the estimated coefficient on the interaction term and its 95% confidence interval for each trading day in the last four weeks of the 60-day estimation window and the following two weeks. A vertical line is drawn immediately to the left of the day of the event. A second vertical line appears in cases where events are in close proximity and so the same event date is visible in more than one panel. Standard errors are clustered by firm.

Table A1: Top Fifteen Peaks in Sanctions News Coverage

Date	Value	Sanctions negotiations event
Panel A - Factiva measure		
Apr 4 2015*	11.76	Framework agreement reached in Lausanne
Jul 14 2015	7.58	Final agreement reached in Vienna
Jul 15 2015	7.03	Final agreement reached on previous day in Vienna
Mar 25 2015*	5.60	Negotiation round ends in Lausanne
Jul 11 2015*	5.20	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna
Nov 25 2013	5.07	Interim agreement reached on previous day in Geneva
Apr 11 2015*	4.26	Framework agreement reached in previous week in Lausanne
Nov 9 2013*	3.74	Negotiation round ends in Geneva
Nov 23 2013*	3.40	Negotiation round in progress in Geneva
Sep 2 2012*	3.23	France calls for stronger sanctions after IAEA report
Sep 28 2013*	3.23	Presidents of Iran and US speak by phone
Nov 16 2013*	3.13	Negotiation round forthcoming in Geneva
Apr 18 2015*	3.13	Framework agreement reached two weeks earlier in Lausanne
Mar 25 2014*	3.09	Negotiation round ends in Vienna
Nov 26 2013	2.85	Interim agreement reached two days earlier in Geneva
Panel B - GDELT measure		
Jul 14 2015	10.66	Final agreement reached in Vienna
Mar 25 2015*	9.07	Negotiation round ends in Lausanne
Apr 4 2015*	5.16	Framework agreement reached in Lausanne
Jun 19 2012*	4.97	Negotiation round ends in Moscow
Jul 11 2015*	4.67	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna
Nov 24 2013	4.55	Interim agreement reached in Geneva
Nov 9 2013*	4.22	Negotiation round ends in Geneva
Nov 23 2013*	3.55	Negotiation round in progress in Geneva
Nov 18 2013	3.33	Negotiation round about to begin in Geneva
Jul 15 2015	3.26	Final agreement reached on previous day in Vienna
Sep 28 2013*	3.23	Presidents of Iran and US speak by phone
Jul 4 2015*	3.21	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna
Mar 31 2015	3.17	Negotiation deadline extended in Lausanne
Mar 7 2015*	2.95	Several P5+1 members discuss negotiations
Mar 28 2015*	2.89	Negotiation round in progress in Lausanne

This table displays the top fifteen observations, within the sample period April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015, of a standardized count of the number of articles on relevant events identified in the Factiva (Panel A) and GDELT (Panel B) datasets, as discussed in Section 4.3. For each of these observations, the table shows the relevant date, the value of the variable, and an event of that day that is relevant to diplomatic negotiations for sanctions relief. Entries that are among the top fifteen observations for both of the two measures are highlighted in bold. Dates are marked with stars when the observation also includes events from prior days because of weekends or holidays on the TSE.

Table A2: Clustering by Industry – Geneva Deal

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Firm FEs	Day-by-day estimates	Firm-day-of-week FEs	Industry controls	Market cap controls	Size data subsample	All size controls
Geneva	0.648 [0.021] {0.176}		0.731 [0.012] {0.154}		0.649 [0.022] {0.185}	0.212 [0.553] {0.731}	0.221 [0.532] {0.762}
Day 1		0.548 [0.073] {0.176}					
Day 2		0.748 [0.030] {0.205}					
Target * Geneva	1.256 [0.001] {0.039}		1.212 [0.002] {0.079}	1.306 [0.002] {0.100}	1.260 [0.001] {0.027}	1.962 [0.000] {0.019}	1.927 [0.000] {0.083}
Target * Day 1		1.415 [0.001] {0.032}					
Target * Day 2		1.099 [0.015] {0.095}					
Observations	6,586	6,586	6,580	6,497	6,586	4,017	4,017
Number of firms	128	128	127	127	128	77	77
Number of industries	15	15	15	14	15	15	15

This table reproduces the point estimates from Table 2, along with p-values based on two different clustering strategies. The p-values in square brackets are based on clustering by firm. The p-values in curly brackets are based on clustering by industry, using the wild bootstrap approach of Cameron, Gelbach and Miller (2008) due to the small number of clusters, calculated with the boottest Stata package of Roodman et al. (2019). See the notes for Table 2 for other information on these specifications.

Table A3: Responses of TSE Returns to Oil Price Changes

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	West Texas Interim.		Brent Crude		OPEC Basket	
	Firm FEs	Firm-qtr-day-of-week FEs	Firm FEs	Firm-qtr-day-of-week FEs	Firm FEs	Firm-qtr-day-of-week FEs
Price change	0.039 (0.006)	0.042 (0.006)	0.034 (0.006)	0.032 (0.006)	0.038 (0.007)	0.038 (0.007)
Observations	21,055	20,486	20,516	19,949	22,707	22,142
Number of firms	133	133	133	133	133	133

This table displays estimated effects of oil price changes on returns of sample firms. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The regressor is the difference between the current and the previous TSE trading day in the West Texas Intermediate (columns (1) and (2)), Brent Crude (columns (3) and (4)) or OPEC Basket price (columns (5) and (6)). The sample period includes all trading days in 2010 and 2011. Columns (1), (3) and (5) include firm fixed effects, and columns (2), (4) and (6) include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A4: Estimates of Capital Adjustment Costs for Investment Projections

