

Social Cohesion and Community Displacement in Armed Conflict

Evidence from Palestinian Villages in the 1948 War

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Abstract

Why do some communities flee their homes during armed conflict, while others remain and risk exposure to violence? This article investigates whether and how whole communities are forcibly displaced during armed conflict, which we refer to as *evacuation*. We focus on the form of forced displacement, differentiating between *preemptive* evacuation (prior to violence exposure) and *violent* evacuation (in response to violence exposure). We theorize that community social cohesion, by facilitating collective action, enhances communities' ability to preemptively evacuate and escape violence. We test the theory in the context of the 1948 war in Mandate Palestine. We measure village evacuation drawing upon historical accounts of population displacement during the war and measure community social cohesion using an original village-level dataset based on new archival material from a survey of Arab Palestinian villages during the early 1940s. The findings shed new light on civilian agency in conflict and displacement processes and outcomes.

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Introduction

Why do some communities flee their homes during an armed conflict, while others remain and risk being attacked by armed combatants? This article investigates whether and how whole communities are forcibly displaced during armed conflict, which we refer to as *evacuation*. While a robust literature has explored why some communities are displaced and others are not, scholars have paid far less attention to explaining the *form* of forced displacement. We distinguish between *preemptive evacuation*, in which the community flees prior to possible violence exposure, and *violent evacuation*, in which the community flees during and in direct response to violence. In areas vulnerable to organized political violence, whether communities are able to flee preemptively makes a substantial difference in the number of casualties and the level of suffering in these vulnerable populations.¹

Consider Al-Tina and Jilya, two Arab Palestinian villages roughly 4 miles apart in the eastern coastal plains of what is now Israel. On the eve of the 1948 war in Mandate Palestine, these villages had similar demographics and economic activity, shared similar legacies from the earlier Great Revolt in the 1930's, and both sat along the same strategic route. Despite similar vulnerabilities to conflict violence, the fate of these two villages in the war diverged. Jilya's population fled prior to the arrival of the Jewish-Israeli forces, and settled with the community largely intact outside of contested territory. In Al-Tina, by contrast, a significant portion of the population remained in the village at the time Israeli forces arrived, and were subjected to violence resulting in civilian deaths and forced displacement. What differentiated Jilya from Al-Tina?

Predominant explanations for civilian displacement during conflict highlight structural conditions—such as state violence, regime type, and level of civil liberties—and economic opportunities in both the origin country (push factors) and asylum locations (pull factors). These factors, however, cannot account for substantial variation in displacement patterns within a conflict. To explain local within-conflict variation, scholars have increasingly emphasized ways in which civilian agency shapes conflict and displacement processes. Much of this literature has focused on how civilians respond to *incentives* whether to flee or remain; including material (economic and political conditions), identity attachments to home territory, and social or economic linkages to areas of refuge. In this article, we contribute to understanding local-level variation in forced displacement by emphasizing variation in civilians' *capabilities* to act upon those incentives. We argue that community *social cohesion*, by promoting collective action, represents an essential source of local-level variation in population

¹To be clear, those who flee preemptively are vulnerable to the dangers of travel from conflict-affected areas and the health, economic, food, and physical insecurities facing displaced populations in their areas of refuge. We simply distinguish the casualties incurred by belligerent violence within the conflict zone from those incurred during the process of fleeing or during displacement.

displacement during armed conflict.

We investigate the relationship between community displacement and social cohesion in the context of the 1948 War in Mandate Palestine: the war leading to Israel’s statehood and the Arab Palestinian population’s *al-Nakba*. We measure variation in Arab Palestinian communities’ evacuation during the war by drawing upon detailed historical accounts of villages that suffered forced displacement (Khalidi and Elmusa 1992; Morris 1987). Though scholars have examined the Morris (1987) and Khalidi and Elmusa (1992) sources for insights into forced displacement during the 1948 War for decades, to our knowledge this is the first effort to leverage these sources for systematic (quantitative or qualitative) hypothesis testing of generalizable social science theories. To measure social cohesion and other predictors of community evacuation, we draw upon new data extracted from a village-level survey of Arab Palestinian communities conducted in the early 1940s by the Haganah, the main Jewish military organization that would form the core of the Israeli Defense Forces following Israel’s independence after the war. The survey assessed the social, political, and economic conditions in each community before the war. The authors negotiated access to these documents from the Haganah Archives, translated them from the original Hebrew, and developed a coding scheme to operationalize the information in each village assessment, yielding a dataset of community-level characteristics for 562 Arab villages.

The 1948 war case poses a hard test for the role of Arab Palestinian civilian agency in explaining variation in displacement outcomes. Because armed belligerents possess the capacity to deploy organized violence to control non-combatants, the role for civilian agency to influence conflict processes is moderated by the belligerent’s political goals and tactics. Civilian agency plays a greater role in contexts in which the belligerent’s primary objective with respect to the population is to limit civilian defections, rather than to kill or displace a population perceived as hostile to their ultimate political or military goals (Kaplan 2017, pg. 11). In the 1948 war, Israeli forces sought to carve out a territory within which a Jewish majority would reside and exercise self-determination, based on the 1947 UN Partition Plan, whereas the loose coalition of Palestinian national and Arab state forces sought to incorporate much of the same territory within the area of Arab Palestinian self-determination. Though the Partition Plan called for peaceful population transfers and full citizenship rights for Arabs in the planned Jewish state and Jews in the planned Arab Palestinian state, the outbreak of war alongside competing national ambitions all but guaranteed that to incorporate much of the land designated for the Jewish state would displace Arab civilians and vice versa. Furthermore, throughout the war Israeli forces engaged in *strategic displacement*, defined as “intentional, systematic displacement of civilians” (Lichtenheld 2020, 256), to achieve these goals.² Given the belligerents’ objectives in the war,

²Lichtenheld (2020) identifies three types of strategic displacement: *cleansing*, *depopulation*, and *forced relocation*. Cleansing and depopulation represent “push” strategies designed to expel population groups from territory the belligerent intends to

predominant existing arguments imply that community-level variation in displacement outcomes should be largely explained by strategic military and geographic characteristics. Nevertheless, we show local-level variation cannot be fully explained by these factors, and illustrate an explanatory role for civilian agency.

Because of its unique characteristics, scholars have largely avoided testing general social science theories in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the conflict does share a variety of features with other cases, and a burgeoning empirical literature has recently begun to investigate generalizable theories of conflict processes in the contemporary context (Arnon 2020; Getmanski, Grossman, and Wright 2019; Getmansky and Zeitzoff 2014; McAlexander 2020; Panza and Swee 2020; Weiss 2019). Social scientists have yet to renew attention to the 1948 war, but several of its characteristics provide empirical leverage useful to testing a general theory of local-level population displacement. While the substantial asymmetry in military capabilities between the Israeli forces and the coalition of Arab opposition forces during the war may be exceptional, this disparity was revealed *ex post* rather than expected *ex ante*. Before the war, both Jews and Arabs alike expected much greater parity. Therefore, the incentives and constraints that affected civilians' migration decisions during the war are much more representative of other conflict environments than is commonly acknowledged. Furthermore, the speed with which the Jewish forces conquered contested territory means that Jewish forces either occupied or bypassed Arab Palestinian villages within a short window of time. As a result, communities were forced to make decisions to flee or stay before the *ex post* information regarding the imbalance of military capabilities was fully revealed. Widespread strategic displacement tactics meant Arab Palestinian communities identified strong incentives to preemptively evacuate. By examining a context with little variation in community incentives, we isolate the explanatory role of civilian agency through community capabilities (specifically, social cohesion) from mechanisms operating through variation in community incentives.

In addition to theory testing, the empirical analysis provides new descriptive insights into the history of the 1948 War and the contested origins of Israel and the Palestinian national movement. The conduct of the war and the fate of displaced communities have, of course, received a tremendous amount of scholarly attention. Our focus on civilian agency and the community level departs from the dominant narratives of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, which have focused on either Israeli forces' victimization or Palestinian elites' intentional and unintentional actions that encouraged Arab Palestinians to leave their homes. Furthermore,

occupy. The two strategies are differentiated primarily by the targeting tactics: cleansing entails collective targeting of whole population groups, or based on group membership, whereas depopulation is characterized by indiscriminate targeting. Forced relocation, by contrast, involves tactics designed to "pull" specific population groups within its territorial domain. We focus primarily on explaining local-level forced displacement (evacuation) outcomes in the context of "push", or expulsion, strategic displacement campaigns; cleansing and depopulation.

the village-level assessments provided by the Haganah archives have yet to be examined systematically, likely because these files have been under embargo until very recently. We leverage the unique detailed information from pre-war Arab Palestinian communities to shed light on the processes by which community displacement occurred. By making the original documents and their translated versions easily accessible to scholars, we hope others will incorporate these new sources of information into future research.

1 Definitions

1.1 Preemptive and Violent Evacuation

This article explains local-level variation in community evacuation, a specific manifestation of forced displacement in which (nearly) the entire community leaves their home territory. Specifically we differentiate between two forms of evacuation. Preemptive evacuation occurs when the community flees prior to violence exposure, whereas violent evacuation occurs in response to direct exposure to violence. This produces three potential outcomes: 1) preemptive evacuation, 2) violent evacuation, and 3) no evacuation. The residual category in which no evacuation occurs does not imply the absence of forced displacement, only that a substantial portion of the community remains within the home territory.

We measure whether an evacuation event occurred, and if so the type (preemptive or violent), by drawing upon in-depth historical investigations conducted by Morris (1987) and Khalidi and Elmusa (1992). Figure 1 maps evacuation outcomes in Arab Palestinian villages during the 1948 War. The sea of “no evacuation” villages in the eastern and north-central portion of the map fall within the West Bank, and those in the southwest fall within Gaza. The UN Partition Plan designated these areas for the Arab Palestinian State, and Israeli forces did not contest them during the 1948 war. Therefore, we exclude them from our analysis.

The cluster of violently evacuated villages in the center constitute area around Jerusalem, which was of immense cultural and strategic importance to the Israelis. After May 15th, the Israelis crossed the UN Partition line and specifically targeted the area around Jerusalem for conquest. While strategic military considerations can explain higher rates of violent evacuation near Jerusalem compared to the rest of the contested area, they cannot fully account for displacement patterns within and across the rest of the country. Note that in many cases, villages in proximity to one another yielded different evacuation outcomes despite similar threats of violence exposure. This article aims to explain this puzzling variation.

