Social Cohesion and Community Displacement in Armed Conflict

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Abstract

What are the origins of conflict-related population displacement? Why do some communities in conflict zones suffer mass casualties while others evade conflict violence by preemptively mobilizing collective migration? Whether civilians migrate before or after belligerent operations in their vicinity influences the scale of casualties and population displacement in war. We argue that in conflicts involving strategic civilian-targeted violence, social cohesion enhances communities' capabilities to mobilize collective migration, thereby increasing the likelihood of *preemptive evacuation*; a type of forced displacement in which entire communities leave prior to belligerents' military operations to seize territory. We investigate the theory's empirical implications in the context of the 1948 war in Mandate Palestine. We measure Arab Palestinian communities' displacement drawing upon detailed village-level historical accounts of the war. We developed a coding scheme to measure social cohesion and other village features using information in the Village Files, an early 1940s survey of Arab Palestinian villages conducted by Haganah intelligence. We find villages with greater social cohesion were more likely to preemptively evacuate, shedding new light on how civilian agency shapes conflict and displacement processes. By making public the previously restricted Village Files, and our original dataset, we introduce critical sources of evidence to the research community investigating Mandate Palestine, Palestinian society and development, the origins of Israel's statehood, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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Introduction

What are the origins of conflict-related population displacement? Under what conditions do civilians in conflict zones adopt certain survival strategies over others? Why do some communities suffer mass casualties while others sustain fewer casualties by mobilizing collective migration? This article investigates community-level variation in *preemptive evacuation* during conflict, a specific manifestation of forced displacement[4] in which whole communities leave their homes prior to belligerents' military operations to seize and hold territory in their local area.[5] Though in this scenario communities evade conflict violence, preemptive evacuation is equally considered forced displacement because the threat of severe violence is credible and imminent.

Whether civilians leave prior to belligerent military operations to control territory in their vicinity directly impacts the number of (potential) casualties in targeted areas and the number of survivors that seek refuge as displaced persons. Because belligerents often rely on civilians for material and political support, or incur costs associated with civilian resistance to their authority, changes to the social and demographic make-up of the population residing within the conflict zone associated with preemptive migration may alter belligerents' strategies and their interactions with civilians in subsequent conflict processes. Furthermore, recent research has shown whether refugees were exposed to violence shapes their preferences regarding whether to return to their country of origin after conflict subsides.[6]

We argue that community *social cohesion*, by promoting collective action, represents an essential source of local-level variation in population displacement during armed conflict. Civilians in conflict are primarily concerned with safety and survival, but also retain secondary interests, including retaining their homes, communities, and assets. As such, they wish to leave their homes, even temporarily, only when the risk of violence is sufficiently great, direct, and imminent. With limited information about strategic developments in the conflict, civilians are uncertain about the risk of being targeted at any given time and about whether their fellow community members will stay or flee. Furthermore, conflict migration, itself, incurs great costs and risks of violence exposure.

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[4] Following Abbey Steele, "Seeking Safety: Avoiding Displacement and Choosing Destinations in Civil Wars," *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 3 (2009): 419–29, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309102660, pg. 421, we define conflict-related forced displacement as "civilian migration during war that is provoked, directly or indirectly, by the actions of one or several armed groups."

[5] We elaborate on our intentional use of the term *evacuation*, and its meaning in this context, in Section 1.1.

[6] Ghosn Faten et al., "The Journey Home: Violence, Anchoring, and Refugee Decisions to Return," *American Political Science Review*, 2021, 1–17, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000344.

Civilians must amass the resources necessary to survive the journey and period of displacement–such as food, clothing, medical supplies, and means of transportation–and manage to evade belligerent targeting along their route.

Civilians address these challenges through interactions with fellow community members willing to exchange information and resources; perhaps starting with family members but extending to others with whom they have developed personalized trust. Community leaders may facilitate support for members in need, and organize collective action, including emigration when necessary. In divided communities, in which social ties across social cleavages are absent or negative, communication and resource distribution may be confined within parochial groups. By contrast, in cohesive communities in which personalized trust relationships bridge social cleavages, civilians' support networks are more unique, and their size is not limited to insular groups but can extend across the broader community. Even if information and resources are distributed first within-group, individuals can tap secondary connections if still in need. Community leaders leverage trust and experiences with cooperation between groups to facilitate exchange of resources and aid, and to organize collective resistance or migration, across cleavage lines.

This article explains variation in forced displacement outcomes among conflicts in which belligerents deploy strategic displacement violence, "intentional, systematic displacement of civilians";[7] including but not limited to *cleansing*, genocide, and other forms of mass killing.[8] We limit the scope in order to hone the logic of variation in preemptive evacuation when the incentives to (at least temporarily) leave their homes largely dominate incentives to resist belligerent operations to hold territory in the area. In this context, when belligerent ground forces' arrival is imminent and civilians overwhelming seek security from violence, social cohesion is a critical factor to community members' capabilities to mobilize collective migration; increasing the likelihood of preemptive evacuation. Future research is needed to explore the complex relationship between social cohesion and displacement in other contexts; when the incentives for resistance are stronger or civilian-targeted violence is less intense or more selective.

The article builds on existing work that highlights civilians' agency over choices between evasion/migration and engagement/resistance strategies, by explaining variation in preemptive displacement. As an early stage of civilians' survival and conflict management decision-making, preemptive displacement shapes selection into the circumstances in which subsequent civilian and belligerent choices are made. We often think of civilian

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[7] Adam G Lichtenheld, "Explaining Population Displacement Strategies in Civil Wars: A Cross-National Analysis," *International Organization* 74, no. 2 (2020): 256, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000089.

[8] See also Kelly M Greenhill, "Strategic Engineered Migration as a Weapon of War," *Civil Wars* 10, no. 1 (2008): 6–21, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240701835425, Kelly M Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration* (Cornell University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801458668.

agency as limited in this context: given the severe threat of violence, civilians are limited in their choices regarding whether and how to respond. We do not diminish this point, but rather highlight that even under these circumstances civilians can and do take actions to influence their fate.[9] If civilian agency is irrelevant in this context, we should not see variation in whether communities mobilize mass migration before, as opposed to after, belligerents' attempts to take and hold territory in the vicinity.

Understanding forced migration patterns in conflicts involving strategic displacement violence, which include 58 percent of conflicts 1945-2008,[10] is critical to confronting current and future conflict and displacement crises. These conflicts generate massive internal displacement and refugee flows across borders, civilian casualties, and humanitarian crises. Conflicts that have erupted since 2008 only increase their salience. Civilians in active warzones in Syria, Yemen, Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Myanmar, among too many others, are forced to either flee their homes to evade violence, or stay and risk suffering violence exposure. This article has direct policy implications for addressing these ongoing crises. Furthermore, because conflict migration draws refugee-receiving states into civil war[11] and interstate conflict,[12] understanding the origins and dynamics of conflict displacement in these conflicts is a critical issue in contemporary international security.

Empirically, we investigate the relationship between preemptive evacuation and social cohesion in the context of the 1948 War in Mandate Palestine: the war leading to Israel's

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[9] Christina Davenport, Will Moore, and Steven Poe, "Sometimes You Just Have to Leave: Domestic Threats and Forced Migration, 1964-1989," *International Interactions* 29, no. 1 (2003): 27–55, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620304597; Will H Moore and Stephen M Shellman, "Fear of Persecution: Forced Migration, 1952-1995," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 5 (2004): 723–45, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704267767; Will H Moore and Stephen M Shellman, "Refugee or Internally Displaced Person? To Where Should One Flee?" *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 5 (2006): 599–622, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414005276457; Erik Melander and Magnus Öberg, "Time to Go? Duration Dependence in Forced Migration," *International Interactions* 32, no. 2 (2006): 129–52, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620600574873; Prakash Adhikari, "The Plight of the Forgotten Ones: Civil War and Forced Migration," *International Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2012): 590–606, https://doi.org/j.1468-2478.2011.00712.x.

[10] Lichtenheld, "Explaining Population Displacement Strategies in Civil Wars," 267.

[11] Idean Salehyan and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, "Refugees and the Spread of Civil War," *International Organization*, 2006, 335–66, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818306060103.

[12] Idean Salehyan, "The Externalities of Civil Strife: Refugees as a Source of International Conflict," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 4 (2008): 787–801, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2008.00343.x.

statehood and the large-scale population displacement of Arab Palestinians, known as *al-Nakba*. The war escalated after the November 1947 UN Special Committee on Palestine's (UNSCOP) plan to partition Palestine into separate Jewish and Arab territories; beginning with low-level violence between Jewish and Arab Palestinian communities before expanding into to full-scale war. By March 1948, Israeli forces shifted towards offensive operations that included the use of strategic displacement violence,[13] increasing Palestinians' incentives to (preemptively) flee contested territory.[14] Millions of Palestinian civilians were forced to make the decision between fleeing, accepting the risks associated with forced displacement, and remaining in their homes, risking exposure to (further) conflict violence. Ultimately, over 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced, and most (and their descendants) remain so to this day.

Thus, the 1948 War exhibits the core features of conflicts involving strategic displacement violence to which our theory generalizes. Though the aftermath in which refugees were denied the right to return to their homes is an exceptional feature of this case, at the time civilians were making decisions about how to respond to the violence, the permanent status of displacement and statelessness was not known or expected. Many refugees expected displacement to be temporary, famously taking their keys with them, while only in the aftermath would they discover that this would not be an option for most. Furthermore, the 1948 War, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general, represents a critical case for understanding conflict and displacement processes in the context of ethnoterritorial competition,[15] especially conflicts involving claims to a homeland.[16]

We measure Arab Palestinian communities' displacement by drawing upon detailed historical accounts of villages that suffered complete "depopulation"; in which the entire community is displaced during the conflict.[17] These sources identify the proximate cause of

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[13] Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld Publications, 2007), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2006.36.1.6.

[14] Historians debate whether, or the extent to which, strategic displacement operations, including incidents of cleansing violence, were a systematic part of the military strategy. Regardless, Arab Palestinians forced to decide whether and when to flee could not possibly parse Israeli strategy in real time. Even isolated incidents instilled a legitimate fear of victimization that influenced displacement patterns.

[15] Andreas Wimmer and Chris Miner, "The Strategic Logic of Ethnoterritorial Competition: Violence Against Civilians in Africa's Civil Wars," *Journal of Global Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (2020): 389–407, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz009.

[16] Nadav G Shelef, "Unequal Ground: Homelands and Conflict," *International Organization*, 2016, 33–63, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818315000193.

[17] Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, vol. 15 (Cambridge University Press, 1987); Walid Khalidi and Sharif S Elmusa, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Inst for Palestine Studies, 1992).

depopulation in each village in which it occurred. This is necessary to measure our dependent variable of interest, which distinguishes *preemptive evacuation*, in which the entire community exited before Israeli takeover, from those in which a significant portion of the community remained in their villages at the time Israeli forces arrived; the latter including communities that either remained (at least partially) intact and those that were violently expelled by Israeli forces.

