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The Political Legacies of Combat: Attitudes towards war and peace amongst Israeli ex-combatants¹

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Abstract: Does combat experience foster hardliner approaches to conflict, diminishing the likelihood of reconciliation? We exploit the assignment of health rankings determining combat eligibility in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to examine the effect of combat exposure on support for peaceful resolution of conflict. Given the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to global affairs, and with no resolution to the conflict currently in sight, the question of the political consequences of combat becomes all the more pressing. We find that exposure to combat hardens attitudes towards the rival and reduces support for negotiation and compromise. Importantly, these attitudes translate directly into voting behavior, such that combatants are more likely to vote for hardliner parties. These findings cast doubt on research highlighting the benign effects of combat and underscore the importance of combatant reintegration for the transition from conflict to peace.

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1 Introduction

Are former combatants likely to promote or impede the resolution of ongoing conflicts? Policy makers have long sided with the latter approach, viewing ex-combatants as a threat to the successful transition from war to peace. This perception has led to the rise of combatant reintegration programs in societies recovering from violent conflict (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2007). Recent research, however, has challenged this perception, suggesting that the political effects of combat are surprisingly benign. Combat experience has been linked to increased political mobilization and participation (Blattman, 2009), greater volunteerism (Nesbit and Reingold, 2011) and higher turnout rates (Teigen, 2006). These studies join an emerging literature on the political effects of violence exposure on civilian victims, which finds that exposure to violence increases political and civic engagement (Bellows and Miguel, 2009; Voors et al., 2012; Gilligan, Pasquale and Samii, forthcoming). Violence exposure, it is argued, increases personal resiliency and collective coping, resulting in increased political participation and social cohesion.

The recent wave of research highlighting the benign effects of violence exposure has undoubtedly enhanced our understanding of the consequences of political violence. However, such studies are limited in their ability to address the relationship between violence exposure and conflict resolution. First, studies conducted in the aftermath of war and in the midst of reconstruction efforts may be biased in favor of more prosocial effects (Jha and Wilkenson, 2012). Second, increased engagement and mobilization do not in themselves guarantee support for reconciliation or post-conflict stability. Political activism can be harnessed in support of exclusionary policies, promoting further conflict and violence (Chambers and Kopstein, 2001). Third, studies emphasizing violence exposure's benign effects have primarily examined attitudes and behavior towards *ingroup* members.¹ Conflict resolution efforts, however, depend first and foremost on attitudes and behavior towards the *adversary* group, which likely follows a different logic. Finally, the majority of recent studies address the impact of political violence on civilians rather than the political legacies of violence for combatants. In sum, how combat experience affects support for war and peace in the midst of an ongoing conflict remains an open question.

The effects of combat exposure on attitudes towards reconciliation are important since ex-combatants exercise considerable influence on the possibility and viability of conflict resolution. Depending on the context, this may be because their skills and training make them more likely to pose a credible violent threat (Jha and Wilkenson, 2012), because they enjoy moral credibility for having participated in battle (Horowitz and Stam, 2012), or simply because their sheer numbers are large enough to sway public opinion, as in countries with mandatory conscription. Yet research on this important question is hindered by the difficulty of isolating the causal effects of combat experience. Selection into combat is typically not random, making it difficult to disentangle its

¹For example, Voors et al. (2012) focus on altruistic behavior towards neighbors, and Bellows and Miguel (2009) examine attendance in community meetings and membership in community groups.

effects from pre-existing differences between combatants and non-combatants that independently affect attitudes towards war and peace.

We employ data from an original survey of former Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers to investigate the consequences of combat for political behavior and for attitudes towards negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel's mandatory conscription laws reduce the selection bias associated with voluntary recruitment methods. Nevertheless, assignment into combat, though not completely voluntary, is subject to some self-selection. We overcome the problem of unobserved heterogeneity in combat recruitment by exploiting the health rankings assigned to Israeli youth as part of the IDF recruitment process. We show that health rankings, the primary factor determining combat eligibility, can be used as an instrument for combat exposure.

We find that combat exposure during high-intensity conflict substantially hardens attitudes towards the rival and heightens preferences for military solutions over negotiated ones. Importantly, the hardening effect we identify is not merely attitudinal but finds stark expression in voting behavior, with ex-combatants voting for more hawkish parties. This difference is highly consequential in the context of the Israeli parliamentary system, in which the majority of citizens vote for parties at the center of the political spectrum and in which the split between the Right and Left blocs is typically close. The relative rightward shift is significant and robust for ex-combatants who served under the high-intensity conditions of the Second Intifada. We do not, however, find evidence for a similar shift among combatants who did the bulk of their military service in the relatively low intensity conditions that have generally characterized the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the years since the IDF's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005.

Our analysis also reveals that the hardening effects of combat exposure depend on the political backgrounds of combatants prior to enlistment. We find that the lion's share of combat's observed causal effect is driven by a significant shift to the right on the part of ex-combatants who grew up in left, center, and moderate right-leaning households. In contrast, ex-combatants from households on the far right report attitudes to the left of non-combatants from similar backgrounds. The implications of this pattern are that while combat service reduces political polarization among recruits, it also hardens the attitudes of precisely those who might otherwise have supported negotiations and compromise, eroding the support base of political parties advocating reconciliation.

Finally, we find some evidence that combat socialization processes as well as prejudice are mediators of the relationship between combat exposure and attitudes towards war and peace. Combat socialization during high-intensity conflict contributes to political hardening by framing the relationship with the adversary through military lenses, resulting in greater belief in the use of force as an appropriate solution for conflict (Snyder, 1984). As for prejudice, while under some circumstances intergroup contact can reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954), our data lends support to the idea that "negative contact" exacerbates intergroup hostility by making group identity more salient and increasing feelings of anxiety and threat (Stephan et al., 2002).

This article contributes to the emerging literature on the political effects of violence exposure by making an important analytic distinction between political attitudes and behavior towards in-group members and towards the rival out-group. While exposure to war related violence may have positive *intra*-group effects (though we do not find evidence for such effects in our sample), its negative impact on *inter*-group attitudes and behavior provides cause for concern. As such, this paper offers important qualifications to this emerging literature and cautions against the interpretation of violence exposure as benign based on measures of political engagement alone. From a policy perspective, our findings thus suggest a renewed focus on combatant reintegration programs to reduce prejudice and to build faith in the viability and desirability of peaceful conflict resolution.

This article also contributes to a longstanding debate on whether military experience is likely to lead to more conservative or enthusiastic attitudes regarding the use of military force (Huntington, 1957; Feaver and Gelpi, 2004). Evidence for either of these claims remains elusive due to the difficulty in isolating combat's causal effects. As the first well-identified study examining attitudes towards war and peace among ex-combatants, this paper challenges the dominant wisdom that soldiers, having personally experienced the costs of war, are less likely to support military action. Instead, our findings demonstrate that social-psychological processes associated with combat socialization and participation in armed conflict can overcome calculations of self-interest, leading to greater support for military solutions.

Finally, the paper makes a methodological contribution by identifying health rankings as a valid instrument for combat, which may be useful for other outcomes as well as in other contexts beyond Israel. The study's identification strategy can allow for improved causal inference regarding combat exposure's effects, improving our understanding of the long-term legacies of conflict.

2 Combat Exposure and Attitudes towards War and Peace

A considerable body of research has sought to examine how military experience in general, and combat exposure specifically, affects political attitudes and behavior. Contrary to some popular portrayals of ex-combatants as disaffected and violence-prone, the predominant approach argues that combat experience has positive political effects, increasing civic engagement and reducing support for the use of force. The primary mechanism through which combat exposure was postulated to affect attitudes towards war and peace was self interest: Dating back to Huntington (1957) and Janowitz (1960), the conventional wisdom has held that since veterans have experienced the costs of war first hand and might expect to bear those costs again should conflict resume, they are likely to be more conservative about the decision to go to war and to perceive it as a last resort.

These initial theories were based primarily on historical case studies and focused on the influence of senior military officials on the formation of foreign policy. Later studies confirmed that at the elite level, those with military experience tend to be more conservative than civilians regarding the

use of military force (Feaver and Gelpi, 2004). Such research is consistent with studies of *civilian* attitudes towards war, which largely find that as the costs of conflict become more concrete and war casualties more proximate, support for military solutions declines (Gartner, 2008). Relatedly, Horowitz and Levendusky (2011) find that conscription reduces support for war, especially among citizens most likely to be affected by a draft.

Yet while military elites are likely more conservative regarding the use of force than their civilian counterparts, the attitudes of ordinary soldiers who served for limited periods may be different than career officers. Investigating this proposition based on cross-sectional public opinion data, Feaver and Gelpi (2004) find that at the mass level, veterans are more supportive of military interventions than non-veterans. As they note, however, it is difficult to ascertain whether these differences are due to military exposure or to pre-existing differences in political attitudes that shape military recruitment patterns. This limitation is partially addressed in a study by Erikson and Stoker (2011), who examine the effect of lottery-based draft vulnerability on attitudes towards the Vietnam war. The authors find that those more vulnerable to the draft adopt more antiwar attitudes. Consistent with the self-interest approach, Erikson and Stoker also hypothesize that actual military service alienates individuals from the war effort, leading to more dovish attitudes. Their findings, however, indicate that military service is weakly associated with greater support for war.²

A second approach linking combat with positive political outcomes emerges from the recent micro-level literature on the consequences of civil wars (Bellows and Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009; Voors et al., 2012). Several of these studies have focused on the psychological processes associated with violence exposure, invoking Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004)'s concept of post-traumatic growth to explain findings that violence exposure results in increased political and civic engagement. According to this approach, traumatic experiences can induce positive change, leading to an increased sense of personal strength and more meaningful relationships. While most of this research concerns civilian victims of violence, Blattman (2009) exploits rebel abduction in Uganda to examine the effects of combat exposure, finding that former rebels are more likely to vote and become community leaders. Based on this logic it is plausible that processes of personal growth and resilience may extend to other prosocial outcomes, including support for peaceful solutions to conflict.

As noted, the majority of recent research on the consequences of violence exposure has been conducted in the aftermath of conflict and has focused on political outcomes for civilians at the intra-group, or communal level. In the context of ongoing conflict, however, there are several reasons to expect that war experiences have far more negative effects on inter-group attitudes and behavior, reducing support for conflict resolution.

