The Market for Moderate Militancy: Experiments on Recruitment and Support in Northeast India

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Competition over recruits and supporters shapes who has power within armed movements, and therefore how conflicts are fought and resolved. Do recruits and supporters flock to ideologically extremist armed groups or to their moderate rivals? Despite long-standing debates over extremism and conflict, there is little direct evidence of how recruits and supporters decide between different armed groups. I argue that the state behavior plays a key role in these decisions. When states demonstrate a willingness to cooperate with militants, even in minor ways, it creates a market for moderation: ordinary people become more likely to take up arms, but also more likely to back moderate armed groups over extremists. I explore these decisions using conjoint survey experiments among nearly 400 likely militant recruits and 100 civilian elders in conflict-affected areas of Northeast India. These experiments provide strong evidence for the main argument. When states offer a long-term ceasefire agreement, respondents were more willing to join and support militants overall, but also more likely to prefer moderates over extremists. These results suggest that states can shape the ideological orientation of armed groups from the bottom up, driving rank-and-file militants to support moderates through conciliation. They also undercut many long-standing theories of terrorism and conflict – most notably theories of *outbidding* and *provocation* – which assume that militancy and extremism rise and fall together. In fact, moderate militants can be quite popular if states allow them room to operate.

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1 Introduction

How do potential recruits and supporters choose which armed group to back? The majority of civil conflicts in the world are multi-sided, meaning that non-state armed groups must jockey for position with one another, not just with the state (Christia, 2012). However, even this vastly understates the extent of intra-rebel rivalries. In intense multi-sided conflicts such as Syria or Iraq, the profusion of armed groups makes specific groups difficult to track (Bakke and Cunningham, 2012). In low-intensity or nascent conflicts, many armed groups that compete over recruits and local governance never conduct large enough offensives to be observed from the outside (Lewis, 2020; Staniland, 2012*b*; Malone, 2018). Even purportedly unified armed organizations often see high-stakes internal competition, as rival leaders court rank-and-file supporters in preparation for mutiny or fragmentation (Mosinger, 2019; Perkoski, 2019). Which organizations, leaders, and ideologies thrive in an armed movement, therefore, is frequently determined by who can attract the most (and best) soldiers and supporters.

Recruitment competition is particularly important when leaders have dramatically different goals for the movement and conflict – that is, when ideological *extremists* compete for recruits against relative *moderates*. When extremists gain strength, armed movements are more likely to indiscriminately target civilians to provoke the state or show their resolve (Fortna, 2015; Kydd and Walter, 2006; Pape, 2005). At the same time, groups with more ambitious goals are more likely to establish parallel state institutions, protecting and providing for civilians (Stewart, 2021; Albert, N.d.; Mampilly, 2011; Hoover Green, 2018). Most importantly, movements dominated by extremists make more stubborn demands of the state, provoking wider conflicts and refusing to compromise until they are won (Kydd and Walter, 2002; Keels and Wiegand, 2020; Prorok, 2018, 2016). When, then, do recruits and supporters prefer to back extremists, and when do they prefer to back moderates?

Support for militancy and extremism are shaped in large part by states' reactions to militant movements. Militancy, after all, does not automatically mean conflict: while

in some cases states aggressively crack down on militants, in others they ignore their operations and accommodate some of their political aims in exchange for reduced conflict (Staniland, 2012*b*, 2017; Hanson, 2021, Forthcoming). Scholars often agree that state violence and accommodation shape support for extremism and militancy, but often disagree on the direction of the effect. One set of arguments, common in work on terrorism and counterterrorism, argue that state weakness and toleration allow extremist militants to gain support. According to these arguments, armed groups grow and multiply when states cannot or will not attack them, such as in *ungoverned spaces* or state-sponsored *safe havens*. In such a crowded marketplace, extremist ideologies help armed groups stand out, attracting recruits and supporters over more moderate competitors (Walter, 2017; Bloom, 2005). Grievance-based works on civil conflict, on the other hand, offer a contradictory view. These argument typically hold that state aggression provokes ordinary people to take up arms and support militants, particularly extremist militants (Gurr, 1970; Petersen, 2002, 2011; Mitts, 2019). Taking a more conciliatory approach to militants, by contrast – negotiating when possible and avoiding outright confrontation otherwise – should therefore dampen support for militants, particularly extremists who feed on anti-state anger. Although these two schools offer opposing predictions and solutions, they both generally assume that militancy and extremism rise and fall together – that is, the conditions that increase armed groups' recruitment and support will also encourage them to back extremists over moderates.

I argue instead that state toleration has two seemingly contradictory effects on militancy: it encourages recruits and supporters to mobilize, but also causes them to prefer moderate armed groups over extremist ones. Most militant recruits and supporters mobilize in order to serve broader political goals such as political representation, regional autonomy, or economic redistribution. If they can achieve these goals without the danger and deprivation of conflict, they will prefer to do so. When states allow armed groups greater room to operate and wield the threat of force, they open greater opportunities for moderate armed groups to achieve their goals without open conflict. While most conflict research is focused on armed groups

engaged in intense conflicts or terror campaigns, there are just as many armed political organizations with much less ambitious goals: swaying elections, securing local autonomy, or redistributing public goods (Staniland, 2012*b*; Arjona, 2016; Cammett, 2014). When governments are less committed to crackdown, they create a market for moderate militancy. When states are willing to tolerate some militant operations, then, they encourage militancy while discouraging extremism.

Despite the long-standing debates over extremism and recruitment, there is very little direct evidence on how militant recruits decide which group to join. First, gathering reliable information on recruitment and support in conflict zones is a substantial challenge. Potential recruits and supporters can be difficult to identify within the broader population, and honest reporting can be difficult to elicit. Even if a study can identify which individuals joined or supported an armed group, it can still be difficult to identify which individuals might have done so under different conditions. Second, comparisons over time and over space are limited by the specifics of a given conflict or armed group. Armed groups vary across a wide array of observable and unobservable characteristics: ideology, military effectiveness, ethnic and tribal networks, economic resources, and others. It can be a challenge, then, to determine why particular armed groups succeed or fail in gaining supporters.

My study provides innovative, causally-identified evidence exploring the preferences of actual likely militant recruits and civilian elders in Northeast India. First, I recruited nearly 400 likely militant recruits, as well as 100 civilians elders in the same communities, in conflict zones in Northeast India. To identify potential recruits, my research team interviewed young men in gathering places where militant recruiters are known to frequent and used screening questions to identify individuals who are likely to consider taking up arms under the right circumstances. Rather than the self-selected individuals who have already joined or a survey of the broad public, these individuals are broadly representative of the recruiting pool that local armed groups are likely to pull from. At the same time, my team interviewed more than 100 older men in the same community gathering places – the elders who are likely to

play a role in supporting armed groups and guiding potential recruits' decisions. Second, using a conjoint survey experiment, I tested what types of groups these individuals prefer to join and support under different conditions. Rather than rely on real, idiosyncratic armed groups, I use hypotheticals with many randomly varying characteristics to test how many different factors positively and negatively affect recruitment and support.

The results bear out my arguments. Respondents were significantly more likely to express interest in joining and supporting armed groups with more moderate political goals – in this case, preferring to negotiate for small autonomy concessions rather than fighting for full independence. They were much more likely to prefer moderate armed groups, however, when the government offered a long-term ceasefire that would accommodate militant operations in exchange for reduced hostilities. At the same time, ceasefire offers increased respondents' willingness to join and support militant organizations overall. State accommodation, in other words, encouraged militancy while decreasing extremism. These results were consistent across three different conflict regions with different histories of militancy and extremism, and even among idealistic activists from community organizations. Leveraging interviews in and around Naga armed groups, I demonstrate that these effects played out in practice: in the years following ceasefire offers, many more people took up arms, but they increasingly supported ideologically-moderate factions. These results provide unprecedented microfoundational evidence on the preferences of potential recruits and supporters, challenge traditional theories of terrorism and rebellion, and demonstrate the tradeoffs that governments face in countering militancy and extremism.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 lays out the key theoretical debates and argues that state conciliation should shift recruits to more moderate armed groups. Section 3 describes the setting and research design of the experiments, while Section 4 explores the results. Section 5 provides case evidence from Nagaland, and Section 6 discusses the theoretical implications of the findings.

