

Final report

Ethnic voting in violent contexts:

Evidence from
Afghanistan

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Abstract

Previous studies on ethnic voting in developing countries have argued that violence increases voter support for co-ethnic candidates. This paper challenges conventional expectations about the mechanisms driving voter support for co-ethnics in insecure contexts, based on evidence from experimental conjoint analysis in three provinces in northern Afghanistan. Contrary to research arguing that violence increases support for co-ethnics, the findings indicate that, under violent conditions, ethnic voting is driven more by an aversion to specific ethnic outgroups associated with violence. The results imply that voters use ethnicity as a proxy for evaluating the performance of certain outgroups on security, rather than being driven by bolstered in-group identities. Finally, the evidence presented here suggests that ethnic voting is less salient amongst higher socio-economic respondents, suggesting that more nuanced models of voter behavior are required in these contexts.

Introduction

An emerging debate on electoral dynamics in conflict-ridden countries concerns the relative importance of candidate ethnicity versus performance in determining public leadership preferences. Recent findings suggest that exposure to violence is likely to bolster in-group identification, resulting in higher vote shares for co-ethnic candidates (Hadzic et al., 2017). However, many studies to date have measured performance as linked to the efficient delivery of public goods such as health, education, and infrastructure. The perceived ability of potential candidates to provide security is relatively understudied as a measure of performance. In war-torn societies, is ethnic voting driven by a hardening of in-group identities? Or are voters making pragmatic decisions based on an evaluation of how certain ethnic groups are likely to perform on security provision?

This study uses an experimental conjoint methodology to closely approximate the decision-making process for respondents living in three provinces in northern Afghanistan. The conjoint methodology employed in this experiment assesses the relative importance of different candidate attributes by asking respondents to choose between two profiles of potential leaders. Candidate attributes were randomized in each profile, and participants repeated the experiment three times. The profiles included co-ethnics and non-coethnics, as well as other control variables likely to influence candidate choice, such as gender, age, education levels, and professional experience. I also tested how exposure to vignette treatments highlighting insecurity might affect these preferences.

The findings confirm that, on balance, Afghans living in the region exhibit a strong preference for co-ethnic candidates. These preferences are largely consistent among different age and income groups, though the salience of ethnicity declined amongst respondents with higher socio-economic status. Raising the salience of insecurity

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with a vignette experiment had significant effects on ethnic voting patterns. However, contrary to prevailing hypotheses on ethnic voting, I found little evidence that exposure to violence increased in-group ethnic preferences, but strong evidence of selective aversion to certain ethnic outgroups associated with violence. The results challenge expectations on how violence affects voter preferences in these contexts, and suggests voters use ethnicity as a proxy for a candidate's likely performance on security provision. I also found that ethnic voting declines in salience amongst respondents with higher socio-economic status, implying that these mechanisms may weaken as educations and incomes rise.

This paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews the extant theoretical literature on the effects of violence on electoral dynamics and outlines two theoretical models of how violence impacts voter behavior. Section 3 briefly describes the specific context of Afghanistan, outlining typologies of leadership in the country. Section 4 describes the experimental design. In Section 5, I present results and analysis. The final section outlines policy implications and suggests directions for further research.

Theoretical Framework: Electoral Dynamics in Violent Contexts

Evidence accumulated over decades suggests that heightened exposure to political violence has some measurable effect on voter preferences. Most foundational literature in this area comes from studies on the effects of war and terrorism on U.S. elections. In a seminal study investigating the effects of the Korean and Vietnam Wars on electoral preferences in America, Mueller (1973) found evidence of both 'rally' and 'casualty' effects: the former increasing support for the incumbent President in the face of external threats, and the latter decreasing support for the incumbent as casualties mount. Follow up studies have found further evidence of the rally effect (Norpoth, 1985; Ostrom and Simon, 1985; Norpoth and Sidman, 2007; Stapley, 2012) and the casualty effect, though the latter is mitigated to some extent by beliefs about how justified the war is and by voters' expectations that the war will be successful (Karol and Miguel, 2007; Gelpi et al., 2007).

Findings from evolutionary psychology provide further evidence that violence has a significant effect on how voters value particular characteristics in their leaders. Experimental studies comparing voter preferences in stimulated wartime versus peacetime scenarios have found that height, masculinity, and attractiveness—interpreted as proxies for health, fitness, and dominance—are particularly valued in wartime, while more feminine, trustworthy faces—suggesting prosocial, cooperative traits—are more valued in peacetime (Little et al., 2007, 2012; Tigue et al., 2012; Re et al., 2013). Preferences for masculinized faces have been found to be particularly pronounced when a threat is perceived to be coming from an out-group (Spisak et al., 2012).

Despite mounting evidence that political violence does have some effect on public leadership preferences, research has produced mixed results on the nature of these effects. On the one hand, exposure to violence may reduce support for incumbent governments, who are blamed for failing to adequately protect the population (Berrebi and Klor,

2006, 2008; Kibris, 2011; Ley, 2014). Heightened exposure to violence—or even simply the threat of violence—has also been positively linked to higher support for right-wing, hawkish parties, which are perceived to be stronger on order and security (Getmansky and Zeitzoff, 2014).¹ A few studies have identified non-linear relationships between exposure to violence and support for hawkish candidates. Gould and Klor (2010) found that low and moderate levels of terrorist attacks in Israel increased support for concessions in peace negotiations, but past a certain threshold hardened public attitudes against further concessions. Elsewhere, Weintraub et al. (2015) found an inverted-U shaped relationship in Columbia, where vote share for a pro-peace candidate was highest in communities with moderate levels of exposure to violence and comparatively low in areas with either very low or very high exposure to violence.