Socialization: Combat soldiers undergo intense socialization processes that are intended to increase aggression towards rival out-groups and inculcate a sense of identification with the military's

²Erikson and Stoker (2011, 227-230) readily acknowledge, however, that their instrument is too weak to allow identification of actual service in Vietnam and is inappropriate for overcoming the problem of self-selection into combat.

objectives and tactics (Grossman, 1996). Such powerful processes, which take place both through formal institutions like basic training and informal initiation and hazing rituals (Wood, 2008), go far beyond ordinary military socialization and are designed to make combatants more comfortable with the use of force. As a result, they may lead combatants to frame relations with the adversary through military lenses, resulting in greater acceptance of military solutions to conflicts (Posen, 1984; Snyder, 1984).

Prejudice: Combat exposure may also lead to the rejection of reconciliation by fostering prejudice. Research in social psychology suggests that when groups are engaged in disagreement over resources and when their interests are perceived as incompatible, intergroup relations will be characterized by prejudice (Brown, 2010). While such processes are applicable to societies in conflict in general, combatants are likely to be more susceptible, as they are typically engaged in sustained negative, threatening contact with the outgroup (Stephan et al., 2002). The circumstances of irregular warfare, in which fighting takes place among ordinary civilians rather than on conventional battlefields, can further heighten prejudice, as civilians are low-status opponents, which tend to elicit contempt and even disgust (Fiske et al., 2002).

Threat: Several studies demonstrate that real and perceived threats raise support for aggressive action against those groups perceived as threatening (Huddy et al., 2005). The perception of threat leads to increased hostility and prejudice (Giles and Hertz, 1994), and ethnocentrism (Grant, 1993). Combatants typically experience such threats first hand, and as such may be more likely to harbor hostility towards the outgroup and support aggressive rather than conciliatory measures. Threat may be compounded by the experience of irregular conflict, where boundaries between combatants and civilians are blurred and violent situations sometimes erupt from what initially seem like innocuous conditions.

Trauma: Exposure to violence can be traumatizing, leading to psychological strain, distress, and PTSD (Levy and Sidel, 2009). Research investigating the role of trauma on attitudes towards war and peace, rather than on political participation generally, finds that violence exposure reduces support for reconciliation, among conflict victims (Pham, Weinstein and Longman, 2004) and former child soldiers (Bayer, Klasen and Adam, 2007). While to our knowledge research has not yet investigated the relationship between trauma and political behavior among adult combatants, it is plausible that similar patterns would hold, reducing support for reconciliation.³

All of these mechanisms suggest that combat exposure may actually *reduce* support for peaceful conflict resolution among former combatants, decreasing the likelihood of reconciliation. The handful of studies that have examined the effects of violence exposure on inter-group attitudes and behavior provide some evidence for these grim predictions. For example, Jha and Wilkenon (2012) find that during the partition of South Asia, districts with larger numbers of ex-combatants

³There exists a large literature on the relationship between combat trauma and anti-social behaviors such as crime, aggression, and domestic violence, but this literature focuses on the relatively small subset of combatants with PTSD rather than combat's impact generally.

were more likely to undergo minority ethnic cleansing.⁴ Beber, Roessler and Scacco (2012) find that Northern Sudanese who personally experienced rioting by Southerners are less likely to favor allowing Southerners to retain citizenship in the North, and Rohner, Thoenig and Zilibotti (forthcoming) find that conflict in Uganda reduces inter-ethnic trust. In the Israeli-Palestinian context, Canetti-Nisim et al. (2009) find that exposure to terrorist violence is associated with hostile and exclusionist attitudes towards Israel's Palestinian minority, and Berrebi and Klor (2008) find that terror attacks within three months of the elections increased support for right wing parties. Finally, using longitudinal public opinion polls, Jaeger et al. (2012) find that exposure to Israeli violence radicalizes Palestinian public opinion, though this effect is relatively short-lived.

These studies all suggest that violence exposure may have dire consequences for inter-group relations and for the likelihood that ex-combatants support compromise and peaceful conflict resolution. However, with the exception of Jha and Wilkenson (2012), past research examines the inter-group consequences of violence for civilian victims, not combatants. And though insightful, the study by Jha and Wilkenson uses aggregated district-level data and hence is unable to test the effect of combat exposure at the micro-level. Our article employs a novel identification strategy and unique survey data that allow us to examine the causal effect of combat exposure at the individual level on three political outcomes: attitudes towards war and peace, vote choice, and political participation.

3 Military Service in the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a defining feature of Israeli politics since Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem in 1967.⁵ After two decades of military occupation, Palestinians first rose against Israeli rule in December 1987 in what became known as the First Intifada (literally "shaking off"). Since then relations between Israelis and Palestinians have been characterized by episodes of intense violence followed by periods of relative calm. Repression of the First Intifada was followed by formal negotiations under the Madrid process in 1991 and secret negotiations culminating in the Declaration of Principles (DOP, also known as the Oslo I Accord), signed by Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in September 1993. The DOP and subsequent Cairo (1994) and Taba (1995) agreements called for gradual withdrawal of Israel from the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and the establishment of a Palestinian National Authority, and provided a framework for final status negotiations. The Oslo process was met with violence from opposition groups among Palestinians and Israelis and its implementation stalled, until ultimately collapsing in 2000 following the Camp David summit.

⁴However, they also find that such districts had fewer deaths, attributing these findings to the organizational skills acquired by former combatants. This mechanism is therefore consistent with both negative and positive intergroup outcomes, depending on the ways in which combatants' skills are put to use.

⁵The roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are, of course, deeper, extending to the struggle between Jewish and Arab nationalist movements beginning around the turn of the 20th century.

On September 29, 2000, the conflict erupted into its bloodiest phase to date, an armed insurgency that came to be known as the Second Intifada. In the course of repression of the insurgency the IDF re-entered areas from which it had withdrawn under the DOP framework, conducting thousands of offensive operations and raids as well as dramatically intensifying its population control measures restricting and regulating Palestinian movement. Over a period of five years levels of insurgent violence gradually declined, and in 2005 Israel unilaterally withdrew its forces and civilian presence from the Gaza Strip. Since 2006 a period of relative calm has ensued, punctuated by occasional bouts of violence. Israeli troops retain freedom of operation in the West Bank, remaining for the most part outside of Palestinian population centers though continuing to conduct limited operations. In Hamas-controlled Gaza, Israeli ground troops are stationed alongside the border while the IDF maintains indirect control through air and naval power, drones, and occasional large scale operations.

The bulk of Israel's military effort in the OPT is born by young men carrying out their compulsory term in the IDF. Since its establishment, Israel has recruited soldiers through mandatory conscription. All citizens are required by law to enlist in the military at the age of 18 and serve a period of three years for males and two years for women. Though the law applies in principle to all citizens, in practice Israel has exempted or created special arrangements for several groups, chief among them Israeli Arabs, Ultra-Orthodox Jews and religious women. As a result, approximately 50 percent of the Israeli population serves in the military, with the figure rising to 75 percent among Jewish males. Upon completing their compulsory service a minority chooses to remain as career soldiers while the rest are released and enter the IDF reserves.

Israeli combatants begin their service with a training period ranging from six to eighteen months and are subsequently deployed to Israel's various theaters of operation, along its borders and in the OPT. Traditionally, soldiers have alternated throughout their service between periods of deployment and periods of training. However, the nature of combat service has varied widely by period, depending on the intensity of conflict in which Israel was engaged at the particular time. During the Second Intifada Israeli troops spent nearly all of their deployment in the OPT, as ongoing training of soldiers was all but suspended to allow for continuous participation in counterinsurgency operations. 3,557 Palestinians and 996 Israelis were killed between 2000-2005, of which 310 were members of the IDF.⁶ Combatants who served in this period were therefore exposed to high levels of violence, as perpetrators, victims, and witnesses.

In contrast, combatants who served in the years following the IDF's withdrawal from Gaza experienced much less violence on average. Israeli casualties dropped by 90 percent from the previous period, and though numbers of Palestinian fatalities were often high, most were killed from air and artillery strikes without direct engagement from ground troops. The nature of deployment

⁶In terms of civilian deaths, the Second Intifada was Israel's most violent episode of conflict since its establishment; see data by the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, at <http://www.btselem.org/statistics>.

changed as well, as ongoing training resumed, tours of duty became more varied, and soldiers had far less direct military engagement with Palestinians.

Though levels of violence have fluctuated considerably, the OPT remain a central theater of operations for the IDF, and nearly all IDF combatants have taken part in the military occupation. Mandatory conscription renders combat exposure a formative socialization experience for a substantial segment of the population. Ex-combatants attitudes are thus instrumental in forming public opinion on matters of security, war, and peace, and an important political force in encouraging or impeding reconciliation.

4 Research Design, Data, and Measurement

To study the causal effects of combat exposure on voting behavior and attitudes towards reconciliation, we designed and implemented an original survey of former IDF soldiers. Our target population is Jewish, male citizens born between 1980 and 1991 and released from mandatory military service between 2001 and 2012. We exclude Arab Israeli and ultra-Orthodox Jews that are exempt from military service, as well as women who serve in the IDF but for the most part do not serve in combat roles.

The survey was implemented in two waves in March and April 2013, generating two samples: former soldiers who enlisted in the IDF between 2004 and 2009 (the “Post-Gaza withdrawal sample”), and former soldiers who enlisted between 1998 and 2003 (the “Second Intifada sample”). Respondents were recruited by iPanel, Israel’s largest “opt-in” internet survey firm. As is common in online survey panels, members collect points for responding to surveys, which they can then redeem for gift certificates. Our power calculation indicated a sample size of about 1,100 was necessary for identifying a treatment effect of combat exposure in each of the two conflict periods: the Second Intifada and the post-Gaza withdrawal years. Given the expected participation rate of online surveys (between 15 and 20%) and the size of iPanel’s pool of respondents, we invited every member that matched our inclusion criteria to participate in the survey.

