

Evaluations of Violence at the Polls: Civilian
Victimization and Support for Perpetrators After War

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Abstract

Following armed conflict, voters must often evaluate candidates who have allegedly committed violence against civilians. What kinds of alleged perpetrators are voters more willing to support and why? I argue that people appraise candidates' alleged involvement in violence by considering how their participation reflects competence and integrity. This article relies on the Theory of Dyadic Morality to build a framework for civilian judgements about perpetrator integrity. The article also argues that the most salient form of competence in the context of civilian targeting is security competence. A conjoint survey in Colombia featuring hypothetical former combatants running for office indicates, in line with my argument, that attributes associated with integrity affect respondent preferences. Respondents are more supportive of candidates who violate less strict norms, have less agency, and have less clear causal links to the victims. More unexpectedly, attributes associated with security competence are less important than broader indicators of competence.

Keywords: violence against civilians, public opinion, Latin America, survey experiment, Political Psychology

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Following armed conflict, voters must often evaluate candidates for political office who have allegedly committed wartime civilian targeting. What kinds of alleged perpetrators are voters more willing to support and why? This question is important because civilian victimization is widespread in wars across the globe, as is the phenomenon of militant groups running for office. For example, the UCDP has recorded 281 conflict actors which engaged in one-sided violence against civilians between 1989 and 2019; this number includes both government and non-state actors (Pettersson and Öberg, 2020). Similarly, almost 15% of all non-governmental militant and ex-militant groups participated in elections between 1970 and 2010 (Matanock, 2016). For example, the Sinn Féin party was closely affiliated with the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) during The Troubles and is one of the largest parties in Northern Ireland today. Hezbollah has been participating in elections since 1992 while continuing its armed struggle. In Colombia, the FARC transformed from an armed group to a political party in a 2016 peace agreement. In such elections, accusations of past or continuing involvement in violence against civilians are often an important criterion which voters must consider. As more peace agreements call for power sharing, former combatant participation in politics is likely to become even more common (Hartzell and Hoddie, 2015).

Although there is a range of survey literature examining public attitudes toward military attacks which involve civilian casualties (e.g. Sagan and Valentino, 2017; Lupu and Wallace, 2019; Bloom et al., 2020), we know relatively little about how civilians differentiate between forms of civilian victimization or how they evaluate the alleged perpetrators of civilian abuses. Thus, my contribution is threefold. Firstly, I provide a theoretically motivated disaggregation of ways that an individual can be involved in civilian victimization. Secondly, I contribute a theory about how ordinary citizens make tradeoffs between candidates who have allegedly participated in civilian targeting. Lastly, using an original survey experiment in Colombia, I examine a scenario in which people living in a country affected by armed conflict evaluate alleged perpetrators for office.

I argue that voters assess civilian victimization by evaluating how candidate involvement

in the violence indicates integrity and competence. People infer character traits from actions, and these two traits have been shown to influence voting behavior (e.g. Uleman, Adil Saribay and Gonzalez, 2008; Bittner, 2011). I rely on the Theory of Dyadic Morality (TDM), which focuses on the harm that one person commits against another, to build a framework for understanding civilian judgements of the integrity of perpetrators (e.g. Schein and Gray, 2018). There are three relevant elements of TDM: the strength of the norm that the harm violates, the agency of the perpetrator, and the clarity of the causal link between the perpetrator and the victim. I argue that, in the context of violence against civilians, lethal violence violates a weaker norm than sexual violence, forced recruits and unenthusiastic perpetrators have limited agency, and the causal link between perpetrator and victim is least clear when the perpetrator does not touch the victim or when the violence would have been likely to occur even without the actions of that individual. I refer to individuals who behave in a more moral fashion according to TDM as having “dyadic integrity.”

In regard to competence, I suggest that post-conflict voters, who face both present and future threats, should prioritize electing security competent leaders who can protect them in case of a return to war. The key indicators of perceived security competence in the context of civilian victimization are military success, gender, and the target of the violence.

To test the observable implications of this theoretical framework, I conduct an online conjoint survey experiment which pits hypothetical candidates for governor in Colombia against each other, all of whom have allegedly been involved in civilian victimization. In line with my argument, respondents are more supportive of candidates who violate less strict norms of violence, have less agency, and have less clear causal ties to the victims. In contrast, I do not find that respondents assess perpetrators on the basis of security competence. Nonetheless, respondents do consider broader indicators of competence, such as age and education. In summary, although respondents are in principle not unwilling to support perpetrators of civilian targeting, they are sensitive to ethical considerations and prioritize dyadic integrity over security competence.

1 Prior Research on Civilian Targeting, Public Attitudes, and Elections

Survey research on American respondents has shed light on their attitudes toward violence in wars abroad. Sagan and Valentino (2017) find that, when faced with sacrificing a large number of American troops or killing an even larger number of foreign civilians, the majority of Americans would approve of killing 100,000 civilians of an enemy state. Similarly, Press, Sagan and Valentino (2013) conclude that Americans have only a weak aversion to the use of nuclear weapons; they show that respondent attitudes are driven primarily by considerations of military utility. Dill and Schubiger (2020) find that U.S. respondents prioritize saving the lives of U.S. military troops. At the same time, they conclude that respondents prefer attacks against military targets to attacks against civilian targets and also seek to minimize foreign civilian casualties. Bloom et al. (2020) argue that trivialization of the moral dilemma that military attacks involving civilian casualties entail and resentment against the victims both facilitate support for such attack decisions. Lastly, Rathbun and Stein (2020) suggest that individuals' moral concerns about retribution, deference to authority, and in-group loyalty are associated with increased support for the use of nuclear weapons.

Other studies with similarly nuanced findings have focused on people who live in countries where civilians are targeted. Lyall, Blair and Kosuke (2013) and Condra and Shapiro (2012) find that, although civilians in Iraq and Afghanistan react negatively to groups which employ civilian targeting, their responses vary based on the identity of the armed group inflicting harm. In contrast, Kao and Revkin (2019) conclude that the type of rebel collaboration is more important than the rebel's social identity in shaping respondent preferences for punishment and forgiveness. While these authors do not explicitly study civilian targeting, they focus on a group that committed extensive violence against civilians. Lastly, in a study of India, Israel, and Argentina, Lupu and Wallace (2019) demonstrate that respondents are more supportive of government repression when the opposition engages in violence.