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Sample firms				All firms	
	Winsorized top/bottom 1%		Winsorized top/bottom 5%		Winsorized top/bottom 1%	
Market-to-book	0.019 (0.021)	0.017 (0.019)	0.044 (0.021)	0.032 (0.018)	0.034 (0.015)	0.024 (0.014)
Cashflow		0.050 (0.016)		0.089 (0.017)		0.064 (0.012)
Observations	473	473	473	473	1,239	1,239
Number of firms	80	80	80	80	209	209

This table displays estimates of capital adjustment costs to be used in our projections of the effect of the Geneva deal on investment by target firms. The dependent variable is the ratio of investment in fixed assets for a given year to total fixed assets as of the previous year. ‘Market-to-book’ is defined as the previous year’s market-to-book ratio. ‘Cashflow’ is the ratio of current cashflow to the previous year’s level of fixed assets. In columns (1), (2), (5) and (6), the top and bottom 1% of observed values are winsorized for all variables. In columns (3) and (4), the top and bottom 5% of observed values are winsorized for all variables. In columns (1) to (4), the sample includes only the firms from the target and non-target portfolios with available data on Orbis. In columns (5) and (6), the sample includes all Iranian firms with available Orbis data. The sample period is from 2012 to 2018 (since the number of firms with available data is much smaller in earlier and subsequent years). All columns include firm fixed effects and year fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A5: Clustering by Industry – News Coverage

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Continuous measure		Top 10%	2 SD	Spaced	Negotiations	Positive
	Firm	Firm-qttr-day-	dummy	dummy	2 SD	only	negotiations
	FEs	of-week	FEs	FEs	dummy	dummy	dummy
Panel A - Factiva measure							
Coverage	0.055 [0.000] {0.000}	0.077 [0.000] {0.000}	0.145 [0.001] {0.005}	0.405 [0.000] {0.000}	0.439 [0.000] {0.000}	0.483 [0.000] {0.001}	0.679 [0.000] {0.000}
Target * coverage	0.065 [0.000] {0.000}	0.092 [0.000] {0.005}	0.196 [0.002] {0.041}	0.418 [0.000] {0.010}	0.363 [0.001] {0.043}	0.654 [0.000] {0.002}	0.856 [0.000] {0.001}
Observations	75,021	74,775	74,775	74,775	74,094	73,335	72,853
Number of firms	138	136	136	136	136	136	136
Number of industries	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Panel B - GDELT measure							
Coverage	0.069 [0.000] {0.000}	0.065 [0.000] {0.003}	0.072 [0.031] {0.117}	0.256 [0.000] {0.001}	0.235 [0.000] {0.006}	0.340 [0.000] {0.001}	0.679 [0.000] {0.002}
Target * coverage	0.064 [0.000] {0.000}	0.066 [0.000] {0.017}	0.153 [0.003] {0.038}	0.282 [0.001] {0.026}	0.303 [0.003] {0.019}	0.352 [0.003] {0.013}	0.594 [0.001] {0.012}
Observations	62,128	61,843	61,843	61,843	60,763	60,266	59,597
Number of firms	137	136	136	136	136	136	136
Number of industries	15	15	15	15	15	15	15

This table reproduces the point estimates from Table 4, along with p-values based on two different clustering strategies. The p-values in square brackets are based on clustering by firm. The p-values in curly brackets are based on clustering by industry, using the wild bootstrap approach of Cameron, Gelbach and Miller (2008) due to the small number of clusters, calculated with the boottest Stata package of Roodman et al. (2019). See the notes for Table 4 for other information on these specifications.

Table A6: Timeline of Event Days Identified by Spaced 2 SD Dummy Variables

Date	Dataset	Sanctions negotiations event
Apr 14 2012 [†]	Both	Negotiation round held in Istanbul
Jun 19 2012 [†]	GDELTA	Negotiation round ends in Moscow
Jul 14 2012	Factiva	US imposes sanctions on Iranian firms and individuals
Aug 11 2012	Factiva	US imposes sanctions on firm for selling to Iran
Sep 2 2012	Factiva	France calls for stronger sanctions after IAEA report
Mar 25 2013	Factiva	US grants importers waiver on oil sanctions
Sep 28 2013 [†]	Both	Presidents of Iran and US speak by phone
Oct 19 2013 [†]	Both	Negotiation round ends in Geneva
Nov 9 2013 [†]	Both	Negotiation round ends in Geneva
Nov 16 2013	Factiva	Negotiation round forthcoming in Geneva
Nov 24/25 2013 [†]	Both	Interim agreement reached in Geneva
Dec 14 2013	Factiva	US imposes penalties on sanctions violators
Mar 25 2014 [†]	Factiva	Negotiation round ends in Vienna
Jun 16 2014 [†]	GDELTA	Negotiation round begins in Vienna
Sep 6 2014	GDELTA	Iran misses IAEA deadline
Sep 27 2014 [†]	GDELTA	Negotiation round ends in New York
Nov 22 2014 [†]	GDELTA	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna
Feb 24 2015 [†]	GDELTA	Negotiations between Iran and US end in Geneva
Mar 7 2015	GDELTA	Several P5+1 members discuss negotiations
Mar 14 2015	GDELTA	US Secretary of State holds press conference
Mar 25 2015 [†]	Both	Negotiation round ends in Lausanne
Apr 4 2015 [†]	Both	Framework agreement reached in Lausanne
Apr 11 2015	Both	Framework agreement reached in previous week in Lausanne
Apr 18 2015	Factiva	Framework agreement reached two weeks earlier in Lausanne
May 30 2015 [†]	GDELTA	Negotiations between Iran and US held in Geneva
Jun 6 2015 [†]	Factiva	Negotiation round ends in Vienna
Jun 13 2015	GDELTA	President of Iran holds press conference
Jun 27 2015 [†]	Factiva	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna
Jul 4 2015 [†]	Both	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna
Jul 14 2015 [†]	Both	Final agreement reached in Vienna