Our mode of respondent recruitment raises natural questions about the representativeness of our samples. While our sample is representative of the Israeli Jewish male population in the relevant cohort in terms of geographical background, immigration status, and share of combatants, it is somewhat skewed towards more educated and less religious respondents.⁷ However, as our aim in this study is not to estimate precise population values but to investigate the causal relationship between combat service and political attitudes and behavior, concerns of internal validity make the use of a volunteer panel appropriate (Malhotra and Krosnick, 2007). A more detailed discussion of

⁷Socioeconomic bias is typical in studies that are based on opt-in Internet users. In the U.S., for example, studies find that opt-in panels have higher shares of whites and higher educated individuals than the general population (Malhotra and Krosnick, 2007).

sample representativeness can be found in the Supplementary Information (SI), section 3.3.

Of the 15,216 invitations issued to participate in the study, 2,936 individuals responded, constituting a 19 percent participation rate. Of these, 328 respondents were screened for not serving in the military. We further screened out 146 respondents who served in the air force or navy, since they do not engage in direct contact with Palestinians, volunteers, individuals with large amounts of missing data, and ‘satisficers,’⁸ leaving a final dataset of 2,334 respondents. The online survey consisted of three parts: We first asked our respondents to provide socio-demographic information in order to test the plausibility of our identification strategy and analyze heterogeneous treatment effects. To avoid priming, we then ask a battery of questions on political attitudes and behavior before turning to a set of questions about military experience and violence exposure. Tables A.1 and A.2 provide summary statistics of the two samples.

4.1 Identification Strategy: Combat Eligibility Health Rankings

Measurement of the causal impact of combat exposure is complicated by selection problems. Even under Israel’s mandatory conscription laws, assignment into *combat* is commonly subjected to at least some self-selection. Combatants may differ from non-combat soldiers in important ways, which is especially problematic when pre-service differences contribute to political attitudes later in life. To account for potential unobserved differences between combat and non-combat soldiers we use individual IDF health rankings determining combat eligibility as an instrument for combat exposure. This section describes and provides evidence in support of the use of health-based combat eligibility as a valid instrument, at least in the context of this study.

In Israel, all prospective recruits are summoned to their local recruitment center for several mandatory visits in the year prior to enlistment, to evaluate their suitability for the various possible military assignments. On the first visit, prospective recruits are required to produce detailed information from their family physician and other specialists who have treated them in the past, as well as undergo comprehensive medical examinations including orthopedic and vision evaluations, height, weight, blood pressure, pulse, and urinalysis tests. In some cases, they are ordered to provide additional medical information and attend a follow-up evaluation by medical specialists. The results of the medical examinations are evaluated by a medical committee that assigns each recruit a health score on an A-F scale, known as a “profile score” (Chaiter et al., 2010). These scores are the single most important criterion in determining the likelihood of serving as combatants. Recruits that score A-D are eligible to serve as combat soldiers; those assigned a score of E or F are ineligible for combat and are assigned to non-combat roles; and those assigned a G or H are released from service, temporarily or permanently (though some nonetheless decide to volunteer).

⁸“Satisficing” refers to haphazard responses by respondents employing mental shortcuts to proceed quickly through the survey, compromising data quality (Malhotra and Krosnick, 2007). Note, however, that our findings are robust to the inclusion of airforce personnel and satisficers (see SI).

Members of the latter two categories are excluded from the analysis, since they either did not serve or self-selected into military service, a factor which may well be associated with political attitudes.

Notably, lower health rankings reflect the presence of medical conditions such as chronic illness, allergies, or physical impairments, rather than lifestyle choices such as physical fitness. While low physical fitness may make individuals ineligible for some of the more elite IDF combat units, it does not render them ineligible for combat generally (see SI, section 1, for more information on health rankings). Finally, since combat eligibility may change after initial assignment due to changing health conditions, we use initial eligibility rankings as an instrument.

This study’s key independent variable is combat exposure. In order to ensure that only respondents with combat experience are coded as combatants, we define combat exposure as over twelve months of service in a combat role. This means that IDF recruits who dropped out of their combat units during or shortly after basic training are coded as non-combatants. According to this definition approximately 42% of our sample of former IDF soldiers served as combatants, which is almost identical to the share of combatants in the relevant cohorts in the larger population.⁹ Table 1 provides information on the bivariate relationship between health-based combat eligibility and combatant status. Only six percent of those assigned a health score *below* the health eligibility cutoff point served as combatants, compared to about half of individuals assigned a health score above the cutoff point.¹⁰ This suggests that a recruit’s health score is a strong but imperfect predictor of combat status.

Health-based combat eligibility cutoff	Combatant Status		Total
	No	Yes	
Below (E-F)	385 (94)	24 (6)	409 (100)
Above (A-D)	973 (51)	952 (49)	1,925 (100)
Total	1,358 (58)	976 (42)	2,334 (100)

Table 1: Bivariate Relationship Between Health Score and Combat status.

To be a valid instrument, health eligibility must not only strongly predict combat status but must also be exogenous to the study’s outcomes. Key to our identification strategy is the implicit assumption that the presence of chronic health conditions that affect health scores—such as hearing or visual impairments—are *randomly assigned by nature*. If this is in fact the case, pre-treatment covariates between former soldiers above and below the combat eligibility cutoff should be balanced.

⁹Calculations are based on statistics released by the IDF in 2011 and 2013 regarding rates of combat service per district for recruits born in 1990 and 1991. See SI, section 3.3 for details.

¹⁰Individuals with health scores below the cutoff can become combatants if they successfully appeal their ineligibility based on changes in medical condition. As noted, we only use initial scores as an instrument.

Our survey includes a battery of questions regarding the respondent’s background prior to enlistment that may affect motivation to serve as a combatant. These include household income at the age of 18, household ideology at 18 on a 1-7 Right-Left scale, immigrant or Israeli-born, whether the respondent’s father served as a combatant, level of religiosity at age 18, ethnic background, and residence during high school. Table A.3 provides a balance check for the Second Intifada and post-Gaza withdrawal samples. A rule of thumb for assessing covariate balance is if the means of both groups are less than one fourth of a standard deviation apart (Ho et al., 2007). Table A.3 indicates that all covariates are relatively well-balanced.

There are two potential ways in which our identification assumption could be undermined. First, health impairments may in principle be correlated with household income, which in turn may be correlated with political attitudes. We do not, however, find any evidence for such a correlation in our sample, likely due to Israel’s comprehensive universal healthcare system that ensures that all citizens have access to healthcare regardless of socioeconomic status. Second, it is possible that some individuals intentionally sort themselves into low or high health categories and that such sorting patterns are correlated with political attitudes. We do not believe that sorting constitutes a major concern in this study. First, the ability to sort is rather limited given the comprehensiveness of the medical examination at the recruitment centers and the quality control mechanisms in place to assess the profile assignment process (Chaiter et al., 2010). Second, since only about 50% of those who are eligible ultimately serve as combatants, there are ample ways for new recruits with low motivation to serve to avoid combat assignment without manipulating health information.

We nonetheless take several steps to eliminate any remaining concerns about sorting. First, we conducted a pilot study of approximately 400 Israeli youth who had already been assigned combat eligibility rankings but had not yet enlisted. Had a significant share of recruits intentionally manipulated their medical condition, we would have witnessed that combat eligibility is correlated with political attitudes or behavior *before* military service. We find no significant differences in political attitudes or participation between youth above and below the combat eligibility threshold.¹¹ Second, we conduct a sensitivity analysis that estimates how large an unobserved covariate u must be to impact combat eligibility, thereby violating the exogeneity assumption. Assuringly, we find that our findings are robust to the presence of relatively large potential unobserved confounders affecting treatment status (SI, section 2.2).

In addition, to better account for the fact that selection into combat is not random for those *above* the eligibility threshold we conduct the following analysis. First, we subset our data to only include those who are assigned a health score above the combat eligibility threshold. Second, we fit a logistic model in which a combat status indicator is regressed on all available covariates.¹² Using

¹¹Further details regarding sampling, data, measures and analysis of the youth survey are presented in the SI, section 2.

¹²Since the IDF releases no demographic indicators on its recruits, there is no systematic evidence available regarding the characteristics of people who select into combat.

this model, we then predict for *all* survey respondents the propensity to serve as a combatant, whether their health scores are above or below the combat eligibility cutoff. Strikingly, the mean combat propensity is almost identical for both of our samples. In the Second Intifada sample, the mean combat propensity for those above and below the eligibility cutoff is 0.47. Similarly, in the post-Gaza withdrawal sample, the mean combat propensity is almost identical for those above (0.48) and below (0.49) the cutoff. Had there been systematic intentional sorting into health categories above and below the eligibility cutoff we would expect the mean propensity to serve as combatants among those below to be significantly lower than the mean propensity of those above. In sum, we believe the evidence at hand supports the use of health-based combat eligibility as an instrument for combat exposure, at least in the Israeli context. We now turn to describe measurement of the study’s main outcomes of interest.

4.2 Measurement of Key Variables

Our study examines the causal effect of combat exposure on three broad outcomes: *attitudes towards reconciliation*, *political participation* and *vote choice*. We operationalize the first two outcomes by grouping a number of related measures into summary indices. Following Anderson (2008), a summary index is a weighted mean of several standardized outcomes, where the weights—the inverse of the covariance matrix—are used to maximize the amount of information captured by the index. This approach improves statistical power while being robust to over-testing because each index represents one test. Moreover, summary indices ensure that the probability of a false rejection does not increase as additional items are added to the index, and minimize the risk that researchers over-interpret individual proxy measures that may be statistically significant due simply to random chance. We report the effect of combat exposure on both the summary index and the constituent items, but conclude that combat exposure has a causal effect if and only if the coefficient on the summary index is statistically significant by conventional standards. Each of the outcomes is described in turn.

Attitudes Towards Reconciliation

Attitudes towards reconciliation are operationalized using an index of ten items that are considered central matters of dispute between Israelis and Palestinians and constitute obstacles to resolving the conflict: Degree of support for territorial compromise in the West Bank (“*negotiated territorial withdrawal*”); degree of support for territorial compromise in Jerusalem (“*negotiated division of Jerusalem*”); degree of support for compromise on a right of return for Palestinian refugees (“*negotiated refugee right of return*”); degree of belief that there is a Palestinian partner for peace (“*Palestinians are partners for peace*”), degree of support for conciliatory policies for ending the conflict such as a two-state solution (“*support conciliatory policies*”); degree of agreement with

the notion that the land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people and is therefore indivisible (“*Israel indivisible*”); degree of support for Israeli settlements in the West Bank (“*settlements endanger Israeli democracy*”); degree of principled opposition to the occupation of Palestinians (“*occupation is illegal/immoral*”); degree of support for freedom of operation for human rights monitoring NGOs (“*oppose limitations on NGOs*”); and self-identification on a seven-point Right-Left scale (“*dovish self-identification*”). All items were recoded such that higher rankings represent views that are more conciliatory, and were standardized to allow for easy comparison of effect magnitude. The ten items are positively correlated with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.90.