There is also an extensive but inconclusive literature on how wartime violence impacts electoral outcomes. For example, Balcells (2012) argues that victimization experiences only lead to the rejection of the perpetrators, including electorally, along the political cleavages that were salient during the war and when the victimization is severe. Indeed, some groups in intrastate conflicts retain electoral support despite engaging in civilian targeting. In fact, electoral success may be unrelated to wartime use of violence against civilians (Daly, 2019). Violence by non-state groups may also have electoral implications for government-affiliated figures, but there are currently disparate findings about the impact of such violence on electoral outcomes for incumbents, dovish politicians, and hawkish candidates (e.g. Berrebi and Klor, 2008; Weintraub, Vargas and Flores, 2015; Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014; Morales, 2020). One reason for these contradictory findings may be that different non-state armed groups use different violent strategies to alter the results of elections (Gallego, 2018). Most broadly, the electorate's responses to conflict-related violence could impact the longevity of peace because elections themselves shape post-conflict stability. For example, political participation of former rebel groups may help ensure peace, but elections may also contribute to conflict recurrence if politicians cannot credibly commit to peace (e.g. Hartzell and Hoddie, 2015; Flores and Nooruddin, 2012; Matanock, 2018). Of 205 incumbent and rebel parties which transitioned from civil conflict to politics between 1970 and 2015, 30 percent experienced a return to war with the same combatants (Daly, 2020).

While previous work on the electoral implications of violence is observational in nature, I utilize a survey experimental approach. Moreover, unlike prior studies of attitudes toward wartime violence, I consider the evaluation of individual perpetrators and their alleged involvement in violence rather than focusing on variables such as military utility, the number of victims, or perpetrator identity. Before I consider how people assess perpetrators running for office, I will first establish next how individuals assign character traits on the basis of behavior and then consider which character traits are most important in post-conflict elections.

2 Theory

One way that individuals make judgements about others is by making character inferences based on actions. Any individual's behavior can be caused both by the person and the situation that the person is in, but perceivers of actions tend to blame the individual rather than the situation (e.g. Heider, 1958; Moskowitz, 2005). A simple model explains why: perceivers first identify and categorize behavior in trait terms, then they characterize the actor who is engaged in the behavior in these same trait terms. Only after this do they take situational context into account (Gilbert, 1989; Trope, 1986). People can even make such judgements about actors' character traits unconsciously and unintentionally (e.g. Winter and Uleman, 1984; Uleman, Adil Saribay and Gonzalez, 2008). This long line of research in Psychology about character evaluation suggests that how candidates for office behave tells us who they are, and precisely who they are can be expressed in trait terms.

Perceived candidate character traits help explain American voter behavior (e.g. Kinder et al., 1980; Funk, 1999; Clifford, 2018), although there are a range of models concerning which candidate traits are most important (for a summary, see Bittner, 2011). Following Bittner's suggestion, I will differentiate between two: competence and integrity. I do so for three reasons. Both factor analysis and the generation of trait typologies have converged Kinder's four original traits: competence, leadership, integrity, and empathy. Integrity and empathy are highly correlated, as are competence and leadership (Kinder, 1986). As a result, a range of scholars from Kinder et al. (1980) to Bittner (2011) have utilized variations of these two basic traits. Secondly, given how complex the phenomenon of civilian victimization is and how little we know about public opinion on the subject, beginning with the most basic model of candidate character is prudent. Thirdly, a literature on valence, which is primarily based on formal models rather than on surveys, also suggests that candidate competence and integrity play a role in voting (e.g. Stokes, 1963; Galasso and Nannicini, 2011; Franchino and Zucchini, 2015). For my purposes, integrity is the quality of being moral and competence is the quality of being effective. In the context of civilian victimization, I will argue that

dyadic integrity and security competence are the most salient versions of these two traits.

In summary, I argue that voters prefer candidate behaviors which indicate competence and integrity, regardless of policy and party preferences. I make no claims about what forms of civilian targeting are objectively effective or ethical but rather theorize about how people may perceive variation in perpetrator character. In the section that follows, I will argue that the Theory of Dyadic Morality (TDM) provides a framework for understanding judgements about the integrity of perpetrators of violence against civilians. Specifically, I argue that civilian targeting is penalized less when perpetrators violate less strong norms, have less agency in committing the crime, or play a less clear causal role in the harm.

2.1 Dyadic Integrity

TDM suggests that norm violations are seen as immoral when the violations cause harm to others. This harm must be dyadic, because two minds are always involved: the actor who intends the harm, and the victim who experiences the harm (Gray and Wegner, 2011; Gray, Waytz and Young, 2012; Schein and Gray, 2018). Moral judgement of such harmful acts “is proportional to the agency of agents, the experience of patients [victims], and the clarity of causation between them” (Schein and Gray, 2018, p. 38). I will focus on norm violation, perpetrator agency, and causal clarity. Given that all civilian targeting causes immense suffering for the victims, I choose not to assess when such violence entails worse pain for the victims. I will refer to those individuals who behave in a relatively moral fashion, according to TDM, as having more “dyadic integrity.”

There are several other prominent theories of moral judgements, including Moral Foundations Theory and Moral Motives Theory (Haidt, 2013; Janoff-Bulman and Carnes, 2013). These theories, like TDM, have applications for the study of political attitudes. For example, Kertzer et al. (2014) draws upon Moral Foundations Theory to investigate how moral values are correlated with foreign policy attitudes among Americans.² I proceed from TDM rather than these other theories because violence against civilians is fundamentally dyadic. When

²For more details about the wide range of work in Political Psychology in International Relations, see Kertzer and Tingley (2018).

a civilian is directly victimized, there must be at least one identifiable, human perpetrator. This dyadic structure also lies at the center of TDM, and, in fact murder and rape are two paradigmatic applications of TDM as well as two forms of civilian victimization (Gray, Waytz and Young, 2012; Schein and Gray, 2018). In focusing on variations in dyadic harm, TDM provides nuance regarding which forms of wrong behavior are perceived as the most wrong. Alternate theories are unable to provide this necessary nuance because they conceive of morality as far more broad than TDM does. In summary, while I do not claim that TDM explains all moral judgements, I do argue that this framework helps generate concrete expectations about the ways that voters conceptualize civilian victimization and thus its perpetrators.

