Bearing the Burden of Peace:

How Intergroup Bias Shapes Public Support for Peace Provisions

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**** Draft prepared for the VIP seminar session. Please do not cite nor circulate without the authors' consent.*

Thank you very much for taking the time to read and comment on our paper. As you will see, this is a first and incomplete draft of a manuscript we envision submitting as a short Research Note/Letter. We are particularly interested in hearing your thoughts on (1) the interpretation of results, (2) additional analyses we might conduct to corroborate our main findings, and (3) the pros and cons of our case study. Parts marked in green still need to be added or confirmed (in particular, at the time of writing, we just finished collecting the Wave 2-panel data).

Looking forward to your feedback! Thank you very much.

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We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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Abstract

Civilian support is key to the successful implementation of peace settlements in post-conflict countries, but what drives support for such settlements? In this article, we argue that the public approves peace settlements less (vs. more) when the ingroup (vs. outgroup) bears the burden. To test this argument, we conducted question-wording experiments with over 1,600 respondents in Azerbaijan. In the direct aftermath of a deadly resurgence of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, we primed the bearer of the costs for various peace provisions. We find that public support for peace provisions decreases substantially when the Azerbaijani state pays the burden of peace, but increases when Armenia pays. Emphasizing contributions of the International Community or burden-sharing between Armenia and Azerbaijan has inconsistent effects on support, depending on the peace provision in question. Finally, a panel study confirms that such intergroup bias persists for at least six months. These findings contribute to …

Keywords: war, peace, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, intergroup hostility

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How to establish peace agreements that durably end conflict and build sustainable peace? Scholars have traced the success of peace agreements back to various factors, including the presence or absence of specific peace provisions (e.g., Druckman and Wagner 2019; Matanock 2017), women's involvement in peace negotiations (e.g., Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018), and the timing, sequencing, and extent of peace agreements' implementation (Joshi and Quinn 2017; Langer and Brown 2016). Recently, scholars have also turned to public opinion as a key determinant of peace settlement success (e.g., Garbiras-Díaz, García-Sánchez, and Matanock 2021; Haas and Khadka 2020; Tellez 2019). Civilians not only influence peace processes when agreements are subject to a referendum (Tellez 2019), they also carry weight on peace negotiations (Kew and Wanis-St. John 2008) and the success of their implementation (Nilsson 2012).[1]

In this article, we contribute to this nascent strand of work by evaluating how intergroup bias shapes public support towards specific peace provisions. Given the—often-increasing—salience of identities during and after conflict, we contend that the public will approve peace provisions less when the ingroup bears the burden but more so when the outgroup is responsible for the costs. We also ask what happens to support when both parties or when the international community contributes. To test and answer our hypotheses and questions, we conducted question-wording experiments with over 1,600 respondents in an often-overlooked but conflict-ridden country: Azerbaijan. In a larger battery on support for peace provisions, respondents were randomly assigned to a question on the desirability of monetary compensations for war victims and war crime punishments with no information on

[1] We use peace agreements, settlements, and accords interchangeably.

the cost-bearer (i.e., control group) or with the cost-bearer of those provisions being Azerbaijan (i.e., ingroup condition), Armenia (i.e., outgroup condition), or both groups (i.e., burden-sharing condition). The international community was added as another cost-bearer for the monetary compensations.

Overall, Azerbaijanis are highly supportive of various peace provisions, including compensations for war victims and war crime punishments. Yet, this support drops decidedly when Azerbaijan is primed as the cost-bearer. The magnitude of this priming effect is remarkable. On a 5-point scale, respondents in the ingroup condition are about two full points less likely to support monetary compensations for war victims or war crime punishments compared to respondents in the control condition. By contrast, support for peace provisions increases when Armenia is primed as the cost-bearer, although to a smaller (predominantly because of ceiling effects) but still substantively important extent. Furthermore, the burden-sharing condition has inconsistent effects on public support, depending on the provision in question, while contributions from the international community are largely considered neutral by the public. Finally, a follow-up panel study shows how these effects persist over a longer period and apply to a wider range of peace provisions.