Finally, recent work has examined the effect of violence on voting in clientelistic political systems where parties based on ascriptive identities (e.g. ethnicity) are prevalent. One emerging theory suggests that exposure to violence results in a hardening of group identities, which in turn impacts voting behavior. A recent study of post-war voting patterns found that exposure to violence solidified intra-ethnic preferences in post-war Bosnia, leading to higher vote shares for ethnically-based parties (Hadzic et al., 2017). Similarly, experimental evidence from Kosovo found that violence amplified in-group/out-group cleavages and intensified preferences for parochial communal norms (Mironova and Whitt, 2018). This set of findings suggests that violence prompts voters to place greater value on in-group ascriptive characteristics in potential candidates. However, work by Carlson (2015) in Uganda suggests there is an interaction effect between co-ethnicity and performance: voter preferences for co-ethnics were conditional on good performance, while voters were indifferent to the performance of noncoethnics.

Drawing from the literature above, this article advances the debate on ethnic voting by examining an alternate measure of candidate performance: military prowess. While Carlson (2015) equates performance with the provision of public goods such as infrastructure and health, it is plausible that, in areas beset by violence, voters might place higher value on a candidate's perceived ability to provide security. Indeed, as democratization has spread across the developing world, numerous former rebel leaders have succeeded in winning power in national elections over the past 30 years, such as Charles Taylor in Liberia and Jean-Pierre Bemba in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Tellingly, candidates often explicitly highlight their war records during electoral campaigns even in cases where these records are marred by war crimes, suggesting that candidates believe that military experience is particularly valued in the eyes of the public (Themnér, 2017). The implied mechanism is straightforward: leaders with experience in waging war are best suited to translate those skills into maintaining order and security and protecting their constituents. This mechanism closely aligns with evidence cited above establishing a connection between heightened exposure to violence and preferences for masculine leaders and more hawkish parties. Rather than becoming indifferent to candidate performance as violence increases, this line of argument suggests that voters may remain highly sensitive to candidate performance, but that their priorities shift from more technocratic

¹One exception to this trend occurred in the aftermath of the 2004 Madrid bombings, which boosted electoral support for the left (Bali, 2007; Montalvo, 2011).

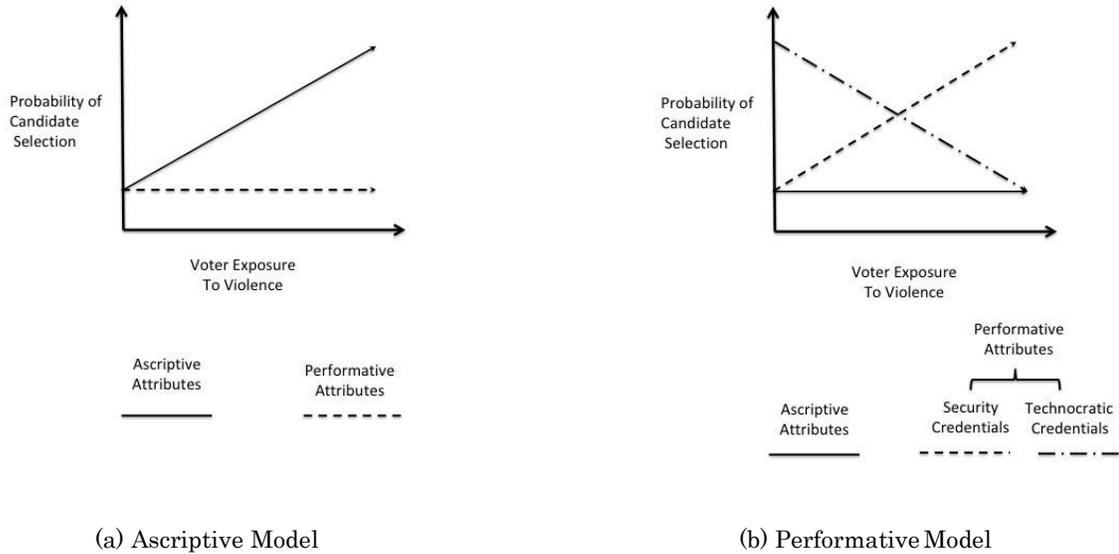


Figure 1: Two Predictive Models on the Impact of Violence on Voter Behavior

candidates likely to excel at public goods delivery towards candidates with more credibility on security. However, the electoral success of these strongmen may be attributable to factors beyond military prowess. Many former rebel leaders are also closely associated with particular ethnicities or regions; therefore, electoral support for these figures could be driven by preferences for candidates with military experience, or alternatively by a general preference for coethnic and/or local candidates.

The literature above suggests two general models of how voter preferences might be shaped by exposure to violence. Model 1 suggests that violence increases the attractiveness of in-group *ascriptive* preferences relative to performance-based measures — that is, under violent conditions voters will be more likely to value local candidates with the same ethnicity, while performance-based measures are comparatively unchanged. This model assumes that the primary mechanism triggered by exposure to violence is a solidification of in-group identities, which manifests in higher support for candidates with proximate identities at the expense of outsider candidates. As identity increases in salience, voters should become more indifferent to indicators of candidate performance.

Model 2 suggests that voters remain sensitive to signals of how candidates are likely to *perform*, but that voters will place more value on a candidate’s security credentials than their effectiveness at service delivery as exposure to violence increases. According to this model, ethnic voting would be used by voters as a signal of performance on security provision. It is also plausible that voters would look to other candidate attributes, such as military experience, as a measure of potential military performance, and may be more likely to select male candidates. This model assumes that performance-based measures remain the primary mechanism for evaluating candidate effectiveness, while in-group preferences remain relatively unchanged.