2.1.1 Norms

All civilian victimization is “wrong,” but TDM indicates that discerning the strength of the norm that the violence violates is crucial for determining precisely how wrong it is perceived to be. Norms are defined here as “expectancies, beliefs, values, and rules about how other people act or should act” (Schein and Gray, 2018, p. 35-36). I argue that there are distinct norms concerning two kinds of violence against civilians, lethal violence and sexual violence, and that global norms against sexual violence in war are stronger.

Norms, customs, treaties, and philosophy form a war convention which indicates what is acceptable in conflict (Walzer, 2015). Although most people are not well-versed in international humanitarian law (IHL) or just war theory, legalization reflects and formalizes global norms, and civil society often leads the fight for legalization (Abbott et al., 2000; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Conversely, IHL continues to permeate public consciousness (ICRC, 2016; Dill and Schubiger, 2020). Given that IHL reflects and shapes public attitudes, stricter international laws indicate stronger norms. Although IHL prohibits the direct targeting of civilians, proportionality means that civilians can legally be killed in many circumstances (e.g. Garbett, 2015). In contrast, IHL explicitly prohibits rape. In fact, the prohibition against sexual violence may have emerged as a *jus cogens* norm from which states may never

derogate even by treaty (e.g. Mitchell, 2004; Eriksson, 2011).

Constructivist Political Science literature also lends support to the argument that global norms against sexual violence are stronger than those against lethal violence. The “innocent civilian” is a gendered concept typically associated with women and children (e.g. Carpenter, 2005; MacKenzie, 2009). Sexual violence is also seen as gendered, even though women can be perpetrators of such aggression (Cohen, 2013; Sjoberg, 2016). If rape is perceived as gendered, and if women and children are seen as the most vulnerable victims in war, then sexual violence is seen as a worse harm than killing. Given the differences between norms surrounding killing and sexual violence, including sexual violence, I hypothesize:

Norm Violation Hypothesis: Respondents are more likely to support a candidate who has engaged in the killing of civilians than one who has engaged in sexual violence against civilians.

2.1.2 Aggressor Agency

Secondly, TMD suggests that a perpetrator’s agency factors into moral judgement. Agency is defined here as the ability to plan, intend, and enact one’s goals. I posit that the perceived level of agency that a perpetrator exercises in committing civilian victimization depends how the individual was recruited into the group and the person’s attitude towards the victimization.

When an individual joins a group for ideological reasons, he or she indicates support for the group’s goals and intends to participate in efforts to achieve them. Such combatants have the ability to enact their plans in accordance with their rank. In contrast, a forced recruit did not plan or intend to join the group or to participate in its crimes. Forced recruits may also be coerced into continued compliance once active in a group (Gates, 2002; Eck, 2014). This difference is reflected in legal doctrine on duress: individuals are less legally culpable for crimes, including perhaps war crimes, when their actions were not voluntary but were instead committed under severe threat (e.g. Epps, 2002). Between these two extremes of forced recruitment and ideological recruitment lie economic recruits who chose to join an armed

group because they lacked other career options. As such, they faced either mobilization or the hardship that not having a job entails. In summary, an ideological recruit has a high degree of agency, an economic recruit has a moderate degree of agency, and a forced recruit has limited agency. I hypothesize:

Recruitment Hypothesis: Respondents are more likely to support candidates who had less agency in the recruitment process.

Alternatively, if respondents are most supportive of ideological recruits, commitment to beliefs may be seen as moral. However, I hypothesize that agency is more important in this context because an individual who is ideologically committed to an immoral behavior is not seen as a moral individual. For example, perpetrators of violence against civilians are not frequently commended for being so committed to their political cause that they engage in violence against innocents.

While recruitment speaks to agency in a conflict at large, an individual's attitude toward a specific attack indicates the perpetrator's agency at the moment of committing the violence. Precluding incapacity or coercion, actors must want and intend to act in order to actually act. However, the extent of intention that an individual has can vary. More precisely, an enthusiastic individual is highly motivated to engage in a given action, whereas a reluctant individual is less motivated to do so. Criminal law stresses the importance of intention through the concept of *mens rea*, and work in Psychology suggests that considerations of intentionality affect moral judgements of behavior (e.g. Norrie, 2014; Cushman, 2008; Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe, 2014). Enthusiastic perpetrators therefore have the strongest intentions and the most agency in committing the crime. Thus, I argue that an enthusiastic perpetrator will be perceived as more culpable than a reluctant one, meaning that:

Attitude Hypothesis: Respondents are more likely to support a candidate who reluctantly committed a crime than one who enthusiastically did so.

2.1.3 Clarity of Causation

Like norm violation and aggressor agency, the clarity of causation between the perpetrator and the victim is relevant for moral judgements within TMD. I distinguish between two theoretically relevant dimensions of causal clarity: physical contact and independent control. Four ways that individuals can participate in violence vary along both of these dimensions: perpetrators can decide on their own volition, follow an order, order someone else, or fail to stop another person.

In general, harm caused by physical contact is perceived as worse than equivalent harm perpetrated without such contact. For example, intervening actors and intermediaries mitigate perceived moral responsibility (e.g. Waldmann and Dieterich, 2007; Paharia et al., 2009). Similarly, in modified versions of the trolley problem, respondents characterize actors who push the victims more negatively than those who flip a switch (Cushman, Young and Hauser, 2006; Greene et al., 2009).³ Given that the perpetrator's intentions remain constant, physical contact makes clear the causal connection between the victim and the perpetrator and thus increases negative judgement. In the context of civilian victimization, those who order violence or do not prevent it are less likely to physically touch the victims than perpetrators who follow orders or decide to commit violence on their own volition.

Secondly, the extent of control a person has over violence is a product of how likely it is that the attack would have occurred without the action of the perpetrator. If a relevant counterfactual exists in which the individual behaved differently and the crime did not occur, then the outcome was likely preventable by that individual. People with a lot of control over the outcome are judged more harshly than those who have less control (e.g. Alicke, 2000; Malle, Guglielmo and Monroe, 2014). For example, if Person A does not prevent Person B from committing harm or follows an order from Person B to commit harm, then Person B may still have orchestrated the harm regardless of the actions of Person A. In contrast,

³In the classic version of the trolley problem, a runaway train is heading toward five people tied to the tracks. You can do nothing, allowing the trolley to kill five people, or you can pull a lever, diverting the trolley to the track with only one person.

if Person A orders Person B to commit the harm or decides to commit the harm on his own volition, that harm would be unlikely to happen without the action of Person A. In summary, when a perpetrator has independent control over whether the crime is likely to happen, that person has a clearer causal tie to the victim and is thus perceived as more morally responsible.