To measure social cohesion and other predictors of preemptive evacuation, we draw upon new data extracted from the "Village Files," a survey of Arab Palestinian communities conducted in the early 1940s by the Haganah, the main military organization that would form the core of the Israeli Defense Forces after independence.[18] Of the 562 Village Files in the archives, we include in the sample for analysis only the 249 villages that 1) were not Jewish majority in 1945 Census, 2) had settled populations,[19] and 3) fall within the territory contested in the 1948 War.[20]

We find a positive correlation between village social cohesion and preemptive evacuation during the war, consistent with the theory's implications. This empirical relationship is robust to a variety of alternative covariate adjustment and estimation strategies, including strategic elements of Israeli priorities such as elevation and distance to main routes. Given the observational nature of the data and limitations associated with restricting the sample to villages with Village Files, the analysis does not causally identify the effect of social cohesion on preemptive evacuation. Rather, the empirical association observed in the data available in this case represents an initial step: setting an agenda for future research to interrogate the mechanisms underlying this correlation linking social cohesion and preemptive evacuation. We discuss these and additional avenues for future research in the conclusion.

Beyond exploring the theory's implications, the empirical analysis provides new descriptive insights into the history of the 1948 War and its aftermath. Our focus on civilian agency in displacement processes, and the community-level variation, departs from the

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[18] The Village Files were collected by the perpetrator of violence that generated the variation in community forced displacement under examination. This raises ethical and measurement bias issues, which we discuss below.

[19] We exclude temporary (Khirbe) and nomadic Bedouin villages.

[20] We exclude villages in the portions of the West Bank and southern Gaza that were not contested as part of the 1948 War. Arab state forces had set up static defenses and were mostly successful in preventing Israeli forces' territorial takeover in these areas. Therefore, the Arab Palestinian populations in these territories did not fear displacement violence similar to those within the contested zone. In fact, many of the displaced from within the contested zone fled to these areas in the West Bank and Gaza. Furthermore, empirically we observe none of these communities were depopulated during the war, validating this characterization of *ex ante* incentives and suggesting these areas do not fit within the scope of this article's emphasis on areas of high risk of civilian-targeted violence.

dominant narratives of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, which have focused on either Israeli forces' victimization of the Arab Palestinian population or Palestinian elites' intentional and unintentional actions that encouraged Arab Palestinians to leave their homes. To be sure, Israel's military strategies play a major role in these patterns. But as we show below, there remains local variation in village displacement outcomes that strategic use of violence cannot explain. In this article, we seek to account for this as yet unexplained variation. Furthermore, the Village Files – our main source of information of village social cohesion – have received only limited attention, having been under embargo. We negotiated access to the files in the Haganah Archives, translated them from the original Hebrew, and developed a coding scheme to operationalize the information in each village assessment. Another contribution of this paper is the publication and codification of these documents. By making the original documents and their translated versions publicly accessible, we hope other scholars will incorporate these sources into future research.

Definitions

Preemptive Evacuation

We disaggregate forced displacement into two types based on the timing relative to belligerent ground forces' military operations designed to seize and hold territory in the local area. When civilians emigrate before belligerent attempt to control territory militarily, we label this *preemptive* displacement. When (surviving) civilians migrate after (in response to) belligerent operations to control territory, we label this *reactive* displacement. The distinction does not imply preemptive displacement is any less forced, as the threat of belligerent violence is imminent. Rather, the distinction matters precisely because the tactics belligerents use to take and hold territory may result in civilian casualties, especially in conflicts involving strategic displacement campaigns under investigation here, in which civilian-targeting is intentional. Therefore, whether civilians leave before or only after belligerent arrival has mortal consequences.

For example, we consider the displacement process in the village of Bayt Nabala, in the al-Ramla sub-district, a case of preemptive evacuation. According to the testimony of Ibrahim Katifan Zayd, who was 20 years old at the time of the Nakba, the villagers saw the violence, and subsequent reactive displacement, occurring to villages in their vicinity. While some young men had suggested to build fortifications and defend the village, the elders decided against this strategy because their was no consensus on armed resistance. Instead, they decided to leave collectively as a village, when they heard bombardments in the neighboring villages.[21] In contrast, we consider 'Innaba, in the same sub-district and roughly 10 miles away from Bayt Nabala, a case of reactive evacuation. While evacuating the women and children early, the village mounted a defense force of 200 men that remained in the village. Israeli forces directly bombarded the village with mortars and cornered it on three sides. When the men staging the resistance ran out of ammunition,

[21] https://www.zochrot.org/testimonies/view/56356/he?

they evacuated through the corridor and the Israelis blew up most of the houses in the village to prevent them from returning.[22]

We focus on civilian forced migration as preemptive or reactive with respect to belligerents' attempts to control territory, as opposed to other forms of belligerent presence; for example, intelligence gathering, hit-and-run guerrilla tactics, and other forms of violence that do not result directly in territorial control. That communities may have previously been exposed to belligerent violence does not imply that any subsequent migration must be considered reactive, as civilians may still preempt the belligerent's subsequent attempt to control territory. While civilians may certainly preempt other violence exposure, with similar security implications, we expect the migration processes under these circumstances, especially collective mobilization, differ from those surrounding the belligerent's operations to militarily seize and hold territory.

Community *evacuation* represents a specific manifestation of forced displacement in which (nearly) the entire community leaves their home territory for an extended period of time due to the threat of conflict. Evacuation does not imply permanent relocation: civilians may evacuate to escape violence with the intention of returning once the violence has subsided. We adopt the term evacuation to highlight two specific features of the outcome under investigation.

First, we focus on the civilian community's actions in the process of population displacement. We therefore distinguish from familiar concepts such as *cleansing* or *depopulation* that refer to a perpetrator's actions.[23] Of course, these tactics directly precipitate displacement and civilian casualties, as was the case for Bayt Nabala. We will also occasionally refer to villages as "violently depopulated" or "expelled" at times to highlight this. In fact, a belligerent's use of violent depopulation represents the context in which preemptive evacuation may occur: evacuation does not imply a voluntary process, but rather choices that civilians make under duress, including the expectation of belligerent violence. Still, civilians retain agency over whether, when, and how to respond to wartime security threats. This article investigates variation in the timing of civilian actions with respect to these forms of belligerent violence, thereby emphasizing civilian agency rather than a mechanical relationship between violence and displacement.

Second, we distinguish the outcome of interest from *flight*, *migration*, *exit*, and similar terms that, while highlighting civilian actions, do not necessarily imply complete depopulation. We focus on *evacuation* not because partial depopulation is inconsequential, but because the historical record in the case under investigation is clearer on distinguishing villages that were completely depopulated from those that were not than it is on distinguishing partially depopulated from those that remained intact. The

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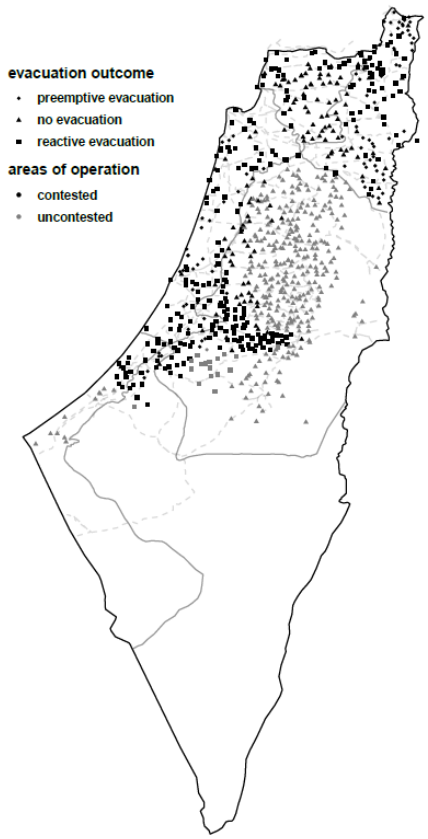
[22] Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, p. 435; Khalidi and Elmusa, *All That Remains*, p. 384

[23] Lichtenheld, "Explaining Population Displacement Strategies in Civil Wars," 256–57.

consequences of mass migration implied by evacuation are of obvious significance, which motivates our inquiry into this specific subset of forced displacement.

Figure 1. Evacuation of Arab Palestinian Villages, 1947–1948

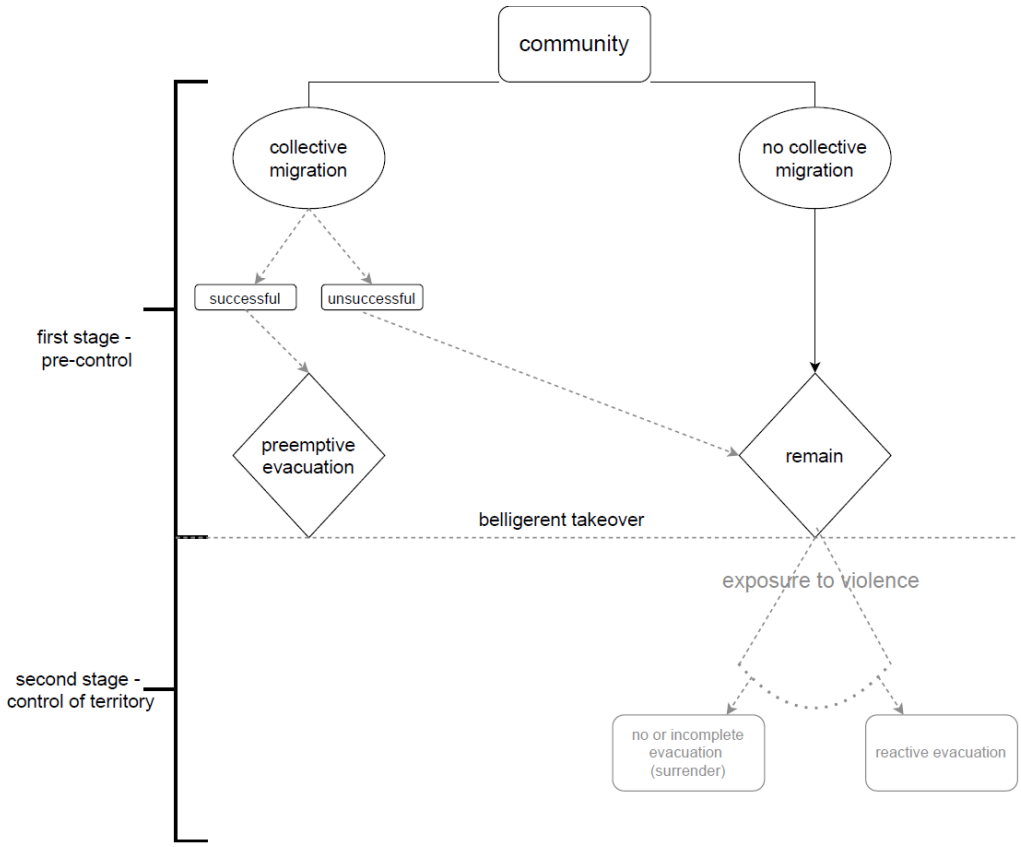


NOTE: The map shows the location of Arab villages in Mandate Palestine and their evacuation outcomes in 1948. Villages shown in black are located behind the frontlines of the Arab state armies, comprising the geographic area relevant to the analysis (531). Gray villages are located within the area of Arab state armies' control and are therefore mostly uncontested (261). Circles indicate villages that experienced preemptive evacuation (86 contested villages), squares indicate villages that experienced reactive evacuation (247 contested villages), and triangles indicate villages that experienced no evacuation (198 contested villages). The solid gray line is the UN partition plan. The dashed gray lines are primary roads.