This table lists the event days used in our specifications in Table 4 column (5). For each of our coverage measures (from Factiva and GDELTA), these days are identified by listing values that are at least two standard deviations greater than the mean, and then excluding cases that are within one week of larger peaks in news coverage, as explained in Section 5.2.1. For each of these days, the table shows the dataset(s) from which the day is sourced, and an event of that day that is relevant to diplomatic negotiations for sanctions relief. For the Geneva deal event, the two datasets (Factiva and GDELTA) identify different days, but these are combined into one entry here. Event days involving direct negotiations between Iran and P5+1 countries, and therefore used in our specifications in Table 4 column (6), are marked with a dagger symbol.

Table A7: Reuters Headlines About Diplomatic Negotiations Identified by Spaced 2 SD Dummy Variables

Date	Site	Reuters headline
Apr 14 2012 [†]	Istanbul	"Iran, big powers agree - to keep talking"
Jun 19 2012	Moscow	"Iran, world powers fail to settle nuclear dispute"
Sep 28 2013 [†]	Phone	"Iranians cheer, protest over Rouhani's historic phone call with Obama"
Oct 19 2013 [†]	Geneva	"U.S. says talks intense, serious after Iran hints at atomic concessions"
Nov 9 2013	Geneva	"Iran nuclear talks fail to reach deal, France pushes back"
Nov 24/25 2013 [†]	Geneva	"Breakthrough deal curbs Iran's nuclear activity"
Mar 25 2014	Vienna	"Senators urge Obama to push for strict Iran nuclear curbs deal"
Jun 16 2014	Vienna	"Iran and six powers seek to recover momentum for nuclear deal"
Sep 27 2014	New York	"No breakthrough in Iran nuclear talks, sides agree to keep talking"
Nov 22 2014	Vienna	"Iran nuclear talks may be extended as U.S. sees 'big gaps'"
Feb 24 2015 [†]	Geneva	"U.S., Iran positive after nuclear talks, say much left to do"
Mar 25 2015	Lausanne	"Facing resistance, U.S. pushes to meet deadline"
Apr 4 2015 [†]	Lausanne	"Iran, world powers reach initial deal on reining in Tehran's nuclear programme"
May 30 2015	Geneva	"U.S. and Iran address obstacles to nuclear deal as deadline nears"
Jun 6 2015	Vienna	"Iran rejects limited international access to military sites - agency"
Jun 27 2015	Vienna	"Disputes linger as Iran, powers push for nuclear deal"
Jul 4 2015 [†]	Vienna	"Iran nuclear talks in endgame, negotiators push on sticking points"
Jul 14 2015 [†]	Vienna	"Iran deal reached, Obama hails step towards 'more hopeful world'"

This table lists the episodes of direct negotiations between Iran and P5+1 countries used in our specifications in Table 4 column (6). For each of these days, the table shows the location of the diplomatic negotiations, and a headline from a Reuters report on those negotiations. For the Geneva deal event, the two datasets (Factiva and GDELT) identify different days, but these are combined into one entry here. Dark blue (and a double-dagger symbol) is used to mark negotiations episodes classified as making forward progress, using reports from media organizations based in each of the negotiating countries: Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France Presse, Deutsche Welle, ITAR-TASS, Xinhua, Fars News Agency and Mehr News Agency. This subset of event days is used in our specifications in Table 4 column (7).

Table A8: Event-by-Event Coefficients for Spaced 2 SD Event Days - Factiva Measure

Date	Sanctions negotiations event	Event dummy	Target * event dummy
Apr 14 2012 [†]	Negotiation round held in Istanbul	0.396 (0.251)	0.223 (0.391)
Jul 14 2012	US imposes sanctions on Iranian firms and individuals	0.120 (0.341)	-0.059 (0.426)
Aug 11 2012	US imposes sanctions on firm for selling to Iran	0.756 (0.365)	-0.826 (0.446)
Sep 2 2012	France calls for stronger sanctions after IAEA report	0.502 (0.293)	-0.117 (0.359)
Mar 25 2013	US grants importers waiver on oil sanctions	1.828 (0.265)	-0.598 (0.361)
Sep 28 2013 [†]	Presidents of Iran and US speak by phone	0.367 (0.228)	1.910 (0.384)
Oct 19 2013 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Geneva	-0.040 (0.323)	1.033 (0.461)
Nov 9 2013 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Geneva	-0.046 (0.294)	0.563 (0.429)
Nov 16 2013	Negotiation round forthcoming in Geneva	0.748 (0.246)	0.375 (0.367)
Nov 25 2013 [†]	Interim agreement reached in Geneva	0.829 (0.283)	1.138 (0.471)
Dec 14 2013	US imposes penalties on sanctions violators	-0.441 (0.341)	-0.182 (0.540)
Mar 25 2014 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Vienna	0.621 (0.276)	0.283 (0.428)
Mar 25 2015 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Lausanne	0.409 (0.172)	0.164 (0.315)
Apr 4 2015 [†]	Framework agreement reached in Lausanne	2.094 (0.259)	0.611 (0.407)
Apr 11 2015	Framework agreement reached in previous week in Lausanne	-0.632 (0.181)	-0.128 (0.351)
Apr 18 2015	Framework agreement reached two weeks earlier in Lausanne	-0.376 (0.248)	0.942 (0.420)
Jun 6 2015 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Vienna	0.139 (0.191)	0.044 (0.224)
Jun 27 2015 [†]	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna	0.030 (0.181)	0.238 (0.308)
Jul 4 2015 [†]	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna	0.914 (0.268)	0.210 (0.393)
Jul 14 2015 [†]	Final agreement reached in Vienna	0.093 (0.295)	0.442 (0.432)