This study makes several contributions to both science and society. First, it advances the growing literature on public opinion toward peace agreements. Theoretically, we elucidate how conflict sharpens the boundaries between rivalry groups and how this, in turn, affects citizens' responses to peace provisions, especially in the immediate aftermath of war when memories of violence are still very much alive. While previous work has studied the role of intergroup bias in shaping support for combatants (Lyall, Blair, and Imai 2013) or in the context of leadership endorsements (Garbiras-Díaz, García-Sánchez, and Matanock 2021; Haas and Khadka 2020), less is known about how framing peace provisions in inclusive or exclusive ways affect support. We also depart from previous work by focusing on *specific*

peace provisions, an *inter-state conflict*, and the *direct aftermath* of conflict rather than peace agreements in their entirety, intra-state conflicts, or long-term tendencies. Second, we make a methodological contribution. The question-wording experiments were embedded within a larger battery on attitudes toward peace provisions to elicit truthful answers to sensitive questions about post-war retribution and punishment. Our easy-to-implement, unobtrusive experimental design and sampling strategy may be of interest to other scholars studying the causal effects of informational cues regarding peace provisions in other contexts. Third, this study provides timely policy implications for Azerbaijan and beyond. Peace does not come for free, and our results show that elites can significantly influence public opinion by providing information about who pays its price. At the same time, the results present elites with a fundamental paradox: While emphasizing out-group contributions may increase support in the short term, sharpening group boundaries might not be the best option for building sustainable peace in the longer term.

Theory and Hypotheses

One of the most well-established ideas in social sciences is that humans have an almost instinctive tendency to divide the world into in- and out-groups and derive a positive social identity from favorable comparisons between the in-group and relevant out-groups. Because of the pervasiveness of such social categorization and comparison processes, in-group favoritism—often accompanied by out-group denigration—is a “remarkably omnipresent feature of intergroup relations" (Tajfel and Turner 1979, 38–40). People form their social identity based on various social categories including, but not limited to, nationality, race, religion, gender, and partisanship (Huddy 2001). While social identities are “omnipresent” in everyday life, intergroup bias is often even more pronounced during and

after conflict, because conflict—often fought between clearly demarcated groups—sharpens group boundaries (Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis 2002).

In this paper, *we argue that intergroup bias plays a key role in shaping attitudes towards peace provisions*. Social identities provide mental shortcuts for people to assess both the *motives* and *threats* associated with different groups. First, when people share an identity with perpetrators of political violence, this violence is more likely to be perceived as caused by external circumstances and, therefore, less worthy of strong responses (including punishments). In contrast, outgroup members engaging in similar violent behavior are often seen as more responsible for their actions and thus more deserving of harsh punishments. This is what Gordon Allport, the founding father of intergroup relation studies, has labeled a "fundamental attribution error" (1954), and is in line with broader rally-around-the-flag tendencies in times of crisis (Brody and Shapiro 1989; Mueller 1970).[2] Second, violence also bolsters threat perceptions and security preferences (Davis and Silver 2004), and this is particularly true for outgroup violence. Prolonged intergroup conflicts, such as the Armenian-Azerbaijani one, often cause the parties involved to believe "that they are the 'true' victims of the conflict," while perceiving the outgroup as "the guilty, violent perpetrator" (Noor et al. 2012, 352, 356: see also Bar-Tal 2000). Hence, to the extent that post-war reparations convey a deterrence effect, punishing the outgroup should be seen by respondents as an efficient way to reduce threat (in addition to restoring justice). Taken together, drawing on these different insights, we expect that citizens will be more likely to endorse peace provisions that punish the outgroup (i.e., Outgroup Hypothesis) but less likely to endorse peace provisions that punish the ingroup (i.e., Ingroup Hypothesis).[3]

[2] We expect rally tendencies to be even more pronounced in our *inter*state setting given that state boundaries are very clear-cut and *international* crises are central in classic rally theories.

[3] These hypotheses were pre-registered at Open Science framework ([redacted].