Figure 1 illustrates the variation in evacuation outcomes in Arab Palestinian villages during the 1948 War, the case examined in this article. The cluster of villages in the eastern and north-central portions of the map (modern-day West Bank) and southwest (southern Gaza), as noted, are excluded from analysis because Israeli forces did not contest them during the 1948 war. The cluster of violently expelled villages (reactive evacuation) in the center represent the area around Jerusalem. After May 15th, the Israelis crossed the UN Partition line specifically to conquer Jerusalem, which was of immense cultural and strategic importance to both sides. While strategic and military factors can explain why the rate of expulsion is higher near Jerusalem compared to other regions, 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.

Figure 2. Preemptive and Reactive Evacuation in Conflict Processes



NOTE: The flowchart illustrates the process underlying the conceptual distinction between preemptive and reactive displacement/evacuation.

The conceptual framework implies a two-stage displacement process, illustrated in Figure 2, which structures our theoretical argument. In the *pre-control* period before belligerent territorial seizure, civilians may take action to mobilize collective migration or not. If the community does attempt collective migration, and they are successful exiting before belligerent arrival, the community's outcome is *preemptive evacuation*. Bayt Nabala, for example, did exactly this. Prior to the arrival of belligerents, they evacuated the entire community to safety. If community members do not mobilize collective migration in this period, or they attempt but fail to evacuate everyone in time, at least some community members *remain* in the territory at the time of belligerent's attempted takeover. In 'Innaba, for examples, the remaining defenders made a conscious choice to stay, knowing that the outcome would likely be engaging the belligerents' offensive.

The second stage, *control*, begins when belligerent forces arrive in attempt to control territory. The belligerent observes the community members that remain, and may deploy strategic displacement violence to forcibly expel the population. At this point, civilians may (be forced to) flee violence, collectively or individually, in response. If (nearly all) surviving community members exit, the community's outcome is *reactive evacuation*. If at least some members remain, the community is *not evacuated*. We emphasize that communities *not evacuated* include a huge range; from those that remain largely intact (likely spared violence exposure) to those in which partial depopulation occurs.

Civilians must make decisions whether to mobilize collective migration in the first stage before they know the level of belligerent violence, and by implication whether their community will reactively evacuate or remain at least partially intact, in the second stage. While we observe the violence in 'Innaba opon Israeli takeover, we cannot know for sure whether Bayt Nabala would have suffered strategic displacement violence had some community members chosen to remain. Therefore, to investigate our theory of preemptive evacuation, we collapse reactive evacuation and "not evacuated" to the single category of "remain"; as Figure 2 illustrates the potential outcomes of the first stage. Explaining preemptive evacuation prior to belligerent takeover is the logical first step. To explain *reactive evacuation* (in the second stage) or overall displacement (combining preemptive and reactive evacuation), requires understanding selection into which territorial units retain civilian residents when belligerents seize control, and potentially deploy civilian-targeted violence. Because explaining variation in these subsequent conflict and displacement processes will require examining different outcomes and adopting additional assumptions about belligerents' strategic incentives to adopt a particular repertoire and intensity of violence, we leave this effort for future research.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion refers 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)."[24] At the group level, social cohesion refers to the distribution of these membership attitudes and behaviors in the relevant population. Namely, "groups are cohesive when group-level conditions are producing positive membership attitudes and behaviors and when group members' interpersonal interactions are operating to maintain these group-level conditions,"[25] These

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[24] Noah E Friedkin, "Social Cohesion," *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 410, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110625.

[25] Friedkin, 410.

conditions represent the foundation for the cognate concept of social capital, "the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively."[26]

Individuals retain membership and identity attachments to multiple, overlapping, social groups simultaneously. *Community* social cohesion, specifically, implies the distribution of residents' attitudes and behaviors relevant to the community, 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. 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 identities.

For example, we consider the village Hadatha in the Tiberias sub-district, a case of high social cohesion. The Village Files on Hadatha indicated broad acceptance and a high degree of trust in the local leadership and good relations between community members, including the absence of any blood feuds or family rivalries. The Villagers engaged in a variety of public goods provision and community activities collectively, such as weddings and holiday celebrations and funding a public madaffa (guest house).

By contrast, we consider the village of al-Maliha, in the Jerusalem sub-district, a case of low social cohesion. In testimony about the period, Musa Muhammad Daoud Salame emphasized that there was low trust between people in the village,[27] and the Village Files for al-Mahila highlight multiple blood feuds between rival clans. There are no public madaffas or other shared public goods expenditures that community members contribute to collectively, and there are multiple mukhtars (a local notable and leader), as no one leader can garner broad acceptance across rival clans.

Civilian agency and forced displacement in armed conflict

Under what conditions do civilians adopt certain survival strategies over others when war approaches their doorstep? The (expected) intensity of conflict violence[28] and the state's

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[26] Michael Woolcock and Deepa Narayan, "Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy," *The World Bank Research Observer* 15, no. 2 (2000): 226, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/15.2.225.

[27] For testimony see here: https://zochrot.org/he/testimony/56300

[28] Susanne Schmeidl, "Exploring the Causes of Forced Migration: A Pooled Time-Series Analysis, 1971-1990," *Social Science Quarterly*, 1997, 284–308; Davenport, Moore, and Poe, "Sometimes You Just Have to Leave"; Moore and Shellman, "Fear of Persecution"; Sarah Kenyon Lischer, "Causes and Consequences of Conflict-Induced Displacement," *Civil Wars* 9, no. 2 (2007): 142–55, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240701207302.

history of repression[29] encourage vulnerable populations to flee. The *form* of violence also matters. Campaigns of mass killing, such as genocide and politicide, and other strategic displacement violence are especially likely to trigger population displacement.[30] By comparison, civilians are more likely to remain in their home territory when civilian-targeted violence is more selectively focused on controlling civilian defection.[31] This logic also explains local variation in displacement outcomes. Belligerents are more likely to use strategic displacement violence in areas where they lack the capacity to identify and selectively target enemies, or where their motivations or requirements to hold territory do not depend on civilian support.[32]

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[29] Eric Neumayer, "Bogus Refugees? The Determinants of Asylum Migration to Western Europe," *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (2005): 389–409, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2005.00370.x; Will H Moore and Stephen M Shellman, "Whither Will They Go? A Global Study of Refugees' Destinations, 1965–1995," *International Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2007): 811–34, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2007.00478.x.

[30] Moore and Shellman, "Refugee or Internally Displaced Person? To Where Should One Flee?"; Lischer, "Causes and Consequences of Conflict-Induced Displacement"; Greenhill, *Weapons of Mass Migration*; Lichtenheld, "Explaining Population Displacement Strategies in Civil Wars."

[31] Oliver Kaplan, *Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2017), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316671887.

[32] Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818462; Reed M Wood, "Rebel Capability and Strategic Violence Against Civilians," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 5 (2010): 601–14, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310376473; Reed M Wood, "Opportunities to Kill or Incentives for Restraint? Rebel Capabilities, the Origins of Support, and Civilian Victimization in Civil War," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 31, no. 5 (2014): 461–80, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0738894213510122; Laia Balcells, "Rivalry and Revenge: Violence Against Civilians in Conventional Civil Wars," *International Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2010): 291–313, https://doi.org/j.1468-2478.2010.00588.x; Laia Balcells, *Rivalry and Revenge* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316392737; Yuri M Zhukov, "Population Resettlement in War: Theory and Evidence from Soviet Archives," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 7 (2015): 1155–85, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713520590; Justin Schon, "Focus on the Forest, Not the Trees: A Changepoint Model of Forced Displacement," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28, no. 4 (2015): 437–67, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feu037; Abbey Steele, "Electing Displacement: Political Cleansing in Apartadó, Colombia," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 3 (2011): 423–45, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002711400975; Abbey Steele, *Democracy and Displacement in Colombia's Civil War* (Cornell University Press, 2017),

Though clearly important, belligerent violence cannot entirely explain variation in displacement outcomes for three main reasons: civilians may have competing *incentives* related to non-security interests even during armed conflict, lack critical *information* about the risk of violence exposure due to the "fog of war," and vary in their *capabilities* to resist or evade belligerents' actions. Civilians may (rationally) choose to remain in their homes despite violence.[33] Individuals may possess identity attachments to their home territory, strong economic incentives,[34] or social connections that reduce their security risks in the home territory.[35] Still, these factors can cut both ways. Strong social ties in one's home community may reduce the costs of fleeing because trusted community members remain to protect property left behind.[36] Past violence exposure may, in fact, motivate individuals to engage in pro-social behavior to support others, making them more likely remain in their homes or at least delay migration.[37]

Civilians may face disincentives to flee based on the costs of displacement. Political authorities in areas of refuge may vary in their treatment of displaced persons, and in their ability to absorb them into the economy. Therefore, as the security, political, and economic conditions in neighboring or other destination countries improve, civilians' willingness to seek refuge across borders may increase.[38] Aside from government policy, sudden

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https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.7591/cornell/9781501713736.001.0001; Wimmer and Miner, "The Strategic Logic of Ethnoterritorial Competition."

[33] Steele, "Seeking Safety"; Melander and Öberg, "Time to Go? Duration Dependence in Forced Migration"; Stefanie Engel and Ana Maria Ibáñez, "Displacement Due to Violence in Colombia: A Household-Level Analysis," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 55, no. 2 (2007): 335–65, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/508712.

[34] Engel and Ibáñez, "Displacement Due to Violence in Colombia"; Mathias Czaika and Krisztina Kis-Katos, "Civil Conflict and Displacement: Village-Level Determinants of Forced Migration in Aceh," *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 3 (2009): 399–418, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309102659; Prakash Adhikari, "Conflict-Induced Displacement, Understanding the Causes of Flight," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 1 (2013): 82–89, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00598.x.

[35] Jerome F Marston, "Resisting Displacement: Leveraging Interpersonal Ties to Remain Despite Criminal Violence in Medellin, Colombia," *Comparative Political Studies*, 2020, 0010414020912276, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020912276; Adhikari, "The Plight of the Forgotten Ones."