Arab Palestinian Community Evacuation in 1948 Palestine

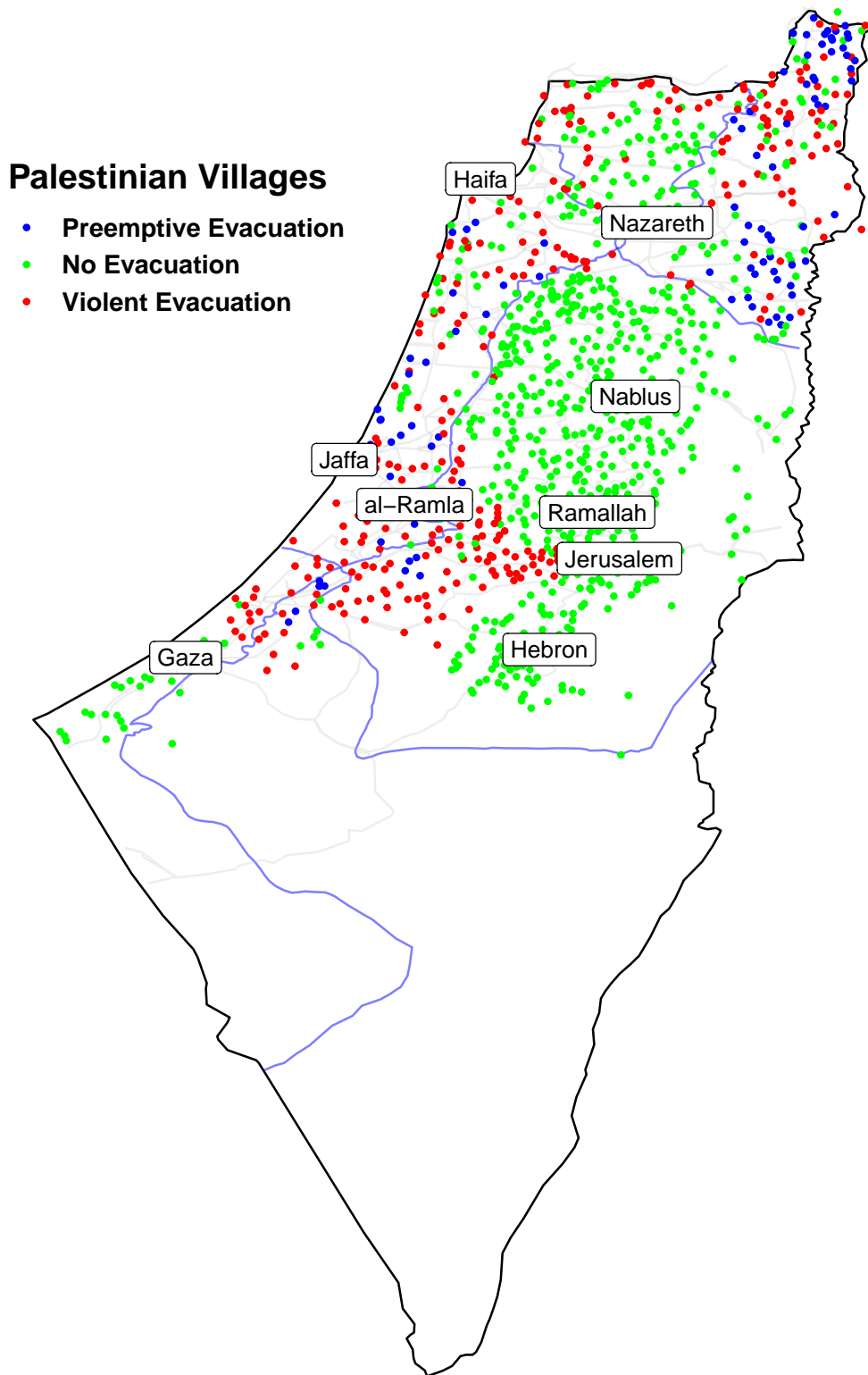


Figure 1: The map shows the location of villages in Mandate Palestine in 1948. Blue villages are villages that experience preemptive evacuation, green villages are villages that experience no evacuation, and red villages are villages that experienced violent evacuation.

1.2 Social Cohesion

Scholars use the term *social cohesion* to refer to both individual- and group-level characteristics. At the individual level, social cohesion encompasses “(a) individuals’ membership attitudes (their desire or intention to remain in a group, their identification with or loyalty to a group, and other attitudes about the group or its members); and (b) individuals’ membership behaviors (their decisions to sever, weaken, maintain, or strengthen their membership or participation in a group, their susceptibilities to interpersonal influence, and other behavioral indicators of commitment and attachment to the group)” (Friedkin 2004, 410). At the group level, social cohesion refers to the aggregation, or distribution, of these membership attitudes and behaviors in the relevant population (Friedkin 2004). Group-level social cohesion is related to the cognate concept of social capital, “the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000, 226), which refers to the social structure that both reflects and influences community-level social cohesion.

Individuals retain membership and identity attachments to multiple, overlapping, social groups simultaneously. *Community* social cohesion implies the distribution of residents’ attitudes and behaviors relevant to the community, specifically, attitudes towards community membership and other community members, participation in community activities, and commitment to community welfare. Armed conflict and violence often strain the complementarity between overlapping social identities, for example by pitting community membership against *parochial* group identities, such as clan or family, which may represent salient social cleavages within the community. Therefore, to observe variation in the degree of *community* social cohesion, one must assess residents’ attitudes and behaviors with respect to the community in comparison to attitudes and behaviors with respect to these parochial social groups. In other words, community social cohesion requires individual members retain strong positive attitudes towards the community as a whole and willingness to take actions that reflect and serve the community rather than more parochial social groups.

We measure Arab Palestinian communities’ social cohesion by drawing upon archival documents that record information on social, political, and economic conditions within Arab Palestinian villages during the years preceding the 1948 War. Because of the violence and forced migration during the war, much of the information about Arab Palestinian local village life and institutions was lost, frustrating efforts to systematically analyze pre-war community-level variation. A notable exception, the Haganah’s Information Services (Shai) compiled what is commonly known as the “Village Files” in the early-to-mid 1940s. The information recorded in these files is rich and detailed, since it draws upon informant residents within each village. Ezra Danin, the project’s leader, composed a uniform questionnaire to ensure that the information was collected systematically.³ The authors scanned the entire repository of original documents, translated

³In the appendix we include the 30-item questionnaire composed by Danin and an example of a translated village file for

them to English from the original Hebrew, and developed an operationalization scheme to measure variables of interest for use in village-level statistical analysis.

We construct our measures of social cohesion drawing upon information about each *hamula* in the village and the social relationships among them. The *hamula* represents a primary social group through which members organize social, economic and political activity. The documents record each *hamula*'s size, religion and ethnic makeup, political affiliations with the rival Palestinian national movements, and, crucially, the existence of any rivalries or blood feuds between them. To measure social cohesion we aggregate these characteristics, which represent common social cleavages, and barriers to social cohesion, within Arab Palestinian communities during this period. Figure 2 maps the bivariate relationship between social cohesion and evacuation outcomes within the sample included in the empirical analysis. We exclude from our analysis villages located in what became known as the West Bank and Gaza,⁴ temporary villages (Khirbe), nomadic Bedouin communities, and Jewish-majority villages.

2 A Tale of Two Villages

Al-Tina and Jilya, two Arab villages in the al-Ramla district of Mandate Palestine, sat four miles apart along the same main highway leading from Jerusalem to Majdal. In both villages, buildings were primarily made of simple clay brick with straw roofs, with a few newer buildings made of cement. Between 1921 and 1945, Jilya had grown from several hundred to 1300 residents. During the same time, al-Tina grew from several hundred to 800 residents. Both villages also witnessed increased school enrollment and mosque attendance rates in this period. In both villages, citrus was the primary crop. As a result, each enjoyed the economic boom to the citrus industry resulting from the war economy during the Second World War, which extended to a growth in commerce. In the 1940's the average plot size per household was similar; approximately several dozen dunam (a quarter of an acre). Furthermore, the two villages had similar experiences during the 1936-1939 Palestinian revolt. In each, roughly half a dozen residents participated in the revolt, targeting nearby Jewish villages and British patrols. Both villages suffered a casualty from British security forces, several arrests, and incurred minor damages to property.

Jilya and al-Tina differed, however, on key dimensions of social structure and community cohesion. In Jilya there was only one dominant hamula (clan) – Dar Abed al-Rahman, which dictated allegiance to the Mufti and his party. Unity was maintained through family relations, and a public guesthouse maintained by a public tax on all villagers, with contributions from the more wealthy Affendis (local notables). In Al-Tina,

Qira, in the Haifa subdistrict.

⁴As noted above, the Haganah did not contest these areas in the 1948 war.

Community Evacuation and Social Cohesion

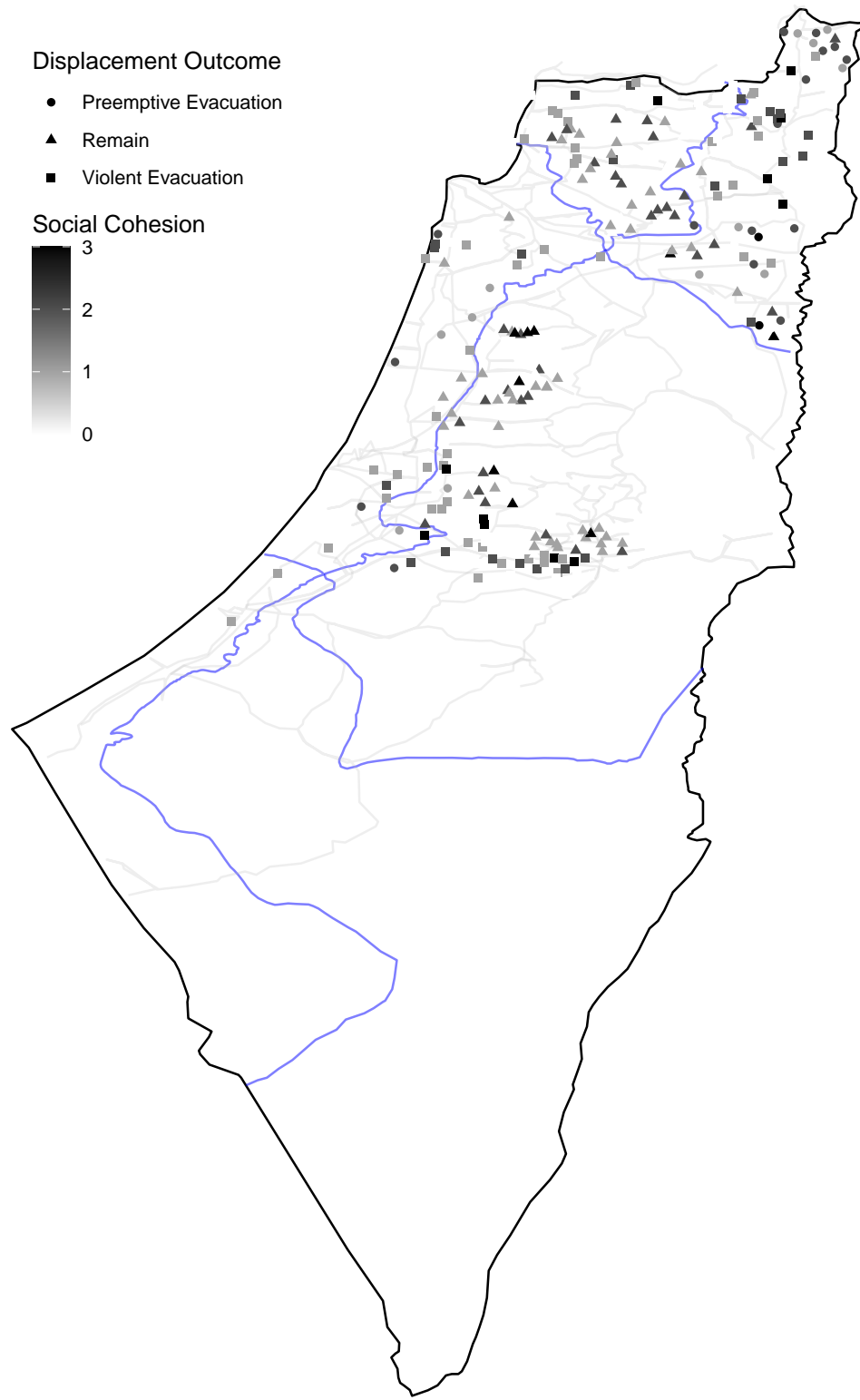


Figure 2: This map shows Arab Palestinian villages along with their displacement outcome and level of social cohesion. Darker villages indicate higher social cohesion, while the shape of the village icon indicates the type of displacement outcome.