2 Theory

2.1 Extremism and Recruitment Competition

Non-state armed movements are often internally divided over how ambitious their goals ought to be. That is, they are divided between *moderates* who are willing to accept more achievable goals and *extremists* who will continue fighting to achieve more ambitious goals. The specific content and motivations for these differences can vary substantially depending on the context while still representing the tradeoff between radicalism and realism. In separatist movements like those in Northern Ireland or Palestine, the divide is often between those who call for special recognition or regional autonomy versus those who call for outright independence (Perkoski, 2019; Bloom, 2005). In center-seeking identity movements like Sunni and Shia sectarians in Iraq, the divide is often between those calling for greater representation versus those calling for outright ethnic or religious control (Robinson, 2008). In class- or caste-based movements like those in civil wars in El Salvador and Nepal, moderates calling for modest redistribution may face extremists calling for economic overthrow (Wood, 2003; Subedi, 2012). In religious movements, armed leaders seeking religious parties in government often compete with those seeking de facto or de jure theocracy (Mironova, 2019; Farrell, 2020).

These moderate or extremist ideologies tend to be both enduring and meaningful for how armed groups behave. In principle, public expressions of extremism and moderation could merely be transient, non-credible cheap talk (Christia, 2012). In practice, however, these ideologies tend to be enduring and self-reinforcing over time. First, armed leaders often have enduring psychological and ideological reasons for favoring a particular approach (Prorok, 2018; Huff, 2019). Second, armed leaders with extremist reputations attract other activists with extremist preferences and are encouraged to take actions that represent extremist constituents and alienate more moderate ones. As a result, armed organizations' stated goals tend to be reliable predictors of how they behave in and out of conflict. At the onset,

political movements with extremist demands for representation and autonomy are more likely to provoke a civil war with the government than those with more moderate demands (Vogt, Gleditsch and Cederman, Forthcoming). During a conflict, extremist political groups are more likely to launch indiscriminate attacks against enemy civilians (Bloom, 2005; Kydd and Walter, 2006) but also more likely to provide civilians with effective local governance (Stewart, 2021; Mampilly, 2011; Hoover Green, 2016). At the bargaining table, extremists can disrupt negotiations with violent spoiling or obstructionism more generally, meaning that conflicts last longer and are more likely to be resolved by military means (Keels and Wiegand, 2020; Kydd and Walter, 2002; Cunningham, 2014; Prorok, 2016, 2018).

The struggle between moderates and extremists often plays out via recruitment competition. For the reasons above, armed groups often find it difficult to shift their ideological approach and reputation as opportunities change. Rank-and-file cadres and recruits, on the other hand, often have multiple armed groups they can choose to join. Most armed movements include multiple armed groups or factions, often recruiting from overlapping geographic areas and social networks (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Nanes and Knuppe, N.d.; Gutierrez Sanin, 2008; Mosinger, 2019; Pischedda, 2020). Even during peace time, armed leaders' influence comes in large part by the number and commitment of their recruits and supporters: armed leaders wield influence in large part by promising protection to those that cooperate with them and threatening violence against those who do not (Daly, 2016). It matters a great deal, then, which armed leaders can attract new recruits and peel defectors off of their rivals – particularly whether those armed groups are extremist or moderate.

2.2 The Role of the State

When, then, do potential recruits and supporters prefer to back extremists over moderates, or vice versa?

A key determining factor in militant mobilization and extremism is the state's general

approach to militants. While states sometimes relentlessly crack down on militants, others accommodate their operations. States may offer a formal ceasefire or tacitly allow militants to patrol territory, gather recruits and resources, and influence local governance (Staniland, 2017; Arjona, 2016; Hanson, 2021). Governments choose to accommodate militants for a host of reasons, many of which have little to do with the conflict itself: states may lack military resources for a protracted campaign, may need to divert resources toward more pressing security threats, or may have leaders who share ideological sympathies with militants (Driscoll, 2015; Talmadge, 2015; Staniland, 2016). Low-level or short-term cooperation may also serve as a costly signal for future status negotiations, credibly conveying a more general willingness to cooperate with militants (Clayton, Nathan and Wiehler, Forthcoming; Akebo, 2016). Relative to more aggressive state crackdown, toleration offers militants the chance to deescalate without surrendering their aims or arms.

State violence and accommodation, in turn, should dramatically change the costs and benefits of militancy and extremism for militant recruits and constituents. There is a substantial debate, however, whether state accommodation should encourage potential recruits and supporters to mobilize and support extremists, or should discourage them from doing so.

One side of the debate, there are *law-and-order* theories prominent in scholarly and policy work on counterterrorism, which generally argue that militancy and extremism flourish when states look the other way. A long-standing argument, often associated with Hobbes (1651) but at the heart of most scholarly and policy work on conflict, holds that state violence is the most important deterrent to militant mobilzation. These arguments have found particular purchase in work on counterterrorism, which argue that extremist groups are most likely to succeed in weak states and in safe havens where potential recruits and supporters can back them with less danger and discomfort (Arsenault and Bacon, 2015; Mir, 2018). Likewise, many argue that accommodating militants merely encourages recruits and supporters to back more extremist armed groups. Fearing moderates will sell out the movements' goals when

they are in reach, recruits and supporters may back extremists who will be more aggressive (Perkoski, 2019; Bloom, 2005; Kydd and Walter, 2002). These arguments dovetail naturally with theories of extremist *outbidding*, which argue that recruitment competition is a key driver of extremism.[1] If state accommodation emboldens more armed groups to mobilize and compete over recruits, then it should also drive recruits into the arms of extremists. The driving assumption behind these theories, however, is that given a choice between extremists and moderates, recruits and supporters will prefer to back extremists – particularly when the government is open to accommodating militants.

On the other side of the debate, there are grievance-based theories of rebellion, which generally argue that state aggression provokes both extremism and militancy more generally. If states pursue militants too aggressively, or too indiscriminately, in their pursuit of militants, it can provoke anger and frustration among potential recruits and supporters (Lyall, Blair and Imai, 2013; Getmansky and Zeitsoff, 2014). These emotions, in turn, are shown to cause individuals to become more risk-tolerant and uncompromising, even at personal cost (Petersen, 2002; Young, 2019; Mironova, Mrie and Whitt, 2019; Mitts, 2019). This argument is often assumed in provocation theories of terrorism: by provoking state aggression, extremists can capture recruits and supporters (Kydd and Walter, 2006; Carter, 2016). By this logic, accommodating some militant activities and goals should help states deescalate conflict, reducing militant mobilization and support while empowering moderate militants.

2.3 The Argument

I argue that each camp has half of the answer right. On one hand, law-and-order theories are right about militant mobilization and support overall: state toleration encourages constituents to join and support militant organizations, just as crackdown discourages those

[1] Outbidding has been documented in particular cases and contexts, especially among Salafist groups in the Middle East (Bloom, 2005; Walter, 2017; Farrell, 2020; Vogt, Gleditsch and Cederman, Forthcoming; Nemeth, 2013). However, the cross-national evidence is more mixed (Findley and Young, 2012; Abrahms, 2018).

behaviors. At the same time, grievance-based theories are right on extremism in particular: even though more recruits and supporters mobilize during periods of toleration, they become more likely to back moderates over extremists.

For an individual recruit or supporter, deciding whether to mobilize and whether to back a moderate or extremist armed group involves at least three considerations. First, most individuals who join an armed movement typically have some desire – whether for material, social, ideological, or emotional reasons – to serve the collective goal (or goals) sought by the group. Second, most would-be recruits and supporters would rather those goals be achievable rather than purely symbolic. Third, most individuals would prefer to remain safe and comfortable while pursuing those goals. By its nature, taking up arms for a particular group involves tradeoffs. Joining an armed group typically means trading off personal safety and wellbeing for the pursuit of a collective goal (Olson, 1993; Weinstein, 2007). Choosing a moderate armed group over an extremist one, likewise, typically involves trading off a more attractive goal for a more achievable one. Every would-be recruit and supporter judges and weighs these considerations differently, but they are likely to be at least somewhat sensitive to the conditions on the ground.

State toleration opens opportunities for would-be militants to mobilize safely and comfortably, but it also heightens the comparative advantages that moderates have over extremists. When states accommodate militants' operations and goals, they create room for militants to pursue both political and organizational goals safely and comfortably. With more room to operate and leverage the use of force, militants can tax and police civilians, sway government officials, and redistribute public goods for ideological or interpersonal reasons. At the same time, even tacitly cooperating with the state in this way means that militants must limit some of their more ambitious goals, at least in the short run. Armed groups in ceasefire typically can operate only in defined regions, can meddle only in specific issues, and must restrain violence against state forces (Arjona, 2016; Staniland, 2020; Waterman, 2021; Hanson, 2021). This is hardly a secret; militant cadres, especially fiery ones, often wonder

why their leaders are cooperating with the enemy.