[36] Engel and Ibáñez, "Displacement Due to Violence in Colombia."

[37] Justin Schon, *Surviving the War in Syria* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108909716.

[38] Davenport, Moore, and Poe, "Sometimes You Just Have to Leave"; Eric Neumayer, "Asylum Destination Choice: What Makes Some West European Countries More Attractive

migration may stimulate anti-refugee/migrant backlash in host communities, which reduce individuals' prospects associated with the exit option.[39] 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.

Civilians' incentives to stay or flee may also depend on what others do. Under certain conditions, they may prefer to flee or stay *collectively*, in order to maximize personal security by clustering in geographic space. Clustering may increase the *group's* risk of being targeted with violence, but decrease each *individual's* risk of being personally targeted compared to resettling alone, in which case they are easily identifiable.[40] Under certain conditions, individuals may remain when they have social connections that can be leveraged to reduce personal security risks.[41] However, civilians may, alternatively, leverage this social capital for protection from violence and exploitation through the precarious process of migration through the conflict zone.[42] Whether social connections increase civilians' propensity to remain or flee depends, largely, on the security situation. When threats to security intensify, civilians increasingly leverage social capital to migrate.

As civilians' *perceptions* of the security situation is what drives responses to potential violence exposure, the information environment plays an important role alongside incentives. With perfect information about the level of violence in their area, civilians would flee only if and when an unbearable level of violence becomes imminent. However, armed conflict generates tremendous uncertainty on many fronts ("fog of war"), for both belligerents and civilians alike. Civilians are uncertain about whether belligerents will actually seize control in their specific location, the level and form of violence and property

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Than Others?" *European Union Politics* 5, no. 2 (2004): 155–80, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116504042444; Neumayer, "Bogus Refugees? The Determinants of Asylum Migration to Western Europe"; Eric Neumayer, "Asylum Recognition Rates in Western Europe: Their Determinants, Variation, and Lack of Convergence," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 1 (2005): 43–66, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002704271057; Christopher Blair, Guy Grossman, and Jeremy M Weinstein, "Forced Displacement and Asylum Policy in the Developing World," *SSRN 3565557*, 2020, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3565557.

[39] Anna Getmansky, Tolga Sınmazdemir, and Thomas Zeitzoff, "Refugees, Xenophobia, and Domestic Conflict: Evidence from a Survey Experiment in Turkey," *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 4 (2018): 491–507, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343317748719.

[40] Abbey Steele, "Civilian Resettlement Patterns in Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 56, no. 1 (2019): 34, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343318820576.

[41] Marston, "Resisting Displacement"; Adhikari, "The Plight of the Forgotten Ones."

[42] Schon, *Surviving the War in Syria*.

destruction belligerent control will entail, and the duration of active fighting. They cannot know which belligerent will control the area after the fighting stops, what the political order will look like, or the economic opportunities available. For example, Mara Revkin[43] 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. Civilians 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.

Communication networks disseminate information needed to mitigate sources of uncertainty outlined above and facilitate collective action,[44] including in conflict settings.[45] Civilians learn about the belligerents' use of violence, their proximity to the fighting, and strategic developments in the conflict that affect the community's risk of conflict exposure. They also communicate about expected (re)actions to these developments, and may learn from those who have migrated about conditions in areas of refuge.

Civilians are not passive victims reacting to circumstances, but rather strategically take actions to shape conflict and displacement processes. Crucially, they vary in their capabilities to do so. 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, expecting to leverage this power to shape

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[43] "Competitive Governance and Displacement Decisions Under Rebel Rule: Evidence from the Islamic State in Iraq," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 2020, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002720951864.

[44] Michael Suk-Young Chwe, "Structure and Strategy in Collective Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 1 (1999): 128–56, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/210269; Roger V Gould, "Collective Action and Network Structure," *American Sociological Review*, 1993, 182–96, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2095965; Matthew O Jackson, Tomas Rodriguez-Barraquer, and Xu Tan, "Social Capital and Social Quilts: Network Patterns of Favor Exchange," *The American Economic Review* 102, no. 5 (2012): 1857–97, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.102.5.1857; David A Siegel, "Social Networks and Collective Action," *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 1 (2009): 122–38, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2008.00361.x.

[45] Jennifer M Larson and Janet I Lewis, "Rumors, Kinship Networks, and Rebel Group Formation," *International Organization* 72, no. 4 (2018): 871–903, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000243; Janet I Lewis, "How Does Ethnic Rebellion Start?" *Comparative Political Studies* 50, no. 10 (2017): 1420–50, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016672235; Janet I Lewis, *How Insurgency Begins: Rebel Group Formation in Uganda and Beyond* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108855969.

the local political order under belligerent presence. A community's capabilities for engagement and/or evasion strategies are shaped by a variety of factors, including the strength of local institutions and leadership,[46] organizational capacity,[47] and social structure.[48]

How Social Cohesion Influences Displacement during Conflict

Social cohesion enhances communities' capabilities to mobilize collective action by 1) converging individuals' incentives and 2) mitigating information challenges. By enhancing collective action, social cohesion strengthens the community's ability to mobilize *both* mass migration *and* strategies to engage with belligerents in order to preserve the community in home territory, including collective resistance. Therefore, these direct effects are insufficient, on their own, to predict displacement outcomes. To explain the relationship between social cohesion and preemptive evacuation requires taking into account the community's incentives for evasion (leading to forced displacement) versus engagement.

We argue the effect of community social cohesion is moderated by the expected costs of remaining in place; chiefly the risk of lethal displacement violence. Civilians' primary interest is in survival, but they also have strong secondary interest to remain in their homes. This implies that civilians are willing to accept some risk, including of bodily harm, in order to remain in their homes through conflict. As the risk of lethal displacement

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[46] Ana Arjona, *Rebelocracy: Social Order in the Colombian Civil War* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316421925.

[47] Kaplan, *Resisting War*; Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, "Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 03 (2013): 418–32, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000208.

[48] Roger D Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612725; Cassy Dorff, "Violence, Kinship Networks, and Political Resilience: Evidence from Mexico," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 4 (2017): 558–73, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343317691329; Jana Krause, *Resilient Communities: Non-Violence and Civilian Agency in Communal War* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108675079; Michael A. Rubin, "Rebel Territorial Control and Civilian Collective Action in Civil War: Evidence from the Communist Insurgency in the Philippines," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 2-3 (2020): 459–89, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002719863844; Emily Kalah Gade, "Social Isolation and Repertoires of Resistance," *American Political Science Review*, 2020, 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000015; Anastasia Shesterinina, *Mobilizing in Uncertainty: Collective Identities and War in Abkhazia* (Cornell University Press, 2021), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2022.2063477.

violence grows, the survival imperative increasingly supersedes secondary interests. In conflicts in which (civilians believe) the use of strategic displacement violence is widespread and intense, we expect social cohesion will increase preemptive evacuation, as civilians mobilize collective action towards evasion for survival.

Social Cohesion Enhances Collective Action During Conflict

Social cohesion increases community members' incentives and capabilities to coordinate a response to the risk of violence in order to act collectively and is associated with deeper experience with cooperation across social cleavage lines to resolve problems or achieve common goals. Where community social cohesion is especially low, as in episodes of communal conflict or inter-group rivalries over political power or economic resources, civilians may face incentives to compete rather than cooperate in response to belligerent activity.[49] Communal conflict precludes, or makes more difficult, collective engagement with belligerents, but also collective migration. Community members may choose to remain in the home territory despite the risk of belligerent violence in order to protect their assets from a rival group, or to take advantage of rivals' flight in order to seize disputed assets.

By contrast, in communities with higher social cohesion, civilians may have incentives to cooperate with others in community-level collective action. They may also worry less that neighbors will seize their assets should they decide to flee violence.[50] Social cohesion strengthens networks of trust and motivates individuals to engage in pro-social behavior, thereby facilitating stronger, more organized resistance against more powerful belligerents,[51] and other coping strategies to remain in home territory under the threat of violence,[52] but also to mobilize collective flight from areas of violence when necessary. Social cohesion also plays an important role in reducing uncertainty about conflict processes, such as belligerent movements in proximity to the community, and in coordinating expectations of others' behavior, giving communities the opportunity to flee before belligerents arrive.[53] Communication is more efficient when traveling through dense and far-reaching networks of personalized trust. Warnings about impending violence, and expectations of others' reciprocal pro-social behavior converge, quickly reach a larger portion of the population.

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[49] Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*.

[50] Engel and Ibáñez, "Displacement Due to Violence in Colombia."

[51] Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*; Dorff, "Violence, Kinship Networks, and Political Resilience"; Gade, "Social Isolation and Repertoires of Resistance."

[52] Adhikari, "The Plight of the Forgotten Ones"; Kaplan, *Resisting War*.

[53] Kara Ross Camarena, "Leaving as a Community: How Uncertainty and Group Dynamics Inform the Choice to Flee Violence," n.d.; Steele, *Democracy and Displacement in Colombia's Civil War*.

Social Cohesion Increases Preemptive Evacuation in Strategic Displacement Campaigns

To explain variation in community-level evacuation requires taking into account the community's costs associated with belligerent arrival. When the expected costs, in terms of violence exposure, are sufficiently low, communities may leverage social cohesion toward resistance or autonomy strategies to retain a strong presence in the home territory.[54] 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.

In settings characterized by high expected costs associated with belligerent territorial control, communities instead leverage social cohesion to mobilize collective migration to evade violence exposure and repression, increasing the likelihood of *preemptive evacuation*. Civilians may expect higher costs when the belligerent has primary objectives to holding the territory that do not depend on civilian compliance, such as extracting lootable natural resources or controlling strategic routes for moving military personnel and supplies, with limited or no interest in extracting support from the local population. The expected costs are greatest when a belligerent's main objective is to displace the local population in order to shift the demographic balance in favor of its core constituency, as in strategic displacement campaigns.

In this article, we focus on the latter conflicts characterized by high costs of belligerent control that incentivize collective migration. In this context, a variety of factors influence why some communities that attempt collective migration are able to achieve preemptive evacuation. Terrain and transportation infrastructure affect the cost and speed of travel. The location and spatial distribution of belligerent presence and violence along pathways to areas of refuge influence the cost of travel and the risk of death or injury. Vertical ties to political or military personnel in government or insurgent organizations can reduce these barriers. We argue social cohesion represents a critical factor shaping civilian capabilities to migrate, and especially consequential relative to these other factors in the process of *collective migration* leading to preemptive evacuation. Social cohesion increases the speed with which communities communicate information about the risk of (imminent) violence to all members, converge on a collective response, and mobilize resources and logistics to leave in time, thereby increasing the prospects for successfully evacuating prior to belligerent arrival.

Hypothesis: *In conflicts involving strategic displacement violence, the likelihood of preemptive evacuation increases with community social cohesion.*

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[54] Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion*; Arjona, *Rebelocracy*; Kaplan, *Resisting War*; Rubin, "Rebel Territorial Control and Civilian Collective Action in Civil War."