on the other hand, there were four separate hamulas. Since the murder of Naif Sabah Sarhan, a prominent member of one of these clans, relations among the clans remained tense, including continuous blood feuds. Furthermore, each hamula maintained separate political allegiance with respect to the national parties. The larger and wealthier family in Al-Tina supported the Mufti’s party, one of the smaller hamulas supported the Nashashibi’s party, and another hamula of Egyptian origin maintained separation and neutrality.

Israeli forces adopted an offensive strategy in April 1948, taking the initiative before the arrival of the invading Arab armies, which resulted in the first wave of village evacuations. By May 15 (first truce), some 200,000-300,000 Palestinians had been displaced. Israeli operations escalated in the al-Ramla district during the second offensive, which began on July 9th, and advanced using the main highway near Jilya and Al-Tina. Expecting the approaching Israeli forces, Jilya residents decided to preemptively evacuate on the morning of July 9th. In Al-Tina, many residents remained through the crucial evening of July 10th, when after a short battle the Israeli forces occupied al-Tina and surrounding villages. On the following day, the nearby district centers of Lydda and al-Ramla surrendered following aerial bombardment. A massacre ensued following their surrender, as would several others in the following months.

Why did Jilya mobilize to evade violence while the residents of al-Tina did not? Given their similarities on key dimensions of geographic position, demographics, economic conditions, and capabilities for community defense, their divergent fates present a puzzle. Our conjecture, which we explore empirically in this article, is that the differences in social cohesion within these two villages, highlighted above, plays a role in explaining the variation in outcomes. Whereas Jilya enjoyed a social and political structure that produced social cohesion among residents, al-Tina was plagued by fractious relations and enmity between hamulas.

3 Contributions to Existing Literature

A robust literature exploring civilian agency in conflict displacement processes emphasizes the civilians’ responses to *incentives* to remain in or flee home territory; often labeled *push* and *pull* factors. First and foremost, the expectation and intensity of violence exposure (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004), the form of civilian-targeted violence (Kalyvas 2006; Lischer 2007; Moore and Shellman 2006), and the state’s history of repression (Moore and Shellman 2007; Neumayer 2005b), each encourage vulnerable populations to flee. The distribution of belligerents’ military capabilities and strategic interests throughout contested territory shapes the local-level variation in the scale and form of violence, and thereby displacement patterns (Balcells 2010, 2017; Kalyvas 2006; Schon 2015; Steele 2011, 2017 ; Wood 2010, 2014; Zhukov 2015). Furthermore, civilian communities’ *perceptions* of the local balance of power matter. Revkin (2020) finds that a sizable majority of Mosul residents at the time of Islamic State takeover believed IS would

lose control within weeks, in stark contrast to its three-year occupation of the city, which led many to remain in the area rather than flee.

Though belligerents typically enjoy a decisive military advantage over civilians, communities that possess the (perceived) ability to influence belligerent conduct may be more likely to remain in home territory. In areas in which belligerent forces are more reliant on local collaboration, the civilian population may leverage its (limited) power to shape the local political order under belligerent presence (Arjona 2016; Kaplan 2017; Rubin 2020). Even where communities lack capacity to influence belligerent behavior, civilians may (rationally) choose to remain in their homes despite violence (Engel and Ibáñez 2007; Melander and Öberg 2006; Steele 2009). Individuals may possess identity attachments to their home territory, face strong economic incentives to remain, and disincentives for exit (Adhikari 2013; Czaika and Kis-Katos 2009; Engel and Ibáñez 2007), or maintain social connections that reduce their security risks (Marston 2020). For example, residents who own land within the conflict zone may lose their wealth entirely when unable to sell, and those with skills valuable in the local economy but not in areas to which they might flee, may face steep costs to establishing a comparable life in the area of refuge.

Pull factors, or exit options, also play a role in population displacement. As the security, political, and economic conditions in neighboring or other destination countries improve, civilians' willingness to seek refuge across borders may increase (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Neumayer 2004, 2005b, 2005a). In addition to becoming stateless, migrants lack the knowledge and access to political channels in their new country. Social ties among community members at home may be broken or transformed in the process of migration, and power structures disintegrate or take on new meaning. Furthermore, the political authorities in areas of refuge may vary in their treatment of displaced persons, and in their ability to absorb them into the economy. Sudden, simultaneous migration may stimulate anti-refugee/migrant backlash in host communities, which reduce individuals' prospects associated with the exit option (Getmansky, Simmazdemir, and Zeitzoff 2018).

Precisely because civilians that remain in conflict zones suffer tremendously when exposed to violence and loss of access to basic goods and services, it is important to understand not only *which* communities are likely to be displaced, but also the *form* of displacement. In particular, this article explores variation in whether civilians flee prior to, or in response to, violence exposure. As Steele (2017) notes, many of those forcibly displaced during conflict are *not* directly exposed to violence. Rather, many displaced flee in advance, having recognized approaching security threats by observing conflict dynamics or having been warned by neighbors or by belligerents themselves. Existing research suggests that communities vulnerable to conflict violence have incentives to flee their homes collectively (Camarena n.d.; Steele 2019). *Collective* preemptive exit can make a huge difference in both the number of community members left behind in the origin location, and therefore exposed to belligerent violence,

as well as in the level of security in the destination in which they seek refuge. Indeed, in the Palestinian case, villages were often replicated, wholesale, within the refugee camp to which they fled (Khalili 2004).

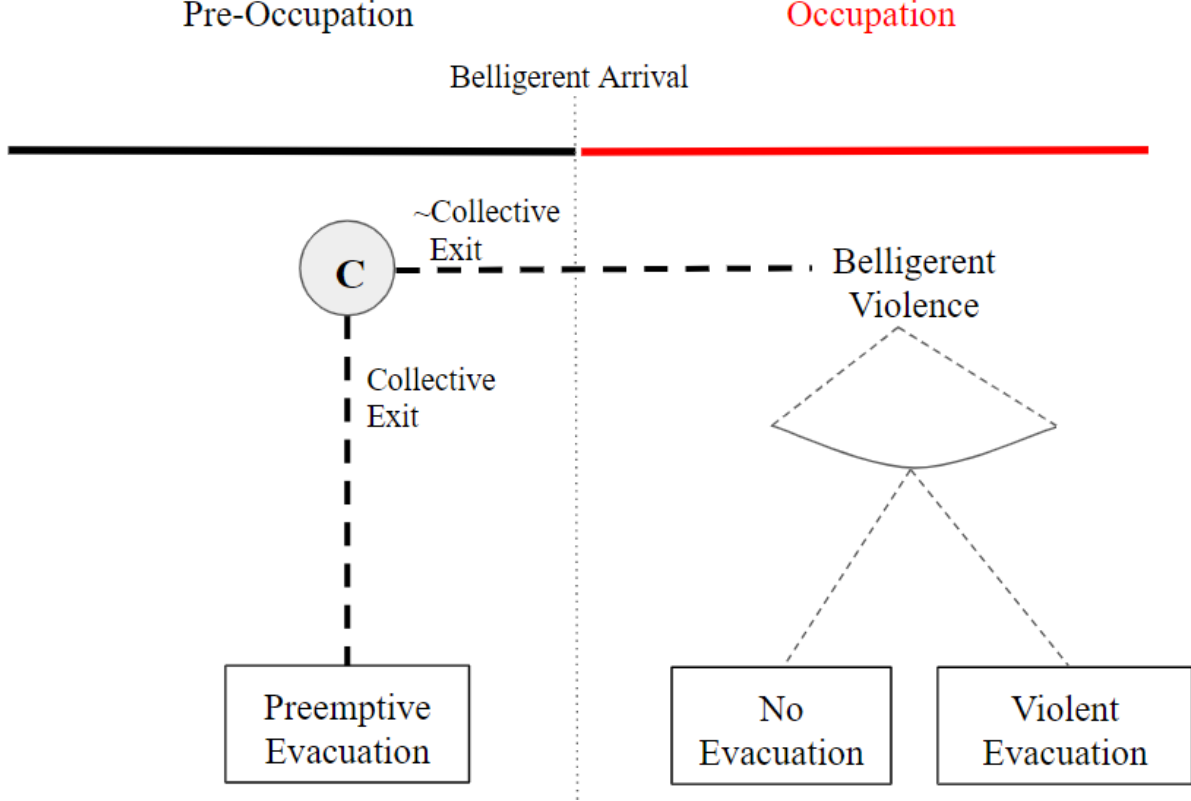
This article contributes by complementing the existing emphasis on civilian incentives with attention to variation in community *capabilities*. Social structure influences community trust networks and their ability to disseminate information necessary for collective action (Chwe 1999; Gould 1993; Jackson, Rodriguez-Barraquer, and Tan 2012; Siegel 2009), including in conflict settings (Arjona 2016; Dorff 2017; Gade 2020; Kaplan 2017; Krause 2018; Parkinson 2013; Petersen 2001; Rubin 2020). Kaplan (2017) argues that communities with greater “organizational capacity” are more successful in retaining autonomy from belligerent control and escaping violence during civil war and, though left unexplored suggests that organizational capacity may facilitate *collective exodus* from conflict zones (pg. 44); what we label *preemptive evacuation*. Krause (2018) illustrates communities vulnerable to communal violence may exercise collective agency by, for example, constructing institutions and means for collective action in order to mitigate their vulnerability. Observing that displaced people commonly arrive in areas of refuge in groups, Camarena (n.d.) argues that communities may coordinate action to reduce uncertainty and facilitate collective exit. This article contributes by advancing a theory linking social cohesion to local-level variation in preemptive evacuation (collective exit) within conflicts, and testing the argument in community-level data from an important case of mass population displacement.