State toleration, then, should make moderate armed leaders more appealing for recruits and supporters while having little effect on the appeal of extremist leaders. Moderates, with more to gain from cooperation, should be more likely to reciprocate state overtures and should be more trustworthy in keeping them. Extremists, on the other hand, should be less likely to consent in the first place and more likely to risk cooperation to claim greater power or prepare for future conflict. Even if extremists wish to adopt a more moderate approach, they may find it difficult to pivot – or to convince potential recruits and supporters of their new approach. Armed leaders often spend years and decades surrounding themselves with like-minded supporters and demonstrating their ideology in word and deed, making reputations hard to shed. While some recruits may prefer armed leaders with a more combative approach during any period, more recruits should find moderation appealing during periods of toleration than during periods of determined crackdown. So long as a state is willing to accommodate their operations, moderate armed groups should be able to more reliably offer a safe and comfortable life to their soldiers, club goods to supporters, and tangible progress on political goals. If cooperation takes two sides willing to accommodate, then moderation is likely to be much more attractive when the other side is willing to accommodate.

This argument contradicts – or at least dramatically scopes – the logic of both law-and-order and deescalation theories of conflict and terrorism described in the previous section. Both theories assume that militancy and extremism rise and fall together, regardless of whether state violence provokes or deters them. Yet most work on conflict and terrorism focuses on the most extreme militants under the most extreme conditions (Staniland, 2012*b*). For the vast majority of groups, some level of coexistence with state forces is possible and likely, fostering a market for moderate militancy.

2.4 Hypotheses

The argument described above has two primary implications. The first is that state accommodation should bolster militant mobilization and support overall. When states accommodate militant activities, rank-and-file militants and supporters can serve ideological and organizational goals of the movement while facing much lower risks of death or injury and much less material deprivation.

> **Hypothesis 1:** The possibility of state accommodation of militants, such as through a ceasefire offer, should encourage potential recruits to take up arms and civilians to show greater support for armed groups.

At the same time, the opportunities afforded by state accommodation should only be attractive if militant leaders are willing to cooperate. Therefore, would-be recruits and civilians should show a greater preference for joining and supporting moderate armed groups over extremist ones.

> **Hypothesis 2:** The possibility of state accommodation of militants, such as through a ceasefire offer, should increase potential recruits and potential supporters' preference for armed groups with moderate goals relative to ones with extremist goals.

These effects should be observable in armed movements as a whole as well as with individual potential recruits and supporters. When states alter their strategy, it should change the decisions of rank-and-file recruits and soldiers, as well as civilian supporters. When states offer a ceasefire arrangement, for example, it should lead to greater militant recruitment and greater success for moderate armed groups relative to extremist ones. This may also empower moderate subordinates to attempt coups or form new factions, knowing they are more likely to gain rank-and-file support for their approach. These effects, however, may take years to play out as militants and civilians become more confident in state accommodation and update their behavior.

3 Research Design

I investigated these questions in a set of conjoint survey experiments in Northeast India, fielded in Nagaland and Assam in July-September 2017. The goal of these experiments is to test how likely militant recruits decide whether to join – and how civilian elders decide whether to support – extremist or moderate armed groups. These survey experiments were designed following more than three months of qualitative fieldwork in the area, during which I interviewed dozens of current and former militants about why and how they joined, as well as many civilians about why they did not join.

3.1 Armed Groups in Northeast India

Over the past six decades, the Government of India has clashed with more than 100 armed groups from ten distinct ethnic-separatist movements in its Northeast region. Each of these movements mobilized demanding independence or autonomy for one of the region's ethnic minority groups, whose members generally see themselves as racially distinct and had a history of self-rule before 1948 (Lacina, 2017; Scott, 2010). These movements are not well known outside of South Asia, but they are significant. Throughout recent decades, the three largest movements (in Nagaland, Assam, and Manipur) have each fielded between five and twenty thousand militants, comparable to leftist guerrillas in Colombia or separatist insurgents in Kashmir. Together, these conflicts have seen tens of thousands of deaths, and the deadliest periods of fighting in these conflicts have been more intense than those of the majority of civil wars throughout the world (Lacina, 2006).

More importantly, though, these areas cases contain variation – both between armed groups and over time – on the variables that are most important for the argument of the book. First and most importantly, armed movements in Northeast India have experienced both periods of intense crackdown and state accommodation. In Nagaland, a brutal state campaigns in the 1950s-1960s and 1990s were punctuated by long-term ceasefires lasting

from 1975-1990 and 1997-present. In Manipur and Assam, meanwhile, counterinsurgent campaigns have been much more consistent over time. As mentioned above, these types of patterns are quite common in long-running conflicts. States often tolerate militants during some periods and target them brutally during others – even during ongoing civil wars. The Government of India often transitions from crackdown to toleration by offering an indefinite ceasefire, freezing the conflict in place but still permitting militants to operate freely. Generally, India has offered these ceasefires to one militant movement at a time, pausing entire conflicts in a single stroke and initiating more cooperative relationships.

Second, the armed groups in these regions vary across a host of group-specific characteristics, particularly their goals. All of the armed groups examined in this book are separatists. At the same time, the big tent of separatism includes groups with more and less ambitious goals for their regions. Most notably, "anti-talk" extremists are steadfast in demanding independence from India, while the "pro-talk" moderates are open to negotiating for more achievable autonomy concessions, like statehood status and representation in local governments. In addition, armed groups in Northeast India vary on a host of other dimensions, meaning that respondents can call on their experiences interacting with factions which were large and small, generous and stingy, strict and lax, moderate and extremist. The recruitment experiment was conducted in three conflict areas: in and around Dimapur and Kohima (home to Naga separatist groups), Guwahati and Jorhat / Sivsagar / Dibrugarh (Assamese), and Udalguri (Bodo). In each area, the survey was conducted in a variety of urban and rural locations to make sure the respondents were both representative of militant constituents in the region and similar to those in other settings.

3.2 Potential Recruits and Civilian Elders

Within Northeast India, I designed and implemented a sampling process based on the real-life behavior of militant recruiters in the region. By replicating these recruitment tactics, I gathered a group of *potential recruits*: young men who are not yet militants but are

highly likely to be approached by recruiters and would consider joining under the right circumstances. My research team — locals of the same ethnicity as respondents in their early twenties — approached these subjects in social settings in which armed groups are known to recruits. These included ethnic volunteer organizations, tea shops, moonshiners, and stadiums. Northeast India, like many conflict-ridden regions, suffers from substantial youth unemployment and underemployment. As a result, many young men idle in public places during the day looking for something to do: whether volunteer work, social drinking, or pick-up soccer. As a result, members of rebel organizations are known to spend substantial time in these locations, talking up their employers to potential recruits. The research team was careful to include locations in both towns and villages, in both more and less educated areas, and near rebel camps, where potentially-interested youth tend to gather. These young men are broadly representative of militant recruits in Northeast India: young, unemployed, and unattached.[2]

The activity, in other words, has in some ways more in common with elite surveys of politicians or bureaucrats than with surveys of the mass public. It is meant to track the opinions and behavior of the individuals who might be called upon to make decisions on an everyday basis. The sampling, therefore, was designed to be selective rather than representative, picking out the most likely recruits rather than surveying the population as a whole.

In addition, I also fielded the survey to about 100 older men in the same gathering places. The goal of this second group was two-fold. First, on a theoretical level, this civilian pool acts a proxy for community input, testing the preferences of the sort of older men who might advise younger men on which groups to join. Older members of the community are unlikely to actively participate in combat, but still have a strong stake and voice in local armed politics. As a result, rather than being asked which groups they themselves would prefer to join, these men were asked which groups they might advise younger men to join. Second,

[2]Respondents are also fairly well-educated. Scheduled Tribe groups in Northeast India have high youth educational attainment but very low employment.