The two models of voter behavior above are not mutually exclusive: for example, it is possible that preferences

for coethnics and preferences for military leaders could increase simultaneously as violence increases. However, this article is concerned with the *relative* importance of the two models: which model is most indicative of voter behavior in violent contexts? I also acknowledge that other mechanisms may be at play, and that more nuanced models may be necessary that account for socio-economic and demographic differences within the population. Nonetheless, the two models above best reflect dominant assumptions about voter behavior in violent contexts, and therefore constitute an initial set of hypotheses for the study.

Violence and Voter Preferences in Afghanistan

I chose Afghanistan as a case study to test these hypotheses as it is a *most-likely case* where we would expect to see significant effects of political violence on voter preferences. It has experienced successive waves of political upheaval over the past four decades, and there is a large supply of potential leaders with experience fighting in one or more of Afghanistan's recent wars. At least a million civilians were estimated to have died from war-related violence during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and hundreds of thousands more have been killed in the years since (Khan, 2012). Currently, the Afghan government faces a serious threat from the Taliban and other insurgent groups that, as of 2018, controlled or contested as much as 46.2 percent of districts in the country (Sopko et al., 2019).

Despite rising instability, nascent electoral institutions have emerged in Afghanistan in recent years. After the overthrow of the Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan adopted a democratic constitution with regular Presidential and Parliamentary elections, allowing for some degree of voter choice. Since then, Afghanistan has completed three cycles of presidential elections, with a fourth scheduled for mid-2019. Despite widespread allegations of fraud, the country experienced its first-ever peaceful transfer of power between two elected governments after Presidential elections in 2014 (Giustozzi and Mangal, 2014). While programmatic parties exist, political factions are largely associated with the country's diverse ethnic groups, and are often supported by ethnically-based militias.

There is not much reliable evidence about how the current composition of leadership aligns with public preferences. The last two presidential elections were marred by accusations of widespread fraud, making them unreliable benchmarks for public opinion (Gall, 2014). Additionally, individual votes may have little to do with personal preferences, particularly in rural areas, where Afghan villages are often mobilized to vote en masse as directed by community elders (Aikins, 2014). Finally, Afghan presidential candidates have typically assembled diverse coalitions with a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds, making it difficult to infer what types of candidates voters are attracted to. For example, President Ghani's 2014 running mates included Dostum, an Uzbek warlord, and Hazara politician Mohammad Sawar Danish. Qualitative interviews with political figures and analysts conducted prior to data collection produced mixed results, as respondents were divided about the relative popularity of the nation's warlords. While some interviewees bitterly criticized the violent legacies and corrupt behavior of Afghanistan's warlord politicians, other interviewees insisted that these individuals were the only leaders with the means and ability

to provide security. The conjoint methodology employed in this study compensates for deficiencies in observational data.

Northern Afghanistan is a particularly suitable region of the country to explore ethnic voting patterns. It is more ethnically diverse than other areas of the country, with large numbers of Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Pashtuns living with a sizeable minority of Turkmens, Hazaras, and other ethnic groups. Additionally, while the entire region is at risk of insecurity, there is considerable subnational variation in the degree to which provinces are exposed to insurgent violence. The region therefore allows for testing of preferences between ethnic groups and between those living in relatively secure versus insecure areas.

Experimental Design

I use a choice-based conjoint design to test leadership preferences amongst respondents. While conjoint analysis has long been used to conduct market research, it has only recently been applied to political science (Hainmueller et al., 2014). However, conjoint analysis and other experimental methods offer unique opportunities for enhancing research in violent contexts, as evidenced by the exploration of sensitive topics such as support for insurgents, wartime informing, and attitudes towards in and out-groups (Voors et al., 2010; Lyall et al., 2013, 2015; Silva and Mace, 2015). Respondents are often reluctant to answer sensitive questions truthfully, instead providing answers they believe surveyors want to hear. In insecure or politically oppressive areas, respondents' fear of reprisals for providing unsatisfactory answers may exacerbate this tendency. A choice-based conjoint design mitigates social desirability bias by testing preferences for multiple factors at once, making it difficult for respondents to predict what a satisfactory answer might be (Wallander, 2009). Individual respondents are asked to choose between profiles but not to justify their choice, allowing respondents more scope to express their true preferences. For example, a respondent might feel strongly against being represented by noncoethnics, but may feel uncomfortable expressing this preference to a surveyor. However, in conjoint experiments, respondents are aware that the surveyor cannot trace which attributes are most important in driving their choices, and may therefore express their preferences with greater candor. Because ethnic preferences are a particularly sensitive topic in Afghanistan, a conjoint design is a methodologically sound choice for examining respondent preferences.

The conjoint design for this study is an adaptation of the candidate experiment pioneered by Hainmueller et al. (2014). In this experiment, enumerators asked respondents to choose between two randomly generated profiles of potential leaders. Before seeing the profiles, respondents were read a short explanatory text:

Now I am going to show you a few pairs of profiles of potential leaders and ask you to choose, between the two, the one that you think would be the best advocate for you.