Vote Choice

A finding that combat exposure impacts the willingness to support political compromise, by itself, does not reveal the extent to which such attitudes translate into meaningful political action. We therefore examine the effect of combat exposure on vote choice. We use two variables to measure voting behavior. First, we asked respondents to indicate which party they voted for in the most recent parliamentary elections, held in January 2013. We then coded all responses on a nine-point Right-Left scale, constructed using the 2013 Israeli Election Compass published by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) (See SI, section 4.6, for coding details). Second, we measure vote choice in the first elections that took place after release from the IDF. A comparison of these two measures of vote choice provides an indication of the degree to which effects of combat exposure may change over time.

Political Participation

Political participation is operationalized using a summary index of nine proxy measures. These include a five-point scale measure of interest in politics, a three-point scale measure of degree of party activism, and a set of seven indicator variables measuring whether the respondent participated in various political activities in the past twelve months, such as taking part in demonstrations, contacting a member of Parliament, writing a newspaper or calling in radio shows, writing on political affairs on social media sites, etc. All nine variables are positively correlated though the Cronbach’s alpha of 0.66 is somewhat low.

4.3 Estimation Strategy

Estimation strategies were developed in advance in a detailed pre-analysis plan posted on the Experiments in Governance and Politics (EGAP’s) Design Registration webpage prior to analysis. The plan specified the measures of variables and econometric specifications that we would use in our analysis. In the online appendix we describe deviations from the pre-analysis plan and the rationales for these.

To estimate the impact of combat exposure we use an encouragement research design whereby an individual’s health-based combat eligibility Z instruments for combat experience d . In an encouragement design, randomization is not feasible for the treatment itself (in this case, combat exposure), but the encouragement to receive the treatment is ‘as good as random’. While the encouragement substantially increases the probability of treatment, it does not guarantee it, as compliance behavior varies within the encouraged group. Put differently, health scores represent the intention to treat (ITT) rather than the treatment itself.

Our main estimation strategy for the effect of combat exposure on the compliers is, therefore, a simple 2SLS instrumental variable regression with no controls. The IV model considers the effect of combat exposure — endogenously chosen binary treatment d_i , $E[\varepsilon|d \neq 0]$ — on outcome variable Y_i , conditional on the instrument Z_i , where Z_i is an indicator variable that takes the value of 1 for combat eligible soldiers, and zero for soldiers ineligible for combat. The primary interest is in the regression function:

$$Y_i = \alpha_y + \delta d_i + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

where δ is the Local Average Treatment Effect estimate, and ε_i is the error term. The binary decision to serve or not as a combat soldier d_i is modeled as the outcome of a linear function of the instrument Z_i and a random component v_i . Specifically,

$$d_i = \alpha_d + \Pi Z_i + v_i \tag{2}$$

5 Main Results

This section presents our findings regarding the impact of combat exposure on our three outcome variables: attitudes towards reconciliation, vote choice, and political participation. To account for differences in combat environments, we distinguish between our Second Intifada sample (n=1, 189) and post-Gaza withdrawal sample (n= 1, 145) in all results.¹³ Results are reported in figures for ease of presentation, with dots representing the point estimates and surrounding lines representing 90% confidence intervals (see SI, section 4, for tabular results.)

Attitudes towards Reconciliation

Does combat exposure affect attitudes towards war and peace? Figure 1 indicates that for ex-combatants from the Second Intifada combat exposure is associated with a substantial and significant decline in the reconciliation summary index (0.3 standard deviation; pvalue=0.081). This

¹³Core findings for the pooled survey are substantially unchanged in terms of coefficient direction and significance levels. See Table 5 in SI for full pooled results.

pattern holds for most of the constituent variables that make up the index: Ex-combatants are significantly less likely to support territorial withdrawal as part of a possible peace agreement, to believe that the current Palestinian leadership is a genuine partner for peace, and to support a conciliatory solutions to the conflict. They are also significantly more likely to support Jewish settlements in the West Bank and rank themselves as hawkish on a Right-Left scale. In contrast, ex-combatants who served in the post-Gaza withdrawal years do not for the most part differ from noncombatants in their attitudes towards reconciliation. These findings, as well as our other main results, are discussed in the next section.

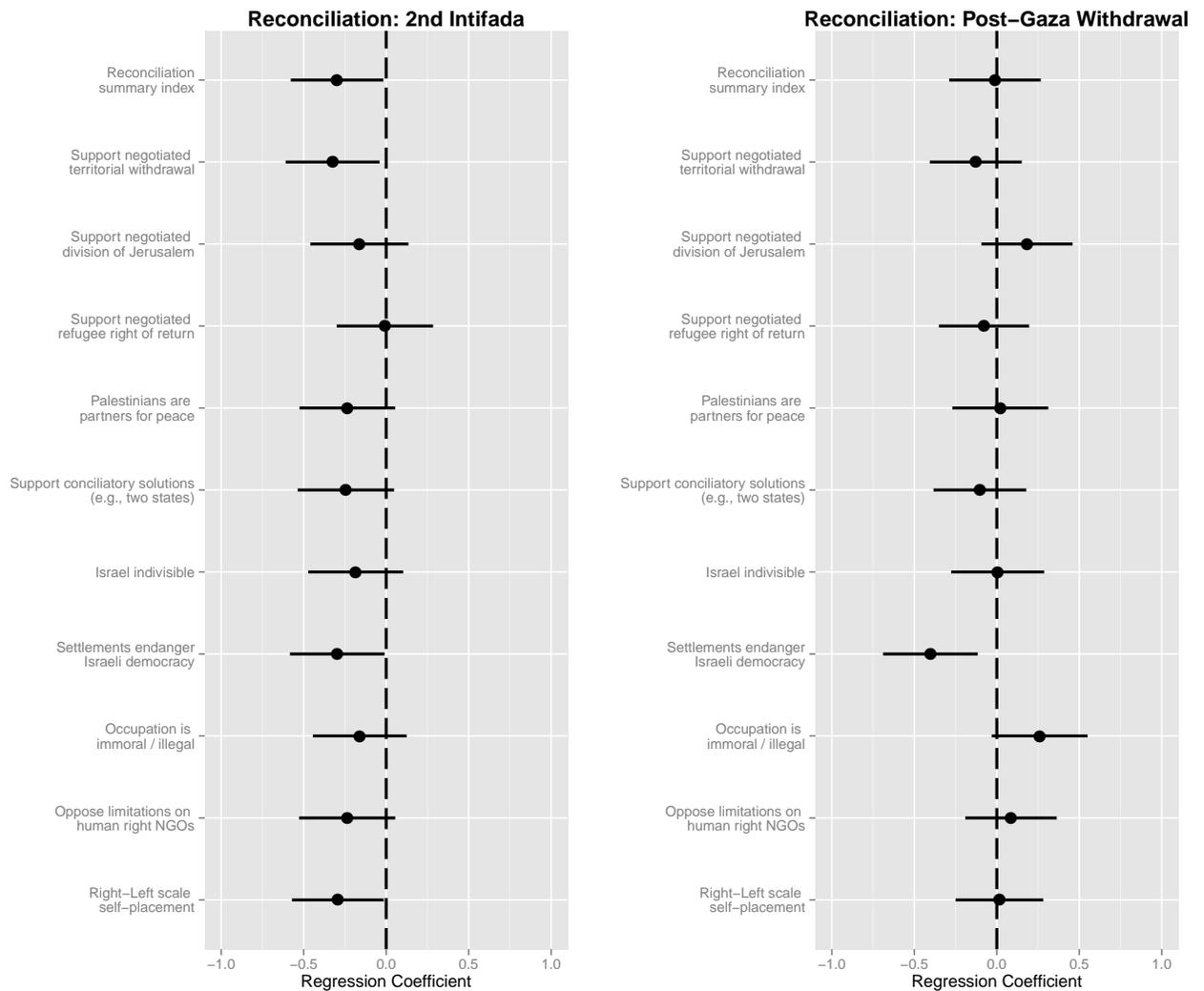


Figure 1: Impact of combat exposure on attitudes towards reconciliation.

Vote Choice

As shown in Figure 2, ex-combatants who served during the Second Intifada are substantially and significantly more likely to vote for hardliner parties. The magnitude of the effect of combat exposure on vote choice is remarkable: Ex-combatants from the Second Intifada voted in Israel's recent elections for parties located 0.7 to the right on the right-left scale of parties (p -value=0.031). We find no evidence for an attenuation of the hardening effect. Quite the contrary, the magnitude of combat's effect on vote choice rises from 0.4 to 0.7 between the first elections following military release and the elections of 2013. A similar hardening pattern is evident among combatants who served in the post-Gaza withdrawal period, but the effect is not statistically significant.