This table displays estimated effects on returns of target and non-target firms of the events used in our specification in Panel A column (5) of Table 4. The table displays the results of a single regression, including dummies for each event day and interactions between these dummies and an indicator variable for firms in the target portfolio. The specification also includes firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The event days are identified by listing values of our Factiva news coverage measure that are at least two standard deviations greater than the mean, and then excluding cases that are within one week of larger peaks in news coverage, as explained in Section 5.2.1. Event days involving direct negotiations between Iran and P5+1 countries, and therefore used in our specification in Table 4 Panel A column (6), are highlighted in light or dark blue (and a dagger or double-dagger symbol). Dark blue (and the double-dagger symbol) is used to mark negotiations episodes classified as making forward progress, which are also used in Table 4 Panel A column (7). The sample period is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015. The regression includes 74,094 observations and 136 firms. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A9: Event-by-Event Coefficients for Spaced 2 SD Event Days - GDELT Measure

Date	Sanctions negotiations event	Event dummy	Target * event dummy
Apr 14 2012 [†]	Negotiation round held in Istanbul	0.396 (0.251)	0.223 (0.391)
Jun 19 2012 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Moscow	-0.303 (0.225)	-0.006 (0.254)
Sep 28 2013 [†]	Presidents of Iran and US speak by phone	0.722 (0.226)	1.771 (0.367)
Oct 19 2013 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Geneva	-0.138 (0.313)	0.907 (0.460)
Nov 9 2013 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Geneva	-0.141 (0.287)	0.429 (0.452)
Nov 24 2013 [†]	Interim agreement reached in Geneva	0.615 (0.367)	1.199 (0.481)
Jun 16 2014 [†]	Negotiation round begins in Vienna	0.534 (0.233)	0.059 (0.338)
Sep 6 2014	Iran misses IAEA deadline	-0.706 (0.292)	0.517 (0.399)
Sep 27 2014 [†]	Negotiation round ends in New York	-0.274 (0.202)	-0.156 (0.312)
Nov 22 2014 [†]	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna	-0.353 (0.247)	0.011 (0.402)
Feb 24 2015 [†]	Negotiations between Iran and US end in Geneva	0.327 (0.296)	-0.342 (0.417)
Mar 7 2015	Several P5+1 members discuss negotiations	-0.219 (0.253)	0.227 (0.367)
Mar 14 2015	US Secretary of State holds press conference	0.897 (0.223)	-0.173 (0.343)
Mar 25 2015 [†]	Negotiation round ends in Lausanne	0.409 (0.172)	0.164 (0.315)
Apr 4 2015 [†]	Framework agreement reached in Lausanne	2.211 (0.257)	0.459 (0.415)
Apr 11 2015	Framework agreement reached in previous week in Lausanne	-0.516 (0.195)	-0.279 (0.348)
May 30 2015 [†]	Negotiations between Iran and US held in Geneva	0.138 (0.216)	0.101 (0.334)
Jun 13 2015	President of Iran holds press conference	0.765 (0.215)	-0.163 (0.291)
Jul 4 2015 [†]	Negotiation round in progress in Vienna	1.029 (0.270)	0.066 (0.407)
Jul 14 2015 [†]	Final agreement reached in Vienna	0.145 (0.291)	0.414 (0.431)

This table displays estimated effects on returns of target and non-target firms of the events used in our specification in Panel B column (5) of Table 4. The table displays the results of a single regression, including dummies for each event day and interactions between these dummies and an indicator variable for firms in the target portfolio. The specification also includes firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The event days are identified by listing values of our GDELT news coverage measure that are at least two standard deviations greater than the mean, and then excluding cases that are within one week of larger peaks in news coverage, as explained in Section 5.2.1. Event days involving direct negotiations between Iran and P5+1 countries, and therefore used in our specification in Table 4 Panel B column (6), are highlighted in light or dark blue (and a dagger or double-dagger symbol). Dark blue (and the double-dagger symbol) is used to mark negotiations episodes classified as making forward progress, which are also used in Table 4 Panel B column (7). The sample period is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015, excluding February to August 2013. The regression includes 60,763 observations and 136 firms. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A10: Robustness Checks – Continuous News Coverage Measure

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Excluding Geneva	Post- Geneva	Industry controls	Market cap controls	Size data subsample	All size controls
Panel A - Factiva measure						
Coverage	0.070 (0.012)	0.062 (0.013)		0.083 (0.013)	0.071 (0.016)	0.076 (0.017)
Target * coverage	0.055 (0.018)	0.067 (0.021)	0.111 (0.021)	0.084 (0.020)	0.073 (0.024)	0.062 (0.027)
Observations	68,166	39,596	73,247	74,775	44,954	44,954
Number of firms	136	130	135	136	79	79
Panel B - GDELT measure						
Coverage	0.062 (0.012)	0.064 (0.013)		0.071 (0.012)	0.051 (0.016)	0.054 (0.016)
Target * coverage	0.045 (0.018)	0.048 (0.020)	0.077 (0.019)	0.055 (0.018)	0.071 (0.022)	0.068 (0.022)
Observations	55,674	39,596	60,524	61,843	37,096	37,096
Number of firms	136	130	135	136	79	79