Such so-called "in-group love" and "out-group hate" responses are often assumed to be two sides of the same coin but, so far, this assumption has barely been tested. Indeed, whether public support for peace provisions is predominantly driven by ingroup favoritism, outgroup hostility or both remains an open empirical question (but see Haas and Khadka 2020 for a recent exception). Moreover, it remains unclear how emphasizing burden-sharing affects public support for peace provisions (i.e., Burden-Sharing Question) or how contributions from the international community are perceived by the public (i.e., International Community Question)—despite the enormous policy relevance of these questions. Our research design allows us to directly address these questions. But before describing the design in more detail, we give a brief overview of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Never-Ending Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

The Nagorno-Karabakh[4] conflict, fought between Armenia and Azerbaijan, is one of the world's most disputed, intractable, and widely neglected conflicts. The origin of the first full-fledged Nagorno-Karabakh War (1992-1994) goes back to growing ethno-territorial tensions and self-determination sentiments during the late 1980s when both countries were still a part of a dissolving Soviet Union.[5] The main cause of these disputes was the Nagorno-Karabakh ("Karabakh" hereinafter) region, *de jure* a part of Soviet Azerbaijan but with the majority of its population being ethnic Armenians (de Waal 2003). In February 1988, Karabakh Armenians demanded the transfer of Karabakh from Soviet Azerbaijan to Soviet

[4] The grammatically more correct term is *Nagorniy*-Karabakh (de Waal 2003), with *Nagorniy* meaning "mountainous" in Russian and *Karabakh* "Black Garden" in Azerbaijani.

[5] Tensions over the region predate the Soviet Union, however. After the fall of the Russian Empire in 1918, the newly independent *Azerbaijani Democratic Republic* and *First Republic of Armenia* both claimed the Nagorno-Karabakh region, leading to the first violent episode (1918-1920).

Armenia. When this demand was rejected, the situation escalated into a full-fledged war in the early 1990s. After international mediation by several groups, including the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), a Russian-brokered peace agreement ended the fighting in May 1994. By then, Armenia was in full control of the Karabakh enclave and captured seven additional Azerbaijani territories surrounding the enclave. As a result, Azerbaijan *de facto* lost a substantial proportion of its territory which was, and still is, internationally recognized as Azerbaijani (see the in 1993 adopted United Nations Security Council resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884).[6] The 1992-1994 war cost the lives of about 16,000 Azerbaijani and 4,000 Armenian civilians, and displaced over a million people, mostly Azerbaijanis from Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the surrounding areas.

Despite the ceasefire, (violent) tensions persisted, escalating into another full-scale war in 2020. This second Karabakh war—now often called the 44-days war—erupted on 27 September 2020, after intensified clashes in July 2020. In terms of casualties, the clashes were the worst since the 1994 ceasefire and caused alarm in the international community. On November 9th, Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed on a new Russian-brokered settlement to end the war. The agreement calls for Armenia's army to withdraw from the Nagorno-Karabakh region and to be replaced by Russian peacekeepers. The agreement also stipulates that Azerbaijan can keep the areas of Nagorno-Karabakh it has regained over the six-week conflict, sparking anger and fierce resistance in Armenia. Hence, this time, roles were reversed, with Armenia losing significant territory in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Table 1 summarizes the conflict's main events.

[6] The self-declared "Republic of Artsakh" *de facto* governs the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Table 1. Timeline of Main Events

1918-1920	**Armenian-Azerbaijani War**
February 20, 1988	Vote on unification with Armenia
1988-1992	Tensions, violent clashes, and pogroms; dissolution Soviet Union
1992	Escalation of clashes into **first Nagorno-Karabakh War**
May 1994	First Russian-brokered ceasefire
The 2010s	Episodic clashes
September 27, 2020	Escalation of clashes into **second Nagorno-Karabakh War**
November 9-10, 2020	Second Russian-brokered ceasefire, which came into effect at midnight on November 10

[To add: a short paragraph on what NK is a case of, to what other cases this might generalize, but also the limitations of this specific case]