The *Physical Contact Hypothesis* and *Independent Control Hypothesis* are summarized below. The italicized text refers to the hypothesized level of relative support.

Table 1: **Types of Involvement in the Crime and Relative Support**
Physical Contact?

		Yes	No
Indep. Control?	Yes	<i>Lower Support:</i> Decided to commit the crime on his/her own volition	<i>Medium Support:</i> Ordered someone else to commit the crime
	No	<i>Medium Support:</i> Followed an order to commit the crime	<i>Higher Support:</i> Did not prevent someone else from committing the crime

Alternatively, moral judgement could grow more negative as physical distance increases if what is relevant to judgement is not causal clarity but rather the risk that the victim poses to the perpetrator. For example, some argue that drones are “riskless” for the United States and therefore are unethical (e.g. Boyle, 2015; Human Rights Council, 2010). However, I hypothesize that the logic of causal clarity is more prominent than the logic of risk in the assessment of civilian victimization because civilians do not typically pose a threat to armed actors regardless of whether or not the two touch.

2.2 Security Competence

Competence indicates a person’s ability to successfully execute a task, and competent people are more likely to be voted for and characterized as intelligent, knowledgeable, and experienced (Kinder, 1986; Clifford, 2018). I argue that competence has additional meanings in the context of post-conflict elections. Where peace remains fragile, voters may support those people who are most likely to ensure peace among everyone, i.e. peace-competent

individuals, or they may support people who are most likely to provide protection in the case of a return to war, i.e. security-competent individuals. The first provide safety as a public good and the second as a club good. I argue that, facing both present and future threats, voters prioritize electing security competent leaders. I further suggest that there are three key signals of security competence among former combatants running for office: tactical success in conflict, the use of tactics that reflect strategic strength, and gender.

Survey evidence suggests that individuals react to threats not by supporting reconciliatory policies but rather those policies which augment the perceived security of members of the in-group at the expense of other groups,. Such policies include aggressive retaliation against out-groups and violations of their rights (e.g. Gordon and Arian, 2001; Skitka, Bauman and Mullen, 2004). Given their coercive nature, these policies are best implemented by individuals with security experience. Furthermore, given the credible commitment problem inherent in conflict resolution and post-conflict elections, voters cannot trust the promises of continued peace made by candidates for office (e.g. Paris, 2004; Flores and Nooruddin, 2012). In other words, they cannot trust any candidate's promise of peace competence. For example, in Colombia, the 2018 LAPOP survey indicates 44 percent of respondents think that the government will not continue to comply with the 2016 peace agreement and 56 percent think that the FARC will not continue to do so. Thus, I argue that, instead of voting for candidates whose skills and experience are best suited to promoting peace for all, voters seeking safety will entrust their interests to those politicians who are best suited to promoting security for their supporters in the not unlikely case that war returns.

One indicator of security competence is a candidate's prior tactical success in conflict. While any war involves a wide range of tactics, the quintessential function of a soldier is to fight battles. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

Tactical Success Hypothesis: Respondents are more likely to support a candidate who won more battles than one who won fewer battles.

Choice of tactics is also an indicator of security competence because some tactics require

more strategic strength to enact. For example, selective violence requires high-quality information about specific individuals. In contrast, indiscriminate violence requires less information, meaning that armed actors use the tactic when they are losing, under threat, or lacking high quality local information (Kalyvas, 2006; Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay, 2004; Downes, 2008). I will refer to indiscriminate violence as fundamentally random targeting, collective violence as targeting based on collective identity, and selective violence as targeting based on individual behavior (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, 2017; Steele, 2017). In summary, selective violence implies the most competence, collective violence implies a medium level of competence, and indiscriminate violence suggests a low level of competence. Thus,

Strategic Strength Hypothesis: Respondents are more likely to support a candidate who has engaged in more selective violence against civilians than one who has engaged in less selective violence against civilians.

If people employ a retributive logic according to which some civilians deserve to be attacked, then targeting could also signal integrity.⁴ Attitudes toward targeting could reflect this retributive logic in two ways. First, if respondents support efforts to eliminate the maximum number of civilians affiliated with the enemy, then they would be most supportive of candidates who engage in collective violence. A second possibility is observationally equivalent to the hypotheses above. If people are more supportive of targeting those civilians who are more closely affiliated with the enemy, then selective targeting would be seen as the most ethical and indiscriminate targeting as the least ethical. I posit that neither of these retributive logics are likely in a conflict which does not involve genocide or ethnic cleansing. Although voters across a range of conflicts support aggressive policies against out-groups when they are threatened, as discussed above, campaigns of ethnic cleansing or genocide require a narrative in which the target population is seen as inherently dangerous, unwinnable, and uncontrollable (Straus, 2015). Such narratives are rare. For example, in countries at conflict

⁴Psychological research incorporating retributive reasoning includes Carlsmith and Darley (2008) and Schein and Gray (2018).

across the world, nearly 80 percent of people think it is wrong to attack enemy combatants in populated villages (ICRC, 2016). Thus, I argue that targeting is tied to competence rather than to integrity in conflicts without genocide or ethnic cleansing.

Lastly, I argue that post-conflict voters will support men more than women because of gendered stereotypes about how men are better at handling security issues (e.g. Sanbonmatsu, 2002; Dolan, 2014). Women may be seen as ineffective at security issues because they are stereotyped as more peaceful than men (e.g. Melander, 2005; Shea and Christian, 2016). As a result of these gendered stereotypes, voters who are most concerned about security are more likely to support male candidates, and periods of security crisis are correlated with decreased representation of women in political leadership positions (e.g. Falk and Kenski, 2006; Schroeder, 2017; Barnes and O'Brien, 2018). It is also possible that the process of militarization and preparation for war entrenches traditional gender roles in which men are seen as heroes (Elshtain, 1987; Goldstein, 2003).⁵ In summary, I argue that, when security is highly salient and war could recur, voters should favor male candidates, who are seen as competent in matters of security.

Gender Hypothesis: Respondents are more likely to support a male candidate than a female one.