Respondents were subsequently shown a randomly generated pair of profiles of potential leadership candidates according to the attributes in Table 1, and asked: *Given a choice between these two profiles, which person would*

*you prefer as a leader?*¹ Outcome variables were measured in two ways: first, the forced-choice result was codified as 1 if the candidate profile was selected and 0 if the profile was not selected. Second, after respondents chose between the two profiles, they were subsequently asked to evaluate each profile on a scale of one to five: *On a scale of 1-5, where one indicates that you think the person is absolutely unsuitable to represent you as a leader, and where five indicates that the person would be an ideal leader for you, where would you rate the first profile? (Profile A)/ Using the same scale, how would you rate the second profile (Profile B)?*

In addition to ethnicity, other attributes selected for these profiles reflect particularly salient cleavages in the region that are presumed to be important in determining leadership preferences: age, education, gender, place of birth, and professional experience. I distinguished between foreign and domestic university degrees for two reasons. First, having a foreign degree implies a long period of time spent out of the country, which respondents may see as beneficial in terms of building leadership skills and connections, or conversely may resent as elitist and out of touch. Second, having Western-educated leaders has been positively linked with democratization (Gift and Krcmaric, 2017) implying at least some link between performative agendas and foreign education. While other attributes, such as tribal affiliation, may also be important, they were omitted due to complexity and information collected during preliminary fieldwork suggesting that, in the areas of northern Afghanistan where data was collected, ethnic cleavages are most relevant. Additionally, place of birth options were restricted to provincial levels rather than district or village levels.¹ While local identities may also be important predictors of leadership preferences, an unreasonably large number of options would be necessary to include all potential areas where the data collection took place.¹

Respondents had the choice of doing the survey in either Dari or Pashto, the two main languages of Afghanistan. Survey translations in both languages were piloted to ensure that the terminology was clear in layman terms before the data collection took place. Due to high levels of illiteracy in Afghanistan, enumerators were trained to read all questions aloud to respondents and to assist them with examining both profiles. Robustness checks between respondents with no education and respondents with some formal education did not yield major differences, suggesting that respondents without a formal education were able to complete the conjoint exercise with the assistance of an enumerator. More information about these robustness checks is provided in the supplementary information (SI).

The experiment also tested whether exposure to information on insecurity has effects on leadership preferences. Before starting the conjoint experiment, a random selection of participants were exposed to a short vignette

²In this experiment, the precise leadership position was deliberately left ambiguous. Specifying a particular leadership position, such as President or Governor, might have caused respondents to imagine the current incumbent while participating in the conjoint experiment, which may have in turn biased the results.

³Kunduz is excluded as a provincial option since the province was only added in a later round of data collection and the option to select Kunduz was therefore not available to all respondents.

⁴I imposed three restrictions on randomization in order to avoid implausible candidate profiles. First, I restricted candidates with military experience to males only. Although there are women currently serving in the Afghan army, it is still considered highly unusual. Second, all candidates from Kandahar were defined as having Pashtun ethnicity only, as Kandahar province is overwhelmingly Pashtun. Third, I restricted 28 year olds to having at least a high-school education, as it would be unlikely that those in leadership positions at such a young age would not have been educated to that level at a minimum.

Table 1: Attributes of Candidate Profiles

Attributes	Values
Age	28 37 49 57 68
Education	Madrassa Educated to High School University Education in Afghanistan University Education Abroad
Gender	Male Female
Ethnicity	Pashtun Tajik Uzbek Hazara Turkmen
Place of Birth	Balkh Kabul Kandahar Saripul Kunduz
Professional Experience	Business Owner Donor Agency Employee Government Employee Military Private Sector Employee

describing general insecurity in Afghanistan. A control group received a neutral vignette describing generic facts about Afghanistan. The full text of each vignette is provided in the SI.

Finally, the survey collected demographic information on respondent ethnicity, age, socio-economic status, place of birth and gender. This information was used to determine how ethnic voting patterns differ between these groups. I also used the demographic information to determine to what extent respondents expressed a preference for leaders with characteristics similar to their own.

This research design has several advantages over previous studies on voter preferences in conflict-affected settings. Instead of testing single hypotheses about leadership preferences, the randomization of multiple attributes in conjoint analysis allows for empirical comparisons between many factors by measuring them on the same scale. While it does not test for every conceivable determinant of legitimacy, such as personal charisma or endorsements from key figures, it captures many key candidate attributes that are likely to influence political choice. Additionally, this study makes a novel empirical contribution by combining a randomized vignette experiment with conjoint analysis, using the vignette as the independent variable and respondent leadership preferences as measured by the conjoint experiment as the dependent variable.

Sample

The data presented in this paper come from a household survey of adults conducted in northern Afghanistan between August 2016 and January 2017. The survey was conducted in three provinces: Balkh, Saripul, and Kunduz. These provinces range from relatively secure (Balkh) to moderately insecure (Saripul) to highly insecure (Kunduz)⁵. More information about security conditions in each province is provided in the supplementary information.

In each province I targeted approximately 800 respondents. The final data sample includes 2,485 complete survey responses, each of which includes three rounds of the conjoint experiment, resulting in a total of 7,455 discrete candidate choices. Sampling points were selected by random draw from a list of accessible settlements in each of the three provinces. Sampling points deemed to be inaccessible or too dangerous were removed from a comprehensive list of settlements prior to the draw.⁶

Due to high levels of insecurity throughout Afghanistan, the sample is limited to areas with a sufficient degree of security and does not capture opinions of civilians living in areas outside of government control. The results therefore cannot be considered fully representative of public opinion in the three provinces in the sample. However, the survey collected data from a range of age, ethnicity, gender, income, and education levels in the target population. The sample is not limited to urban areas, but includes a significant number of small rural settlements as well. Although the data presented below cannot be considered purely representative, the sample can be presumed to

⁵These categories were based on security assessments in mid-2016 at the outset of the project. The data collection took place in Balkh and Saripul between August and September 2016 and between December 2016 and January 2017 in Kunduz. Additionally, 50 pilot surveys were collected in May 2016 in Kabul but were not included in the final sample.

⁶During the data collection, a small number of sampling points in all three provinces needed to be substituted due to unforeseen security issues. In these cases, the substitute points were selected from the same district as the original sampling point with a similar size and ethnicity.

have greater external validity than a pure convenience sample and is as representative as possible given existing security constraints.