Method

Survey and Question-Wording Experiment

We conducted a large-scale online survey in Azerbaijan about two months after the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace deal peace was signed,[7] designed to estimate the causal effect of framing peace provisions in exclusive or inclusive terms on public support. After having measured participants' socio-demographics, political attitudes, and war-related traumas, two unobtrusive question-wording experiments were embedded within a larger battery measuring attitudes toward peace in general, and in particular, peace provisions. More specifically, for the items on monetary compensations for victims and penalties for war crimes, the parties paying the compensations or standing trial were randomized as follows:

- Victims of the war, both Azeris and Armenians, should receive monetary compensation from the [Azerbaijan state/ Armenian state/ Azerbaijan and Armenian state/international community (like the United Nations)/*no actor*].
- All war crimes committed by [Azeri forces/Armenian forces/both Azeri and Armenian forces/*no actor*] should be severely punished.

Respondents rated their level of agreement with each provision on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (=1) to strongly agree (=5). The full survey battery, in which the experiments were embedded, is available in Appendix A. Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regressions are used to obtain our estimate of interest (i.e., Average Treatment Effect, ATE), with the "no actor" condition used as the baseline reference category.

[7] We obtained ethical approval from [redacted]. The survey ran from January 5 to February 23, lasted approximately 15 minutes, and was available in both Azerbaijani and English.

Participants

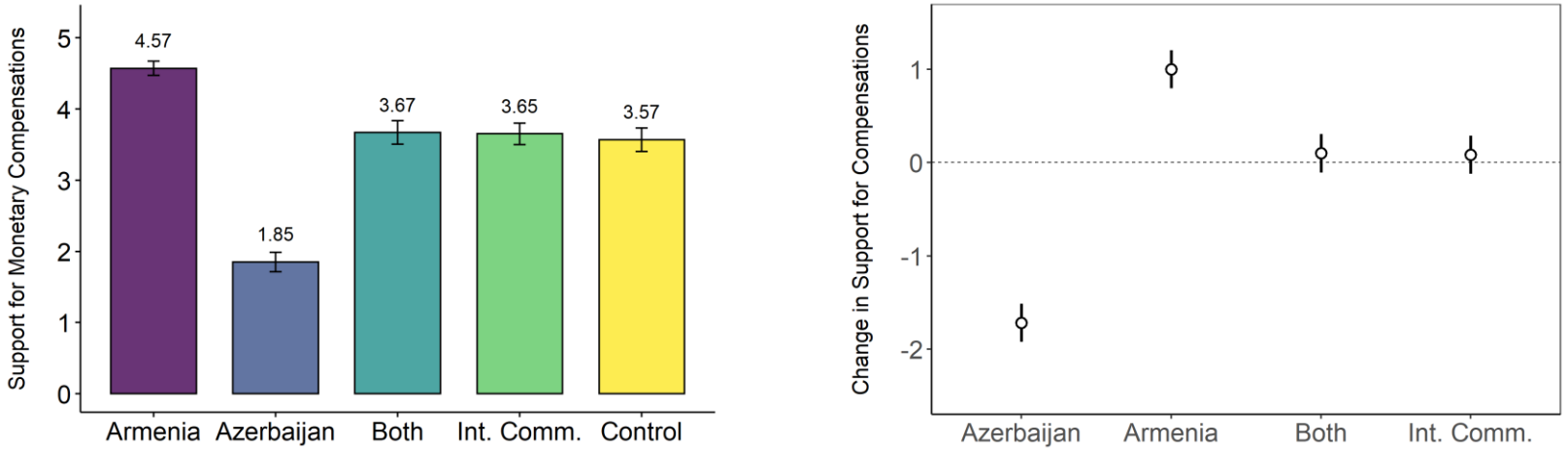
We recruited participants online using Facebook ads. After some broadly publicized posts, we targeted our posts to those groups at risk of being underrepresented in the data. On the one hand, this sampling strategy allowed us to collect unique, well-powered data at a relatively low cost within a hard-to-reach population (during the pandemic; see Appendix A for more details). On the other hand, we still rely on a convenience and unrepresentative sample, which has implications for the external validity of our results (see conclusion). After cleaning the data, we obtain a sample of N=1613.[8] The sample overrepresents male and highly educated participants, originating from and residing in the capital (see Table A.1).