This table displays robustness checks of the results in Table 4 column (2). The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The variable ‘coverage’ is a standardized count of the number of articles on a relevant event identified in the Factiva (Panel A) or GDELT (Panel B) data, as discussed in Section 4.3. In Panel A, the sample period in column (1) is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015 excluding August 26, 2013 to November 24, 2013, in column (2) it is from and November 25, 2013 to July 15, 2015, and in columns (3) to (6) it is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015. In Panel B, the sample period in all columns excludes February to August 2013. Column (3) includes interactions of industry dummies with dummies for each day of the sample period. Column (4) includes interactions of de-measured log market capitalization as of March 10, 2014 with dummies for each day of the sample period. Column (5) reproduces the baseline estimate in Table 4 column (2) for the subsample of firms (those with available data on turnover, assets and employees in 2012) used in column (6), for purposes of comparison. Column (6) includes interactions of log market capitalization as of March 10, 2014, and log turnover, log assets and log employees from 2012 (if this data is available from Orbis), all de-measured, with dummies for each day of the sample period. All columns include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A11: Alternative Portfolio Definitions – Continuous News Coverage Measure

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Direct targets and assets	Portfolio of other firms	Other sources	Ownership shares	Matched sample	All firms
Panel A - Factiva measure						
Coverage	0.077 (0.013)	0.077 (0.013)	0.077 (0.013)	0.089 (0.007)	0.068 (0.013)	0.080 (0.007)
Target * coverage		0.092 (0.019)	0.049 (0.019)	0.124 (0.035)	0.063 (0.023)	0.083 (0.015)
Direct target * coverage	0.102 (0.042)					
Target asset * coverage	0.090 (0.020)					
Other * coverage		-0.001 (0.015)				
Observations	74,775	169,028	76,186	152,414	75,483	178,879
Target firms	50	50	51	N/A	23	53
Non-target firms	86	86	86	N/A	110	268
Total number of firms	136	306	137	279	133	321
Panel B - GDELT measure						
Coverage	0.065 (0.013)	0.065 (0.013)	0.065 (0.013)	0.067 (0.007)	0.036 (0.013)	0.061 (0.007)
Target * coverage		0.066 (0.017)	0.040 (0.018)	0.100 (0.032)	0.081 (0.021)	0.069 (0.014)
Direct target * coverage	0.071 (0.042)					
Target asset * coverage	0.066 (0.018)					
Other * coverage		-0.009 (0.015)				
Observations	61,843	139,892	62,968	126,131	62,412	148,009
Target firms	50	50	51	N/A	23	53
Non-target firms	86	86	86	N/A	110	268
Total number of firms	136	306	137	279	133	321

This table displays robustness checks of the results in Table 4 column (2), displaying estimated effects on returns of various firm portfolios. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The variable ‘coverage’ is a standardized count of the number of articles on a relevant event identified in the Factiva (Panel A) or GDELT (Panel B) data, as discussed in Section 4.3. Column (1) separates the target portfolio into two parts: firms identified directly from smart sanctions documents (‘direct target’) and firms in which targeted entities have a direct ownership stake (‘target asset’). There are six direct target firms and 44 target asset firms in these regressions. Column (2) includes firms dropped from the baseline sample, excluding firms involved in the nuclear program, as a separate portfolio (‘other’); 170 of these other firms are included in these regressions. Column (3) defines the target portfolio as the set of firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets in smart sanctions documents, Alfoneh (2010) or Reuters (2013). This adds 20 additional target firms to the regressions, while dropping 19 firms from the baseline target portfolio. In column (4), the variable ‘target’ is the observed share of a firm that is owned by firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets in smart sanctions documents, rather than a dummy variable for portfolio membership. In column (5), the sample of firms is selected using coarsened exact matching on industry, market capitalization, turnover, assets and employees, among firms for which this data is available. In column (6), the sample of firms is widened to include all firms listed on the TSE as of April 14, 2012, and all firms not satisfying the baseline target definition are classified into the non-target portfolio. This also adds three target firms that had been dropped due to involvement in Iran’s nuclear program. The sample period is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015 (excluding February to August 2013 in Panel B). All columns include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A12: Robustness Checks – Positive Negotiations Dummy

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Industry controls	Market cap controls	Size data subsample	All size controls
Panel A - Factiva measure				
Coverage		0.738 (0.115)	0.625 (0.156)	0.653 (0.148)
Target * coverage	0.945 (0.190)	0.713 (0.172)	0.769 (0.226)	0.681 (0.230)
Observations	71,359	72,853	43,790	43,790
Number of firms	135	136	79	79
Panel B - GDELT measure				
Coverage		0.727 (0.112)	0.528 (0.149)	0.583 (0.144)
Target * coverage	0.689 (0.185)	0.475 (0.169)	0.691 (0.216)	0.538 (0.209)
Observations	58,322	59,597	35,723	35,723
Number of firms	135	136	79	79

This table displays robustness checks of the results in Table 4 column (7). The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The variable ‘coverage’ is a dummy for episodes where progress in direct international negotiations is apparent from media articles on relevant events identified in the Factiva (Panel A) or GDELT (Panel B) data, as discussed in Section 5.2.1. Column (1) includes interactions of industry dummies with dummies for each day of the sample period. Column (2) includes interactions of de-measured log market capitalization as of March 10, 2014 with dummies for each day of the sample period. Column (3) reproduces the baseline estimate in Table 4 column (7) for the subsample of firms (those with available data on turnover, assets and employees in 2012) used in column (4), for purposes of comparison. Column (4) includes interactions of log market capitalization as of March 10, 2014, and log turnover, log assets and log employees from 2012 (if this data is available from Orbis), all de-measured, with dummies for each day of the sample period. All columns include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. The sample period is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015 (excluding February to August 2013 in Panel B). Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A13: Alternative Portfolio Definitions – Positive Negotiations Dummy