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. The time from the first individual decision to flee until full evacuation, is short. In larger communities, the longer time until evacuation leaves the community vulnerable to violence exposure in the interim. Therefore, social cohesion plays an essential role in closing this mobilization gap, critical to preemptive evacuation, in large communities but not in small communities.

Hypothesis: *In conflicts involving strategic displacement violence, the positive association between community social cohesion and preemptive evacuation increases with the size of the population.*

To illustrate the mechanism linking social cohesion to preemptive evacuation, we return to contrasting experiences of the villages of Hadatha and al-Maliha during the 1948 War in Mandate Palestine, the case under examination here. Based on its entry in the Village Files and residents' testimonies collected years after the Nakba, detailed above, we consider Hadatha as having high levels of social cohesion. Once the Israeli forces began seizing control in nearby villages, and especially after hearing about the massacre in Deir Yasin, the community decided to evacuate. As there were no cars in the village, they collectively rented a truck to transport the women, children and elderly; the men left afterwards. Almost the entire community evacuated together to Jordan.[55] We argue that the community's high social cohesion was crucial to their ability to reach consensus on a strategy of collective migration, and to execute it efficiently to leave preemptively, before violence arrived in the village.

By contrast, villagers in al-Maliha were unable to arrive at such a consesus decision, and the Israeli forces arrived in the village to find it still inhabited. Though larger in size, al-Maliha had similar sources of wealth and income to Hadatha, but exhibited lower social cohesion. The Village Files for al-Mahila highlight multiple blood feuds between rival clans and lack of trust in local leadership. In testimony about the period, Musa Muhammad Daoud Salame emphasized that there was low trust between people in the village, and each person responded to the events as they saw fit.[56] The community's debates regarding how to respond to calls from Adb al-Qadir al-Husayni — the Jerusalem-based leader of one of the major Palestinian national parties — for Palestinians to join his resistance forces provide an illustration. As many in al-Maliha opposed sending military-aged men to fight elsewhere, one of the mukhtars asked people to remain to defend their village. However, several community members ignored the plea, arguing that this mukhtar lacked legitimacy, having had sold land to Jewish buyers. These divisions within al-Maliha precluded a

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[55] Testimony is recorded here: https://zochrot.org/he/testimony/56284, https://zochrot.org/he/testimony/56286

[56] For testimony see here: https://zochrot.org/he/testimony/56300

collective response to conflict dynamics as they unfolded. Families left individually or in small groups, rather than collectively, and dispersed to different locations, rather than a single area as the community in Hadatha had done. For the most part community members left al-Mahila only after Israeli forces arrived in the village, rather than preemptively.

In these two villages, communities responded to the risk of conflict violence differently depending on their level of social cohesion. Crucially, this also led to distinct forced displacement outcomes. In the remainder of the article, we examine this relationship systematically across a large sample of villages to explore the extent to which the theory's empirical implications are consistent with the broader patterns in village depopulation during the 1948 war in Mandate Palestine.

Research Design

We test the argument in the context of the 1948 War in Mandate Palestine, using village-level data from Arab Palestinian villages. We focus on a single case in order to observe sufficiently fine-grained data required to investigate the theory's community-level empirical implications regarding variation in forced displacement during armed conflict. We draw upon rich historical research documenting detailed local-level information on the Arab Palestinian population's displacement during the 1948 war[57] to measure preemptive evacuation. Crucially, the historical sources record not only whether communities suffered population displacement, but also the proximate cause. This allows us to observe whether community members fled preemptively or were expelled by belligerent violence, necessary to testing our theory of preemptive evacuation.

We measure Arab Palestinian communities' social cohesion by drawing upon primary archival documents that record information on social, political, and economic conditions within Arab Palestinian villages during the years preceding the 1948 War. The Village Files include information about each clan in a village, which represents a primary social group through which members organize social, economic and political activity. The documents record clan 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 barriers to inter-clan social cohesion within Arab Palestinian communities during this period.

Mandate Palestine and the 1948 War

The transition from Ottoman rule to British colonial authority in Palestine following the First World War ushered in dramatic social and political changes. With the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the British recognized Jewish national rights, but did not do the same for Arab Palestinians. The influx of Jewish migration and organized land purchases significantly

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[57] Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*; Khalidi and Elmusa, *All That Remains*.

impacted social and economic conditions for the Arab Palestinians across social strata. These changes in dominant cleavages shaped the national Palestinian identity and transformed relations with the British and the Jewish population in Palestine.

Palestinian nationalist mobilization reached its apex in the revolt of 1936-1939. Though it enjoyed initial successes, pressuring the British to revoke Jewish immigration rights, the British ultimately quashed the revolt by force.[58] The national leadership and institutions essentially lost credibility among many Arab Palestinians, and the movement devolved into infighting and fragmentation. Collaboration with Zionists, considered a treacherous act during the revolt, quickly became the norm in its aftermath. 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."[59] 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.[60]

By contrast, during the 1940s the Zionist movement accelerated institutional statebuilding efforts and accumulated materiel and military training in preparation for confrontation with the Arab Palestinian population and neighboring Arab states. The Zionists set up large-scale illegal immigration operations, smuggling in over 20,000 Jews by boats in defiance of the British white paper revoking Jewish immigration. The Zionist Haganah paramilitary force expanded military intelligence operations to obtain information from collaborators, Jewish scouts, former rebels, and even aerial photographs, though in the "fog of war" these were rarely used for operational purposes during the 1948 War.[61] The "Village Files," the survey of Arab Palestinian villages we use in the empirical section, represent one such source.

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[58] Matthew Hughes, "The Banality of Brutality: British Armed Forces and the Repression of the Arab Revolt in Palestine, 1936–39," *The English Historical Review* 124, no. 507 (2009): 313–54, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/cep002.

[59] Hillel Cohen, *Army of Shadows: Palestinian Collaboration with Zionism, 1917–1948* (Univ of California Press, 2009), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/978052093398, pg. 208.

[60] Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine: Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939-1948* (SUNY Press, 1991); Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139013239; Bayan Nuweihid Al-Hout, "The Palestinian Political Elite During the Mandate Period," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 9, no. 1 (1979): 85–111, https://doi.org/10.2307/2536320.

[61] Shimri Salomon, "The Village Files Project, Part 2: 1945-1948," *Haganah Quarterly Bulletin*, no. 2 (2010).

Ultimately, the Zionists' sustained campaign of anti-colonial violence convinced British policymakers that maintaining control over Palestine was more trouble than it was worth.[62] The British delegated the Palestine problem to the United Nations, which 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 the majority plan proposed to partition the Mandate into Jewish and Arab non-contiguous territories. The alternative minority plan was more in line with Arab preferences and proposed a bi-national federal state. Jewish-Zionist leaders accepted the UN majority plan, but Arab Palestinian leaders and Arab state leaders rejected it, as the proposal consigned a substantial Arab population to the Jewish territory and less cultivable land to the Arab Palestinian territory. After the proposal, inter-communal violence escalated in the ethnically mixed larger cities,[63] which quickly led to tit-for-tat exchanges between Jewish and Arab Palestinian militias. 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, were left to fend for themselves as invading Arab state forces failed to protect them.

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 period (November 1947 - February 1948) the Haganah was mainly positioned defensively and the fighting is characterized by harassment and reprisal attacks between Jewish and local militia of Arab Palestinian communities. By the end of February 1948, the Haganah began adopting strategic displacement violence, expelling Arab Palestinians from their homes in contested territory. This became more systematic with the adoption of Plan Dalet on March 10, 1948. Having secured strategic advantage over the local Arab Palestinian militias, in the second phase (March - October 1948), the Haganah shifted to an offensive campaign to seize and hold territory, in anticipation of the British withdrawal. This period included the largest episode of forced displacement, with strategic displacement violence primarily along strategic routes. By May 1948 neighboring Arab state forces began invading the areas of Mandatory Palestine, but failed to make inroads to protect Arab Palestinian communities, except for areas in the Jordanian front. In the third phase (November 1948 until the cessation of hostilities in March 1949), Israelis renewed their offensive, resulting in another round of military operations to seize and hold territory which again resulted in massive forced displacement of Arab Palestinians.

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

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[62] Bruce Hoffman, *Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel, 1917-1947* (Vintage, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110626407-014.

[63] David Tal, *War in Palestine, 1948: Israeli and Arab Strategy and Diplomacy* (Routledge, 2004).

observe variation in whether villages were depopulated, and whether the village resisted or surrendered. Until April, most villages evacuated before the arrival of Haganah or other Jewish armed groups. 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[64] characterizes Israel's policy towards Arab villages on the main strategic routes as "inconsistent, circumstantial and haphazard."

While a mass exodus occurred, over 130,000 individuals in 82 villages and three cities elected to surrender and remain under Israeli control. The high levels of fragmentation within Arab Palestinian society meant many villages adopted independent strategies with respect to the Haganah or other Jewish armed groups, if and when they arrived.

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 clans, and marriages frequently occurred within a clan, or within the village. In Artas, an Arab Palestinian village near Bethlehem, in 1944, over seventy percent of marriages occurred within the village.[65] Inter-village relations were limited: Morris refers to the villages as "autarchic or semi-autarchic."[66] To be sure, life in Mandate Palestine was not confined to rural villages. There existed robust, often ethnically heterogeneous, cities throughout the colony, such as Haifa, Jerusalem, and Acre. We chose the rural village as the unit of analysis here because none of the cities were completely depopulated and we do not have detailed data on the social structure of these cities (in addition, the social structure of these much larger entities is orders of magnitude more complex than in the villages). Concretely, this means that all the villages in our statistical sample are rural villages.