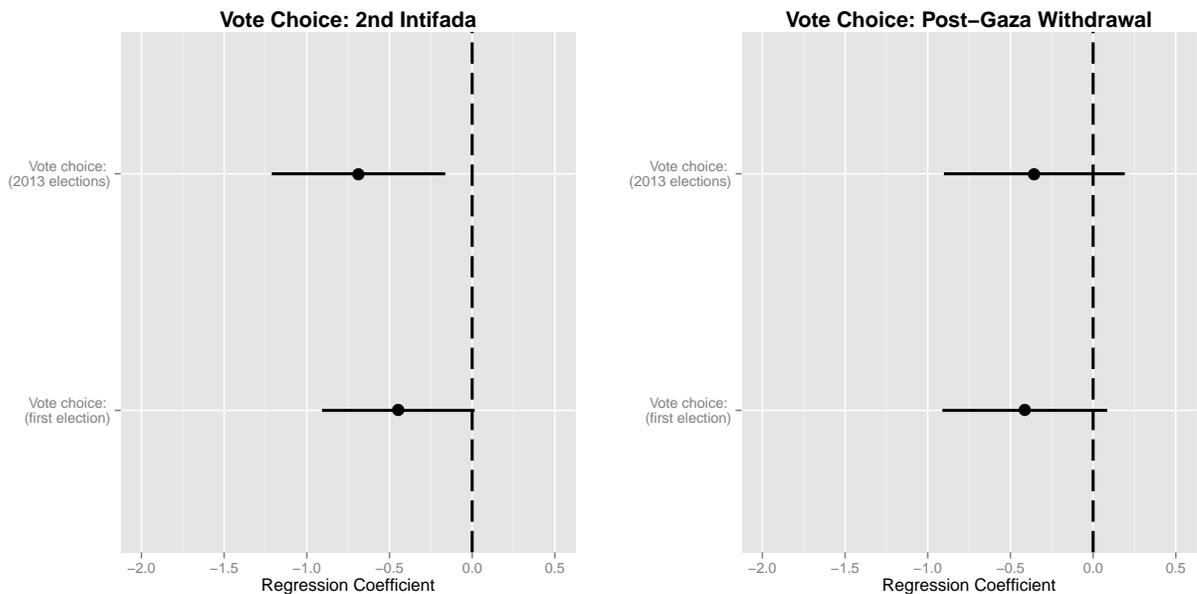


Figure 2: Impact of combat exposure on vote choice.

Political Participation

We find that combat exposure results in lower levels of political participation (Figure 3). The effect is substantial and significant among ex-combatants from the Second Intifada (0.31 standard deviation, $p=0.062$), and approaches statistical significance in the post-Gaza withdrawal sample as well ($p=0.155$). These results run contrary to findings by Blattman (2009) that combat exposure among rebels leads to greater political engagement. The divergence in findings may be due to differences in the political environment between Israel and Uganda. For example, it might be that in Israel combat service itself, including reserve duty, is viewed as a form of political participation.

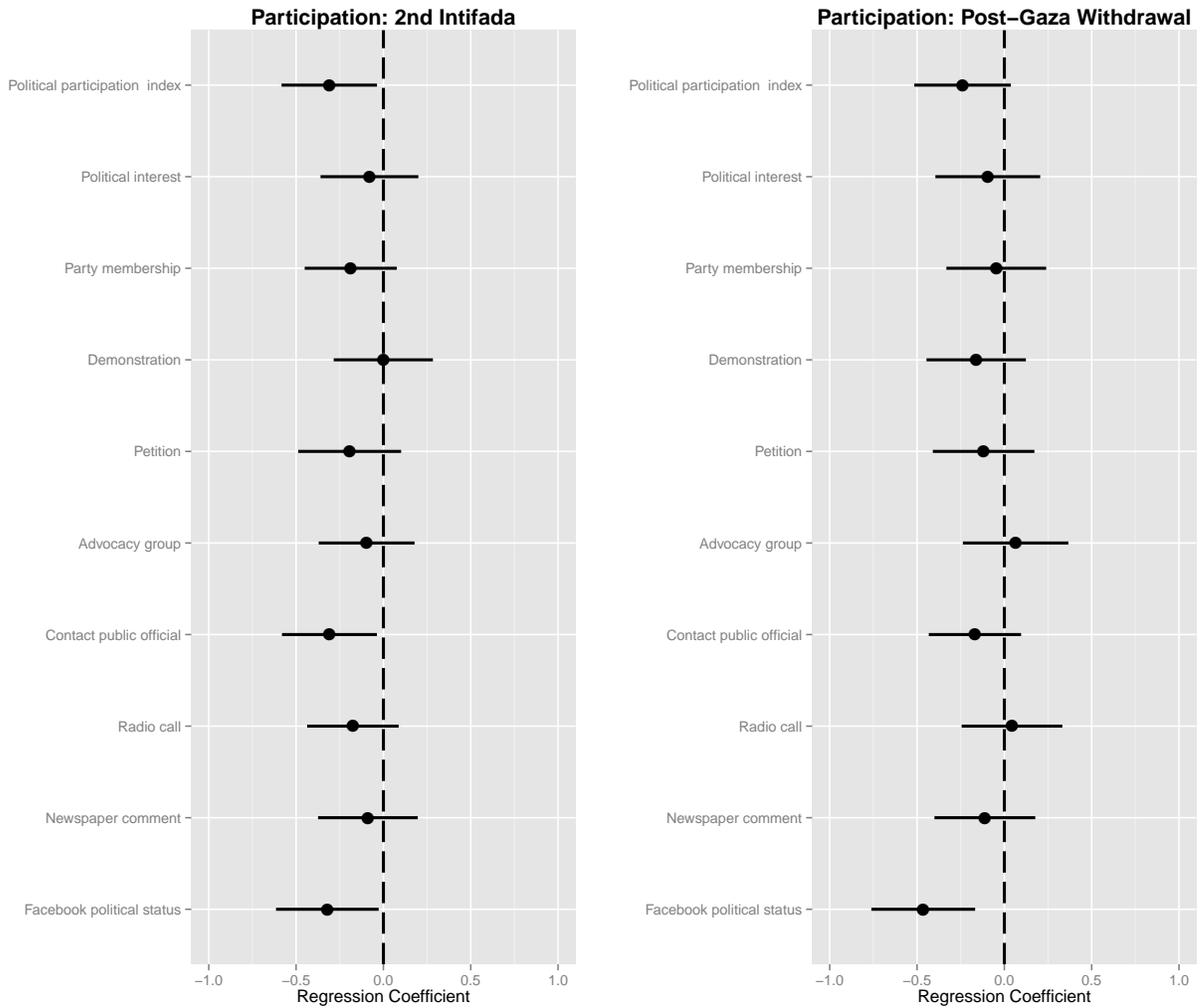


Figure 3: Impact of combat exposure on political participation.

Whose Attitudes Harden? Combat-effect Heterogeneity

For a more nuanced understanding of how combat exposure affects the political attitudes of combatants from the Second Intifada, we turn to examine heterogeneous treatment effects as a function of combatants (pre-treatment) ideological backgrounds. We measure background by asking respondents to rank the political ideology of the household in which they were raised on a 1-7 Right-Left scale. We first dichotomize the household ideology scale at the median, coding household ideologies below the median as right-leaning (1-3), and those at the median or above as center and left-leaning (4-7). The left panel of Figure 4 depicts the effects of combat on individuals from right-leaning households, individuals from center and left-leaning households, and the average effects on the entire sample. The results indicate that the effects of combat vary by household ideology: while combatants from center and left-leaning households exhibit a substantial and significant hardening in attitudes and vote choice and a significant reduction in political participation, combat has no

significant effect on soldiers from right-leaning households.

Next we split the data between the far-right (household ideology 1-2) and the left, center, and moderate right (3-7). The results, shown in the right panel of Figure 4, reveal that the hardening effects of combat extend to soldiers from moderate-right leaning backgrounds. In contrast, combatants from backgrounds in the far-right actually exhibit a substantial, significant shift to the *left* compared to individuals from similar backgrounds who served in non-combat roles. Combat exposure, then, hardens the political attitudes of all but the most right-leaning combatants, while moderating somewhat the attitudes of combatants from the far right. The overall effect is a significant reduction in polarization, compared to the distribution of political attitudes of non-combatants (see SI, section 4.1 for a formal test using randomization inference).

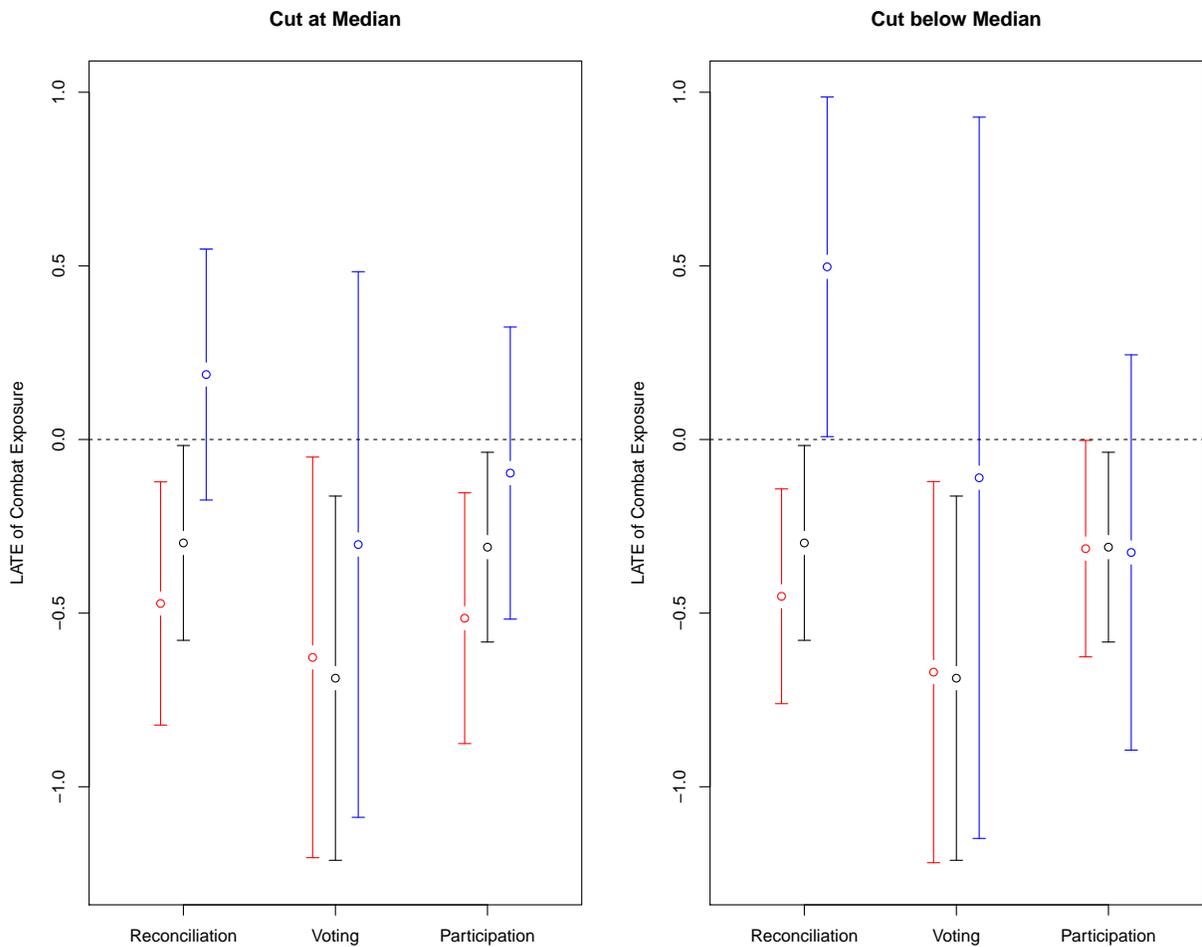


Figure 4: Heterogeneous Effects of Combat Exposure as a Function of Household Ideology. In the left panel, the red line indicates center and left-leaning backgrounds and the blue indicates right-leaning backgrounds. In the right panel, the red line represents the center, left, and moderate right, and the blue represents far-right backgrounds. The black line is the overall local average treatment effect.