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Direct targets and assets	Portfolio of other firms	Other sources	Ownership shares	Matched sample	All firms
Panel A - Factiva measure						
Coverage	0.679 (0.122)	0.679 (0.122)	0.679 (0.122)	0.818 (0.073)	0.604 (0.153)	0.801 (0.070)
Target * coverage		0.856 (0.179)	0.597 (0.175)	1.140 (0.294)	0.603 (0.229)	0.697 (0.145)
Direct target * coverage	0.931 (0.357)					
Target asset * coverage	0.845 (0.188)					
Other * coverage		0.127 (0.151)				
Observations	72,853	164,684	74,235	148,482	73,563	174,274
Target firms	50	50	51	N/A	23	53
Non-target firms	86	86	86	N/A	110	268
Total number of firms	136	306	137	279	133	321
Panel B - GDELT measure						
Coverage	0.679 (0.120)	0.679 (0.119)	0.679 (0.120)	0.713 (0.072)	0.560 (0.149)	0.751 (0.072)
Target * coverage		0.594 (0.177)	0.481 (0.171)	1.204 (0.245)	0.517 (0.223)	0.532 (0.144)
Direct target * coverage	1.144 (0.285)					
Target asset * coverage	0.514 (0.185)					
Other * coverage		0.032 (0.150)				
Observations	59,597	134,778	60,654	121,502	60,125	142,599
Target firms	50	50	51	N/A	23	53
Non-target firms	86	86	86	N/A	110	268
Total number of firms	136	306	137	279	133	321

This table displays robustness checks of the results in Table 4 column (7), displaying estimated effects on returns of various firm portfolios. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The variable ‘coverage’ is a dummy for episodes where progress in direct international negotiations is apparent from media articles on relevant events identified in the Factiva (Panel A) or GDELT (Panel B) data, as discussed in Section 5.2.1. Column (1) separates the target portfolio into two parts: firms identified directly from smart sanctions documents (‘direct target’) and firms in which targeted entities have a direct ownership stake (‘target asset’). There are six direct target firms and 44 target asset firms in these regressions. Column (2) includes firms dropped from the baseline sample, excluding firms involved in the nuclear program, as a separate portfolio (‘other’); 170 of these other firms are included in these regressions. Column (3) defines the target portfolio as the set of firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets in smart sanctions documents, Alfoneh (2010) or Reuters (2013). This adds 20 additional target firms to the regressions, while dropping 19 firms from the baseline target portfolio. In column (4), the variable ‘target’ is the observed share of a firm that is owned by firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets in smart sanctions documents, rather than a dummy variable for portfolio membership. In column (5), the sample of firms is selected using coarsened exact matching on industry, market capitalization, turnover, assets and employees, among firms for which this data is available. In column (6), the sample of firms is widened to include all firms listed on the TSE as of April 14, 2012, and all firms not satisfying the baseline target definition are classified into the non-target portfolio. This also adds three target firms that had been dropped due to involvement in Iran’s nuclear program. The sample period is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015 (excluding February to August 2013 in Panel B). All columns include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A14: Heterogeneity by Conglomerate – IRGC and Setad Assets

	(1) Full sample	(2) Before Setad sanctions	(3) After Setad sanctions
Panel A - Factiva measure			
Coverage	0.077 (0.013)	0.138 (0.038)	0.066 (0.014)
IRGC * coverage	0.149 (0.044)	0.115 (0.071)	0.145 (0.055)
Setad * coverage	0.085 (0.019)	-0.075 (0.053)	0.106 (0.021)
Observations	74,775	23,357	51,322
Number of firms	136	134	132
Panel B - GDELT measure			
Coverage	0.065 (0.013)	0.042 (0.039)	0.067 (0.013)
IRGC * coverage	0.077 (0.041)	0.126 (0.072)	0.072 (0.045)
Setad * coverage	0.065 (0.018)	0.015 (0.054)	0.070 (0.019)
Observations	61,843	16,078	45,765
Number of firms	136	133	131

This table displays estimated effects on returns of target firms (divided into those that are IRGC assets and those that are Setad assets) and non-target firms from specifications that include a daily measure of news coverage related to diplomatic progress between Iran and the P5+1 countries. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The variable ‘coverage’ is a standardized count of the number of articles on a relevant event identified in the Factiva (Panel A) or GDELT (Panel B) data. In Panel A, the sample period in column (1) is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015, in column (2) it is from April 14, 2012 to June 3, 2013 and in column (3) it is from June 8, 2013 to July 15, 2015. In Panel B, the sample period in all columns excludes February to August 2013. All columns include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A15: Heterogeneity – Non-Target Firms in Industries Subject to Sanctions

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Geneva deal	Continuous measure Factiva	GDELT	Positive negot. Factiva	dummy GDELT
Geneva	0.116 {0.722}				
Industry sanctions * Geneva	1.140 {0.174}				
Coverage		0.056 {0.033}	0.045 {0.094}	0.262 {0.061}	0.322 {0.122}
Industry sanctions * coverage		0.046 {0.143}	0.042 {0.169}	0.877 {0.008}	0.757 {0.022}
Observations	3,909	44,092	36,360	42,968	35,017
Number of industries	14	14	14	14	14

This table displays estimated effects of industry-specific sanctions on returns of non-target firms. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. The variable ‘industry sanctions’ is a dummy equal to one for firms in Iranian industries subject to sanctions, according to the list of sanctions to be removed in the final deal between Iran and the P5+1 countries. In column (1), ‘Geneva’ is defined as the two days Saturday November 23 and Sunday November 24, 2013. In columns (2) and (3), the variable ‘coverage’ is a standardized count of the number of articles on a relevant event identified in the Factiva (column (2)) or GDELT (column (3)) data, as discussed in Section 4.3. In columns (4) and (5), the variable ‘coverage’ is a dummy for episodes where progress in direct international negotiations is apparent from media articles on relevant events identified in the Factiva (column (4)) or GDELT (column (5)) data, as discussed in Section 5.2.1. Column (1) includes firm fixed effects, and columns (2) to (5) include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects. Here, ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. In column (1), the sample period is Geneva and the previous sixty trading days. In columns (2) to (5), the sample period is from April 14, 2012 to July 15, 2015 (excluding February to August 2013 in columns (3) and (5)). The p-values in curly brackets are based on clustering by industry, using the wild bootstrap approach of Cameron, Gelbach and Miller (2008) due to the small number of clusters, calculated with the boottest Stata package of Roodman et al. (2019).