2.3 Other Indicators of Competence and Integrity

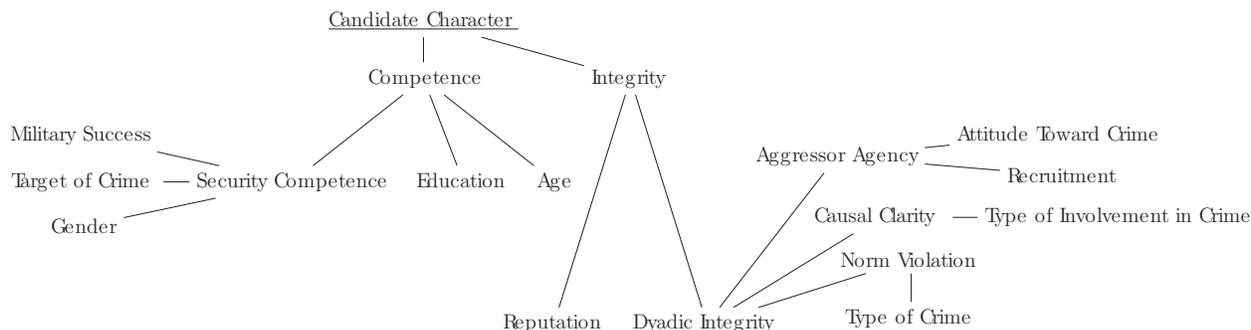
I have argued that people evaluate candidates' engagement in violence against civilians by assessing how their involvement in the conflict reflects security competence and dyadic integrity. However, former combatants running for office are not merely former fighters, and they are likely evaluated on the basis of information other than their engagement in conflict. In other words, people may evaluate candidates on the basis of broader signals of character than I have thus far discussed. More specifically, education, age, and reputation are signals

⁵On the other hand, warfare can disrupt existing social institutions, thereby prompting shifts in gender roles and increasing women's empowerment (e.g. Webster, Chen and Beardsley, 2019). Female combatants can also disrupt and challenge gender dichotomies (e.g. Getry and Sjoberg, 2015). However, increases in women's empowerment do not necessarily imply that women are more likely to be elected than men, merely that they are more politically empowered than they would have been absent war.

of candidate character for all individuals running for office, regardless of their participation in conflict. Education has been used as a measure of competence in previous studies (e.g. Galasso and Nannicini, 2011; Franchino and Zucchini, 2015). Age is also an indicator of competence because individuals with more life experience have more knowledge to utilize while governing. Lastly, reputation has been used as indicator of integrity; candidates who are kind and set a good example have integrity, whereas power-hungry and unjust candidates lack integrity (e.g. Kinder, 1986; Clifford, 2018).

A diagram of the key elements of the theory elucidated above follows in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overview of Operationalization



3 Research Design

3.1 Case Selection

To meet the scope conditions, a country must be currently or recently involved in an internal conflict which does not involve ethnic cleansing or genocide, and armed actors that have been widely involved in civilian victimization must publicly have candidates on the ballot. Colombia meets these conditions. In 2016, the FARC signed a peace agreement with the government and became a political party with 10 guaranteed seats in Congress. In the October 2019 regional elections, the FARC presented 308 candidates for office, 101 of whom were ex-combatants (Colombia2020, 2019). Few FARC candidates were elected, although this loss is unsurprising given the FARC’s lack of popularity combined with the violent elimination of the FARC’s previous political party, the UP, and the subsequent targeting

of civilians on the basis of their votes for that party (Steele, 2017; Rivera, Plata Caviedes and Rodríguez Raga, 2018). Former guerrillas from other groups have also run for office, including the runner up to the 2018 presidential election, Gustavo Petro. Colombia's security forces and pro-state paramilitaries are also intertwined with politics. The Vice President from 2017-2018 was a member of the national police, more than 30 politicians have been indicted for colluding with paramilitaries in the parapolitics scandal (Brodzinsky, 2008), and former president Uribe was placed under house arrest in August of 2020 in connection with allegations of witness tampering in a case tied to paramilitary massacres (Turkewitz, 2020).

Over 80 percent of the victims of the armed conflict were civilians; rebels, paramilitaries, and the government all engaged in deliberate strategies of civilian targeting (Grupo de Memoria Histórica, 2013). While not all individuals running for office have ties to such violence or to the conflict more broadly, a range of prominent officeholders have been accused of involvement in violence against civilians. For example, six out of FARC's ten members of Congress were called before the Special Peace Jurisdiction (JEP) in 2018 concerning their role in kidnappings from 1993 to 2012 (Tiempo, 2018). Former FARC guerrillas can run for office in Colombia before the JEP has decided their case. To run, candidates must agree to accept and submit to the decisions of the JEP (Meléndez, 2017). Additionally, JEP case 03 concerns the false positives scandal, in which members of the military killed civilians and presented them as rebels in order to inflate casualty counts. Former president and current senator Uribe has consistently denied playing a role in the deaths, which occurred while he was president (Legrand, 2020). Given that the government, the FARC, and many of the candidates themselves have engaged with the JEP, voters would likely find out about alleged candidate engagement in violence against civilians through the work of the institution. Although candidates may deny their involvement in such violence, the JEP serves as a relatively clear and legitimate source of information about civilian targeting in Colombia.

3.2 Survey Design and Implementation

I implemented an online survey experiment in Colombia in October 2019, a month before local and regional elections. The 1,589 respondents, all Colombian adult citizens, were drawn from the Colombia panel of the survey firm Dynata. The survey utilizes a conjoint experiment in which respondents are presented with information about pairs of hypothetical candidates for governor, both of whom have been accused of violence against civilians. In each of four choice tasks, respondents choose one candidate over the other (forced choice) and indicate how likely they would be to vote for each candidate on a scale from 1 to 5 (rating). For the levels of each attribute, see Figure 2 or Appendix Table A.5.

Conjoint designs disaggregate multidimensional treatments into a series of components or attributes, thereby allowing for the estimation of the average causal effects of multiple treatment components (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). The design limits social desirability bias (Horiuchi, Markovich and Yamamoto, 2019), performs well in comparison to behavioral benchmarks (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015), and provides a partial solution to informational equivalence violations (Dafoe, Zhang and Caughey, 2018). Recent evidence has suggested that neither an increase in the number of attributes up to 18 nor in the number of choice tasks to up to 30 substantively increases respondent satisficing (Bansak et al., 2018, 2019a).