Results and Analysis

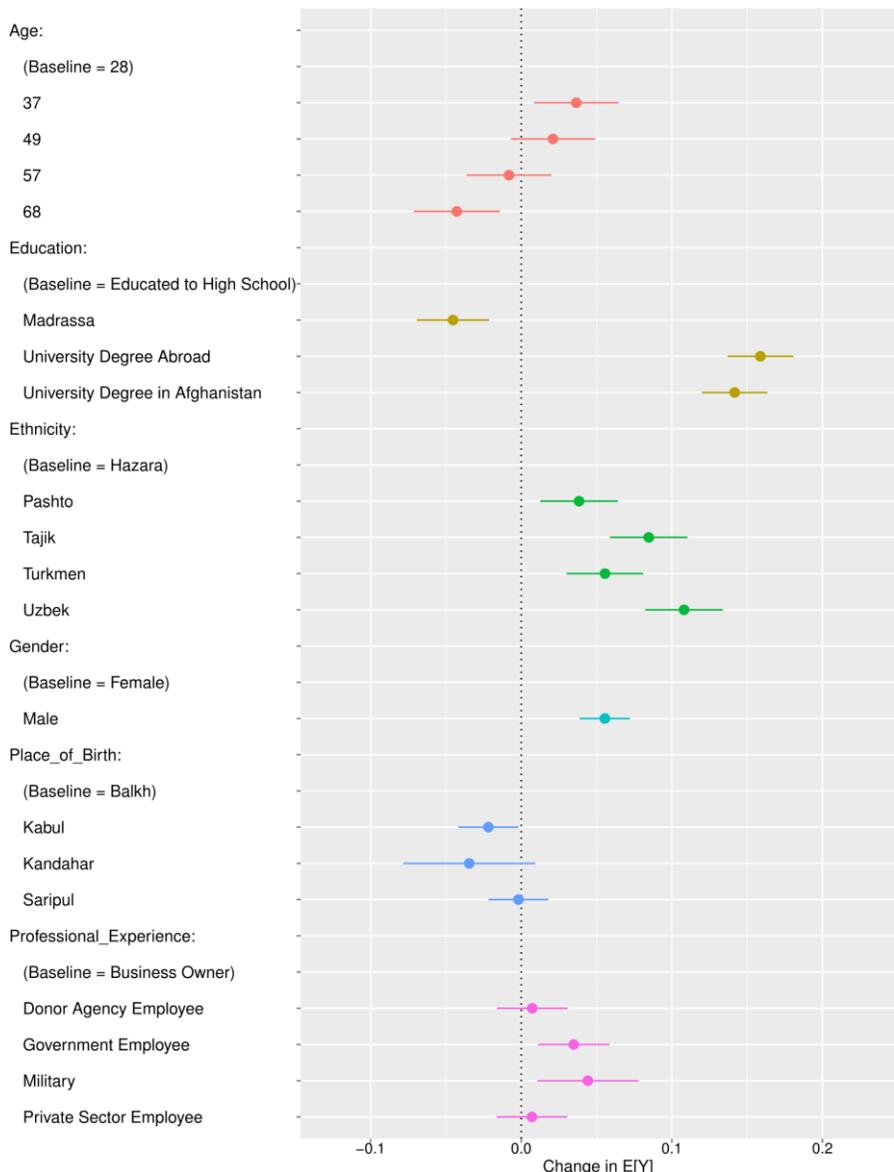
I estimated Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) to complete the analysis. The AMCE represents the average difference in the probability of a leadership profile being selected when comparing two different attribute values, where the average is calculated over all possible combinations of the other leadership attributes. This allows for a direct comparison of means between different attributes and attribute levels (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015).

Figure 2 displays results for the full sample of respondents, which indicates which types of candidates are most appealing at the aggregate level. In general, the results support the notion that ethnicity is a significant predictor of voting behavior. Gender, education and age were also found to be significant, while place of birth and professional experience were less important.

Because the overall sample is comprised of multiple ethnicities, the overall AMCEs for ethnicity are likely to be underestimated due to mixed effects. In order to measure voter preferences for co-ethnics, I divided the sample by respondent ethnic group and calculated conditional AMCEs for these groups (Figure 3). As expected, strong voter preferences for co-ethnics were evident for each ethnic group. Uzbeks and Pashtuns showed the strongest preferences for co-ethnics, giving co-ethnic candidates a bonus of 0.27 (SE=0.03) and 0.26 (SE=0.03) over a baseline Hazara candidate, respectively. Likewise, Hazara respondents were 0.27 (SE=0.05) more likely to select a co-ethnic candidate than a Pashtun candidate and 0.23 (SE=0.05) than an Uzbek candidate. For these groups, co-ethnic candidates were the most important attribute driving voter choice, with university education the second most attractive attribute in both cases. Tajik candidates also preferred co-ethnic candidates to a lesser extent (0.16, SE=0.02) but put greater weight on education, giving candidates with a foreign university degree a bonus of 0.21 (SE=0.02) and those with a domestic university degree a bonus of 0.19 (SE=0.02). Finally, while Turkmen respondents had a preference for co-ethnic candidates (0.19, SE=0.07), they were favorably disposed to Uzbek candidates to an even greater extent (0.23, SE=0.07).