Table A16: Clustering by Industry – Post-Deal Events

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	US election Nov 2016	Factiva measure post-election	GDELT measure post-election	
Election	-1.667 [0.000] {0.001}			
Target * election	-1.296 [0.003] {0.020}			
Coverage		0.040 [0.022] {0.099}	0.051 [0.002] {0.030}	
Target * coverage		-0.031 [0.152] {0.130}	-0.036 [0.117] {0.129}	
US coverage				0.015 [0.350] {0.485}
Target * US coverage				-0.007 [0.747] {0.660}
P4+1 coverage				0.044 [0.024] {0.047}
Target * P4+1 coverage				-0.035 [0.204] {0.127}
Observations	6,346	36,484	36,484	36,484
Number of firms	120	123	123	123
Number of industries	15	15	15	15

This table reproduces the point estimates from Table 5, along with p-values based on two different clustering strategies. The p-values in square brackets are based on clustering by firm. The p-values in curly brackets are based on clustering by industry, using the wild bootstrap approach of Cameron, Gelbach and Miller (2008) due to the small number of clusters, calculated with the boottest Stata package of Roodman et al. (2019). See the notes for Table 5 for other information on these specifications.

Table A17: Robustness Checks – Election Event

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Firm-day- of-week FEs	Industry controls	Market cap controls	Size data subsample	All size controls
Election	-1.705 (0.319)		-1.642 (0.297)	-1.653 (0.344)	-1.742 (0.376)
Target * election	-1.236 (0.434)	-1.499 (0.462)	-1.479 (0.430)	-1.133 (0.564)	-1.136 (0.618)
Observations	6,344	6,199	6,346	3,851	3,851
Number of firms	120	118	120	74	74

This table displays robustness checks of the results in Table 5 column (1). The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. ‘Election’ is defined as the event day Wednesday November 9, 2016. All columns except column (1) include firm fixed effects. Column (1) includes firm-day-of-week fixed effects. Column (2) includes interactions of industry dummies with dummies for each day of the sample period. Column (3) includes interactions of de-meaned log market capitalization as of March 10, 2014 with dummies for each day of the sample period. Column (4) reproduces the baseline estimate in Table 5 column (1) for the subsample of firms (those with available data on turnover, assets and employees in 2012) used in column (5), for purposes of comparison. Column (5) includes interactions of log market capitalization as of March 10, 2014, and log turnover, log assets and log employees from 2012 (if this data is available from Orbis), all de-meaned, with dummies for each day of the sample period. The sample period is the election event day and the previous sixty trading days. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A18: Alternative Portfolio Definitions – Election Event

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Direct targets and assets	Portfolio of other firms	Other sources	Ownership shares	Matched sample	All firms
Election	-1.667 (0.305)	-1.730 (0.304)	-1.667 (0.305)	-1.808 (0.186)	-1.710 (0.348)	-1.639 (0.183)
Target * election		-1.293 (0.430)	-0.434 (0.472)	-1.021 (0.690)	-1.159 (0.608)	-1.290 (0.359)
Direct target * election	-0.330 (0.767)					
Target asset * election	-1.490 (0.449)					
Other * election		0.122 (0.387)				
Observations	6,346	14,128	6,432	12,848	6,403	14,676
Target firms	48	48	50	N/A	23	51
Non-target firms	72	72	72	N/A	105	234
Total number of firms	120	274	122	248	128	285

This table displays estimated effects of the election event on returns of various firm portfolios. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. ‘Election’ is defined as the event day Wednesday November 9, 2016. Column (1) separates the target portfolio into two parts: firms identified directly from smart sanctions documents (‘direct target’) and firms in which targeted entities have a direct ownership stake (‘target asset’). There are six direct target firms and 42 target asset firms in this regression. Column (2) includes firms dropped from the baseline sample, excluding firms involved in the nuclear program, as a separate portfolio (‘other’); 154 of these other firms are included in this regression. Column (3) defines the target portfolio as the set of firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets in smart sanctions documents, Alfoneh (2010) or Reuters (2013). This adds 19 additional target firms to the regression, while dropping 17 firms from the baseline target portfolio. In column (4), the variable ‘target’ is the observed share of a firm that is owned by firms identified as IRGC or Setad assets in smart sanctions documents, rather than a dummy variable for portfolio membership. In column (5), the sample of firms is selected using coarsened exact matching on industry, market capitalization, turnover, assets and employees, among firms for which this data is available. In column (6), the sample of firms is widened to include all firms listed on the TSE as of April 14, 2012, and all firms not satisfying the baseline target definition are classified into the non-target portfolio. This also adds three target firms that had been dropped due to involvement in Iran’s nuclear program. The sample period is the election event day and the previous sixty trading days. All columns include firm fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A19: Post-Deal Events – Additional Specifications