6 Robustness

We conduct several tests to assess the robustness of our findings, employing an alternative indicator for the independent variable, estimating the effects of combat on the subset of observations close to the health-based eligibility threshold, and using a variety of matching methods that improve covariate balance between the treated and untreated groups. This section summarizes these tests in brief. Details and full results can be found in section 4 of the SI.

First, to ensure that our measure of combat exposure captures actual combat experience, we test an alternative measure of combat: a binary variable indicating whether respondents reported participating in at least one of the major combat operations that took place during the Second Intifada. Results are even stronger than those reported here: combat exposure has a substantial and significant negative effect on support for reconciliation, vote choice, and political participation. Analysis of heterogeneous effects by household ideology produces the expected pattern, with the hardening political effects of combat evident among combatants from center and left-leaning backgrounds but not among those from right-leaning homes.

Next we estimate effects on the subset of the data closest to the eligibility threshold, excluding from the analysis former soldiers who were assigned a health score of A or B. Narrowing the window in this way results in a loss of approximately 70% of the observations, such that even large point estimates fall below conventional significance levels. Still, the direction of coefficients is generally similar to our findings, increasing our confidence in the results.¹⁴

Finally we test the robustness of our results to various matching estimations. We first use our estimate of combat propensity (see section 4.1 above) to match between combat eligible and combat ineligible former soldiers with similar propensities to become combatants. We then run the instrumental variable regression on the matched sample using a variety of matching algorithms. The core pattern identified here remains in evidence: combatants from center and left-leaning backgrounds are substantially and significantly less supportive of reconciliation, negotiations, and compromise, while combatants from right-leaning backgrounds show opposite effects, though these do not quite reach statistical significance. We then perform an additional matching analysis, this time matching eligible and ineligible soldiers on the *covariates* themselves. Once again we find that combat exposure has substantial and significant negative effects on support for reconciliation among soldiers from center and left-leaning backgrounds, and positive (but non-significant) effects on combatants from right-leaning backgrounds.

¹⁴In order to identify a significant effect for a coefficient of the magnitude reported here the sample would need to be more than double in size. See SI, section 4.3, for simulation-based power analysis.

7 Discussion

The findings in this study present an important challenge to the growing literature stressing the benign effects of violence exposure and to past work on the conservative attitudes of former soldiers towards deployment of military force. Our data suggest that high intensity combat hardens attitudes and significantly reduces support for reconciliation. Ex-combatants who served during the Second Intifada self-identify as more hawkish on a Right-Left scale than non-combatants and are also significantly less likely to support negotiations and compromise. These effects are remarkably durable, remaining evident nearly a decade after release from service.

Importantly, this hardening effect is not limited to attitudinal change but affects vote choice, with former IDF combatants substantially and significantly more likely to vote for hardliner parties. This finding reflects the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the most salient issue in the Israeli political arena since 1967, and attitudes towards the conflict are the key determinant of Israeli voting behavior (Arian and Shamir, 2008). The size of the effect of high-intensity combat exposure on vote choice is considerable, indicating a relative shift of close to a party to the right on a nine point left-right scale.

As a rough illustration of the magnitude of this effect, consider that in 2013, the Israeli parliament split nearly equally between the Right block (61 seats) and Center-Left blocs (59 seats). One parliamentary seat is equal to approximately 1/120 of the popular vote, which translated into 29,364 votes in the 2013 elections. The number of IDF troops is undisclosed, but according to estimates by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, in 2004 IDF ground troops included 85,000 conscripts, which is equivalent to about one parliamentary seat a year. Eight cohorts of combatants serving during all or part of the Second Intifada are thus equivalent to 7-8 seats, a number that can exercise considerable political influence in Israel's polarized political arena. A comparison of the predicted values of the dichotomous "*support conciliatory policies*" variable reveals that among non-combatants, support for a conciliatory solution to the conflict is 59%, compared to 46% for ex-combatants. The hardening effect of combat thus reduces *de facto* the likelihood that political parties supporting a negotiated peace agreement could form a winning coalition.

Our analysis of heterogeneous effects reveals that combat nonetheless affects different combatants in different ways. While combat experience reduces support for peaceful conflict resolution among individuals from backgrounds in the political left, center, and even moderate right, ex-combatants from hardliner political backgrounds become somewhat less radicalized, though the significance of this moderation effect is not as robust to changes in model specifications. The political significance of this pattern is twofold. First, it demonstrates that service in combat units reduces political polarization among recruits. Totalizing socialization processes, brotherhood-in-arms, and the intense experience of participation in armed conflict decrease political differences among combat soldiers, reflected in a large and significant decline in political attitudes variance

among ex-combatants when compared to former non-combatants (SI, section 4.1). At the same time, the fact that all but the most hardliner combatants become more hawkish in their opinions has substantial implications for the likelihood of reaching a peace agreement, as combat hardens precisely those individuals who would otherwise have advocated more conciliatory views. Combat exposure thus erodes the support base of leaders and parties advocating for peace negotiations, a factor all the more acute given mandatory conscription.

More generally, these heterogeneous effects suggest that the political effects of combat exposure are moderated by additional factors. This is also reflected in the divergence of our results in the two periods examined. While we find substantial political hardening among combatants who served during the Second Intifada we do not find similar effects in subsequent years. What accounts for this difference? A likely explanation is the very different nature of combat service in the two periods. In the Second Intifada, combatants confronted an armed Palestinian insurgency, engaging in continuous operations in the OPT under risky and intense conditions. The high levels of violence and particularly the suicide terror attacks in Israeli cities raised the legitimacy of the IDF's counterinsurgency campaign, which enjoyed very high popular support among the Israeli public generally and among combatants in particular. The subsequent years saw a sharp reduction in Palestinian violence and consequently a change in the nature of combat operations, which were typically more limited and far less intense.

The difference in conflict intensity across the two periods is evident in our sample: Table A.4 compares the mean levels of violence exposure for individuals who served during and following the Second Intifada on three binary measures, indicating whether respondents reported witnessing first-hand the injury or death of an (a) Israeli soldier; (b) enemy combatant; and (c) Palestinian civilian. The differences in violence exposure are large and significant, corroborating official data on conflict casualties.

To assess whether the intensity of conflict can indeed account for the hardening effects of combat in the Second Intifada we examine the effects of combat-related violence exposure on our three political outcomes. Figure 5 shows that all three conflict intensity indicators are associated with a substantial and significant reduction in support for reconciliation, a shift to the right in vote choice, and decrease in political participation other than voting. Echoing our main results, this effect varies by household ideology, with combatants from center and left-leaning backgrounds, but not combatants from the political right, exhibiting a large and significant hardening effect.

The association between political hardening and conflict intensity suggests that serving in a combat unit leads to more exclusionary attitudes once a certain threshold of violence has been crossed. When combatants operate in relatively safe and nonviolent conditions, their military service is not very different from the type of service experienced by non-combatants, and as a result political effects are far less consequential. This proposition is consistent with studies of Israeli public opinion, which have found attitudes towards peace to be negatively affected by conflict intensity,

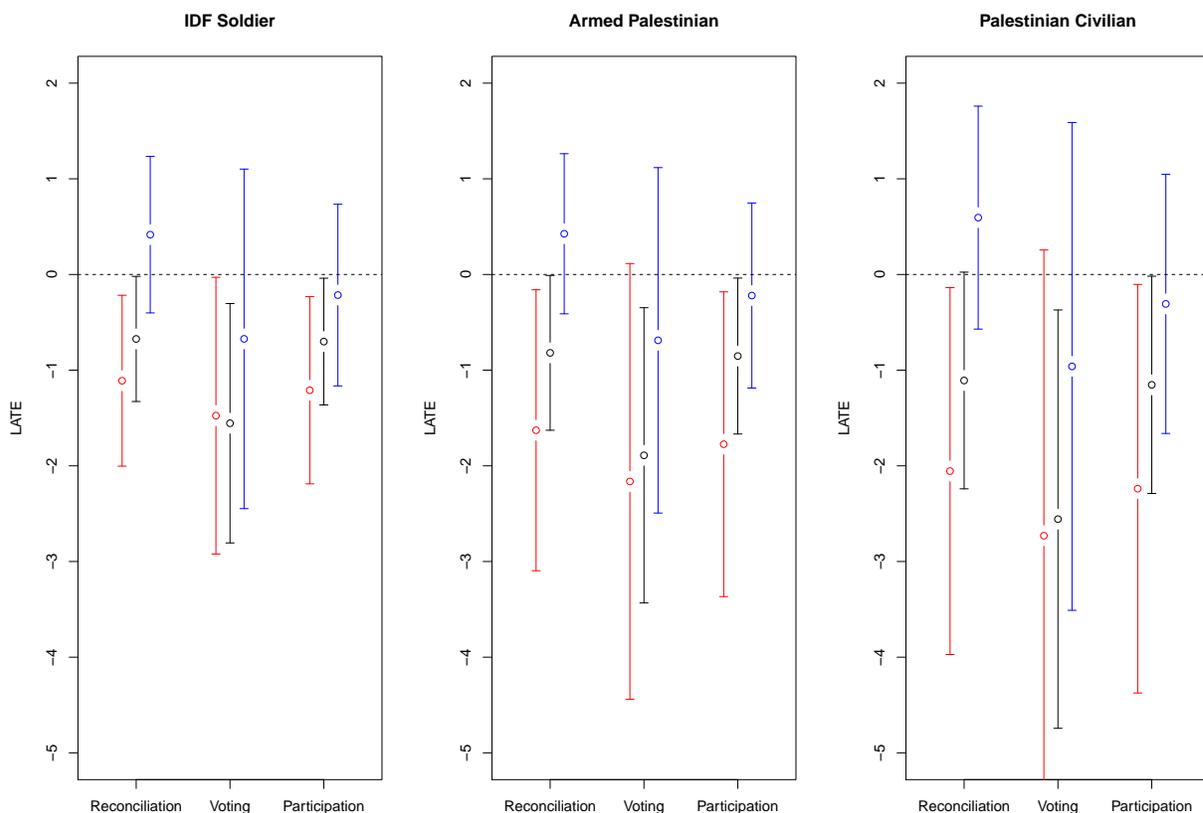


Figure 5: Political Effects of Conflict Intensity. The red line indicates center and left-leaning backgrounds and the blue indicates right-leaning backgrounds. The black is the average treatment effect.

and particularly by Israeli fatalities (Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Fielding and Penny, 2009). The next section explores the reasons for this effect in greater detail.