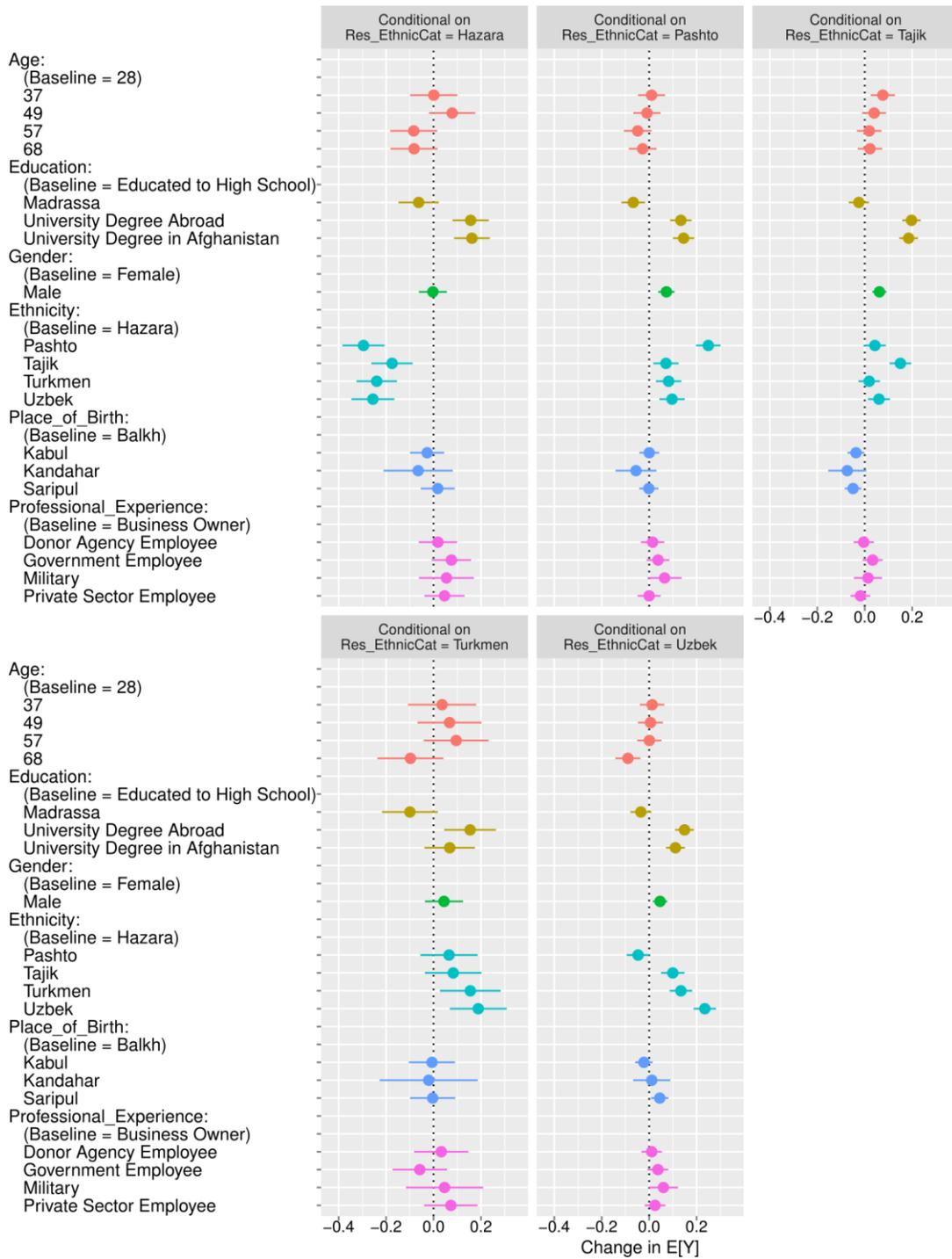
Given that the Afghan population in the region has suffered from long-term exposure to violence, the results have significant implications for the theoretical models outlined above. Ethnicity remains a significant factor and respondents in the sample generally showed strong preferences for co-ethnics. I found little evidence that military prowess was the driving factor in voter decision-making; even if respondents have a more positive view of military leaders than they would in peacetime, the results suggest that these shifts are quite small in magnitude in comparison to ethnicity. Nonetheless, as discussed below, ethnic voting patterns in this region vary between groups and require more nuanced qualifications.

Figure 2: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Figure 3: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Ethnicity



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on respondent ethnicity. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

Effects of Exposure to Violence on Leadership Preferences

To isolate the effects of exposure to violence on voter preferences, I compared results between respondents with heightened exposure to violence with those with less exposure. Using a two-stage experimental design, I raised the salience of security concerns with a vignette describing insecurity in Afghanistan to see whether this would prompt shifts in leadership preferences. Respondents in the control group were exposed to a vignette describing generic facts about Afghanistan. These vignettes were randomly selected and read out loud to respondents before they engaged in the three rounds of conjoint selection. For the analysis, I fitted a model with interaction effects for the treatment variable and conducted t-tests between the control estimate and the treatment estimates for each of the attributes, with a null hypothesis of no significant difference between control and treatment samples.

I found that exposure to the vignettes had only trivial effects on conjoint results with regards to non-ethnic attributes. For almost all attributes, differences between the conjoint results in the control group and the treatment group were statistically insignificant. Notably, those in the treatment group did not express significantly higher preferences for military leaders than the control group. There is therefore little conclusive evidence that information about insecurity had much effect on respondent preferences regarding these attributes.

However, the vignette treatment had significant effects on ethnic voting patterns. Contrary to the hypothesis that exposure to violence triggers strong in-group preferences, I found that respondent preferences for coethnics were statistically similar between treatment and control groups. However, I found that exposure to the treatment triggered major differences in respondent attitudes towards outgroups. Most notably, members of all ethnic groups exposed to the insecurity treatment were significantly less likely to select Uzbek leaders — even respondents of Uzbek ethnicity. For example, while Hazara respondents in the control group conferred a 0.20 penalty ($SE=0.11$) on Uzbek candidates compared to coethnics, respondents in the treatment group penalized Uzbek candidates much more harshly (-0.424 , $SE=0.08$). This finding is plausible, as Uzbek militias are plentiful in Northern Afghanistan, and have a fearsome reputation in many areas (Dirkx, 2017). However, the same Hazara respondents exposed to the treatment viewed Turkmen candidates more favorably (-0.179 , $SE=0.09$) compared to the Hazara control group (-0.280 , $SE=0.11$), suggesting that voters are not motivated purely by a greater aversion to outgroups in general, but selectively evaluate outgroups based on their association with violence. Pashtun candidates were also penalized by all respondents in the treatment group apart from Pashtun respondents, who gave coethnic candidates a slight bonus compared to the control group. As Taliban insurgents are historically associated with Pashtun ethnic groups, it is likely that Pashtun candidates are penalized by noncoethnic respondents for this reason.