4 How Community Social Cohesion Influences Evacuation during Armed Conflict

Our general theoretical framework, summarized in Figure 3, considers a two-stage process with three potential outcomes: 1) preemptive evacuation, 2) violent evacuation, or 3) remain. The first stage, which we refer to as *pre-occupation*, is characterized by active conflict in the broader conflict zone, but during which the belligerent forces have not yet arrived in the community’s home territory. In this stage, the community (C) makes a decision whether to collectively exit or not. Collective exit, if successful, terminates the process in preemptive evacuation. If the community chooses to forego collective exit, or fails to complete the mobilization and emigration process prior to belligerent arrival, then a substantial portion of the population remains into the second stage of *occupation*, which begins when belligerent forces arrive in the home territory. In the occupation stage, the community is exposed to some level of belligerent civilian-targeted violence, which can range from no violence to mass killing. The occupation stage ends with either the community’s violent evacuation or

with the community remaining (at least partially) intact in the home territory, with the probability of violent evacuation increasing in the intensity of violence.

Figure 3: Evacuation Process and Outcomes



This article focuses on the first stage: we explain variation in whether the community successfully evacuates preemptively or remains in the village, risking violence exposure. Crucially, though, we must incorporate community expectations of the second stage into our explanation of variation the first. Community members base their decisions whether to preemptively flee at least partially, and often primarily, on the *expectation* of the costs associated with remaining in place. The expected costs are based on civilians' estimates of the probability the belligerent will enter the home territory and the level of violence in the event that they do. Building on recent work emphasizing the role of civilian agency in conflict and displacement processes, we argue that social cohesion, by facilitating communication and collective action in risky environments, accounts for some of this unexplained variation.

4.1 Social Cohesion Enhances Collective Action in the Fog of War

A key reason that the expected violence and political costs cannot fully account for variation in whether communities flee preemptively in the pre-occupation stage is precisely because these *ex ante* predictions are

imperfect. Armed conflict processes generate tremendous uncertainty on many fronts (“fog of war”), for both belligerents and civilians alike. Civilians are uncertain about whether belligerents will actually occupy or operate in their specific location, the level of violence and property destruction they will suffer if they do, and the duration of active fighting. They cannot know which belligerent will control the area after the fighting stops, and what political conditions and economic opportunities will be available. They are also uncertain how many of their fellow community members will stay versus flee. Should they decide to flee the home territory, civilians are uncertain about political conditions and economic opportunities available in possible areas of refuge, and how long they will need to remain displaced before they can return to their homes. How individuals assess each of these dimensions of the conflict shapes whether they remain at home or flee to seek refuge elsewhere.

Facing a crisis of impending belligerent arrival, and these uncertainties, individuals acquire information and coordinate common expectations through social networks. In socially cohesive communities, information travels, and expectations of others’ behavior converge, more efficiently and encompass a larger portion of the population. Strong social capital, interpersonal and generalized trust, and social and political institutions through which to mobilize collective action all enhance the community’s ability to build a broader consensus on a decision whether to leave or remain and to reach higher rates of participation in the actions to pursue the community’s goals and preserve its security.

For certain community outcomes, such as preemptive evacuation, social cohesion is an essential component to collective action in large groups but not necessarily for small groups. In small communities, the barriers to communication, consensus building, and mobilization are low, regardless of the community’s social and organizational infrastructure. There are simply few people to reach, impart information, and fewer veto points to achieving consensus. Furthermore, small groups may yield preemptive evacuation through mechanisms other than coordinated collective action. Consider a purely non-cooperative cascade model of individual decisions to leave the home territory. In small communities, the tipping point that triggers mass flight is much lower, and the time from the first individual decision to flee until full evacuation is short. The length of the cascading process increases with the number of community members, which leaves communities vulnerable to violence exposure in the interim. Therefore, social cohesion plays an essential role, closing this mobilization gap critical to preemptive evacuation, in large communities but may not play a significant role in small communities.

These direct effects of social cohesion on community action during conflict are insufficient, on their own, to predict whether communities flee preemptively or remain in the home territory. Social cohesion and collective action *simultaneously* strengthen the community’s ability to mobilize collective exit *and* the collective resistance or autonomy strategies in order to preserve the community in the home territory. To

explain variation in community-level evacuation requires taking into account the community's expectations in the occupation stage. The expected level of violence influences the community decision towards collective exit or resistance, and community cohesion influences the variation in the likelihood of successful mobilization in the selected strategy; why some communities that attempt collective exit are able to achieve preemptive evacuation while in others community members are exposed to violence.

4.2 Social Cohesion and Preemptive Evacuation in Strategic Displacement Campaigns

When the expected costs associated with occupation are sufficiently low, communities may leverage social cohesion to retain a strong presence in the home territory, which preserves community autonomy and security (Arjona 2016; Kaplan 2017). This condition may prevail when the belligerent actor's main objective is to prevent civilian defection, rather than to promote population displacement, especially when the actor's ultimate objective is to govern the local population in the post-conflict era. It also occurs in contexts in which the belligerent actor is reliant upon the local population for material support or population concealment to avoid enemy reprisals. Under these conditions, civilians retain a variety of strategies for dealing with belligerents in their territory; including cooperating with one belligerent over others, negotiating autonomy, and, in extreme cases, mobilizing violent or nonviolent resistance to belligerent forces (Kaplan 2017). Each of these alignment strategies requires communities effectively negotiate with belligerents and communicate credible commitments to take specific actions as a collective, and social cohesion strengthens their ability to do so.

In settings characterized by high costs associated with the occupation stage, by contrast, communities leverage social cohesion to mobilize collective exit to escape violence exposure and repression, resulting in a higher likelihood of *preemptive* evacuation in the pre-occupation stage. This condition prevails when the belligerent's main objective is to displace the local population in order to shift the demographic balance in favor of its core constituency, or has other primary objectives to holding the territory such as extracting lootable natural resources or controlling strategic routes for moving military personnel and supplies. These conditions lead communities to expect unbearably high costs of occupation especially when the belligerent need not rely on local compliance or support.

In strategic displacement campaigns, and high occupation cost contexts generally, social cohesion increases the likelihood of preemptive evacuation through both informational and material mechanisms. Steele (2017) shows how social networks within and across communities hasten the spread of information about belligerent movements, giving communities the opportunity to flee before belligerents arrive. Camarena (n.d.) emphasizes

civilians' communication through social connections to reduce uncertainty in violent contexts and mobilize collective exit. We argue that cohesive social structure facilitates the information and communication mechanisms to increase the propensity for collective preemptive evacuation in vulnerable territory.

In addition, social cohesion also influences community members' physical and economic security in the precarious position of displacement. Keeping communities intact through the stages of forced migration and subsequent displacement reduces individual members' costs associated with fleeing their homes, as they retain the social connections and bonds needed to rebuild physical and economic security in a new setting. Kaplan (2017 pg. 44) notes that collective exit generates conditions such that "families can be kept together... in a safer location that is ready with supplies and assistance from neighbors" and furthermore may be helpful later in "facilitating a more rapid and orderly return to the territory if and when conflict conditions improve." Steele (2019) argues that civilians facing political cleansing maximize their security by clustering in geographic space, whether within the country (segregation) or across international borders (expulsion), which incentivizes collective exit. Displacement ruptures support networks underlying individuals' social safety net upon which they may depend to manage social and economic crises. Though still certainly more precarious than pre-conflict conditions at home, community members enjoy greater social and economic opportunities, through continuity in crucial support networks, when (most of) the community migrates together to a new location.

Social cohesion, by increasing the propensity for collective exit during conflict, also increases the prospects for return to the home territory after conflict subsides as a singular unit, softening the downsides associated with fleeing conflict-affected territory. For example, conflict migration may create new social cleavages over competing claims to abandoned land and property, between those who stayed through violent episodes and returning displaced persons hoping to regain the lives they left during conflict (Schwartz 2019). Our conjecture is that social cohesion reduces the possibility that former neighbors will lay claim to each others' property and bolster their collective efforts to negotiate with any individuals who may have moved into the home territory in the interim.

In this article, we focus on a context in which the expected costs of occupation are high. The legacy of political conflict and clashing Jewish and Arab national aspirations in Palestine throughout the British Mandate period, alongside deep attachment to the land (high stakes) among both Jews and Arabs, created a collision course toward violence. These conditions imply that Arab communities expected high costs associated with remaining in villages vulnerable to Jewish forces. These fears were reinforced, at least among the villages not yet occupied during the first offensive from April to May 1948, by some Israeli commanders' use of strategic displacement tactics. Therefore, our argument implies that in our sample, preemptive evacuation should be positively associated with community social cohesion.

***Hypothesis 1:** In the 1948 War, the likelihood of preemptive evacuation increases in community social cohesion; especially among villages with larger population.*

5 Mandate Palestine and the 1948 War

The transition to British colonial authority in Palestine following the First World War, replacing the crumbling Ottoman Empire, ushered in dramatic changes in Palestinian society. The British recognized Jewish national rights—the Balfour Declaration in 1917—but did not do the same for Arab Palestinians. The influx of Jewish migration and organized land purchases significantly impacted social and economic conditions across social strata within the Arab Palestinian population: urban and rural; traditional elites and the *nouveau riche*; Christian, Muslim and Druze; sedentary and nomadic Bedouin. These incremental changes in dominant cleavages propelled the national Palestinian identity and transformed relations with the British and the Zionist-Jews.

Palestinian nationalist mobilization reached its apex in the revolt of 1936-1939. The revolt enjoyed initial successes, pressuring the British to revoke Jewish immigration rights. But the revolt eventually devolved into rabid infighting, corruption, and crime, and was quashed by overwhelming British force. The titular leader during the early stages of the revolt, the Grand Mufti Amin al-Husseini, fled to Lebanon. The national leadership and institutions essentially collapsed and lost credibility among many Arab Palestinians. Collaboration with Zionists, which was considered a treacherous act during the revolt, quickly became the norm after the revolt ended. By the mid-1940s Palestinian leaders were attempting to revive national institutions, but they remained fragmented and disparate. “A plethora of competing organizations and lack of central political leadership accepted by all became the most salient feature of Palestinian Arab politics” (Cohen 2009, pg. 208). By 1947 when the war erupted, Arab Palestinian communities had fragmented to such an extent that each community was left to fend for itself. Linkages between Arab Palestinian communities resisting Israeli statebuilding were rare, and weak.