There are several survey design decisions to note. Firstly, the attributes are presented in the same order to all respondents to tell a coherent story. Other studies have held attribute order constant for realism (Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015), and attribute order effects are often minimal in conjoint experiments (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014; Auerbach and Thachil, 2018). Secondly, I sought to elicit attitudes toward victimization rather than specific armed groups. Thus, the conjoint does not indicate the affiliations of perpetrators and victims, nor does it include crimes which are closely tied to specific groups. This helps make sure that all combinations of attributes are realistic and that none of the possible combinations decisively indicate a specific armed group affiliation.

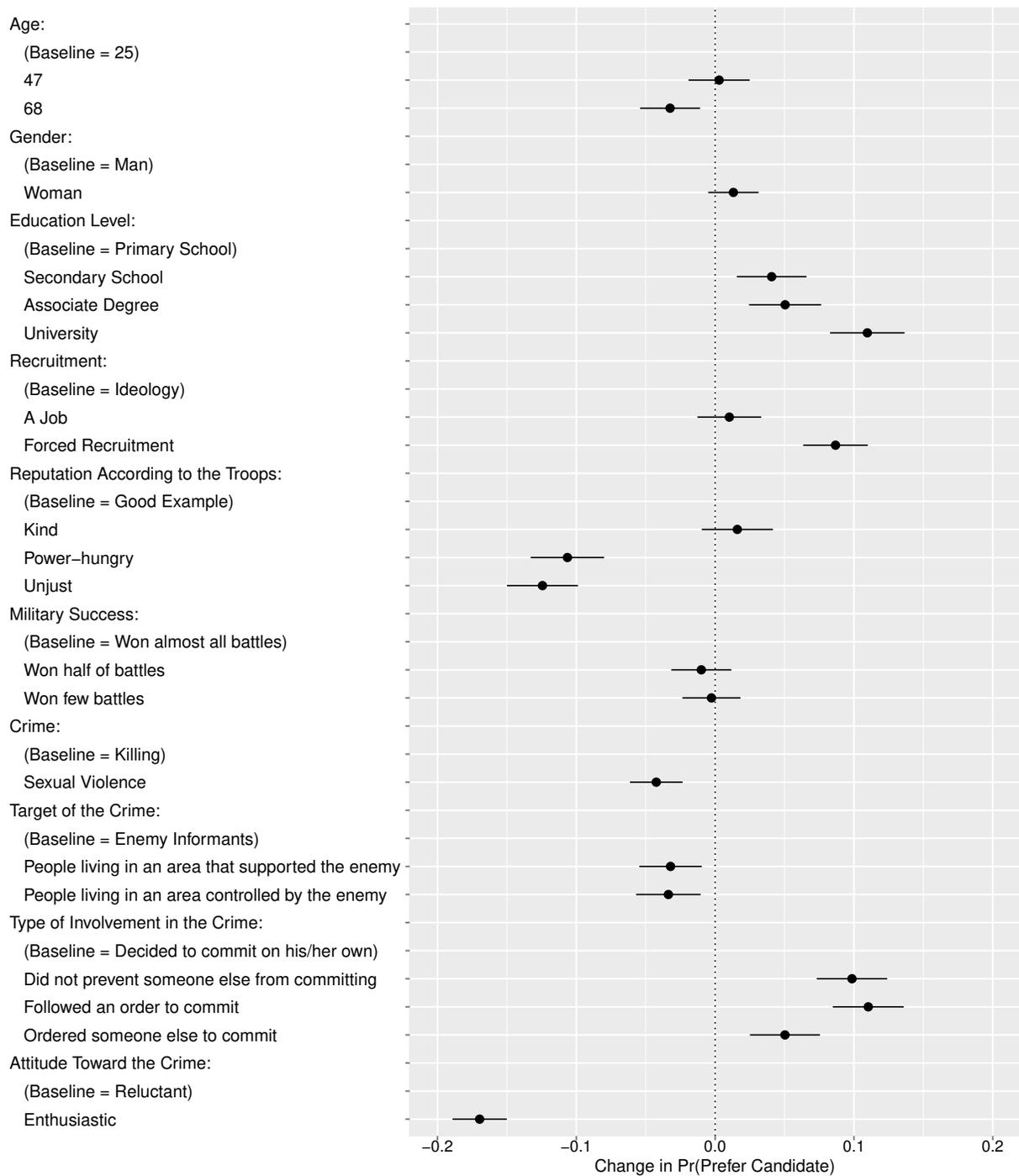
Additionally, respondents are told to imagine that they “support the political agenda of all presented candidates.” Thirdly, in focusing narrowly on violence in order to disaggregate types of civilian targeting, the experiment features only former combatants. To help ameliorate a lack of realism, I utilize rating responses to assess whether respondents would consider voting for the hypothetical candidates if not required to do so via forced choice.

To analyze the conjoint, I estimate the average marginal component effect (AMCE): the marginal effect of each attribute averaged over the joint distribution of all other attributes (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). I estimate all forced choice AMCEs simultaneously with a linear regression; the binary dependent variable takes the value of 1 for those candidate profiles that respondents preferred within a pair. I report standard errors which are clustered on respondents. Note that these AMCE results do not have clear implications for majoritarian election outcomes because conjoints combine information on the direction and intensity of preferences. Nonetheless, the estimand provides valuable information on the average effects of attribute changes on expected vote shares (Abramson, Koçak and Magazinnik, 2019; Bansak et al., 2019*b*). When analyzing subgroup preferences, I estimate marginal means (MM) rather than subgroup AMCEs because marginal means are not sensitive to the baseline category. Marginal means indicate the level of respondent favorability toward a profile with a particular attribute level (Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley, 2019).

4 Results

Figure 2 shows the results of the forced choice regression; the coefficients indicate the component-specific marginal average effect of a given attribute relative to the baseline category of that attribute. Overall, the forced choice results presented and discussed below suggest that dyadic integrity is more important than security competence in judgements about the hypothetical candidates. See Appendix 1 for a numerical presentation of the forced choice results as well as for details about the rating results, which are similar to the forced choice ones. See Appendix 3 for marginal means presentation of the results. Appendix 4 contains a summary of which pre-analysis plan hypotheses were supported.

Figure 2: Forced Choice Results



4.1 Dyadic Integrity

Respondents took norm violation, perpetrator agency, and clarity of causation into account when evaluating perpetrators. As the Norm Hypothesis suggests, involvement in sexual violence decreases the chances that a candidate is preferred by 4 percentage points compared to involvement in lethal violence ($-.042$, $95\%CI=[-.061, -.023]$).