While clans tended to be homogeneous in terms of religion or ethnicity, many villages included clans from divergent backgrounds. In many villages, prominent clans 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 clan level. This often led to divisions along clan lines, with rivals supporting opposing national political parties. These divisions were both exacerbated and exploited by British colonial rule. The British exerted authority at the local level through traditional

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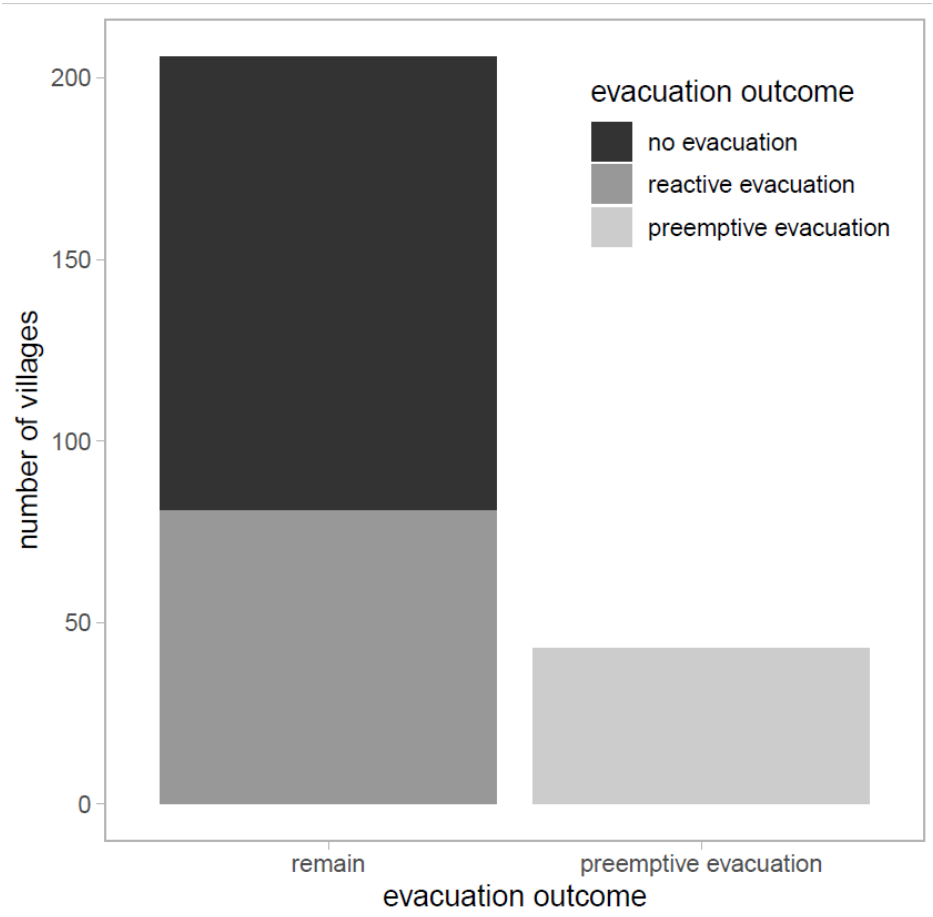
[64] *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, pg. 198.

[65] Ylana N. Miller, "From Village to Nation: Government and Society in Rural Palestine, 1920-1948," *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I*, 1975.

[66] Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2004), pg. 109.

village structures. Colonial governance was often challenged from within the village since often "conflict was as permanent as agreement in the dynamic village society."[67]

Figure 3: Distribution of Arab Palestinian Village Evacuation in Mandate Palestine, 1948



NOTE: The bar plot shows the distribution of the evacuation outcome in the sample. Of the 249 Arab villages included in the final sample, 125 did not evacuate, 81 evacuated after Israel took over (reactive evacuation), and 43 preemptively evacuated. We combine villages that experience reactive evacuation and those not evacuated into one category of those that remain at least partially intact when Israeli forces arrived in the village (206 total).

Measuring Preemptive Evacuation

We measure community evacuation using data from the *Atlas of Palestine*,[68] which combines historical accounts by Morris[69] and Khalidi and Elmusa[70].[71] We operationalize

[67] Miller, "From Village to Nation," pg. 66.

[68] Salman H Abu-Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine, 1948* (Palestine Land Society, 2004).

the distinction between *preemptive* and *reactive* evacuation by drawing upon the six distinct proximate causes of village evacuation enumerated in Morris[72]:

- 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;[73]
- Influence of fall of, or exodus from, neighboring town.

The first two types attribute the proximate cause of evacuation to military-perpetrated violence, and so are considered *reactive*. 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 remain populated (at least partially), we observe three distinct displacement outcomes. Villages that remain populated (no evacuation) did not necessarily escape violence or forced displacement.

The theory advanced above focuses on the first stage in the proposed displacement process, explaining variation in whether communities were depopulated before Israeli takeover. Therefore, the outcome in the empirical analysis is a binary variable for preemptive evacuation. We collapse "reactive evacuation" and "no evacuation" outcomes into a single category because, during the time period in which preemptive flight is an available option, civilians do not know yet whether they will be exposed to violence should they remain in the home territory.[74] Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the binary outcome variable in the sample of Arab Palestinian villages included in analysis. Forty-three villages in the sample preemptively evacuated, while in 206 at least some civilians remained at the time the Israeli military seized control in the area.

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[69] *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*.

[70] *All That Remains*.

[71] Morris used Israeli archives, while Khalidi's accounts come from the *Palestine Index Gazeteer's* list of villages.

[72] *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*.

[73] The 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.

[74] We refer the reader back to Figure 2 to illustrate why we collapse this variable.

Measuring Social Cohesion from the Village Files

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 and scouting missions. The Shai began recruiting Arab Palestinian informants and trained Zionist scouts to collect a slew of information on each Arab Palestinian village, including demographic, economic, social and security (including activities during the revolt of 1936-39) conditions. Ezra Danin, the project's leader, composed a uniform questionnaire to ensure that the information was collected systematically.[75] The authors scanned the entire repository of original documents, translated them to English from the original Hebrew, and developed an operationalization scheme to measure variables of interest for use in village-level statistical analysis.

In addition to village-level characteristics, files also include select information at the clan level, including their affiliations with political parties, their size (number of members/households), and the existence of rivalries and blood feuds. These indicators are imperfect proxies for social cohesion, and emphasize *barriers* to cohesion to distinguish villages on this key variable. Still, they represent credible measures of social cohesion, as they capturing the distribution of resources and interests across the primary social units within this context and the relationships between them.

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 clans are unified in their political affiliations with respect to 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 1 if only one faction has support in the village (each clan supports the same faction or is unaffiliated with any faction), and 0 if at least one clan supports the opposite faction. Villages in which the clans 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 clans are politically united on the national political cleavage enjoy greater social cohesion through common cause.

The second variable captures whether there exists intra-community conflict ("rivalry" and "blood feuds") between clans. Villages with active, or recent histories of, inter-clan rivalry or blood feuds clearly suffer high barriers to cooperation and exchange of resources across clan lines. Individuals may harbor weaker or more negative attitudes towards the community as a whole relative to attitudes toward the parochial clan group, which constrains the extent of their positive social ties in the network from which they may seek to acquire mobilization resources. 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.

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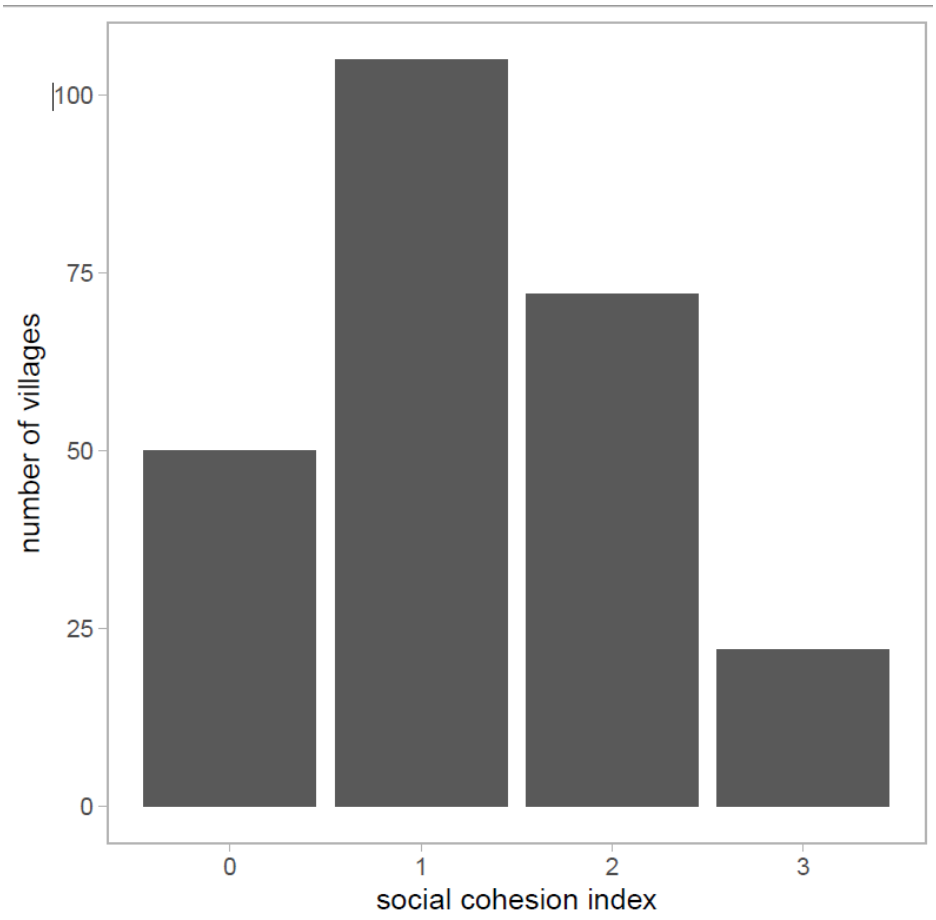
[75] In the appendix we include the 30-item questionnaire and a translated file for Qira, in the Haifa subdistrict.

Figure 4. Distribution of the Social Cohesion Index in Arab Palestinian Villages



NOTE: The social cohesion index is an ordered categorical variable with four values (0–3). It is comprised of indicators for political unification/polarization, internal social conflict, and clan structure. The bar plot shows the number of villages in each category.

The third variable measures village clan structure. Villages with more clans of substantial membership face higher barriers to social cohesion and collective action than those with fewer clans. To see why this is important, consider two stylized villages each with two clans. In Village A, clans A.1 and A.2 both have 100 members. In village B, clan B.1 has 100 members but B.2 has only 25 members. Whereas in A we may say there are 2 clans that influence, and perhaps compete over, collective decision-making, in village B we may find that the significantly larger clan B.1 drives much of the village decision-making and the smaller B.2 must follow.

To capture this feature of clan structure, we require a measure that incorporates not only the number of distinct clans in the village but also their relative sizes with respect to one

another. We use the formula for the "effective number of parties" in a party system.[76] 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 clans is less than 2, which is the median number of clans in the sample (in addition to making intuitive sense to capture social division within the community).[77]

Figure 4 shows the distribution of our social cohesion index across villages in the sample.

To Illustrate the construction of the social cohesion variable we return to the villages of Hadatha and al-Maliha. Hadatha, which we measured as having high social cohesion, had a single clan - Dar Abu al-Hija, all committed to the Majlasi political party. The Village Files indicate that the relations between villagers was "normal," meaning the absence of contentious relations and blood feuds. Hadatha scored a three on our social cohesion index because it showed coalescence around a shared political and social view, was united around a single clan and the absence of intra-village rivalries. Al-Maliha, on the other hand, scored low on social cohesion. It had 4 different clans ranging in size from a few dozen members to several hundred, leading to resentment against the largest and strongest clan - the Darwish. All clans competed over leadership of the village and used political connections and favors to influence village politics and clan standing. The Village Files indicate that "a strong enmity" exists between the clans. Hassin Mahmud, one of the village leader's father from the Odeh clan, was murdered by several members of the Rashid clan, who then served some time in prison. Both within and across clans, the village was divided in its political support for the Moardin and Majlasin parties, with strong ties to each within Jerusalem, increasing the political divisions within the village. Al-Maliha scored a zero on social cohesion.