By contrast, during the 1940s Zionists accelerated institutional statebuilding efforts and accumulated matériel and military training in recognition of the nearly inescapable confrontation with the Arab Palestinian population and the Arab states. The Zionists expanded military intelligence operations—including the survey of Arab Palestinian villages we use in the empirical section—through which the Haganah paramilitary forces obtained information from collaborators and even former rebels, and in its later stages included aerial photographs and access points, though in the “fog of war” these were never removed from the archives or used during the 1948 War. Large-scale illegal immigration operations were set up, smuggling in over 20,000

Jews by boats in defiance of the British white paper revoking Jewish immigration.

Ultimately, a sustained campaign of anti-colonial violence by the Zionists convinced British policymakers at home and in the colonial office that maintaining control over Palestine was more trouble than it was worth (Hoffman 2016). The British delegated this problem to the United Nations, who then created the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP). UNSCOP entertained a number of options for how to deal with the ethnic conflict in Palestine, and in November 1947 ultimately decided to partition the Mandate into Jewish and Arab non-contiguous territories. Jewish-Zionist leaders accepted the UN plan, but Arab Palestinian leaders and Arab state leaders rejected it. Immediately after the UN announced the partition plan, Arab Palestinian attacks against Jews escalated in the ethnically mixed larger cities (Tal 2004). After the British withdrawal in May 1948, Arab state armies attacked the newly-founded state of Israel. Arab Palestinian communities, lacking national institutions to coordinate responses, relied on the invading Arab state forces to save them, but were eventually left to fend for themselves as these armies did not reach many of them.

5.1 Israel's Strategic Considerations during the War

The ensuing war that led to Israel's independence, and the Palestinian *al-Nakba*, is customarily divided into three parts, each with a major episode of forced displacement. In the first, November 1947 - February 1948, Jewish forces were mainly positioned defensively and the fighting is characterized by harassment and reprisal attacks between Jewish and local Arab Palestinian forces. In the second phase, March - October 1948, Jewish forces began on the offensive, in anticipation of the British exit and included the the largest episode of forced displacement, primarily along strategic routes. By May 1948 Arab forces from neighboring countries began invading the areas of Mandatory Palestine, but failed to make inroads to protect Arab Palestinian communities. In the third phase, from November 1948 until the cessation of hostilities in March 1949, Israeli offensives continued and another round of forced displacement occurred.

During the offensives, the main areas of strategic concern for the Israeli forces were located along the main roads leading to areas of Jewish settlement. But, as Figure 1 shows, we still observe variation in whether villages were depopulated, and whether the village resisted or surrendered. Until April, most villages evacuated before the arrival of Jewish forces. Active expulsion policies began in earnest in April along the coastal plains, lower Galilee, and the Jerusalem corridor, though exceptions were made to multiple villages. Morris (1987 pg. 198) characterizes Israel's policy towards Arab villages on the main strategic routes as "inconsistent, circumstantial and haphazard."

It is important to note, that while a mass exodus occurred, over 130,000 in 82 villages and three cities elected to surrender and remain under Israeli control. The high levels of fragmentation within Arab Palestinian

society and the independent strategies that villages adopted, also led to variation in how they dealt with the Jewish forces, if and when they arrived, though we do not address this variation specifically in this article.

5.2 The Foundations of Social Cohesion and Conflict in Arab Palestinian Villages

Arab Palestinian villages in the late Mandate Palestine period, many rural and somewhat disconnected from their larger surroundings, were the center of life throughout this period. Most villages were centered around the extended family, often called clan, or *hamula*. Most villages had several different *hamulas*, and marriages frequently occurred within a *hamula*, or within the village. In Artas, an Arab Palestinian village near Bethlehem, in 1944, over seventy percent of marriages occurred within the village (Miller 1975). Morris refers to the villages as “autarchic or semi-autarchic” (Morris 2004, pg. 109).

While clans tended to be homogeneous in terms of religion or ethnicity, many villages included *hamulas* from divergent backgrounds. In many villages, prominent *hamulas* engaged in perennial feuds with each other. In extreme cases, these rivalries devolved into cycles of killings and reprisals.

Furthermore, opposing national Palestinian movements competed to court loyalty and support at the *hamula* level. This often led to divisions along clan lines, with rival *hamulas* supporting opposing national political parties. The British colonial government exerted authority at the local level through traditional village structures. The changing relationship with the British authorities required the village to arrive at a consensus, but this was often challenged from within the village since often “conflict was as permanent as agreement in the dynamic village society” (Miller 1975, pg. 66).

6 Research Design and Data

We interrogate the argument empirically using village-level data from the 1948 War in Mandate Palestine. The sample available for analysis includes 249 villages: restricted to those included in the Village Files, excluding the West Bank and Gaza, and for which we have sufficient information to measure key covariates. Below, we discuss the representativeness of the sample and discuss the limitations to confidence in the inferences drawn, given patterns of missing data. We conduct a cross-sectional analysis on the sample of Arab Palestinian villages in Mandate Palestine, fitting a logit model to regress the village’s ultimate evacuation outcome on pre-war indicators of social cohesion and potential confounders.

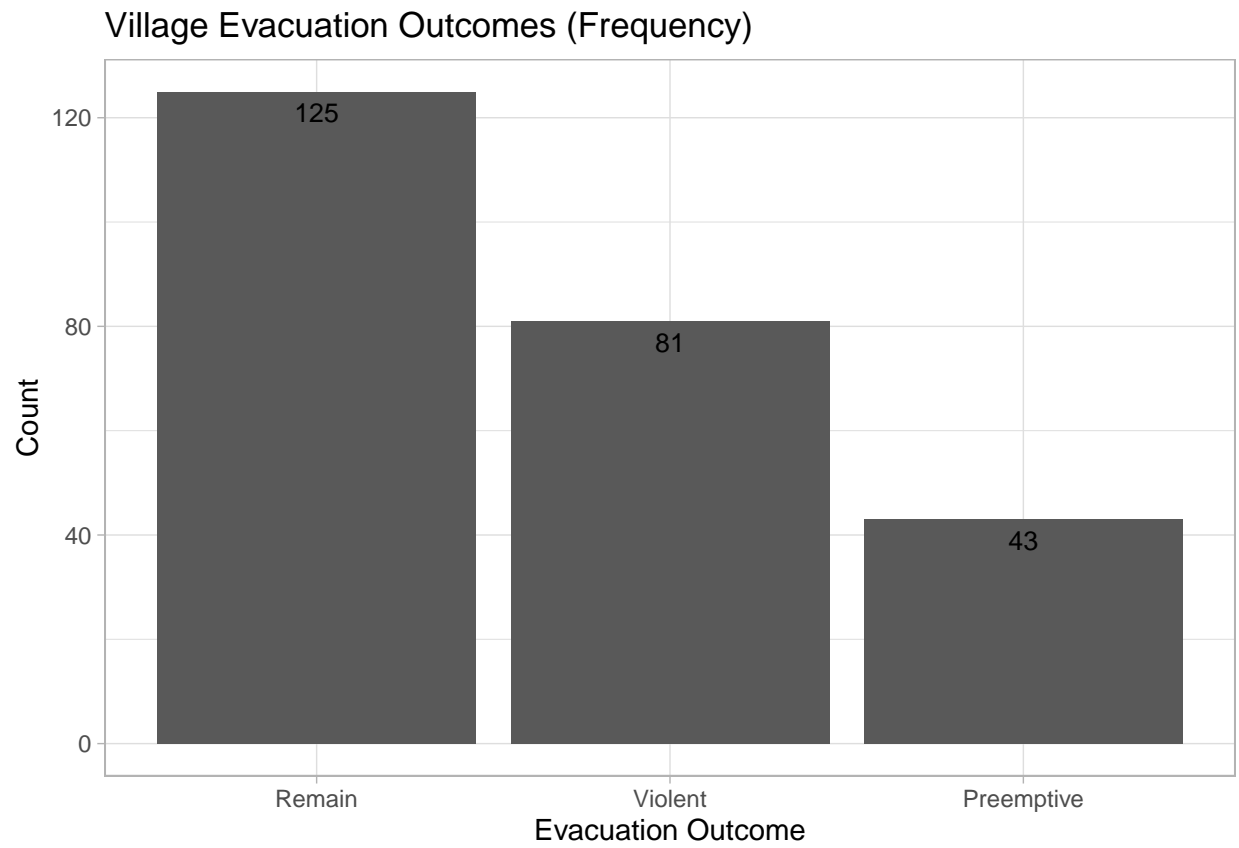


Figure 4: This figure shows the frequency of our three displacement outcomes: no evacuation (remain), violent evacuation, or preemptive evacuation.

6.1 Village evacuation data

We measure community evacuation outcomes using data from the *Atlas of Palestine* (Abu-Sitta 2004), which combines historical accounts by Morris (1987) and Khalidi and Elmusa (1992).⁵ We operationalize the distinction between *preemptive* and *violent* evacuation by drawing upon the six distinct proximate causes of village evacuation enumerated in Morris (1987):

- Expulsion by Jewish Forces;
- Military assault on the settlement by Jewish troops;
- Abandonment on Arab Orders;
- Fear of Jewish attack or of being caught up in the fighting;
- “Whispering” campaigns;⁶
- Influence of fall of, or exodus from, neighboring town.

The first two types attribute the proximate cause of village evacuation to direct military-perpetrated violence, and so are considered *violent*. The remainder still involve coercion, including the threat of violence, but not yet its active deployment. We therefore consider these as *preemptive* evacuation. Including villages that 3) remain populated (at least partially), we observe three distinct evacuation outcomes. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the evacuation outcome across Arab Palestinian villages included in the sample.

6.2 Village Social Cohesion Data

The Village Files include information at the *hamula* level, indicating the political loyalties of each *hamula*, its number of members, and the existence of rivalries and blood feuds between *hamulas* within the village. This detailed and systematic information allows for the construction of a measure of social cohesion based on distributive elements and relationships between primary social units within a village.

In addition, the Village Files also record a number of potential military attributes of the village, which we use as controls. For example, the reports specify the number of military aged men, and whether firearms are present in the village. We use these as indicators for the communities’ perceived efficacy to militarily engage the Israeli belligerents.

The main measure of social cohesion we use in the analysis is a composite of three binary variables extracted from the Village Files. The first variable indicates whether community members are unified in

⁵Morris used Israeli archives, while Khalidi’s accounts come from the *Palestine Index Gazeteer’s* list of villages.

⁶The whispering campaigns refer a tactic in which the Jewish forces spread rumors among Arab villages about their military advances and brutality, to scare locals into preemptive collective exit.

support of *one* of the competing factions vying to represent the Palestinian national movement; the factions were lead by the Husseini and Nashashibi clans, respectively. This variable takes a value of 0 if at least one *hamula* in the village is affiliated with the Nashashibi, *and* at least one is affiliated with the Husseini faction. It takes a value of 1 if each *hamula* supports the same faction, or is unaffiliated any political party. Villages in which the *hamulas* support different factions of the Palestinian national movement are plagued by infighting related to alignments with, and patronage from, competing national elites. By contrast, villages in which the *hamulas* are politically united on the national political cleavage enjoy greater social cohesion through common cause.