Respondents were also sensitive to perpetrator agency i.e. attitude and recruitment type. In line with the Attitude Hypothesis, compared with reluctance, enthusiasm in committing the violence decreases the likelihood of a candidate being preferred by 17 percentage points ($-.17$, $CI=[-.19, -.15]$). The Recruitment Hypothesis posits that respondents are more likely to support candidates who had less agency when they joined the group. Indeed, relative to ideological recruitment, forced recruitment increases the chances of a candidate being selected by 9 percentage points ($.087$, $CI=[.064, .11]$). Relative to economic recruitment, forced recruitment also increases the probability of a candidate being preferred ($.077$, $CI=[.053, .10]$) (Figure A.2). However, in comparison with ideological recruitment, economic recruitment does not affect the chances of a candidate being preferred.

Respondents took the clarity of causation between the perpetrator and victim into account. This causal relationship is clearest when the perpetrator touches the victim (Physical Contact Hypothesis) and when the violence would have been unlikely to happen without the actions of the perpetrator (Independent Control Hypothesis). In comparison to deciding to commit the crime on one's own accord, ordering someone else to commit the violence increases the chances of a candidate being preferred by 5 percentage points ($.050$, $CI=[.025, .076]$), and following an order to commit harm increases the chances by 11 percentage points ($.11$, $CI=[.085, .14]$). The first finding supports the Physical Contact Hypothesis, and the second lends support to the Independent Control Hypothesis. Figure A.2 suggests that, relative to not preventing someone else from committing the violence, ordering someone else to commit the harm decreases the chances of a candidate being preferred by almost 5 percentage points ($-.048$, $CI=[-.073, -.023]$). However, relative to not preventing someone else from committing

the crime, following an order has no statistically significant impact on the likelihood of preferring a candidate.⁶ These findings support the Independent Control Hypothesis and provide partial support for the Physical Contact Hypothesis.

4.2 Security Competence

I find little support for my hypotheses about security competence. The Tactical Success Hypothesis, concerning battles won, receives no support. Relative to winning almost all battles, winning half of or few battles has no effect on the likelihood of a candidate being preferred. Respondents were also not more likely to prefer male candidates to female ones or vice versa. Lastly, the Strategic Strength Hypothesis, concerning how selective the targeting is, receives partial support.⁷ Compared to selective violence, collective violence reduces the chances that a candidate will be preferred by 3 percentage points (-.032, CI=[-.055, -.0097]), as does indiscriminate violence (-.034, CI=[-.057, -.010]). These findings do not disappear with a bonferroni p-value correction. In contrast, respondents do not differentiate between perpetrators of collective and indiscriminate violence (Figure A.2).

4.3 Other Indicators of Competence and Integrity

Respondents do take into account broader measures of competence and integrity: education, age, and reputation. When compared to candidates who finished primary school, those who attended university are 11 percentage points more likely to be preferred (.11, CI=[.083, .14]). Similarly, although there is no statistically significant difference between 25 and 47 year olds, relative to 25 year olds, candidates who are 68 years old are 3 percentage points less likely to be preferred (-.032, CI=[-.054, -.011]). While these results do not support the original hypothesis that respondents prefer older candidates, they nonetheless suggest that people consider competence because 68 year olds may be seen as declining. In terms of integrity, relative to candidates who are good examples, candidates who are power-hungry

⁶Relative to deciding to commit the harm on one's own, not preventing someone else from committing the crime increases the chances of a candidate being preferred by 10 percentage points (.099, CI=[.073, .124]). This relationship was not hypothesized in the PAP but is implied by Table 1 and the hypotheses in the PAP.

⁷Selective targeting victimizes enemy informants, collective targeting victimizes people living in an area that supported the enemy, and indiscriminate violence victimizes people living in an area controlled by the enemy.

and unjust are less likely to be preferred by 11 percentage points (-.11, CI=[-.13, -.080]) and 12 percentage points (-.12, CI=[-.15, -.099]), respectively. In summary, although respondents prioritize dyadic integrity over security competence in evaluating candidate involvement in violence against civilians, they nonetheless emphasize more general indicators of capability. As such, my results resonate with existing prior research on American elections which has established that candidates who are competent and have integrity receive more support.

4.4 Subgroup Heterogeneity

Some groups of respondents could be less supportive of perpetrators overall, or different groups could respond the conjoint differently. To assess the first possibility, I use rating responses; these convey information about how likely the respondent would be to support both candidate A and B if not forced to choose. To assess the second, I use forced choice responses, like above.⁸ Overall, both sets of analyses suggest that the respondents respond very similarly to the conjoint regardless of their identity or experience.

Given Colombian politics, it is important to consider ideological heterogeneity. The 2019 elections were the first regional ones in which the FARC ran candidates, and the FARC's political participation has been the subject of great debate. Thus, one concern is that respondents thought all of the candidates were members of the FARC. However, analysis of rating responses indicates that conservative respondents would not categorically refuse to support the hypothetical candidates. This suggests that it is unlikely that the respondents systematically associated the hypothetical candidates with the FARC. For example, the average rating among the whole sample is 2.50 out of 5, and the mean rating among right-of-center voters is 2.52. Among respondents who voted for President Duque, a conservative, the mean is 2.52. T-tests indicate that these differences are not statistically significant. Furthermore, when controlling for other respondent traits, there is no statistically significant relationship between respondent ideology or Duque vote and candidate rating (Table A.6).⁹

Ideology may also shape which conjoint attributes respondents prioritize. Former President

⁸Subgroup analysis of the forced choice conjoint responses is exploratory and was not detailed in the PAP.

⁹These results do not provide support for hypothesis 12 from the PAP.

Uribe, the Centro Democrático party, and President Duque are all hawkish toward the guerrillas, suggesting that conservative voters may prize security competence. Similarly, leftist voters may be more sympathetic toward ideological recruits. However, subgroup analysis in Appendix 8 indicates limited heterogeneity by ideology in the forced choice responses. Omnibus F-tests as recommended by Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley (2019) indicate that there are not statistically significant between-group differences by ideology (Table A.7). For example, among both Duque voters and conservatives, the number of battles a candidate won has no effect on the likelihood of the candidate being preferred (Figures A.9 and A.10). While an F-test conducted on the forced choice results does indicate that there are subgroup differences between Duque and non-Duque voters ($F(21)=1.83$, $p=.012$), the attributes along which responses vary signal only weakly that Duque voters prioritize security competence. They are more likely to prefer perpetrators of collective violence than non-Duque voters, and they do not differentiate as strongly between reluctant and enthusiastic perpetrators (Table A.8). Thus, although there are a few differences between Duque and non-Duque voters, the results do not suggest that there is significant heterogeneity by respondent ideology.