These findings indicate that violence triggers shifts in ethnic voting preferences, but not in the way Model 1 would suggest. Rather than solidifying in-group preferences, the key mechanism activated is the assignment of *blame* towards certain outgroups. Respondents demonstrated an ability to distinguish between particular outgroups, conferring greater penalties towards members of ethnic groups associated with violence—primarily Pashtuns and Uzbeks. This suggests that voters use ethnicity as a proxy for expected performance of outgroup candidates in

maintaining security, implying that an interaction effect exists between candidate ethnicity and performance.

Interaction Effects for Age, Income, and Education

Finally, I examined whether these patterns held between different demographic and socio-economic groups in the sample. First, I examined differences between age groups. Over the past 40 years, generations in Afghanistan have experienced radically different forms of governance, which may lead to divergent expectations with regards to political leadership. To test this, I examined differences in leadership preferences between different age groups. I divided the sample into the following age quartiles: 18-23, 24-33, 34-49, and 50+.⁷ Contrary to the expectation that older generations might be more conservative or traditional in their preferences, I found very little evidence for this hypothesis – on the contrary, preferences between younger and older generations are very similar (see SI). Furthermore, there were no clear patterns between the degree to which voters in these quartiles preferred co-ethnic versus outgroup candidates.

I also examined whether there were differences in voting patterns between socio-economic subgroups. Individuals in lower and higher socio-economic groups could reasonably be expected to have different political preferences owing to divergent economic interests. Ethnic voting is likely more prevalent amongst lower socio-economic groups. One explanation, consistent with Chandra (2007), is that respondents with low levels of income and education may be more dependent on employment and other economic benefits distributed through ethnically-based patronage networks. Individuals with higher levels of income, by contrast, enjoy a greater level of economic independence and have more opportunities to engage with other ethnic groups, leading to a moderating effect on ethnic voting.

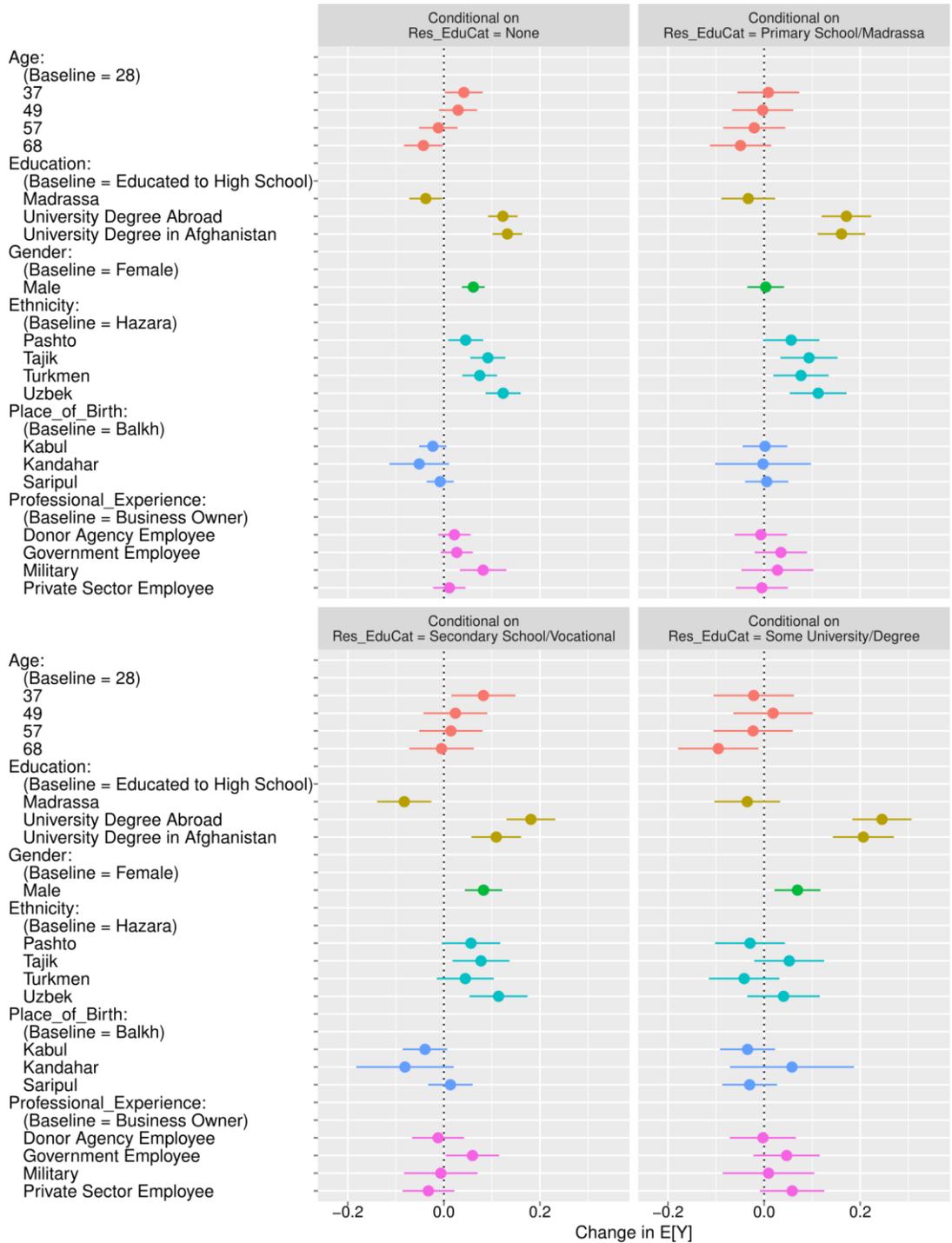
I found that education had a mitigating effect on the significance of ethnicity in driving voting choice. Respondents were divided into subgroups with no education, those with primary school/madrassas education only, those educated to a high school/ vocational training level, and those with some university or with a university degree. The importance of ethnic preferences declined with more education, becoming statistically insignificant amongst those with university education (Figure 4). Significantly, voters in all educational subgroups exhibited strong preferences for highly educated candidates.