Table 1: Demographics and Traits by Sampling Group

	Likely Recruits	Civilians
N	371	102
Mean Age	27	54
Completed Grade 12	48%	11%
Rural (from Village, not Town/City)	48%	83%
Unemployed	60%	40%
Think of Self as [Ethnicity] over Indian	91%	96%
Agree: Negotiation More Effective than Violence	75%	80%
Agree: Gov't Provides Important Services	64%	75%
Agree: Rebels Provide Important Services	28%	30%

this civilian pool is useful to compare for methodological reasons. There is a robust body of work on civilians' attitudes toward armed groups in their communities, especially during counterinsurgency campaigns (Lyall, Blair and Imai, 2013; Fair, Malhotra and Shapiro, 2014; Morgan, 2016). It is worth asking whether civilian support is a reliable indicator for militant recruitment, and what ways potential recruits might differ from the broader public. Table 1 shows the ways that these older men are similar and different from the potential recruits: they are better-educated, more likely to be employed, and more likely to have grown up in a village.

3.3 Experimental Design

The theory posits that both potential recruits and civilian elders will favor more moderate armed groups when the state is open to accommodating armed groups. However, armed groups can vary over a host of other dimensions, making it difficult to identify the precise causes of a decision.

Therefore, rather than asking about real groups and real past behavior, I designed a conjoint survey experiment to test the effects of many different features at once. The experiment asks the potential recruit to imagine a hypothetical local armed organization fighting for separatism / autonomy for his ethnic group. Each hypothetical group was accompanied by a series of visual images representing the characteristics of the group in order

to help less literate and non-English-speaking respondents remember and imagine the group. The activity then asks the respondent whether "someone like you" would join the hypothetical group. This phrasing, designed after Holland (2017), encourages the respondent to respond with their own preferences in a given situation while providing plausible deniability to admit their interest. Indeed, more than 40 percent of responses were that "some," "many," or "all" young men like them would join a given group (rather than "none" or "a few") (see Figure 1 below). Civilian elders, meanwhile, were asked a slightly different question. These individuals are unlikely to join an armed group themselves, but may play an important role in guiding potential recruits and community resources toward militants. Therefore, they were asked, "Would you support or oppose a youth from your community joining this armed group?"

The first major randomized treatment for each group was a conflict-level treatment: *whether the state has offered a ceasefire* to armed groups in the area. In general, and especially in the Northeast India context, ceasefire offers are understood as a way that states signal to militants that they are open to accommodate the activities and goals of armed groups. Ceasefire offers mean an opportunity for safety and comfort for militants, but they also mean that the government is open to cooperation more generally.

Each hypothetical armed group, then, consisted of five attributes that recruits may use to evaluate their interest in joining (Table 2). Each of these attributes were designed to reflect both established work on civil conflict and the particular context of Northeast India. These questions were written based on three months of prior interviews, with input from local research assistants, and field tested before primary data collection.

The most important group attribute for this paper is armed group goals. In most areas of Northeast India, as in many separatist conflicts, the primary ideological divide is between extremist groups that commit to fighting for full independence and groups that voice their willingness to negotiate for more achievable autonomy. These distinctions are not merely transient strategies, but instead are baked into the identity of the organizations and leaders.

Table 2: Treatments in Conjoint Experiment

Overall Treatment: State Accommodation

Ceasefire Offer	**No Ceasefire Offer**
For the next set of groups, imagine that the government has offered all of the armed groups a long-term ceasefire like the one that the government has with the Naga armed groups today. The government and the armed groups may or may not agree to a long-term peace deal in the future, but for now there is no active fighting and the armed group is allowed to function peacefully.	For the next set of groups, imagine that the government has refused to offer any ceasefire to any of the armed groups, and the fighting is intense like it was in Nagaland in the 1990s. The government and the armed groups may or may not agree to a long-term peace deal in the future, but for now, there is active fighting and the armed group is under attack.

Armed Group Attributes

Trait	**Possibilities**
Goals	(Moderate) Leaders want to make a peace deal with government
	(Extremist) Leaders want to keep fighting until [region] is independent
Strength	Weak (200 troops)
	Medium-Strength (1,000 troops)
	Strong (5,000 troops)
Discipline	Reputation for Loose Discipline
	Reputation for Strict Discipline
Lifestyle	Offers no wages, hard lifestyle
	Offers small wages, OK lifestyle
	Offers high wages, good lifestyle
Connections	Leaders from a different tribe/community and different area
	Leaders from a different tribe/community in the same area
	Leaders from the same tribe/community

Tribe/Community is a subset of Area in the NEI context.

Armed factions in Northeast India frequently have "pro-talk," "anti-talk," "accordist," or "non-accordist" in their official or unofficial names. Therefore, half of the groups were described as having extremist independence goals, while the other half were described as having moderate autonomy goals.

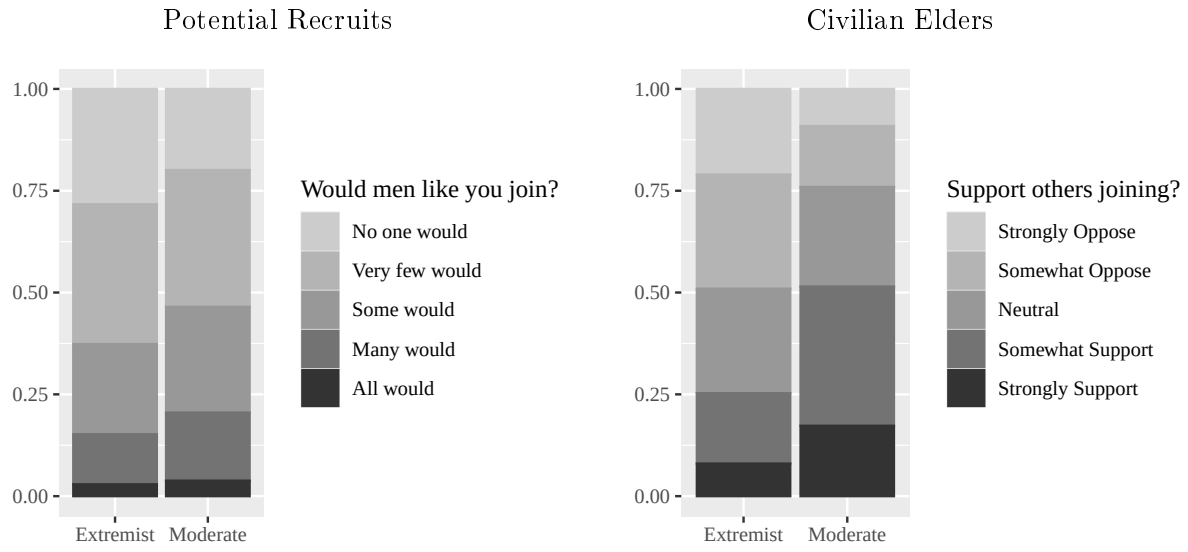
The other four factors are not related to identity: the group may be strong or weak (Christia, 2012), have strict or lax disciplinary systems (Hoover Green, 2018), offer few or plentiful material benefits (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Weinstein, 2007; Collier, 2000), and have leaders with or without tribal ties to the respondent (Lewis, 2020; Mosinger, 2018; Doctor, 2020). Including these other characteristics enables me to test alternative causal stories, gauge relative strength of causal effects, and ensure that new information about lifestyle or ceasefire are not merely proxies for these other features based on past experience with armed groups (Dafoe, Zhang and Caughey, 2018).

Each respondent evaluated ten different hypothetical groups, each with new independently-randomized features. This allows me to separately measure the effect of changing each of these features on a potential recruit's stated willingness to join the armed group — and, more importantly, the differences in these effects between high- and low-commitment recruits. Following Hainmueller and Hiscox (2010), I report the OLS estimates for each effect. For robustness, I also reran all results using ordered probit, which yielded substantively identical results (full results in *Appendix*).

4 Results

The results of the conjoint survey experiments provide evidence for the main hypotheses described in the theory section. Potential recruits in Northeast India are more willing to join an armed group, and civilian elders are more likely to support one, when the state has demonstrated its willingness to accommodate militants through a ceasefire (H1). More importantly, this accommodation makes recruits and supporters more likely to favor armed

Figure 1: Respondents' Willingness to Join/Support Armed Groups



Responses to all hypothetical groups shown to potential recruits (N=3664) and civilian elders (N=990).

groups with more moderate goals over those with more extremist goals (H2). These results are consistent across regions and subgroups, and respondents do not appear to be seeing extremism as a signal of strength or discipline. Instead, both likely recruits and civilian elders appear to prefer armed groups with moderate approaches when cooperation with the state is possible and have more equivocal preferences when it is not.