Beyond ideology, women rate perpetrators lower, younger people rate the perpetrators higher, and individuals who disagree with principles of international law rate candidates higher. However, income, urbanity, and exposure to victimization are not strongly correlated with rating responses (Table A.6).¹⁰ Despite these differences in average rating responses, respondents exhibit consistency in their preferences for some perpetrators over others. Omnibus F-tests on the forced choice responses indicate that there are not subgroup differences by conflict victimization, gender, urbanity, income, or attitudes toward international law (Table A.7). In summary, the respondents answer the forced choice questions similarly regardless of their ideology, relationship to the conflict, or demographics.

¹⁰These results provide support for PAP hypothesis 11, regarding attitudes toward international law, but not for PAP hypothesis 13, regarding experience with victimization.

4.5 Possible Threats to Inference

There are four possible threats to these conclusions: survey respondents may not resemble the Colombian population, there may be design effects in the experiment, respondents may not have been paying attention, and there may be nonresponse bias. A brief review of each indicates that the respondents have similarities with the population politically if not demographically, design effects are limited, and respondents were paying attention. There is, however, nonresponse bias; I will discuss below the implications of this for the results.

Because surveying respondents in-person in rural areas and conducting sampling are difficult, the respondents are members of Dynata’s online Colombia panel who are not demographically representative of the Colombian population. Nonetheless, there are several similarities between the Colombian population and the respondents in terms of political attitudes. 33 percent of survey respondents voted for Duque in the first round of the 2018 presidential election, and 25 percent voted for Petro; nationally, Duque received 39 percent of the vote and Petro received 25 (Registraduría Nacional del Estado, 2018). Similarly, the average ideological self-placement of respondents on a 10-point scale was 5.8, and the national average in 2017 was also 5.8 on an identical scale (Rivera, Plata Caviades and Rodríguez Raga, 2018). Furthermore, although it is not clear that the results generalize to developing countries, several studies suggest that survey results from online convenience samples are similar to those obtained from nationally representative population-based samples (Mullinix et al., 2015; Coppock, 2019).

Respondents also responded carefully to the conjoint, which had limited design effects. Overall, 94 percent of respondent answers were consistent across the forced choice and rating questions.¹¹ Additionally, Appendix 5 indicates that design effects are limited. For example, the results are robust to excluding female rapist candidates, who may be perceived as atypical due to stereotypes about the roles that women play in conflict (Figure A.8).

However, there is nonresponse bias. Because the survey concerned a sensitive topic,

¹¹Consistency refers to choosing candidate A and also rating A higher than B in a given task.

respondents could skip any question; 11.7 percent of forced choice questions and 6.5 percent of rating questions were unanswered. Despite concerns that victims would be less likely to respond, T tests indicate that there are not statistically significant differences in rates of victimization between the overall sample and individuals who did not respond to the forced choice or rating questions; about one third of all respondents have immediate family members who were hurt in the conflict. However, individuals who did not respond to the conjoint questions are older, less educated, less wealthy, and live in more rural areas. They are also slightly more conservative and less likely to have voted in the 2018 presidential election (Table A.3). Differences in means tests, adjusted for multiple testing with a bonferroni correction, suggest that these differences are statistically significant. It is not clear, however, that the response bias made it easier to detect results that support the hypotheses elucidated above. For example, F-tests indicate that respondents do not answer the forced choice conjoint question differently on the basis of a range of demographic variables and measures of political attitudes (Table A.7). Furthermore, the results are robust even when using multiple imputation, despite a few changes in statistical significance levels (Table A.4).

5 Conclusion

I have argued that people evaluate candidate engagement in civilian victimization by interpreting what it indicates about perpetrator dyadic integrity and security competence. A conjoint survey experiment in Colombia indicates, in line with my argument, that attributes associated with dyadic integrity affect respondent preferences. Respondents were more supportive of perpetrators who violated less stringent norms, i.e. killed rather than raped; who had less agency, i.e. were forcibly recruited or reluctant to commit the crime; and who had a less clear causal tie to the victims, i.e. lacked physical contact with the victim or independent control over the crime. In contrast, respondents did not prioritize security competence. They did not distinguish between collective and indiscriminate targeting, nor did they differentiate between candidates on the basis of gender or tactical effectiveness. Nonetheless, respondents did take into account broader measures of competence, education

and age. These results indicate that people are highly attentive to the ethics of civilian victimization but do not see all violence as equally unethical.

Beyond contributing to literatures on attitudes toward violence and the electoral implications of insurgent violence, these findings provide insight into post-conflict politics. Respondents' nuanced candidate evaluations indicate that people may be more supportive of transitional justice policies which are attuned to the details of specific cases. Additionally, respondents were unwilling to support perpetrators perceived as unethical despite agreeing with those perpetrators politically, suggesting that some violence against civilians does indeed have electoral costs. On the other hand, the findings hint that some armed groups may retain electoral support despite engaging in objectionable violence because they put forth as candidates perpetrators who are seen as relatively more ethical, such as those who are linked to lethal rather than sexual violence or whose causal ties to the violence against civilians is murky.

Building upon this work, further research should consider how the shadow of future elections affects combatant behavior, including the use of different forms of civilian targeting. Additionally, because perpetrators do not act in isolation, future research should examine the relationship between perceptions of individual perpetrators and beliefs about the groups to which they belong. Lastly, further research into attitudes toward perpetrators should integrate the environment in which information about war crimes is disseminated and debated.

Additional research is necessary to explain the null security competence results, but I shall briefly consider a few possible explanations. Perhaps post-conflict voters seek peace competent rather than security competent candidates. Relatedly, it is possible that people see security competent candidates are more likely to precipitate a return to conflict. In other words, security-competent candidates could be seen as peace *in*competent. Lastly, maybe respondents were confident in the continued stability of their country, rendering the election of security competent officials unnecessary for continued safety. In summary, while future work should explore the forms of competence that voters care about in post-conflict elections, this study shows that they prioritize candidate dyadic integrity.

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