These patterns were similar between high and low-income subgroups, to a more moderate extent.⁸ Ethnic preferences were more salient amongst low-income respondents across all ethnic groups compared to medium and high-income respondents (see SI). The effect was particularly strong for Pashto and Tajik candidates. For example, low-income respondents gave Pashto and Tajik candidates a bonus of 0.12 (SE=0.03) and 0.15 (SE=0.029) against a baseline Hazara candidate, respectively, whereas high-income respondents were only 0.01 more likely to prefer

⁷While there are no precise estimates of Afghanistans age distribution, over 40 percent of people are estimated to be under the age of 14 (CIA, 2017). The survey was limited to adult respondents only; the age distribution is younger than most developed countries but is plausible given Afghanistan's demographic estimates.

⁸A low income household was defined as one in which respondents' annual household income was 50,000 AFS (approximately 732 USD) or less, medium income was defined as between 50,000-100,000 AFS (approximately 732 and 1,465 USD) and high income was defined as greater than 100,000 AFS (1,465 USD). Average monthly household income in the northern region of Afghanistan was estimated to be between \$123 and \$135 USD in 2016 (Asia Foundation, 2016). I measured annual rather than monthly income because many Afghan households are dependent on seasonal incomes that fluctuate considerably at different times of the year.

Figure 4: Effects of Candidate Attributes on Probability of Being Selected as Preferred Leader by Education



Note: This plot shows estimates of the effects of the randomly assigned candidate attribute values on the probability of being selected as a leader, conditional on respondent education levels. Bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Pashtuns (SE=0.019) and 0.05 more likely to prefer Tajiks (SE=0.019) against the baseline.

Robustness Checks

In the SI, I report results for a number of robustness checks. First, I compared AMCEs in the conjoint choice model to respondent evaluations of each candidate profile on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates that a candidate is “completely suitable” and 5 indicates that a candidate is “completely unsuitable. I compiled evaluation results in the sample and compared them to results from the conjoint choice model. The results of the two models are broadly similar.

I also ran robustness checks for carryover effects between the three rounds of profiles. As each respondent participated in three rounds of the conjoint experiment, the assumption is that there are no carryover effects between profiles, and respondents would make the same choices regardless of which order they received the profiles. Consistent with that assumption, I found that AMCEs are similar across the three rounds.

The validity of the conjoint experiment is also conditional on assumptions that there are no attribute order effects and that the profiles are indeed randomized. I used *Qualtrics* software on electronic tablets for the data collection. Because the software randomizes the order that attributes were displayed in each profile and the composition of the profiles, we can assume these assumptions are fulfilled.

Finally, it is possible that the treatment and control vignettes were not sufficiently understood. To account for this, I included a manipulation check administered immediately after the vignettes were read aloud to assess respondents level of understanding. The results of the manipulation check suggest that respondents by and large understood the content of the vignettes, indicating that the treatments were effectively administered.

Discussion and Conclusion

The conjoint methodology used in this study contributes to previous studies of voter preferences in conflict-affected areas by providing an empirical estimate of the relative importance of different candidate attributes amongst populations affected by political violence. The results have significant implications for dominant models of voter behavior in violent contexts. The findings suggest that, contrary to expectations, higher exposure to violence does not result in significantly stronger preferences for co-ethnic candidates. Instead, respondents in the treatment group selectively penalized non-coethnic candidates of ethnicities predominately associated with violence. The findings suggest that voters in violent contexts use ethnicity as a measure of performance with regards to security. Finally, I found that the salience of voting declined amongst respondents from higher socio-economic backgrounds, suggesting that these mechanisms may weaken as socio-economic status improves.

There are a number of caveats to the findings above. The results are limited to a particular region of Afghanistan; patterns of leadership preferences elsewhere may vary in other regions. The hypothetical candidate profiles may not

align with ethnic voter behavior in practice, which may be influenced by factors not captured in the study. More complex experiments could explore whether the nature of the leadership position impacts the salience of ethnicity — for example, the ethnicity of local security officials may be of greater importance to voters than it is for officials in more technocratic positions.

Finally, the results also imply potential policy implications for the training and selection of political candidates in these contexts. For example, public resistance to women in leadership positions could potentially be mitigated by investing in higher education for female leaders and selecting female leaders with strong ethnic ties to their respective communities. Political parties running in ethnically-diverse areas could field multi-ethnic teams of candidates, thus accounting for voter bias against particular ethnic outgroups. In the long-run, the results suggest that in-group preferences with regards to ethnicity become weaker as incomes and education grow, implying that improvements in these areas may have future payoffs in weakening voter preferences for co-ethnics. Moreover, policymakers should recognize that, even where co-ethnic preferences are strong, the results presented here indicate that voters are responsive to performance, even in violent contexts, and hence ethnic voting patterns should be seen as mutable rather than fixed.

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