[8] About 2800 subjects started the questionnaire. Appendix Table B1 shows that there are no systematic differences between participants that did and did not complete the survey experiment. Furthermore, an effective sample size of 1,613 still allows for a well-powered test of our hypotheses based on our a priori calculations.

Results

Figure 2 displays the mean levels of support across experimental conditions (left panel) and changes in support compared to the control condition (right panel; see also Table 1 below) for both monetary compensations (Fig. 2A) and war crime punishments (Fig. 2B). As predicted, public support for both peace provisions drops when Azerbaijan is primed as the cost-bearer. The magnitude of this effect is remarkable. Compared to the control condition, respondents in the in-group condition are 1.72 points less likely to endorse monetary compensations for war victims and 2.13 points less likely to endorse war crime investigations (both on a 5-point scale; p's < .0001). By contrast, when respondents read that the out-group (i.e., Armenia) bears the burden of peace, support increases and reaches almost the threshold of the scales. Notwithstanding possible ceiling effects, these increases in support are still significant (p < .0001 for compensations; p = 0.002 for punishments). Finally, neither the burden-sharing nor the international community condition influences support for monetary compensations compared to the control condition (p = 0.334 and p = 0.426, respectively). Yet, respondents in the burden-sharing condition are slightly but significantly less likely to endorse punishments of war crimes (p <.0001). In sum, consistent with our expectations, public support for peace provisions decreases considerably when the in-group has to contribute more and increases when the out-group has to pay. We find no evidence of a change in support when the international community pays the compensations and inconsistent evidence for the burden-sharing condition.

(A) Monetary Compensations for War Victims



(B) War Crime Punishments

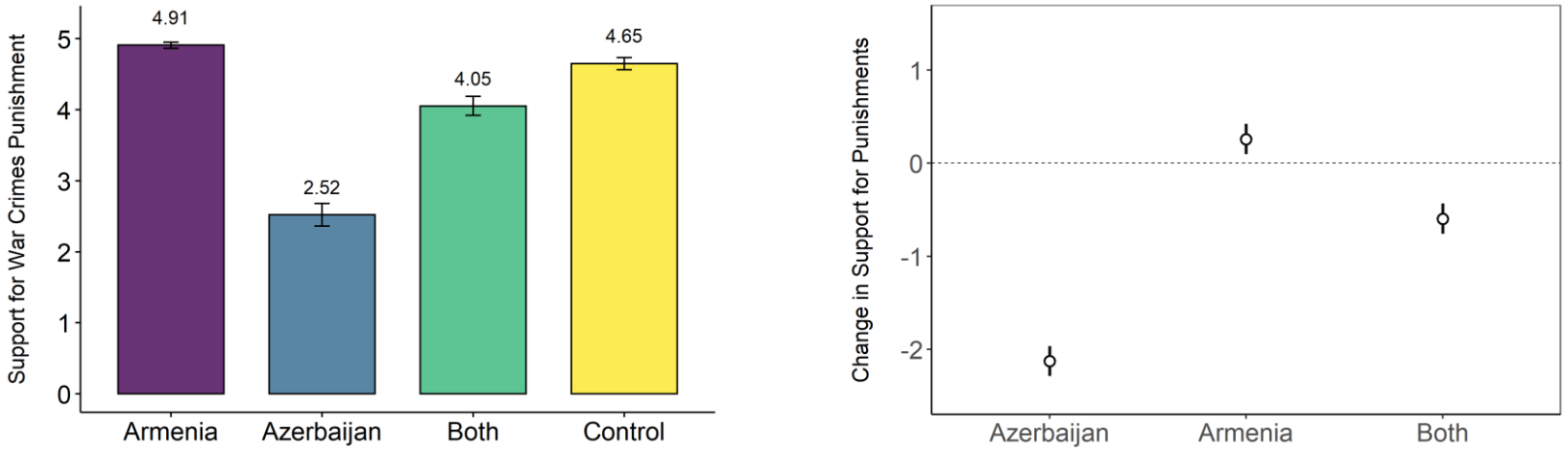


Figure 2. Mean Support per Condition (left) and Change in Support Compared to Control Condition (right) for Both Peace Provisions.