Figure 1 shows the raw responses for all hypothetical groups evaluated by likely recruits (3664 groups by 369 respondents) and civilian elders (990 groups by 99 respondents). Overall, both pools of respondents were more favorable to armed groups that were labeled as having moderate goals. The likely recruits expressed a strong interest in joining ("many / all people like me would join") about 20% of moderate armed groups and 15% of extremist ones, even with many other factors varying. This effect was similar in size overall to an armed group's military strength (5,000-strong vs. 200-strong) or social connections (the group's leader being from the same community vs. from a different area entirely). The overall results are shown in Figure A1 in the Appendix. Civilian elders, meanwhile, expressed support (would

"somewhat / strongly support" a young person joining) for 51% of the moderate armed groups as opposed to just 25% of extremist armed groups. For these civilians, the effect of a group's goals (moderate vs. extremist) was more than twice as large as the effect of military strength, discipline, or social connections and similar to that of material resources (offering high wages to soldiers vs. no wages), which was the most significant factor for all respondents. The effects on likely recruits vs. civilian elders are not directly comparable because the question is certainly different, but these baseline results do suggest that likely recruits may be more amenable overall to an extremist armed group, at least in Northeast India.

This result – that both potential recruits and potential supporters preferred moderate armed groups to more extremist ones – is significant in and of itself, even if it is not the primary question of the paper. Works on conflict and terrorism often assume that extremism is typically a benefit in a crowded recruitment market. Yet in this context, where support for independence and participation in armed groups are widespread, key constituents generally preferred joining and supporting moderate militants over extremist ones.

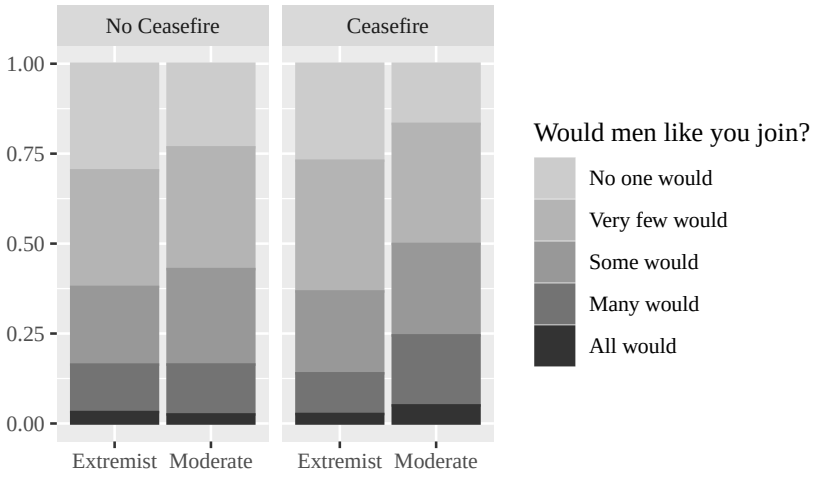
4.1 Likely Recruits

How do likely recruits change their preferences when the government is open to accommodating armed groups rather than cracking down on them? The results, shown in Figure 2, provide strong evidence of the basic contentions in the theory section. The top panel (2a) shows the raw data: how much interest likely recruits show in joining extremist and moderate groups given a ceasefire offer or no ceasefire offer from the government. The second and third panels (2b and 2c) test the differences implied by H1 and H2 explicitly: how a ceasefire offer affects willingness to join armed groups overall, and how it changes preferences for moderate vs. extremist armed groups.

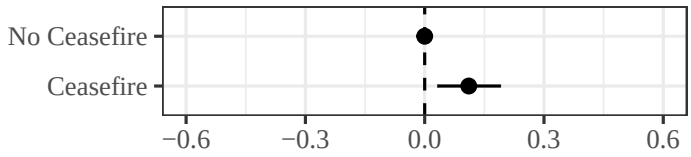
First, when states accommodate militants by offering a ceasefire, it makes potential recruits more likely to take up arms (H1). This effect is small but significant. Even with many

Figure 2: Effect of Ceasefire Offer on Likely Recruits' Willingness to Join Armed Groups

All Responses



Effect on Willingness to Join (H1)



Effect On Preference for Extremist vs. Moderate Groups (H2)

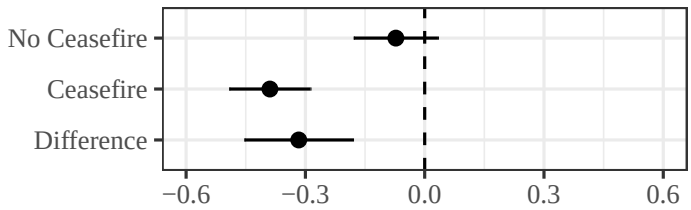


Figure 2b: treatment effect of ceasefire offer on joining (on 1-5 scale) from OLS model (Column 1 in Table A1 in the Appendix). Figure 2c: interaction between treatment effect of extremist ideology and ceasefire offer from OLS model (Column 2 of Table A1). FE for Enumerator-Region pairing. SEs clustered at the respondent level.

other factors varying at the same time, the prospect of a government ceasefire offer increased potential recruits' overall willingness to join by about 0.1 scale points – or about 0.1 standard deviations of the DV. Overall, while 16% potential recruits expressed a strong interest in joining (saying "most" / "all" would join) with no ceasefire offer, this number increased to 19% with a ceasefire offer. This effect is fairly small, but it is statistically significant and undercuts the widespread assumption that most people join armed organizations in order to fight.

More importantly, this treatment is likely to dramatically understate the increases in recruitment from state toleration. In other work (Hanson, Forthcoming), I show that state toleration enables militants to live a much more comfortable life, an extremely attractive prospect to would-be militants. Protected by ceasefire, militants are able to set up semi-permanent camps, travel in the open, live in more populated areas, and even tax local populations. In this survey, the lifestyle that an armed group can offer was a separately randomized treatment. For example, the armed group could offer "no wages and a hard lifestyle" or "small wages an an OK lifestyle," regardless of whether there was a ceasefire offer. In practice, however, agreeing to a ceasefire offer has typically enabled armed groups in Northeast India to offer the latter where they would otherwise offer the former. If both things were to happen – the state offers a ceasefire and armed leaders allow their soldiers to live a more comfortable life – it would effectively combine the effect of both treatments. This combined effect is massive, because both potential recruits and civilian elders cared more about the material lifestyle offered by armed groups than about any other factor (Figure A1 in the Appendix). For example, while just 9% of respondents expressed a strong interest in joining an armed group offering a hard lifestyle with no ceasefire, 17% did so for a group with an OK lifestyle with a ceasefire offer.

Second, state toleration pushes likely recruits toward armed groups with more moderate goals over those with more extremist goals (H2). When the government has not offered a ceasefire, potential recruits are equally likely to express a strong interest in joining ("many/all

people like me would join") regardless of whether the group has extremist or moderate goals: 17% vs. 17%. When the government instead offers a ceasefire, nearly twice as many potential recruits express a strong interest in joining a moderate armed group as an extremist one: 25% vs. 14%.

Controlling for all other treatments (Figure 2c), the difference in recruits' preferences is stark. When the government offered no ceasefire, the effect of a group's goals were very close to (and not statistically distinguishable from) zero. That is, potential recruits were indeed about equally likely to prefer joining an extremist or moderate armed group. When the government offered a ceasefire, on the other hand, extremist goals had a large and statistically significant negative effect on joining (about 0.4 points on a 1-5 scale, or nearly half of a standard deviation of the DV). This difference is very large. With no ceasefire offer, potential recruits essentially do not consider the group's goals at all. With a ceasefire offer, potential recruits react more strongly to a group's goals than they do to its military strength, discipline, and tribal connections.