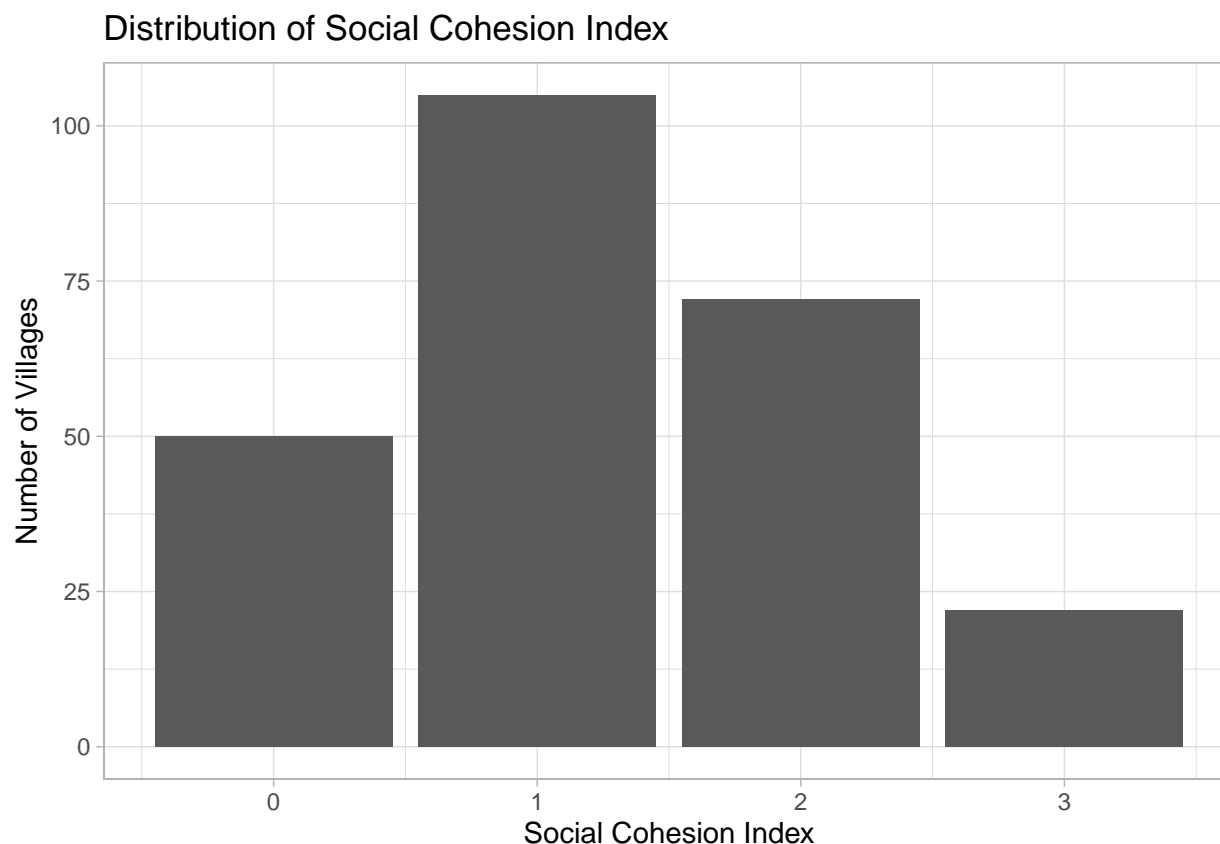


Figure 5: This figure shows the distribution of the additive social cohesion index across villages in the observed sample.

The second variable captures whether there exists intra-community conflict between *hamulas* in the village. The Village Files record the existence of “rivalry” and “blood feuds” between *hamulas*. Villages with active, or recent histories of, inter-clan rivalry or blood feuds clearly suffer high barriers to cooperation, and strong incentive to compete, across clan lines. Furthermore, community members may harbor negative attitudes towards the community as a whole relative to attitudes toward the parochial *hamula* social group. The

variable takes a value of 0 if the village file records the existence of either a rivalry or blood feud, and 1 if not.

The third variable draws upon a measure of the “effective number” of *hamulas*. Specifically, we require a measure that incorporates not only the number of distinct *hamulas* in the village but also their relative sizes with respect to one another. To see why this is important, consider two stylized villages each with two *hamulas*. In Village A, *hamulas* A.1 and A.2 both have 100 members. In village B, *hamula* B.1 has 100 members but B.2 has only 25 members. Whereas in A we may say there are 2 *hamulas* that influence collective decision-making, in village B we may find that the significantly larger *hamula* B.1 drives much of the village decision-making and the smaller B.2 must follow.

We adopt the Laakso-Taagepera (L-T) index (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) to summarize the effective number (N) of *hamulas* using the following formula:

$$N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2};$$

where n represents the number of *hamulas* in the village and p_i representing *hamula* i ’s population as a proportion of the population including all *hamulas*. When the effective number of *hamulas* as measured by the L-T index is low (close to 1), social cohesion is higher. Villages with more *hamulas* face higher barriers to social cohesion and collective action than those with fewer *hamulas*, each having a more broad-based membership. To convert this continuous measure to a binary variable for inclusion in the additive index of social cohesion, the variable takes a value of 1 if the effective number of *hamulas* is less than 2, which is the median number of *hamulas* in the sample (in addition to making intuitive sense to capture social division within the community). Figure 5 shows the distribution of our index of social cohesion across villages.

6.3 Confounding Variables

We also collected data on a number of other village covariates to control for pre-treatment differences across villages that may affect confound our estimates of the effect of social cohesion on evacuation outcomes. First, we control for village population, using data from the 1945 British census. As we argue above, collective action on the scale necessary for preemptive evacuation becomes increasingly difficult with the number of people to mobilize, and introduces greater barriers to social cohesion. Furthermore, we argue that the effect of social cohesion should be moderated by village population. We include village population as a confounder in the naive model fits, and subsequently interact with social cohesion to explore the conditional effect proposed.

To capture spatial variation in proximity to violence, to Jewish villages, and other geographic factors that cluster in space, we control for the latitude and longitude of the village. The Israelis prioritized villages located on hills for conquest in order to secure a strategic outpost. We use the log of the village’s elevation from the *Atlas of Palestine* (Abu-Sitta 2004) to capture variation in a village’s strategic location during the

war. We also control for the log of the land area of the village, since geographic size may affect their likelihood of being targeted as well as the barriers to communication and coordination essential to social cohesion. Lastly, to control for the value of immovable assets, we control for the area within a village dedicated to citrus and banana orchards, since this was a main source of income for many Arab Palestinian communities.

6.4 Which villages enter into the sample?

The Haganah did not survey all villages in Mandate Palestine. The goal of the surveys was to collect important data about each village for strategic purposes, making it unlikely that the villages were randomly selected to be surveyed. To investigate how this non-random selection into the sample may affect our later estimates, we describe how the villages that are in the survey may differ from villages where no survey was conducted. Doing this requires information on villages that were not surveyed. We use the 1945 British Village Census to create a list of villages comprising the total sample, along with relevant covariates. This results in data on 789 villages.

Figure 6 illustrates the geographic distribution of villages included and excluded from the sample of Village Files, and Figure 7 compares the distribution on key covariates across these groups of villages. For most variables, the density plots are roughly similar across the different types of villages. The main difference lies in the distributions of the population variables. This is to be expected. Whether a village was a primarily Jewish or Arab village was well known and easily observable in Mandate Palestine. The Haganah had little reason to issue surveys to villages with a substantial Jewish population, since their coethnics would likely provide valuable intelligence and cooperation during any potential military conflict. The main perceived threat to the Haganah were Arab villages since they would be the main villages targeted in a conflict. Moreover, the different population distributions across villages with and without a survey likely has no impact on our analysis of village evacuation since during the 1948 War the only villages that the Israeli forces targeted for conquest were Arab villages.

7 Findings

7.1 Cross-Sectional Logit Model Results

The bivariate relationship between evacuation outcomes and community social cohesion in the data is broadly consistent with the argument. As Figure 8 shows, among villages that preemptively evacuated, those with higher social higher values of social cohesion are over-represented by a wide margin.

Because the bivariate relationship may be confounded by additional factors that correlate with both