8 Causal Mechanisms

Why does exposure to high intensity combat lead to less conciliatory attitudes? Section 2 proposed several mechanisms that might explain such a relationship. In this section we explore these mechanisms empirically, with the exception of PTSD, which was not measured in our survey. For each, we examine heterogeneous effects when splitting data at the household ideology median and when splitting data at the moderate right. Full results are reported in SI, tables 7 and 8.

We note, however, that we do not conduct complete causal mediation analysis due to non-compliance in our data. The portion of LATE that goes through the mediator, let alone the average causal mediation effects (ACME) of the treatment itself, cannot be identified without making strong assumptions, even if the ignorability assumptions of mediator and outcome hold

(Imai et al., 2011). ACME may be identified if we are willing to assume that treatment uptake (combat exposure) is ignorable conditional on the encouragement and pre-treatment covariates. Recalling that only about half of those assigned a health score above the combat eligibility cutoff ultimately serve as combatants, we do not believe that this is a reasonable assumption. Our data suggests, instead, that unobserved heterogeneity significantly influences uptake *for those assigned a health score above the eligibility threshold*. In consequence, our causal mechanism analysis only allows testing for a causal relationship between the treatment (combat exposure) and the proposed mediator (which we treat as an outcome variable), but not for linking causally the mediator to the ultimate outcome. Findings should be interpreted with this caveat in mind.

We first assess two possible mechanisms that capture socialization processes: *framing* effects and *peer* effects. Combat socialization frames the adversary through military lenses as an enemy to be defeated by force. To test the presence of such framing effects in our sample, we ask our respondents to indicate their position on a seven-point scale between two opposite statements: 1) There is no military solution to the conflict with the Palestinians; or 2) Palestinians can only be overcome by military force. Here higher values indicate greater support for military solutions for conflict. Consistent with the general pattern of polarization reduction, we find large and significant framing effects (0.369 standard deviation, p value=0.065) among combatants from center, left, and moderate right backgrounds, while combatants from backgrounds in the far right show reduced support for military solutions (-0.560 SD, p value=0.136). This pattern is also evident when data is split at the median, though effects are no longer significant.

A second way in which socialization processes might have a mediating affect on political attitudes is through the influence of peers. Combat service is an intense small group experience in which camaraderie is cherished as a central value. The influence of peer attitudes is thus expected to be particularly high. We measure peer effects by asking about the dominant political position in the respondent's unit, where the variable receives a value of 1 if the unit is considered more right-leaning and zero otherwise. We generally find that combatants and non-combatants alike report that the dominant political opinion in their unit was right-wing. This likely reflects the fact that in the military context, militant opinions are more likely to be expressed and valued. We thus conclude that this cannot be a key channel through which combat experience hardens political attitudes.

Combat exposure can also lead to exclusionary views by fostering prejudice, as discussed above. We measure prejudice against Palestinians using a weighted summary index that includes both direct and indirect proxy measures. The direct measure is a survey question asking respondents to indicate their position on a seven-point scale between two opposite statements concerning the goals of the majority of Palestinians: 1) living peacefully alongside Israel's Jewish population or 2) taking over Israel and killing or expelling its Jewish population. We measured prejudice indirectly by assessing the extent to which attitudes towards Palestinians differ from attitudes towards Israelis: Respondents ranked Israelis and Palestinians on four dimensions on a nine-point

scale: intelligence, trustworthiness, altruism and non-violence, with question order randomized to minimize priming. The prejudice measure was constructed by subtracting ratings of Palestinians from ratings of Israelis. The five variables were positively correlated with Cronbach's alpha of 0.74. We find that combatants from center and left-leaning backgrounds are far more prejudiced against Palestinians than their non-combatant counterparts. While the size of this effect is quite large (0.312 standard deviations), it falls slightly short of statistical significance (pvalue=0.128).

It is also possible that combat exposure leads to a heightened sense of threat, reducing support for peaceful conflict resolution. We asked respondents to indicate, on a five-point scale, to what extent they feared (a) missile attacks; (b) terror attacks; and (c) that Palestinians would pose an existential threat to Israel should the IDF withdraw from the West Bank. We do not find evidence that combatants are more likely to fear terror or missile attacks than non-combatants, perhaps because combatants were no more likely to be targeted by such violence than non-combatants or civilians. However, ex-combatants from center and left-leaning backgrounds are far more likely to feel that ending the military occupation of the West Bank would pose an existential threat to Israel's security than soldiers from similar backgrounds who did not serve in combat units. Again, this effect is large (0.35 standard deviations) but falls slightly short of statistical significance (pvalue=0.171).

9 Conclusion

This study offers robust evidence that combat exposure has a significant and durable negative effect on attitudes towards conflict resolution, substantially reducing support for negotiated compromise. This effect is not limited to attitudes but extends to political behavior, producing a significant shift to the right in vote choice. These results are highly consequential in Israel, where the negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a matter of intense contestation.

Our evidence suggests that it is not mere membership in combat units that matters, but rather that combat interacts with background characteristics of combatants as well as with features of the political and military environment. Combat reduces polarization among soldiers, hardening the attitudes of individuals from left-leaning, center, and moderate right-leaning backgrounds, and moderating somewhat the attitudes of combatants from the far-right. Furthermore, combat hardens the attitudes of those who served in the high-intensity environment of the Second Intifada, but has little effect on combatants who served in the subsequent, low-intensity years. Put succinctly, high-intensity combat has the most negative political effect on the very individuals who might otherwise have supported and promoted peaceful conflict resolution.

These findings challenge the predominant approach regarding the effects of military service on attitudes towards war and peace. Invoking calculations of self-interest, this approach suggests that combatants should be more cautious regarding military action than their civilian counterparts since they have personally experienced the costs of war. While this approach may indeed hold

for senior military officials, our evidence suggests that at the mass level psychological processes brought about by combat socialization and participation in armed conflict trump self-interest and decrease support for compromise and reconciliation. Initial evidence provided by Feather and Gelpi (2004) and Erikson and Stoker (2011) has offered preliminary support for this contention, but as the authors acknowledge, such evidence was based on cross-sectional survey data or on a weak instrument that could not well identify the causal effects of combat. The identification strategy employed here substantiates this claim with robust evidence for combat exposure's causal effects.

This study also provides a counterpoint to recent research on the benign effects of violence exposure. Such research has largely been conducted in post-conflict settings and has focused on attitudes and behavior towards ingroup members, such as social cohesion, trust and altruism towards neighbors. We demonstrate that in the context of ongoing conflict, the effects of violence exposure are far bleaker, reducing political participation, increasing prejudice, and fostering support for hardline solutions.

While our data preclude the possibility of conducting formal mediation analysis, we find suggestive evidence that the hardening effect of combat is due both to combat socialization processes and the experience of combat under conditions of asymmetric warfare, heightened violence, and risk. These experiences inculcate a sense of threat and increase prejudice towards the outgroup, which in turn result in more exclusionary attitudes that linger long after combat service has ended.

Though mechanisms of prejudice and threat are supported in the data, there may be other explanations underlying the observed relationship between combat exposure and reduced support for compromise and reconciliation. For example, it could be that combatants and non-combatants follow different life trajectories upon release from service. By this logic combat still has an identified causal effect, but it does so by determining different post-military paths for combatants and non-combatants, which in turn contribute to variation in political attitudes. As this study is a first effort to investigate the causal effects of combat exposure on attitudes towards war and peace in the midst of ongoing conflict, a fruitful avenue for future research would be to further examine the causal mechanisms that account for combat's hardening effects. The literature to date has invoked a multitude of mechanisms, each pointing towards distinct processes. Violence exposure is hypothesized to lead to exclusionary attitudes and behavior through psychological distress and PTSD (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009; Pham, Weinstein and Longman, 2004; Bayer, Klasen and Adam, 2007), the desire to reduce threat (Beber, Roessler and Scacco, 2012), or organizational skills that facilitate collective action (Jha and Wilkenson, 2012). Our study provides initial evidence that combat exposure is associated with increased prejudice. Further studies may shed additional light on the relationship among these mechanisms as well as identify the potentially different processes at work for civilian victims and for combatants.

A second task for future research is to better specify conditions under which combat exposure leads to hardliner attitudes. We have seen that in our sample, findings diverge by period of service.

Our analysis suggests that this variation is best explained by differences in the intensity of combat and levels of violence exposure in the two periods. The implication of this finding is that the political effects of violence exposure are moderated by conflict intensity, a proposition that awaits further testing and analysis.

A natural question that arises is to what extent our findings apply beyond the Israeli case. Indeed, there are some unique features of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that may contribute to our results, such as the relatively high share of former combatants in the Israeli population due to mandatory conscription or the salience of the conflict for Israeli voting behavior. In settings where combatants are a negligible share of the population and hence exercise little political influence, or where an ongoing violent conflict is less prominent in day-to-day politics, the impact of combat exposure on the likelihood of achieving peace may be considerably lower. In addition, as the effects of combat depend on the political backgrounds of soldiers, its impact is expected to vary depending on the types of individuals who enlist. In contexts where most combatants are radicalized before entering service, the experience of combat may actually moderate political attitudes.