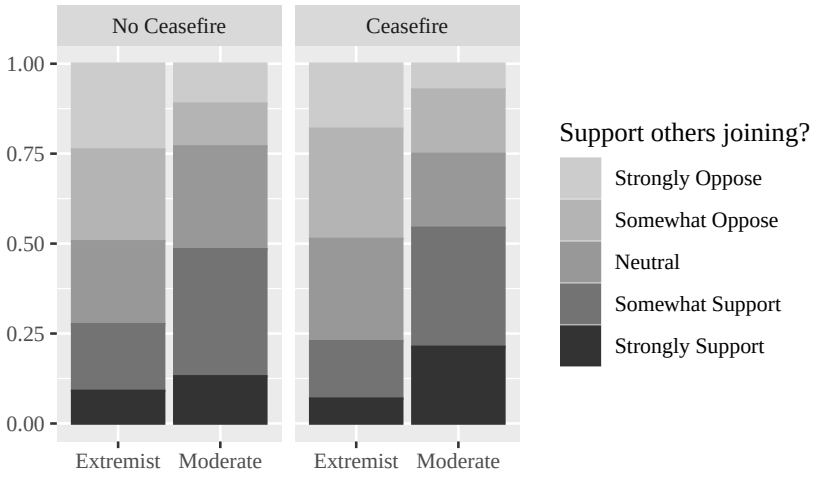
4.2 Civilian Elders

How do civilian elders evaluate which armed groups to support, and how does this change when states accommodate militants' activities? The experiments with civilian elders provide some evidence that ceasefire offers might increase support for militants overall (H1), and much stronger evidence that it pushes potential supporters toward more moderate armed groups (H2). The results for civilian elders are laid out in Figure 3, which is directly comparable to Figure 2's results for potential recruits – though the smaller sample size means more uncertainty in the estimates.

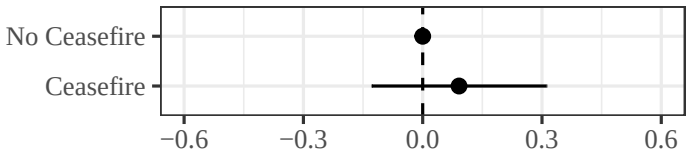
First, civilians were very slightly more likely to support joining an armed group when the government has offered a ceasefire than when it has not (H1). The overall effect was similar in size to the effect on potential recruits (0.1 standard deviations overall), but it was statistically insignificant due to the smaller sample. Regardless, the result does imply that

Figure 3: Effect of Ceasefire Offer on Civilian Elders' Willingness to Support Armed Groups

(a) All Responses



Effect on Willingness to Support Overall (H1)



Effect on Preference for Extremist vs. Moderate Groups (H2)

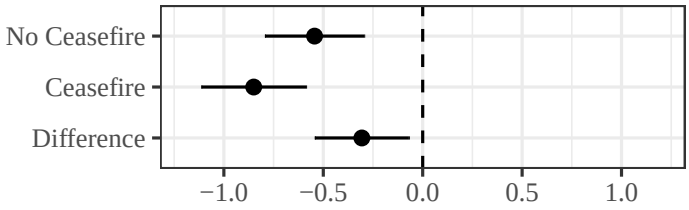


Figure 3b: treatment effect of ceasefire offer on support (on 1-5 scale) from OLS model (Column 1 in Table A2 in the Appendix). Figure 3c: interaction between treatment effect of extremist ideology and ceasefire offer from OLS model (Column 2 of Table A2). FE for Enumerator-Region pairing. SEs clustered at the respondent level.

the effect is small. For example, 40% of civilian elders expressed support for a young man joining an armed organization when there was a ceasefire offer but 38% did so when there was no ceasefire offer. As with likely militant recruits, however, civilian elders were much more supportive of armed groups that could offer modest material comforts. This means that the effect of a ceasefire offer is likely to be much larger in practice because ceasefires enable soldiers to live much more comfortably, so long as armed leaders are willing to accept. Civilian elders were more than twice as likely to express support for an armed group with a ceasefire and offering an okay lifestyle (48%) than one without a ceasefire and offering a hard lifestyle (23%).

Second, like potential recruits, civilians were much more likely to support moderate armed groups over extremist ones when the state was more accommodating (H2). This is surprising partly because the baseline is so high, as stated above: overall, civilian elders were about twice as likely to support moderate armed groups as extremist ones. This effect is much stronger, however, when states offer to accommodate militants. When the state was not offering a ceasefire, respondents were about 20 percentage points more likely to express support for a moderate armed group (48%) than an extremist one (28%). When the state was offering a ceasefire, respondents were more likely to express support for a moderate group (54%) and less likely to express support for an extremist one (23%). Controlling for other factors, civilian elders' preference for moderate over extremist armed groups moves from large (0.5 scale points) to gigantic (0.8 – larger even than the effect of material lifestyle) when the state offers a ceasefire.

4.3 Comparing Subgroups and Regions

These results were generally consistent among different pools of recruits in different conflict settings.

First, state accommodation moved the preferences of even the most idealistic and committed potential recruits. Even if the majority of potential recruits and supporters

were swayed to more moderate factions during times of conflict, it is reasonable to wonder whether the most ideologically-committed recruits might still favor extremists even in times of toleration. However, this does not appear to be the case. In Figures A4 and A5 in the Appendix, I tested the same results among the most ideologically-motivated and extremist subset of recruits, measured three different ways.[3] Even among these highly-motivated recruits, respondents were far more likely to favor moderates over extremists when the government had offered a ceasefire.

Second, the effects are very similar in the two survey regions, which have very different histories of violence and extremism (Figure A2 and A3 in the Appendix). While moderate armed groups (like NSCN-IM) have generally been more successful in Nagaland, extremists (like ULFA) have generally had more success in Assam. While the government has been open to generous long-term ceasefires in Nagaland, they have been far less accommodating in Assam. This latter aspect was important to the results: while respondents and interviewees in Nagaland generally viewed ceasefires as a boon, those in Assam were very skeptical that they would last or offer any benefits to the community. Yet in both settings, both likely recruits and civilian elders preferred to back moderate armed groups over extremist ones, and were far more likely to do so when the government had offered a ceasefire.

4.4 Mechanisms

Why are potential recruits and supporters more likely to favor armed groups with moderate goals over those with extremist ones when the state is open to accommodation? The results do not suggest that accommodation dampens anti-state anger or that moderation is a proxy for other aspects of armed groups. Instead, they are consistent with the main mechanisms posited in the theory section: that state accommodation opens the door for moderates to achieve the movement's goals more safely and effectively.

[3]The subsets are: members of ethnic community organizations (which are often active on political issues); individuals who believe militants provide important community services; and individuals who very strongly identify with their ethnic group over their nationality.

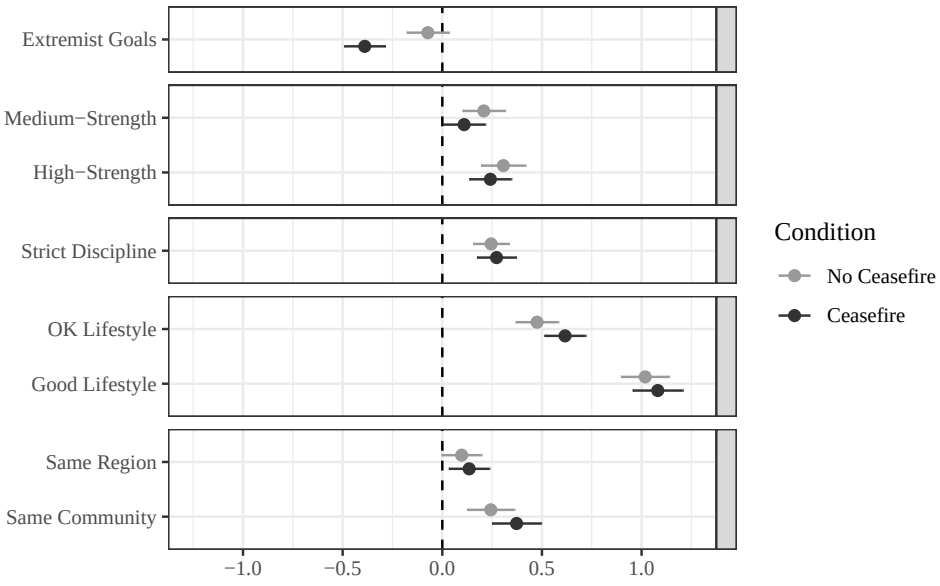
First, it does not appear that ceasefire offers dampen anti-state anger. One possible mechanism by which ceasefire offers could change the preferences of potential recruits and supporters is by softening anger and frustration at the state. If this were the main mechanism, we should expect that respondents should be less likely to express interest in joining or supporting militants given a peace agreement overall – particularly potential recruits, whose behavior is often argued to be driven by anger and frustration. This clearly is not the case, as shown by the Figure 2b. When states offer a ceasefire arrangement, more potential recruits express interest in mobilizing. They just do so for moderate armed groups.