Arab Palestinian Villages Included in the Village Files

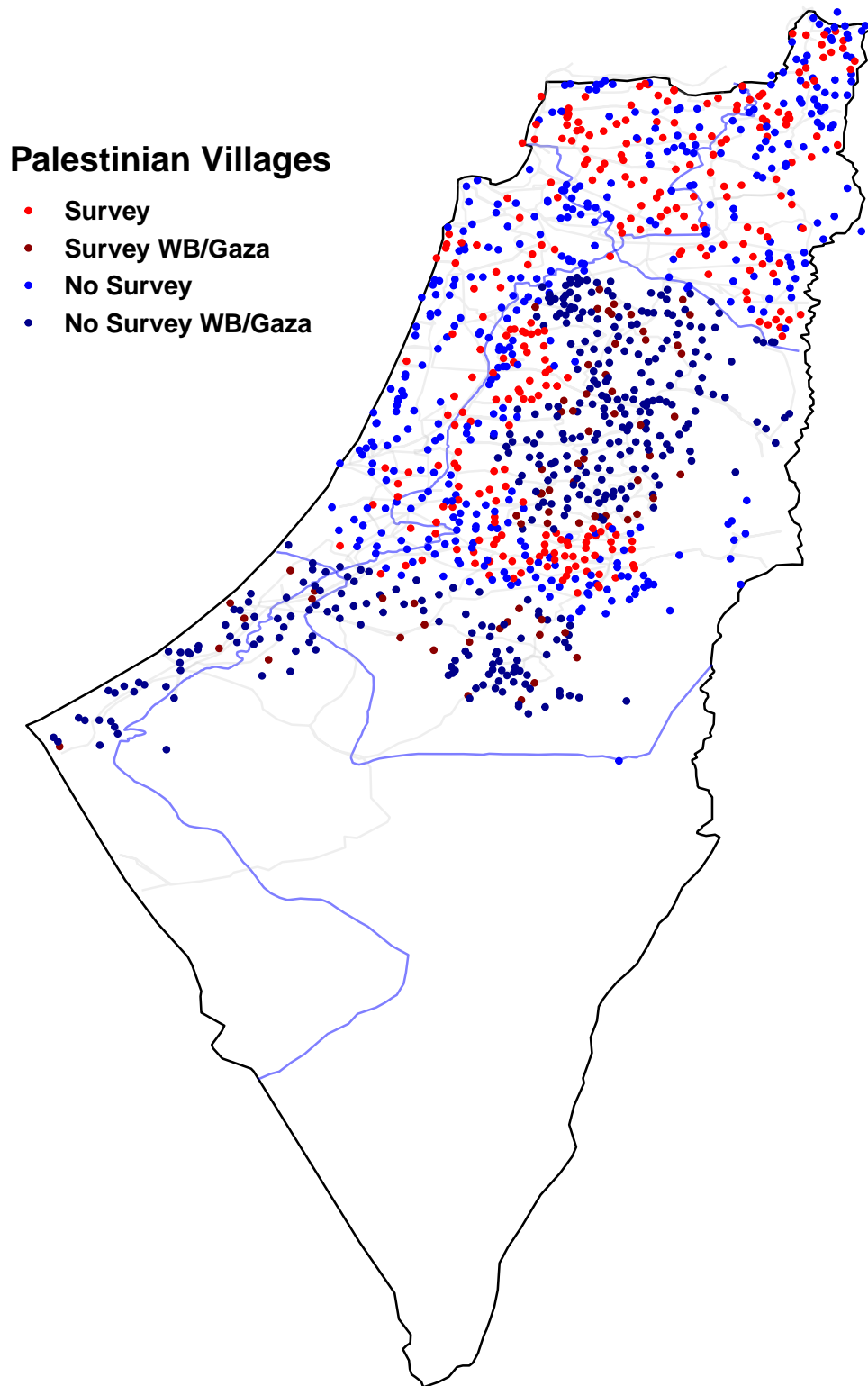
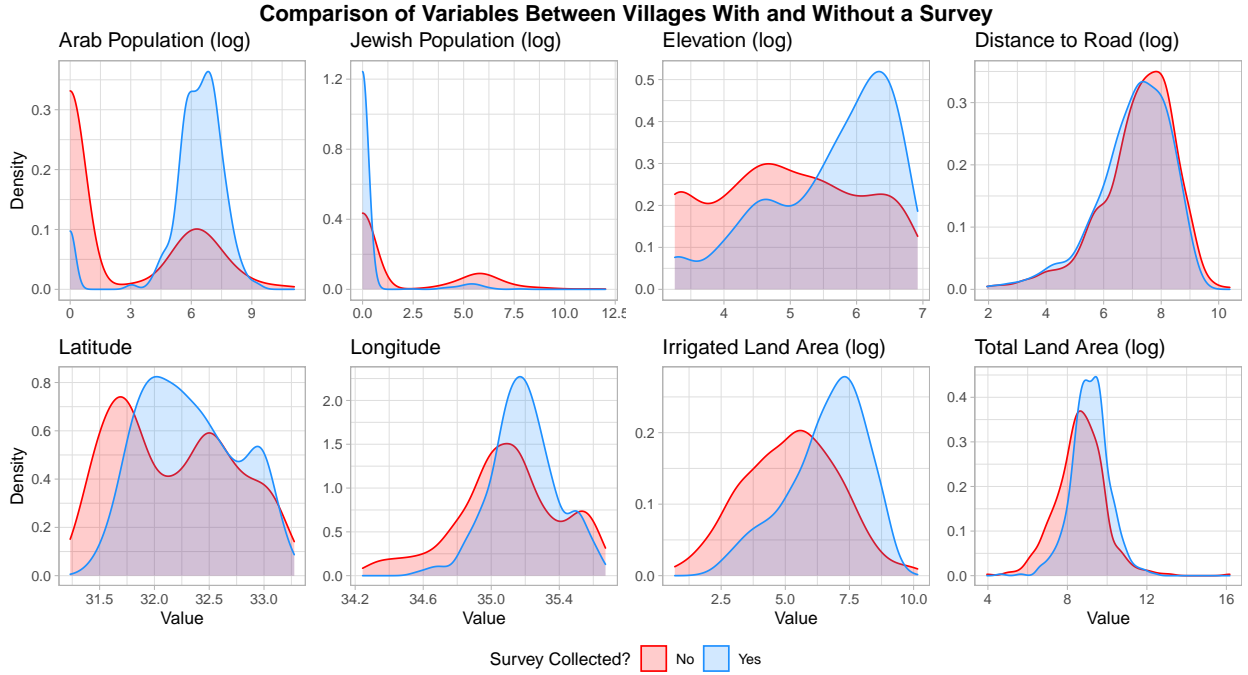


Figure 6: This map shows the location of villages along with whether a Village Survey was conducted, and whether they are located in the current West Bank/Gaza area (excluding all villages in the Jerusalem district).

Figure 7: Balance Plot



cohesion and displacement processes, we present results from cross-sectional multivariate analysis to interrogate whether the relationship is robust to covariate adjustment for potential confounders. We fit a set of logit models in which the dependent variable is whether a village is preemptively evacuated. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Model 1 fits the naive bivariate relationship, regressing preemptive evacuation on the social cohesion index. Model 2 includes covariate adjustment for geographic location (latitude and longitude from the *Atlas of Palestine*) and village population. Model 3 includes additional controls for mean elevation, total land area, and cultivable land area. Model 4 includes an interaction between social cohesion and village population, following the hypothesis that the positive relationship between social cohesion and preemptive evacuation does not operate in small villages, and becomes more important as village population increases.

A close reading of the results shows the coefficient estimates on the social cohesion index are consistent with the theory's empirical implications across models, which suggests community social cohesion should increase the likelihood of preemptive evacuation among Arab Palestinian villages during the 1948 War. In Models 1-3, the coefficient estimates on social cohesion are positive, but statistically indistinguishable from 0 in Models 2-3. The relationship appears weaker in these models for two reasons. First, they assume linearity in the effects of geographic position and village population. Second, and more importantly, the argument suggests a conditional effect of social cohesion moderated by population size. Villages with a smaller population face much lower barriers to engaging in collective action, as there are fewer actors to

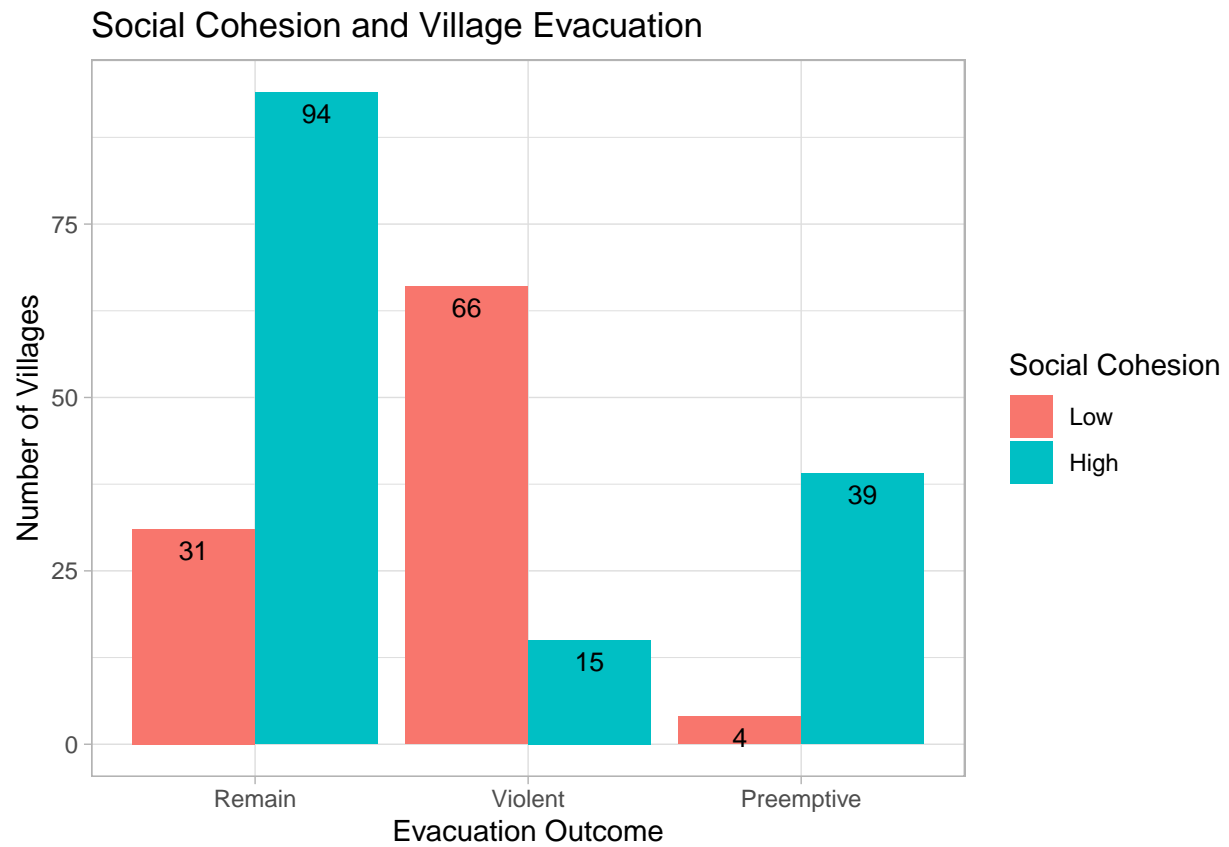


Figure 8: This figure shows the evacuation outcome for each village, split by whether they have high or low levels of social cohesion. Low cohesion villages are those with 0 on the ordinal social cohesion index and high cohesion includes those with 1 or above.

Table 1:

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Preemptive Evacuation					
	<i>logistic</i>			<i>spatial autoregressive</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Social Cohesion	0.346* (0.191)	0.216 (0.208)	0.419 (0.273)	−5.244** (2.297)	0.032 (0.029)	−0.514*** (0.188)
Latitude		−0.525 (0.511)	−3.467*** (0.951)	−3.350*** (0.955)		
Longitude		3.736*** (1.176)	9.505*** (1.940)	9.183*** (1.973)		
Village Pop		−0.008 (0.195)	0.045 (0.272)	−1.163** (0.560)	−0.034 (0.030)	−0.137*** (0.046)
Mean Elevation			−1.652*** (0.354)	−1.652*** (0.357)	−0.051** (0.026)	−0.056** (0.025)
Land Area			0.098 (0.275)	0.065 (0.281)	0.015 (0.031)	0.012 (0.031)
Total Cultivable Land			−0.114 (0.303)	−0.182 (0.312)	0.003 (0.034)	−0.015 (0.034)
Social Cohesion * Village Pop				0.880** (0.352)		0.083*** (0.028)
Observations	249	247	218	218	218	218
Log Likelihood	−112.909	−105.132	−76.441	−72.606	−78.823	−74.594
σ^2					0.116	0.112
Akaike Inf. Crit.	229.818	220.264	168.881	163.211	173.646	167.188
Wald Test (df = 1)					24.814***	25.140***
LR Test (df = 1)					21.099***	21.424***

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

coordinate and fewer veto points. Among larger villages, the ability for a village to engage in collective action should vary considerably with social cohesion. When social cohesion is low, it is exceedingly difficult for the village to coordinate their behavior due to the large number of actors. Collective action on the scale necessary for preemptive evacuation should only occur when social cohesion is high.