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	US waiver renewals				US withdrawal
	May 2017	Sept 2017	Jan 2018	All three	May 2018
Renewal	1.590 (0.243)	0.330 (0.256)	0.487 (0.243)	0.807 (0.163)	
Target * renewal	-0.187 (0.388)	-0.194 (0.319)	-0.156 (0.284)	-0.272 (0.210)	
Withdrawal					-0.633 (0.240)
Target * withdrawal					0.071 (0.336)
Observations	6,115	6,119	6,554	18,789	6,485
Number of firms	120	122	121	123	121

This table displays estimated effects of sanctions-related events after the 2016 US election on returns of target and non-target firms. ‘Renewal’ represents an event day when US sanctions waivers were renewed: May 20, 2017, September 16, 2017 and/or January 13, 2018. Each renewal event is studied separately in columns (1) to (3), while column (4) jointly considers all three renewal events. ‘Withdrawal’ represents the US withdrawal from the sanctions deal on May 9, 2018. The dependent variable is daily stock return in percent. In columns (1), (2), (3) and (5), the sample period is the event day and the sixty preceding trading days. In column (4), the sample period consists of the three renewal event days and the sixty trading days prior to each of these event days. All columns include firm fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.

Table A20: Top Fifteen Peaks in News Coverage Measures – 2016-2018 Sample Period

Date	Value	Event
Panel A - Factiva measure		
May 9 2018	8.89	US withdraws from agreement on previous day
May 8 2018	6.68	US withdraws from agreement
Oct 14 2017*	4.83	US decertifies agreement
Feb 4 2017*	4.71	US imposes sanctions after missile test
May 5 2018*	4.04	US set to withdraw from agreement
Jul 29 2017*	3.97	US-Iran confrontation at sea
Apr 28 2018*	3.95	US Secretary of State calls for new sanctions
Jan 13 2018*	3.36	US renews sanctions waiver
Dec 3 2016*	2.87	US extends Iran Sanctions Act
Aug 6 2017*	2.68	Some P5+1 members attend Iran presidential inauguration
Mar 25 2018*	2.63	US imposes sanctions after hacking episode
Jan 6 2018*	2.34	Demonstrations take place across Iran
Sep 23 2017*	2.17	Iran tests missile, some P5+1 members support deal
May 7 2018	1.84	US set to withdraw from agreement
Jul 26 2017	1.63	Iran imposes sanctions on US firms
Panel B - GDELT measure		
Oct 14 2017*	7.54	US decertifies agreement
May 9 2018	5.40	US withdraws from agreement on previous day
May 8 2018	4.97	US withdraws from agreement
Jan 30 2017	4.00	Iran tests missile on previous day
Jan 13 2018*	3.87	US renews sanctions waiver
Jul 29 2017*	3.67	US-Iran confrontation at sea
Feb 4 2017*	3.54	US imposes sanctions after missile test
Sep 23 2017*	3.17	Iran tests missile, some P5+1 members support deal
May 6 2017*	3.13	Agreement discussed at Iranian presidential debate
Jan 31 2017	2.80	Iran tests missile two days earlier
Dec 18 2016*	2.70	US confirms extension of Iran Sanctions Act
Jan 29 2017	2.52	Iran tests missile
May 5 2018*	2.40	US set to withdraw from agreement
Dec 20 2016	2.31	Iran meets Russia to discuss Syria
May 1 2018	2.23	Israel claims existence of Iran nuclear program

This table displays the top fifteen observations, within the sample period November 12, 2016 to May 9, 2018, of a standardized count of the number of articles on relevant events identified in the Factiva (Panel A) and GDELT (Panel B) datasets, as discussed in Section 5.3. For each of these observations, the table shows the relevant date, the value of the variable, and an event of that day that is relevant to relations between countries of the P5+1 and Iran. Entries that are among the top fifteen observations for both of the two measures are highlighted in bold. Dates are marked with stars when the observation also includes events from prior days because of weekends or holidays on the TSE.

Table A21: Conflict Risk – Additional Specifications

Panel A - Geneva and election event studies				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Geneva event		Election event	
Event	-0.003 (0.138)	-0.067 (0.282)	1.221 (0.421)	1.646 (0.859)
Sensitivity rank * event		0.002 (0.008)		-0.012 (0.023)
Observations	3,788	3,788	3,752	3,752
Number of firms	66	66	64	64
Panel B - Post-election news coverage				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Factiva measure		GDELT measure	
Coverage	0.029 (0.009)	0.002 (0.018)	-0.024 (0.010)	-0.062 (0.019)
Sensitivity rank * coverage		0.0008 (0.0005)		0.0011 (0.0005)
Observations	22,516	22,516	22,516	22,516
Number of firms	64	64	64	64

This table displays estimated effects from specifications based on returns of non-Iranian firms in the arms industry. The dependent variable in both panels is daily stock return in percent. ‘Event’ is defined as Monday November 25, 2013 in columns (1) and (2) and Wednesday November 9, 2016 in columns (3) and (4). ‘Coverage’ is a standardized count of the number of articles on a relevant event identified in the Factiva (columns (1) and (2)) or GDELT (columns (3) and (4)) data. ‘Sensitivity rank’ is the rank of each firm based on the responsiveness of its stock return to the daily change in the airstrike arrival probability in the first quarter of 2012, as discussed in Section 6.2. All columns in Panel A include firm fixed effects, and all columns in Panel B include firm-quarter-day-of-week fixed effects, where ‘quarter’ refers to a unique quarter and year. In Panel A, the sample period is the event day (for the Geneva deal in columns (1) and (2) and for the 2016 US election in columns (3) and (4)) and the sixty previous trading days, and in Panel B, the sample period is from November 12, 2016 to May 9, 2018. Standard errors, clustered by firm, are in parentheses.