Second, it does not appear that recruits perceive extremism as a proxy for strength or discipline. In conflict settings, extremist groups are often believed to be stronger or more disciplined than moderate armed groups, as they are more likely to provoke state crackdown (Walter, 2017; Mironova, 2019). It is possible, then, that recruits and supporters might shift toward extremists during periods of crackdown for protection. Partly to rule out this possibility, the survey included explicit information about armed groups' military strength and reputed discipline. Even holding constant the military strength and discipline of the armed group, however, respondents were much more likely to favor moderates when the government had offered a ceasefire (Figure 4). Moreover, respondents were no less likely to favor strong or disciplined armed groups. Aside from the group's goals, state accommodation did not appear to affect the salience of any other factor.

Instead, it appears more plausible this effect is primarily driven by respondents seeing state accommodation as opening a window for negotiation and coexistence. On the most basic level, it is worth looking at the opinions expressed in Table 1. All potential recruits agreed that their region should be independent (per the screening question), and nearly all expressed at least some level of interest in joining an armed group (in the conjoint experiment), yet 75% of them also believed that negotiation and nonviolent activism are more effective than violent resistance. Similarly, nearly two-thirds agreed that the government was doing important work for their community, while less than one-third thought the same

Figure 4: Effect of Ceasefire Offer on All Preferences

Likely Recruits



Civilian Elders

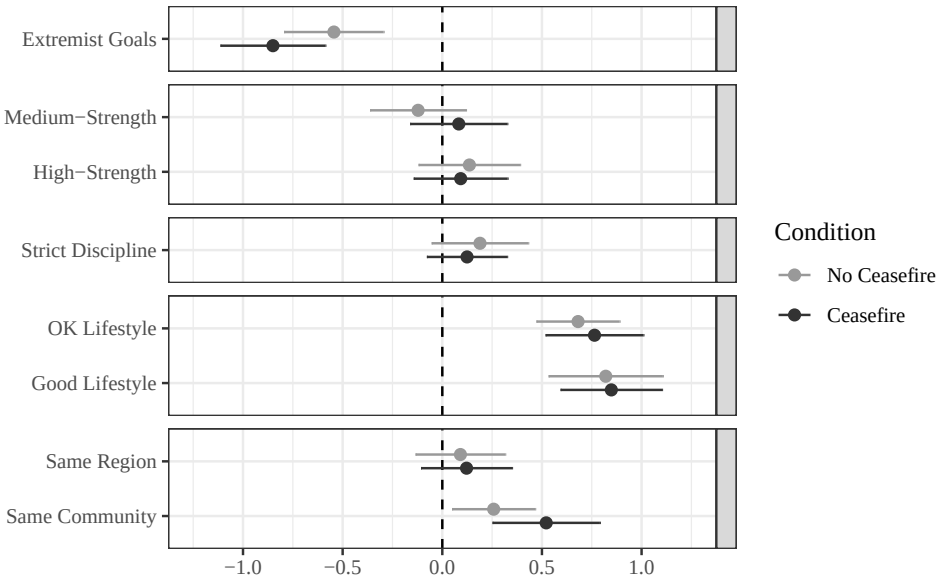


Figure 4a: interaction between all treatment effects and ceasefire offer from OLS model predicting joining (Column 2 of Table A1). Figure 4b: interaction between all treatment effects and ceasefire offer from OLS model predicting support (Column 2 of Table A2). FE for Enumerator-Region pairing. SEs clustered at the respondent level.

about local non-state armed groups. This all suggests that potential militant recruits do not necessarily equate *militancy* with *violence* or see state and militant presence as zero-sum. By opening up possibilities for armed groups to take on more nonviolent roles, state accommodation might push potential recruits and civilian supporters into the ranks of moderate armed groups more comfortable with those roles.

5 Illustrative Case: Militancy in Nagaland

What do these individual-level effects look like in practice, and how might they shape the broader politics of an armed movement? When states signal their willingness to accommodate and coexist with militants in the long-term, armed groups should see greater recruitment and support (H1), but these recruits and supporters should flow disproportionately to moderate factions (H2).

To illustrate, I describe below the recruitment patterns of ethnic Naga armed groups before and after 1997, when the Government of India publicly offered long-term ceasefires to the major Naga factions. This move marked a dramatic transition in the government's strategy toward militancy in Nagaland, from the brutal crackdowns of the 1990s to peaceful coexistence of the 2000s and 2010s (Waterman, 2021; Baruah, 2007; Wouters, 2018). The Government of India continued to station thousands of troops to defend against "terrorists" and Naga militants have continued to maintain that they are the legitimate government and prepared for possible war with the "foreign invaders." Yet so long as they do not attack state forces, militants are permitted to recruit new members, patrol territory, and even collect taxes from Naga civilians.[4] These ceasefire offers had little to do with how the conflict was going – Naga armed groups had made little progress against government forces – instead, government officials wished to divert security forces elsewhere and saw little gain in defeating militants outright.[5] To test how these transitions from crackdown to toleration shaped recruitment

[4] Author interviews with civilian activists (NA2, NA3, NA6), 2016

[5] Author interview with think-tank analyst (NA21), 2015

and support, I conducted more than 40 in-depth interviews of current and former Naga militants (including senior leaders, lower-tier officers, and rank-and-file soldiers) and civilian supporters and opponents in the area (activists, tribal elders, and journalists).

5.1 Before 1997

In the years before the 1997 ceasefire, Naga armed groups had remained relatively stable in size and orientation since 1980, when the NSCN had emerged as the primary armed separatist group in Nagaland.[6] In the 1990s, there were two major Naga factions, similar in size and success: the NSCN-K and NSCN-IM. Since the two factions split in 1988, the NSCN-IM has been consistently and broadly viewed as the more moderate faction. Based in Northern Manipur, its leaders have demanded greater autonomy for Naga-majority regions in Nagaland and Manipur but projected a willingness to make concessions for those goals. The NSCN-K, based along the border with Myanmar, has more ambitious goals for independence and even uniting Nagas on both sides of the border. When the Government of India offered a ceasefire in 1997, therefore, the NSCN-IM jumped at the opportunity to further its local governance goals while the NSCN-K rejected the deal – eventually signing in 2001 but alternating between periods of aggression and ceasefire with the government.[7]

Table 3 describes where these two factions enjoyed recruitment success and support during the 1990s, before the ceasefires, and during the 2010s, a decade after them. In the 1990s, the NSCN-K was somewhat more successful in both. The NSCN-K were the only faction to draw significant numbers of recruits from among Nagas in Eastern Nagaland (primarily from the Konyak tribe) and on the Myanmar side of the border (primarily from the Heimi tribe). In addition, the NSCN-K recruited large numbers of Nagas from the Angami and other tribes in Western and Central Nagaland.[8] The NSCN-IM, meanwhile, was similar in size but slightly smaller, recruiting from Naga populations in northern Manipur and Sumi

[6]"Nagaland Backgrounder," South Asia Terrorism Portal (www.satp.org)
[7]Author interviews (NU1, NU7, NU9, NU16, NC3, NA1), 2016
[8]Author interviews (NA1, NA12, NC3, NC6, NC7), 2015-2016

Table 3: Recruitment Patterns in Nagaland, 1990s vs. 2010s

Area	**Recruitment in 1990s**	**Recruitment in 2010s**
Myanmar	NSCN-K dominant	NSCN-K dominant
Eastern Nagaland	NSCN-K dominant	Split between NSCN-K, NSCN-IM, NSCN-R, NSCN-KK
Western Nagaland	Split between NSCN-IM (Sumi) and NSCN-K (Other)	Split between NSCN-IM (Other) and NSCN-KK (Sumi)
Manipur	NSCN-IM dominant	NSCN-IM dominant

tribal areas of Western Nagaland.[9]

5.2 After 1997

Since 1997, there have been three major changes in recruitment and support for Naga armed groups. Moreover, the evidence suggests that all of these changes are driven from the bottom-up, not from the top-down. That is, armed leaders have not substantially changed their approaches, but recruits and supporters have shifted whether they turn out and who they support.