The results in Model 4 support the proposed conditional effect. The coefficient estimate on social cohesion, representing its effect when village population is 0 (and therefore not substantively interpretable), is negative and statistically distinguishable from 0. The coefficient on the interaction term is positive and statistically significant, suggesting cohesion increasingly promotes preemptive evacuation as population increases. Because the coefficient estimates are not informative beyond this general trend, we illustrate the conditional relationship in the marginal effects plot drawing upon Model 4. The results are displayed graphically in Figure 9. Consistent with our argument, the marginal effect of social cohesion on preemptive evacuation increases with the village size.

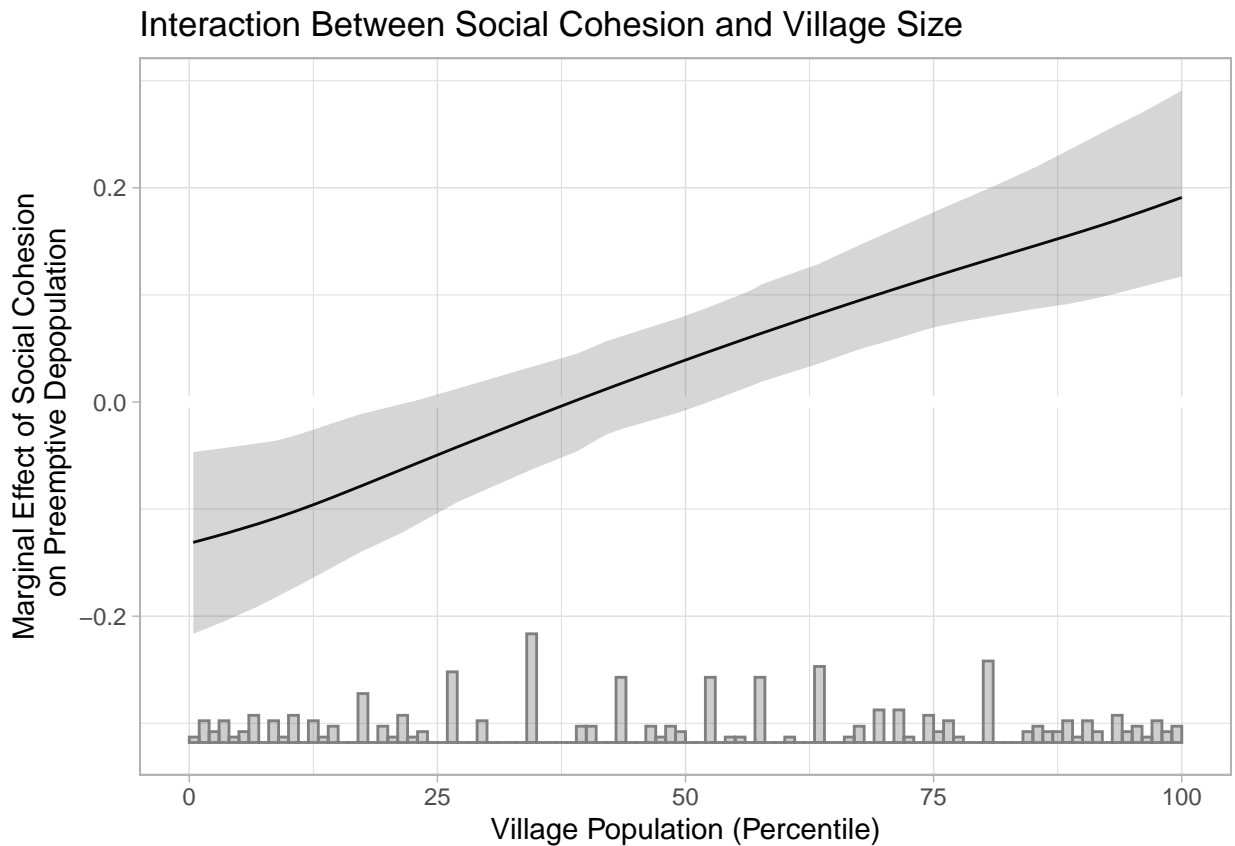


Figure 9: This plot shows the marginal effect of social cohesion on preemptive depopulation, moderated by the size of the village in terms of population.

Models 5 and 6 fit spatial autoregressive models, regressing preemptive evacuation on the battery of

covariates included in Models 3 and 4 (replacing latitude and longitude as covariates in the model), respectively. Spatial autogression takes into account that the outcome and predictor (explanatory variable) are spatially correlated, such that not all observations are independent. As Table 1 shows, the results are statistically very similar and substantively identical to the simpler non-spatial logit model.

7.2 Additional Analyses and Robustness Checks

We conduct a series of robustness checks on the main empirical tests to ensure the results are not sensitive to model specification. We fit alternative models including covariate adjustment for the area of Arab Palestinian-owned orchards, the number of military aged men, and the presence of firearms in the village from the Village Files. Next, we split the sample to investigate the relationship between preemptive evacuation and social cohesion among sufficiently populous villages, varying the threshold of village population used to split the sample. Across the analyses using a range of thresholds, the positive relationship between preemptive evacuation and community social cohesion remains among the higher-population subset when fitting the multivariate models. The full results are reported in the Appendix.

Furthermore, the argument implies social cohesion promotes preemptive, as opposed to violent, evacuation in the observed context of a strategic displacement campaign. One reason our argument is ambiguous in its implications for variation in violent evacuation is that in this context civilian agency to pursue autonomy strategies is extremely limited. Another reason is the sequencing: socially cohesive communities that are most likely to be exposed to violence strategically select into the preemptive evacuation outcome. To probe whether the evidence supports the theoretical mechanisms proposed here, rather than absorbing alternative mechanisms that relate social cohesion to evacuation, we perform a similar analysis in which the dependent variable is a binary indicator of violent evacuation, expecting null or weaker results for the correlation between social cohesion and violent evacuation.

The results are presented in Section C.1 in the Appendix. The coefficient estimates for social cohesion are substantively small and statistically indistinguishable from 0. Together with the results from Table 1, the cross-sectional analysis provides evidence consistent with the argument that social cohesion increases preemptive evacuation (relative to violent evacuation or remain), and that it does not increase violent evacuation (relative to preemptive evacuation or remain).

8 Conclusion

Communities face hard choices and severe constraints on their ability to protect themselves during wartime. Yet, as research on forced displacement has shown, civilians exercise agency to influence belligerent conduct and

protect their communities even in context of widespread and intense civilian-targeted violence. Communities at a minimum retain some control over if, when, and how to flee their homes to escape violence, producing patterns of forced displacement in conflict contexts.

In this article, we focus on *the form* of displacement. We ask, why do some communities *preemptively* evacuate a village, while others remain, risking violent cleansing or depopulation? Previous literature has focused on conditions external to the community that shape civilian incentives, such as the level of violence, characteristics of the areas of potential refuge, political or economic material incentives to leave or remain, or identity affiliations with warring parties. We show that these explanations are incomplete, as they cannot account for observed local-level variation in evacuation outcomes across villages facing similar material incentives and constraints. Shifting focus to civilian agency and communities' social characteristics, we show that social cohesion plays a significant role in displacement processes. Specifically, at least among sufficiently populous villages, communities with higher social cohesion are more likely to facilitate a preemptive evacuation.

The empirical evidence draws upon unique data from a pre-war survey documenting social relationships between families within each village in a crucial case: the 1948 War in Mandate Palestine. The findings suggest that, even in the context of territorial conflict in which the belligerents adopted strategic displacement tactics, community social cohesion played a significant role in shaping whether communities preemptively evacuated prior to violence exposure. The Village Files, from which we measure our key predictor of social cohesion, draw upon uniquely detailed information from local informants to depict social, economic, political, and cultural features at the village level in the period just before the 1948 War. The level of detail in these documents provides essential insight into the pre-1948 social and economic conditions in Arab Palestinian villages that not only contributes to the historical record but also enables the systematic empirical investigation of social science theories related to conflict and displacement processes Morris (2004).

The findings have clear policy implications for war-affected communities. Strengthening ties and relationships within a community, across social cleavages, can mitigate some of the disastrous outcomes during war. Our work shows that this community-level work should be pursued primarily in larger communities, in states with a high risk of conflict emergence.

The present study has several limitations that motivate future research. First, the 1948 War is often considered unique, in a variety of ways related to the politics of the region and religious and ethno-nationalist cleavages. In the absence of national institutions and an organized military, Arab Palestinian communities lacked protection against advancing Israeli forces (strong incentives to flee) and the migration processes could not have been organized by national leadership. This provides the analytic leverage to isolate the role of community capabilities, but suggests additional research is needed to probe generalizability to other conflicts.

Second, Village Files were collected by one of the belligerents in the conflict, whose statebuilding efforts and political violence directly provoked the forced displacement among the villages observed. While the Shai used local informants and designed a system for systematic and detailed description of village conditions according to locals' perspective, we cannot ignore the political and power conditions that may have shaped patterns in access to informants and the veracity and representativeness of the information extracted from the villages. Readers must keep in mind the source of the information and future research may complement this analysis with alternative sources as they become available.

We also do not know exactly why some villages had higher levels of social cohesion, while some had lower levels. The historical literature is quite clear that the events during the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt against British Colonialism led to the fracturing of Arab Palestinian society, with some scholars arguing that this fractionalization enabled the Israeli forces' quick victory. Other explanations stress the importance of the political networks led by the Nashashibi and Husseini clans. We recognize that unobserved characteristics of the Arab Palestinian villages in our sample may confound the relationship between social cohesion and displacement outcomes.

Future research may disaggregate the components of social cohesion to investigate the distinct role of each of its component elements on community choices during war. How and which of these component elements have a specific effect on the constrained choices of communities? Furthermore, future research may integrate the belligerents' strategic considerations into the theoretical and empirical framework examined here, to map variation in the level of threat and community constraints as they vary locally within conflict zones and over time (determined, for example, by the proximity to belligerent attacks at a given time).

In this paper we focused primarily on what we called the pre-occupation phase to address the specific question about the role of social cohesion and its effect on the form of evacuation, but several questions remain. What factors affect the decision to stay? What differentiates communities forcibly evacuated from those that remained intact under the Israeli control after the war ended? How do the pre-conflict relationships between communities across conflict-related social cleavages (Jewish and Arab communities) impact civilians' migration decisions and the community-level outcomes? Lastly, whether and how to evacuate represents but one choice, albeit extreme, that communities face during war. Future research may examine evacuation alongside the broader repertoire of actions communities, and individual civilians, may adopt during conflict; including autonomy and resistance strategies addressed elsewhere and the diverse set of displacement processes other than full evacuation.

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