Follow-Up Panel Study

Puzzled by the magnitude of the effect sizes as well as the divergent and null results of the burden-sharing and international community conditions, respectively, we invited all original participants to complete a follow-up questionnaire half a year after the initial study.[9] This follow-up study was much shorter and included both a within- and between-study component. First, to assess whether intergroup bias declines as time goes by, respondents were assigned to their *original* condition for the monetary compensations and war crime punishments provisions. Second, to determine whether results are conditional on the peace provision in question, respondents were randomly assigned to *seven new* question-wording experiments manipulating the cost-bearer (see Appendix X). Here, randomization happened at the respondent (and not item) level to keep the cost-bearer constant and we changed from a 5- to a 7-point scale hoping to diminish ceiling effects.[10]

The follow-up study yields three crucial findings. First, intergroup biases persist for at least six months. Second, … Third, over and beyond the experimental results, both the initial and follow-up study show that Azerbaijanis are generally strongly in favor of various peace provisions (SI Table X.X).

[9] Out of the 1612 participants who completed Wave 1, 1001 (62%) provided a valid email address to be contacted again. Of these, 333 (33%) completed Wave 2. Participation in T2 is not associated with treatment assignment in T1 nor do we find significant differences in sociodemographics between those participants who took part in T2 and those who did not (see Appendix X). As pre-registered, the sample size in Wave 2 is still sufficiently powered (see osf.xxx.).

[10] We followed Ryan and Krupnikov (2021)'s routine preregistration template to convey what we have learned from the first wave and document the theoretical focus, questions and predictions, and empirical strategy central to the second wav (see [redacted]). A follow-up study was already envisioned in our first pre-registration.

[Possible ways to report the results]

- Any thoughts on the Tables below or the way we present the results above. The right panel of figure 2 and the overall columns in Table 1 are identical (hence, delete one?)

- Should we (also) report the overall means in T1 vs. T2, incl. t-test results?

Table 1. Between- and Within-Subjects Experimental Results (Wave 1 and 2)

	Monetary Compensations			War Crime Punishments		
	Wave 1		Wave 2	Wave 1		Wave 2
	All (N=1,613)	Panel (N=333)	Panel (N=333)	All (N=1,613)	Panel (N=333)	Panel (N=333)
(intercept)	3.568			4.650		
	(0.075)***			(0.059)***		
Ingroup	-1.719			-2.128		
	(0.105)***			(0.083)***		
Outgroup	1.002			0.259		
	(0.104)***			(0.083)**		
Burden-sharing	0.102			-0.599		
	(0.105)			(0.083)***		
IC	0.081					
	(0.104)					

Note: Unstandardized OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in brackets. Coefficients in bold at Wave 2 are significantly different than at Wave 1.

[*Note: We did not pre-register specificities regarding the OLS regression. Hence, it might be best to compare a classic OLS with and without covariate adjustment vs. using robust standard errors vs. using the lin (2013) estimator? (I do not expect many differences).*]

Table 2. Between-Subjects Experimental Results (Wave 2)

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7
(intercept)							
Ingroup							
Outgroup							
Burden-sharing							
IC							

Note: OLS coefficients and robust standard errors in brackets.

Discussion

On November 10, 2020, a Russian-brokered ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan ended a 44-days war in and around the contested Nagorno-Karabakh region in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan regained most of the territory it lost to Armenia during the first war (1992-1994). In this paper, we took a bottom-up perspective on peacebuilding by studying public support for peace provisions. We argued that peace provisions will be perceived through the lens of the intergroup conflict that leads to the war in the first place and, thereby, articulated one of the psychological processes that might bias attitudes toward peace. To test this, we conducted question-wording experiments in Azerbaijan (N=1,613) two months after the weapons were laid down.

Our findings confirm that intergroup bias plays a key role in shaping support for peace provisions in countries transitioning from war to peace. [Elaborate on results at both T1 and T2]. These findings hold practical implications for how elites might frame peace settlements and theoretical implications for work on the role of information cues in post-conflict settings. [End with a cautionary word on the limitations of this study].

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