Measurement and Ethical Questions on the Use of the Village Files

Archival materials are not neutral sources of information, but themselves sites of "power, inequality, and erasure" that shape our knowledge and understanding.[78] The Village Files are no exception, and in fact the censure of archival materials regarding the 1948 War and beyond is politically contested in Israel.[79] The Village Files were made available to the

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[76] Markku Laakso and Rein Taagepera, "'Effective' Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe," *Comparative Political Studies* 12, no. 1 (1979): 3–27, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/001041407901200101.

[77] See Appendix for details on how the variable is calculated.

[78] Aliza Luft, "How Do You Repair a Broken World? Conflict (Ing) Archives After the Holocaust," *Qualitative Sociology* 43, no. 3 (2020): 318, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09458-9.

[79] Ilan Pappé, "An Indicative Archive: Salvaging Nakba Documents," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 49, no. 3 (2020): 22–40, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2020.49.3.22; Adam Raz, "When Israel Placed Arabs in Ghettos Fenced by Barbed Wire," *Haaretz.com*,

authors during a short period of time in which these materials were open to the Israeli public before being digitized.

Because the information in the Village Files is the product of relationships between Haganah intelligence officers and local informants, they may be vulnerable to measurement bias. Informants may have incentives to misrepresent information that the opposing forces intend to use for military purposes, or to foment local rivalries. It is also possible that the intelligence officers imbue their reports with political bias based on their own, or their superior officers', preferences for certain strategies and tactics over others. If these processes are pervasive, the Village Files would misrepresent Arab Palestinian social dynamics key to measuring social cohesion in the villages.

The Village Files appear less vulnerable to these measurement bias concerns. First, scholars have validated the information in the Village Files by cross-referencing, where possible, with other Palestinian sources,[80] and find it to be overall highly accurate.[81] Crucially, the Village Files enjoy distinct advantages over other sources. Archival materials likely provide better coverage, and information "closer to the ground truth," than data produced by monitors and from memory.[82] The Village Files include contemporary and broad coverage of Palestinian life in the villages, a level of disaggregation that allows for analysis at the smallest governance level in Mandate Palestine. As Meron Benvenishti notes, while the Village Files may be a problematic source, their significance lies in our necessary reliance on "Jewish and British sources of information in the absence of Palestinian sources, in order to expand knowledge about Palestinians."[83] Recent projects documenting oral histories from survivors of this period may suffer as well from memory bias, though these sources were also used when possible as confirmatory evidence for documentation in the Village Files. While in some cases, the publication of censored files can serve political purposes, the Village Files were not released to the Israeli public broadly, and made

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2021, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-when-israel-placed-arabs-in-ghettos-fenced-by-barbed-wire-1.8877340.

[80] Mustafa Abbasi, "Before Their Exile: The Transformation of Palestininan Villages in Western Galilee, 1918–1948," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 18, no. 1 (2019): 75–99, https://doi.org/10.3366/hlps.2019.0203; Saleh Abdel Jawad, "Colonial Anthropology: The Haganah Village Intelligence Archives," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 68 (2016): 21; Rona Sela, "Scouting Palestinian Territory, 1940-1948: Haganah Village Files, Aerial Photos, and Surveys," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 52 (2013).

[81] See appendix, Section A

[82] Laia Balcells and Christopher M Sullivan, "New Findings from Conflict Archives: An Introduction and Methodological Framework," *Journal of Peace Research* 55, no. 2 (2018): 137–46, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343317750217.

[83] Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948* (Univ of California Press, 2000), 78–79.

available only after the official Haganah Archivist had completed a ten year study of the documents .[84]

As with state administrative data generally, and especially in a conflict context, research drawing upon archival sources raises ethical considerations. The information discussed in the Village Files include information on people who would later be targeted for search-and-arrest operations, due to their alleged involvement in the 1936-1939 revolt.[85] The information was designed at least partially for oppressive purposes, though their use was very limited during the war itself. Salomon (the deputy chief archivist of the Haganah Archives) notes that they were not used systematically during the war, primarily because Israeli forces could not transport them to frontline operations in time.[86] As Subotic emphasizes, it is incumbent upon researchers to historically contextualize the material and remain transparent about its uses.[87] But researchers engaged in retelling the story of Palestinians note that these documents have value, despite their perhaps malicious intent. Jawad, for example notes that "The Village Files survey, which was intended to destroy Palestinian society, has become, although it certainly was not the intention of those who designed the project, a historical source for the study of economic and social Palestinian history."[88] Because the Village Files, as one of the few surviving contemporary sources, remains unique in its breadth and depth of information on Palestinian lives and the fabric of their local societies during this time period, we join other scholars (both Palestinian and Israeli) in concluding that the benefits of incorporating the documents to answer important research questions outweighs their potential shortcomings. In the appendix we describe in detail how this material was collected and processed consistent with best practices for generating and analyzing data from conflict archives.[89]

Confounding Variables

A critical reader may recognize that there are many potential variables that affect both evacuation outcomes and social cohesion. In order to produce reliable inferences, we much control for these variables as best we can. To do this, we collected data on a number of other village covariates. First, we control for village population, using data from the 1945

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[84] Salomon, "The Village Files Project, Part 2."

[85] Ilan Pappé, "The 1948 Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36, no. 1 (2006): 6–20, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2006.36.1.6.

[86] Salomon, "The Village Files Project, Part 2," 295.

[87] Jelena Subotić, "Ethics of Archival Research on Political Violence," *Journal of Peace Research* 58, no. 3 (2021): 342–54, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343319898735.

[88] Jawad, "Colonial Anthropology," 33.

[89] Balcells and Sullivan, "New Findings from Conflict Archives."

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 that the effect of social cohesion should be moderated by village population. We include village population as a control in the naive model, and later interact population with social cohesion to explore conditional effects.

Another major concern is that the process of evacuation occurred during wartime where two main forces were engaged in an intense strategic interaction with the goal of defeating their enemy. We must try to factor Israel's broad depopulation strategy into our analysis. This strategy led Israeli depopulation efforts to cluster in some areas more than others—hence the cluster of violently depopulated villages that were located on the road to Jerusalem. We thus control for distance to the nearest village that was violently depopulated before the current village was depopulated.[90] In addition, the Israelis targeted villages that were located high up on a hill or mountain in order to capture a strategic outpost. We use the log of the village's elevation from the *Atlas of Palestine*[91] 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. In addition we control for the distance to major roads and distance to the closest international border. 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. Later, we estimate spatial models to fully account for spatial variation in proximity to violence, to Jewish villages, and other geographic factors that cluster in space.

In addition to considering the strategy of the Israelis, we must also consider the military capabilities of the villages themselves. The Village Files record a number of potential military attributes of the village. We treat this information as measuring the capability of the village to militarily resist Israeli combat. For example, the reports specify the number of military aged men and presence of firearms. We exclude these variables from the main models used in empirical analysis because they have higher rates of missingness, and because even the most military capable communities were substantially, and obviously, too weak to resist Israeli forces. Therefore, the potential for confounding the relationship between social cohesion and preemptive evacuation is limited and the reduced sample size sacrifices both statistical power and the extent to which the sample is representative. In robustness checks we include these and other indicators and the results are consistent. Another concern relates to the strategic targeting by Israelis of villages with lower social cohesion, using the Village Files. As mentioned previously, the historical records indicate that the Village Files were not used during the war.[92]

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[90] In cases where a village was never depopulated, we simply use the distance to the closest violently depopulated village.

[91] Abu-Sitta, *Atlas of Palestine, 1948*.

[92] Salomon, "The Village Files Project, Part 2."

Which villages enter into the sample?

While the Haganah did not survey all villages in Mandate Palestine, it did collect surveys on the vast majority (roughly 70%) of all permanent villages. The goal 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.

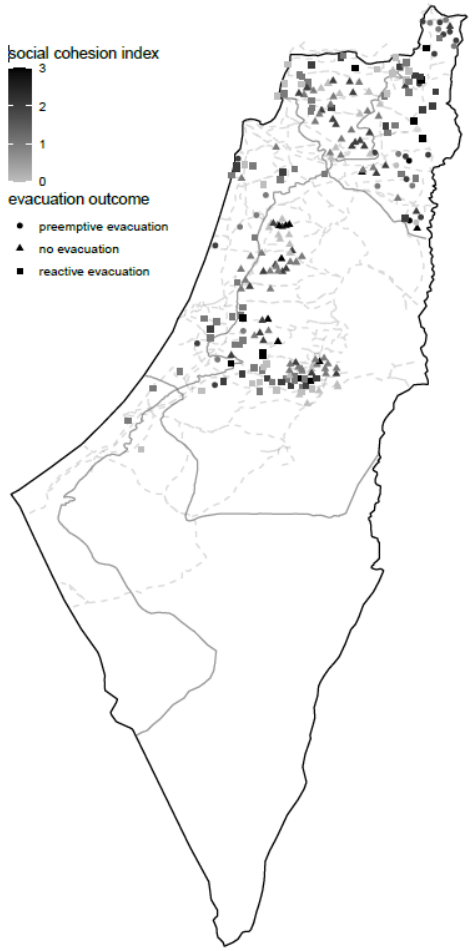
Our analysis (Appendix B) reveals striking similarity across villages included and excluded from the sample on key potential confounders. Note that elevation, distance to roads, latitude and longitude, and land area (irrigated and total) all show similar distributions across both samples. The main differences regard the ethnic make-up of the villages. This is to be expected. Whether a village was a primarily Jewish or Arab was well known and easily observable in Mandate Palestine. The Haganah had little reason to survey villages with a substantial Jewish population, as the Arab Palestinian villages were those expected to represent the challenge to consolidation of the Jewish state.

Estimation Strategy

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. The full sample includes 249 villages: restricted to those included in the Village Files, excluding the West Bank and Gaza. In our main models including covariate adjustment for potential confounders, we further restrict analysis to the 231 villages 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.