The particular nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may also limit the generalizability of our findings in other respects. As an irregular conflict taking place under conditions of military occupation, the conflict brings soldiers into sustained negative contact with civilians from another ethnic group, thereby accentuating differences and power asymmetries. Further research in other settings can shed more light on whether our findings apply to comparable contexts of irregular ethnic conflict, or whether the logic linking combat exposure to reduced support for reconciliation extends to additional types of conflicts, including conflicts between states or civil wars. Already, mounting evidence from settings as diverse as India (Jha and Wilkenson, 2012), Sudan (Beber, Roessler and Scacco, 2012), Uganda (Rohner, Thoenig and Zilibotti, forthcoming) and Georgia (Baur et al., forthcoming) has demonstrated the harmful legacies of political violence for intergroup relations. To the extent that those affected by violence are a large sector of society, this legacy may have considerable negative implications for the likelihood of reaching and upholding a peace agreement. Our study thus points to a potential micro-level mechanism for the oft-noted macro-level finding on the frequent recurrence of conflict (Doyle and Sambanis, 2000).

From a policy perspective, our study has implications for both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for conflict resolution more generally. In the Israeli-Palestinian context it suggests that mandatory conscription has far-reaching political effects that are not yet well-documented or understood. Individuals who are socialized into violent conflict at a formative period of their lives can be deeply affected by that experience in many ways, including in their political attitudes and behavior. Given the size and impact of the ex-combatant population, peace-building efforts should take its needs and experiences into account. More generally, our findings underscore the importance of combatant reintegration programs in reducing inter-group hostility and creating the foundation for a viable, durable peace.

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10 Appendix

Table A.1: **Descriptive Statistics: Second Intifada Sample**

Instrument and treatment variable	Mean	sd	Min	Median	Max	Obs
Combat eligibility	0.8	0.4	0.0	1.0	1.0	1189
Combat exposure	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.0	1.0	1189
Political attitudes outcomes						
Reconciliation summary index	0.1	1.0	-1.4	0.0	2.8	1189
Support negotiated territorial withdrawal	0.1	1.0	-1.1	-0.4	1.6	1189
Support negotiated division of Jerusalem	0.1	1.0	-0.8	-0.1	1.9	1189
Support negotiated refugee right of return	0.0	1.0	-0.8	-0.8	2.6	1189
Palestinians are partners for peace	0.0	1.0	-0.9	-0.1	2.4	1189
Support conciliatory solutions	0.1	1.0	-1.0	1.0	1.0	1189
Israel indivisible	0.1	1.0	-1.1	-0.2	1.7	1189
Settlements endanger Israeli democracy	0.0	1.0	-1.3	-0.2	1.8	1189
Occupation is immoral	0.1	1.0	-0.7	-0.7	3.1	1189
Oppose limitations on human right NGOs	0.1	1.0	-1.0	-0.3	1.9	1189
Right Left scale self-placement	0.1	1.0	-1.3	-0.1	2.4	1189
Vote choice outcomes						
Vote choice 2013 elections	4.7	1.8	1.0	5.0	9.0	1189
Vote choice first election	4.2	1.6	1.0	4.0	9.0	1189
Political participation outcomes						
Political participation index	-0.1	0.9	-1.1	-0.4	3.7	1189
Political interest	-0.1	1.0	-2.2	-0.3	1.5	1189
Party membership	-0.1	0.9	-0.4	-0.4	3.8	1189
Demonstration	0.0	1.0	-0.4	-0.4	2.3	1189
Petition	-0.1	1.0	-1.0	-1.0	1.0	1189
Advocacy group	0.0	0.9	-0.3	-0.3	3.0	1189
Contact public official	-0.1	0.9	-0.5	-0.5	2.2	1189
Radio call	0.0	0.9	-0.2	-0.2	4.5	1189
Newspaper comment	-0.1	1.0	-0.7	-0.7	1.4	1189
Facebook political status	-0.2	1.0	-1.1	-1.1	0.9	1189
Socialization processes						
Framing support military solutions	-0.1	1.0	-1.9	-0.2	1.4	1189
Peer effect right leaning unit	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.0	1.0	1189
Prejudice						
Prejudice summary index	-0.1	1.0	-2.5	-0.2	3.2	1189
Intelligence difference	0.0	1.1	-4.0	-0.3	3.0	1189
Trustworthiness difference	0.0	1.0	-4.5	-0.2	2.7	1189
Altruism difference	0.1	0.9	-3.3	0.1	2.4	1189
Non violence difference	-0.1	1.0	-4.0	-0.2	2.7	1189
Palestinians goal to expel Jews	-0.1	1.0	-1.8	-0.1	1.5	1189
Fear and Threat						
Terror attack	-0.1	1.0	-2.2	0.2	1.0	1189
Missiles attack	0.0	1.0	-1.8	-0.3	1.2	1189
Existential threat	-0.1	1.0	-2.4	0.0	0.8	1189

Table A.2: **Descriptive Statistics: Post-Gaza Withdrawal Sample**

Instrument and treatment variable	Mean	sd	Min	Median	Max	Obs
Combat eligibility	0.8	0.4	0.0	1.0	1.0	1145
Combat exposure	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.0	1.0	1145
Political attitudes outcomes						
Reconciliation summary index	-0.2	1.0	-1.4	-0.5	2.8	1145
Support negotiated territorial withdrawal	-0.3	1.0	-1.1	-0.4	1.6	1145
Support negotiated division of Jerusalem	-0.1	1.0	-0.8	-0.8	1.9	1145
Support negotiated refugee right of return	-0.1	0.9	-0.8	-0.8	2.6	1145
Palestinians are partners for peace	-0.1	1.0	-0.9	-0.9	2.4	1145
Support conciliatory solutions	-0.2	1.0	-1.0	-1.0	1.0	1145
Israel indivisible	-0.2	1.0	-1.1	-0.2	1.7	1145
Settlements endanger Israeli democracy	-0.3	1.0	-1.3	-0.2	1.8	1145
Occupation is immoral	0.0	1.0	-0.7	-0.7	3.1	1145
Oppose limitations on human right NGOs	-0.1	1.0	-1.0	-0.3	1.9	1145
Right Left scale self-placement	-0.2	0.9	-1.3	-0.1	2.4	1145
Vote choice outcomes						
Vote choice 2013 elections	4.1	1.9	1.0	4.0	9.0	1145
Vote choice first election	3.9	1.7	1.0	4.0	9.0	1145
Political participation outcomes						
Political participation index	-0.1	0.9	-1.1	-0.2	3.7	1145
Political interest	0.0	1.0	-2.2	-0.3	1.5	1145
Party membership	0.0	1.0	-0.4	-0.4	3.8	1145
Demonstration	0.0	1.0	-0.4	-0.4	2.3	1145
Petition	0.0	1.0	-1.0	-1.0	1.0	1145
Advocacy group	0.0	1.0	-0.3	-0.3	3.0	1145
Contact public official	-0.1	0.9	-0.5	-0.5	2.2	1145
Radio call	0.0	1.0	-0.2	-0.2	4.5	1145
Newspaper comment	0.0	1.0	-0.7	-0.7	1.4	1145
Facebook political status	-0.1	1.0	-1.1	-1.1	0.9	1145
Socialization processes						
Framing support military solutions	0.2	1.0	-1.9	0.3	1.4	1145
Peer effect right leaning unit	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	1.0	1145
Prejudice						
Prejudice summary index	0.1	1.0	-2.3	0.1	3.2	1145
Intelligence difference	0.1	1.1	-5.6	0.3	3.0	1145
Trustworthiness difference	0.1	1.1	-3.5	0.3	2.7	1145
Altruism difference	0.2	1.0	-2.6	0.1	2.4	1145
Non-violence difference	0.0	1.1	-4.0	-0.2	2.7	1145
Palestinians goal to expel Jews	0.1	1.0	-1.8	0.4	1.5	1145
Fear and Threat						
Terror attack	-0.1	1.1	-2.2	0.2	1.0	1145
Missiles attack	-0.1	1.1	-1.8	-0.3	1.2	1145
Existential threat	0.2	0.9	-2.4	0.8	0.8	1145

Table A.3: Covariate Balance

	Second Intifada Sample				Post-Gaza Withdrawal			
	Below	Above	Diff	std bias	Below	Above	Diff	std bias
HH income	2.946	2.895	-0.051	-0.061	3.048	3.003	-0.045	-0.049
HH ideology	3.563	3.352	-0.211	-0.142	3.021	2.920	-0.102	-0.071
Native	0.905	0.857	-0.048	-0.137	0.845	0.847	0.002	0.005
Father combatant	0.446	0.484	0.038	0.076	0.492	0.480	-0.012	-0.024
Secular	0.680	0.603	-0.077	-0.158	0.551	0.466	-0.085	-0.171
Traditional	0.149	0.207	0.058	0.144	0.209	0.209	0.000	0.001
Religious	0.162	0.184	0.022	0.057	0.219	0.285	0.066	0.146
Sephardic	0.288	0.364	0.076	0.157	0.326	0.381	0.055	0.113
Ashkenazi	0.491	0.388	-0.103	-0.212	0.374	0.364	-0.010	-0.021
Mixed race	0.144	0.133	-0.011	-0.032	0.150	0.116	-0.034	-0.106
USSR	0.068	0.107	0.039	0.126	0.134	0.118	-0.016	-0.049
Jerusalem	0.077	0.080	0.003	0.011	0.102	0.099	-0.002	-0.008
North	0.104	0.130	0.027	0.079	0.080	0.118	0.038	0.117
Haifa	0.108	0.161	0.053	0.145	0.086	0.130	0.045	0.133
Center	0.338	0.266	-0.072	-0.163	0.305	0.289	-0.016	-0.035
Tel Aviv	0.203	0.175	-0.028	-0.074	0.155	0.147	-0.008	-0.022
South	0.135	0.133	-0.002	-0.005	0.193	0.132	-0.061	-0.180
Territories	0.036	0.055	0.019	0.082	0.080	0.085	0.004	0.016

Table A.4: Violence Exposure by Period

Witnessed injury or death:	Second Intifada period	Post-Gaza withdrawal	Difference Δ	p-value (t-test)	Obs
IDF soldier	0.312	0.245	0.067	0	2,334
Armed Palestinian/ terrorist	0.246	0.181	0.065	0	2,334
Palestinian civilian	0.168	0.144	0.024	0.10	2,334