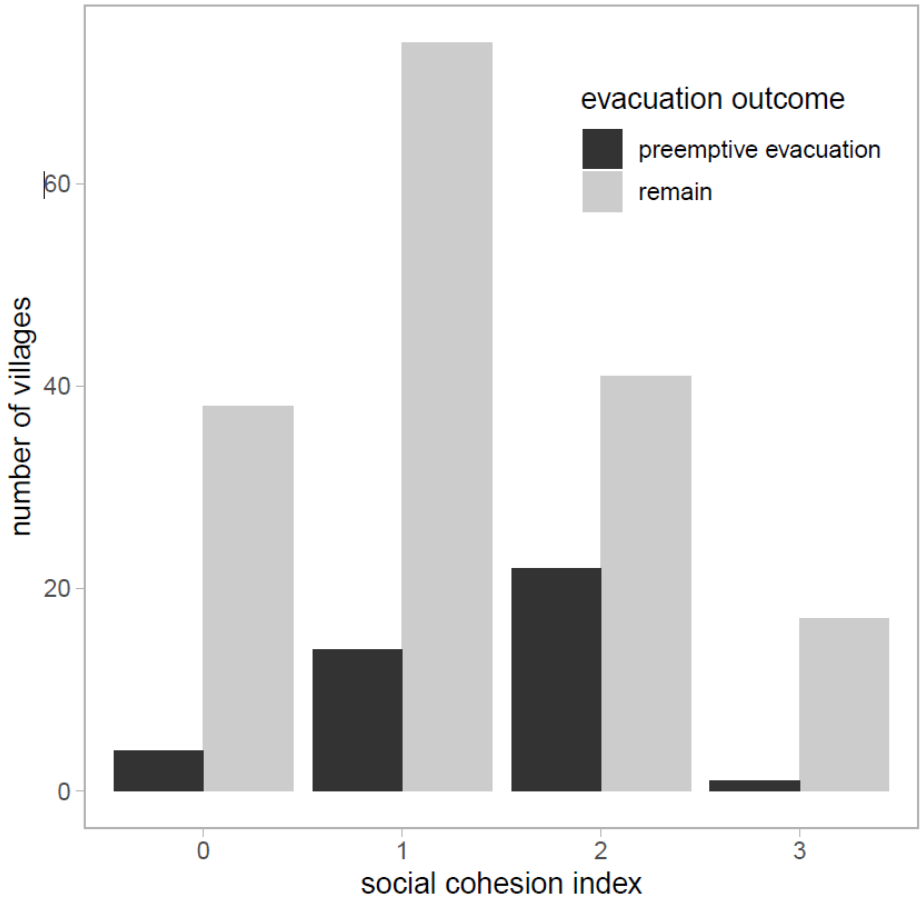
Findings

Figure 5. Evacuation and Social Cohesion in Arab Palestinian Villages (1947–1948)



NOTE: The map shows the evacuation outcomes and levels of social cohesion for the subset of Arab Palestinian villages included in the sample for analysis (249). Darker villages indicate higher social cohesion. Circles indicate villages that experienced preemptive evacuation (43), squares indicate villages that experienced reactive evacuation (81), and triangles indicate villages that experienced no evacuation (125). The solid gray line is the UN partition plan. The dashed gray lines are roads.

Figure 6. Bivariate Relationship between Preemptive Evacuation and Social Cohesion



NOTE: The bar plot shows the distribution of evacuation outcomes across the four levels of the social cohesion index.

Cross-Sectional Logit Model Results

The bivariate relationship between evacuation outcomes and community social cohesion in the data is broadly consistent with the argument. Figure 6 shows the share of villages that preemptively evacuated generally increases in social cohesion, with the interesting exception of those with highest social cohesion. Because only a small number of villages are in the highest social cohesion category, and the bivariate relationship may be confounded by additional factors that correlate with both 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.

Table 1: *Social Cohesion and Preemptive Evacuation*

	Dependent variable:		
	Preemptive Evacuation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Social Cohesion	0.346^{*}	0.524^{**}	-5.743^{***}
	(0.191)	(0.247)	(2.119)
Village Pop		-0.131	-1.472^{***}
		(0.233)	(0.499)
Dist. to Viol. Depop.		0.166	0.278
		(0.274)	(0.284)
Mean Elevation		-0.168	-0.251
		(0.187)	(0.202)
Land Area		0.068	0.080
		(0.267)	(0.282)
Total Cultivatable Land		0.157	-0.065
		(0.259)	(0.295)
Dist. to Int'l. Border		-0.056^{***}	-0.054^{***}
		(0.020)	(0.021)
Social Cohesion * Village Pop			0.969^{***}
			(0.326)
Observations	249	231	231
Note:		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Model 2 includes covariate adjustment for the main potential confounders discussed above: village population, distance to the nearest violently depopulated village, elevation, total and cultivable land area, and distance to an international border. Model 3 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.

The results 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 the main models fit without interaction terms, the coefficient estimates on the social cohesion index are positive and statistically significant at conventional levels. Villages with higher social cohesion were more likely to preemptively evacuate during the war.

The results in Model 3 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. Villages with a smaller population face much lower barriers to engaging in collective action, as there are fewer actors to 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 is more likely when social cohesion is high.

Additional Analyses and Robustness Checks

Because the main analysis is inherently limited, we conduct a series of robustness checks to ensure the results are not sensitive to model specification, and report the results in the Appendix. One key concern is that the main analysis may omit key variables that influence community displacement patterns and also relate to social cohesion. To address this possibility, we fit alternative models including covariate adjustment for alternative potential confounders[93] (Section C.3.2) and spatial autoregressive and error models (Section C.3.4).

An additional concern may be that the analysis omits unobservable confounders, which would affect the results even after including these alternative controls. We address this issue in two ways. First, we use data on repression of villages during the 1936-1939 revolt as an instrument for social cohesion (Section C.3.5). We do not necessarily interpret these effects as causal treatment effects. Rather, our goal here is more modest and to show that

[93] Including: 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.

our results hold if we assume that repression during the revolt was as-if randomly assigned. Second, we conduct a sensitivity analysis (Section C.3.6), which reveals that the effect of an unobserved confounder would have to be of such significant magnitude, several time greater than the magnitude of the observed effect of the distance to the international border, in order to nullify the empirical relationship between social cohesion and preemptive evacuation.

Another concern is that the effect of social cohesion on preemptive exit may be driven by larger political networks and affiliations among the Palestinian villages. The Husseinis and the Nashashibis were the two main families of political elites in Mandate Palestine. While both nationalists, the Husseinis were more aggressive in their opposition to Zionism than the Nashashibis. Thus, it is possible that our measure of social cohesion is capturing affiliation with one of the political families (rather than a unified political affiliation in general) or that the effect of social cohesion on preemptive exit is only driven by villages with an affiliation to the Husseinis or the Nashashibis. We find that the effect is consistent across both types of villages (Section C.3.7).

Furthermore, the argument implies social cohesion promotes preemptive, as opposed to reactive (in response to violence), evacuation in the observed context of a strategic displacement campaign. One reason our argument is ambiguous in its implications for variation in reactive 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 reactive evacuation (Section C.1), expecting null or weaker results for the correlation between social cohesion and reactive evacuation. 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 reactive evacuation or remain), and that it does not increase reactive evacuation (relative to preemptive evacuation or remain).

Conclusion

Despite severe constraints, civilians nevertheless exercise agency to protect themselves and their communities during wartime, even in the context of widespread and intense civilian-targeted violence. In this article, we explain variation in preemptive exit in the midst of conflict, an early stage in the broader process of organized violence and population displacement. We ask: why do some communities preemptively evacuate while others remain, risking exposure to lethal violence associated with cleansing or other strategic displacement tactics? Previous literature has focused on conditions external to the community that shape civilian *incentives*, including but not limited to the level of civilian-

targeted violence, or community social and political characteristics that influence *information* dissemination. This article shifts attention to variation in civilians' *capabilities* to take action under threat of violence. We show that communities with greater social cohesion are more likely to facilitate a preemptive evacuation. We show that community social structure may impact patterns of forced migration, and by implication other conflict processes, through mechanisms other than communication or incentives.

Whereas the existing literature has emphasized the explanatory role that belligerent violence and repression play in generating forced migration and population displacement during conflict, this article has highlighted the ways in which civilians, exercising agency, shape migration and subsequent conflict and displacement processes. Preemptive forced migration influences selection into the contexts in which we observe subsequent civilian and belligerent decision-making and actions. Therefore, whether civilians flee *preemptively*, prior to belligerent arrival in the area, represents an antecedent phase that is essential to understanding local-level variation in conflict processes and broader conflict trends.

The empirical evidence draws upon archival 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 Village Files comprise 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 findings suggest that, even in a context in which the belligerents adopted strategic displacement tactics, community social cohesion played a significant role in conflict processes by shaping whether communities preemptively evacuated prior to violence exposure.

The 1948 War is also an important case, and beyond theory testing the empirical analysis provides new descriptive insights into the history of the 1948 War and its aftermath. The war created a new state, helped end an empire, provided a crucial test of the United Nations' power, and resulted in at least 700,000 displaced persons, including more than 400 villages completely depopulated. Our focus on civilian agency in displacement processes 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.

The findings have important policy implications for domestic and international actors' efforts to prevent or mitigate civilian casualties, and meet the needs of forcibly displaced populations, in ongoing conflicts. Already this year, millions of civilians have suffered conflict-related displacement or casualties, and many more face the grueling decision whether to flee or risk violence exposure every day, in Ukraine, Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and many other conflict zones. Our findings suggest that areas in which communities lack social cohesion may suffer higher casualties from targeted violence, signaling a need for urgent diplomatic and humanitarian prevention or mitigation efforts. Areas in which communities possess greater social cohesion may be better equipped to evade violence by fleeing the conflict zone preemptively, implying greater urgency to support international humanitarian and policy efforts to build and resource the institutions, agencies, and infrastructure required to house, protect, and support these vulnerable displaced populations.

The present study has several limitations that motivate future research. First, as noted, we focus on *evacuation* rather than the full range of community depopulation outcomes, given the advantages in conceptual clarity and observability in available data. The article focuses on preemptive evacuation, in particular. Future research may integrate the subsequent stage of belligerent control to explain not only whether the community preemptively evacuates, but also why some communities are violently expelled while others remain at least partially intact. Explaining these dynamics is critical to understanding displacement and conflict processes in general, and existing work has yet to incorporate the selection process represented by variation in preemptive exit explored here.

Furthermore, this article has limited its scope of inquiry to the context in which the threat of displacement violence is exceptionally high. In this context, civilians leverage social cohesion to mobilize preemptive evacuation. Future research may expand the scope to a broader range of threat severity, permitting examination of preemptive evacuation alongside the broader repertoire of actions communities, and individual civilians, may adopt during conflict; including alignment or collaboration with the belligerent forces, violent and nonviolent forms of resistance, and other strategies.

This article has demonstrated that community social cohesion influences local patterns of conflict-related migration and displacement. Future work may explore the determinants of community social cohesion to deepen understanding of the process leading to variation in preemptive evacuation and subsequent conflict processes. The determinants of social cohesion are likely to vary across countries and cultural contexts, which implies additional within-country empirical investigations will be important to advancing scientific knowledge. In the case analyzed here, the historical literature is quite clear that prior exposure to repression (during the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt against British Colonialism) led to the fracturing of Arab Palestinian society, though others stress the competition between national political networks (lead by the Nashashibi and Husseini clans) played an important role. Future work may interrogate the local-level empirical implications of these and other theories in the Village Files data, and investigate the extent to which these claims generalize to other cases. Furthermore, additional research may disaggregate the components of social cohesion to investigate the distinct role of each of its component elements on community choices during war.