First, there was a dramatic increase in the ranks of Naga armed groups. Following the 1997 ceasefire, the NSCN-IM saw a massive influx of new recruits, by far the largest in its history. Anticipating the 2001 ceasefire, recruits also joined the NSCN-K at a higher rate than normal, but not nearly as dramatically as the NSCN-IM. Overall the major Naga factions more than doubled their ranks during the first few years of ceasefire (to about 10,000), and in total they have remained that size over the two decades since.[10] Meanwhile, civilian supporters were extremely supportive of the ceasefires[11] – though, as I and others show in other work, disciplinary issues inside Naga armed groups have soiled their reputation in the years since (Hanson, Forthcoming, 2019; Wouters, 2018).

[9] Author interviews (NA1, NU4), 2016
[10] Author interviews (U1, U13, U16), 2016
[11] Author interviews (NA1, NA2, NA3, NA6, NA8), 2016

Interviewees consistently emphasized that the ceasefires enabled armed groups to provide their rank-and-file soldiers a safer and easier life. One former militant provided a concise summary of these descriptions.

> "We went from living in jungles to living in buildings, from walking to driving places, from always being afraid to being relaxed, from a hard life to an easy life."[12]

At the same time, militants have still been able to serve the cause of Naga communities, providing security and public goods while living more comfortably at the same time.

Second, in the years since 1997, the moderate NSCN-IM has become by far the largest Naga faction, drawing recruits and supporters away from the hardline NSCN-K. Over the past two decades, the NSCN-K has lost nearly all of its recruiting and support base inside Nagaland. The NSCN-IM, meanwhile, has cemented its role as the leading group throughout much of Western Nagaland and grown its presence in Eastern Nagaland as well. Several former militants and civilians described that young people from their villages nearly exclusively joined the NSCN-K during the 1990s only to become a hotbed of recruitment for the NSCN-IM and NSCN-KK since the ceasefires began.[13]

Interviewees described two major advantages that state toleration has opened for moderate armed groups. First, moderates are more able to credibly promise safety and comfort to recruits and soldiers, allowing them to compete for recruits who would otherwise have little connection. Since the splits, one former militant summarized, "the cadres have flocked to the factions that collect more taxes and offered more benefits."[14] Several rebel leaders recounted stories of rebel recruiters introducing themselves to uniformed members of other rebel groups, hoping to talk them into joining. These recruiters ask questions like "How much do you make?" and "What kind of bed do you sleep in?" promising an easier life if they

[12] Author interview (KU2), Manipur, August 2016
[13] Author interviews (NC3, NC7, NA1, NA8), Nagaland, 2016
[14] Author interview (NC1), Nagaland, 2016

were to switch.[15] The second advantage was an opportunity to advance Naga autonomy. The NSCN-IM regularly redirects government projects, polices local communities, and negotiates with local political leaders.[16] Although it took nearly two decades, the NSCN-IM has finally drawn the Indian government to the bargaining table in recent years to negotiate for greater autonomy for Naga areas.

Third, both the NSCN-K and NSCN-IM have lost recruits to newly-emerging armed groups with more modest aims than either of them. Between 2007 and 2011, officers from both major factions defected to form the NSCN-U (renamed NSCN-KK in 2011). This group unified tribal Sumis from the NSCN-IM and tribal Konyaks from the NSCN-K that had become frustrated by the overly hardline positions that leaders took in negotiations and in maintaining ceasefires. In 2015, much of the NSCN-K's remaining soldiers in Eastern Nagaland broke away to form the NSCN-R when the NSCN-K abrogated its ceasefire with the government. The NSCN-R's leader described the fracture, saying, "The decision left the people in Nagaland in danger. When I raised my voice, I was expelled."[17] In interviews, this disconnect was widely understood to be the main reason for both factional disputes within the NSCN-K: Khaplang's aggressiveness against the Indian government put Nagaland communities at risk, and Konyak subordinates objected.[18] Each of these breakaway factions signed indefinite ceasefires with the government immediately after their founding and have remained in them since.[19]

Naga interviewees, both inside and outside of armed organizations, traced this fragmentation to the ceasefires. To extremists, moderates' willingness to accept ceasefire was a betrayal of the ideals of the movement. "They have given up on the true revolution," said one member of the NSCN-K.[20] To most recruits, however, the NSCN-K's desire to keep

[15] Author interviews with Naga commanders (NU12, NU13, NU16), Nagaland, July-August 2016. Wouters (2018) recounts a similar incident (pp. 115-116).
[16] Author interviews (NA2, NA6), 2016
[17] Author interview (NU15), Nagaland, 2016
[18] Author interviews (NA1, NA5, NU4, NU7, NU16), Nagaland, 2016
[19] See the South Asia Terrorism Portal and UCDP events data (Sundberg and Melander, 2013)
[20] Author interview (NC7), Nagaland, 2016

fighting in the name of independence was a reckless endangerment of the population and movement. The NSCN-R's leader described that when the NSCN-K abrogated the ceasefire, "Khaplang abandoned the Konyak people" to the Indian Army.[21]

The most obvious evidence that defectors were driven by hopes at moderation came in 2015, when the NSCN-IM signed a framework agreement with the Government of India which opened the possibility of a long-term peace settlement. Even before any details of this agreement were public, thousands of militants – including one of the namesake leaders of the NSCN-KK – defected from moderate factions into the ranks of the NSCN-IM. Several NSCN-IM officers expressed genuine frustration with the influx of new soldiers, complaining that they were unable to integrate so many new recruits.[22]

The result of these changes is that Naga moderates have dramatically gained standing as the movement has grown in size, while the NSCN-K and other hardliners have increasingly been marginalized from Naga politics in India. In peace negotiations in the last five years, the Indian government has attempted to keep the NSCN-K out entirely, hoping that a deal with the NSCN-IM and a few more moderate groups (NSCN-R, NSCN-KK, and NNC) will end the conflict entirely.[23] In peace negotiations over the latter half of the 2010s, each organization has offered more favorable terms than either the NSCN-IM (whose peace negotiations have stalled for years over their demands for a separate Naga flag and passport) and the NSCN-K (which has largely refused any negotiations).

6 Discussion

These conjoint survey experiments provide some of the first direct, causal evidence on the preferences of potential recruits and supporters of armed groups. As such, they have important implications for debates about conflict, militancy, and extremism.

First, these results help answer some of the longest-running debates regarding what

[21] Author interview (NU15), Nagaland, 2016
[22] Author interviews (NA1, NU1, NU15, NC6), 2016
[23] Author interview (NA1), Nagaland, 2016

recruits and supporters want from armed organizations. They demonstrate that competition between armed groups need not always cause "outbidding" (Bloom, 2005; Walter, 2017) – or, for that matter, "underbidding" (Cunningham, 2014; Abrahms, 2018). Instead, potential recruits' and supporters' preferences depend a great deal on prospects for achieving political aims – whether they view moderation or extremism as effective and wise given the government's behavior. More generally, these results emphasize that militancy and extremism are not merely two sides of the same coin. Just as taking up arms does not necessarily mean open conflict with the government Staniland (2012*b*), it also does not necessarily mean empowering extremists. The same forces that push would-be militants to extremism may be precisely those that deter them from taking up arms.

Second, these results have more general implications for how states can manage militant threats. In particular, it suggests that pursuing militants at all costs may deter ordinary recruits and supporters from taking up arms, but it also encourages those who do mobilize to back more extremist armed groups, who will likely be more aggressive and more resistant to compromise. Accommodating militants, by contrast, may deescalate support for extremists but may actually increase militancy overall by opening the door for moderate armed leaders. Instead, the underlying appeal of moderate militancy in the face of government accommodation helps explain two otherwise puzzling patterns in civil war: the prominence of "ethnic defection" and "partial peace." During a conflict, governments frequently sign peace agreements with only some of the armed groups arrayed against them, ceding some political power in exchange for a commitment to disarm (Brandt, 2018; Nilsson, 2008; Driscoll, Pearlman and Cunningham, 2012; Cunningham, 2014). These armed groups may even explicitly ally with government forces to fight other militants from their identity group with whom they ostensibly share political goals (Kalyvas, 2008; Staniland, 2012*a*). These defections are often seen only as corrupt bargains by militant leaders which abandon their goals and divide constituents. These results, however, suggests that even the most committed militant recruits and supporters see cooperation as a legitimate way to achieve political goals

if the state is willing to accommodate them. They suggest, in other words, that constituents view moderate militancy as a separate, legitimate strategy that might achieve important political aims – not merely a more restrained version of extremism.

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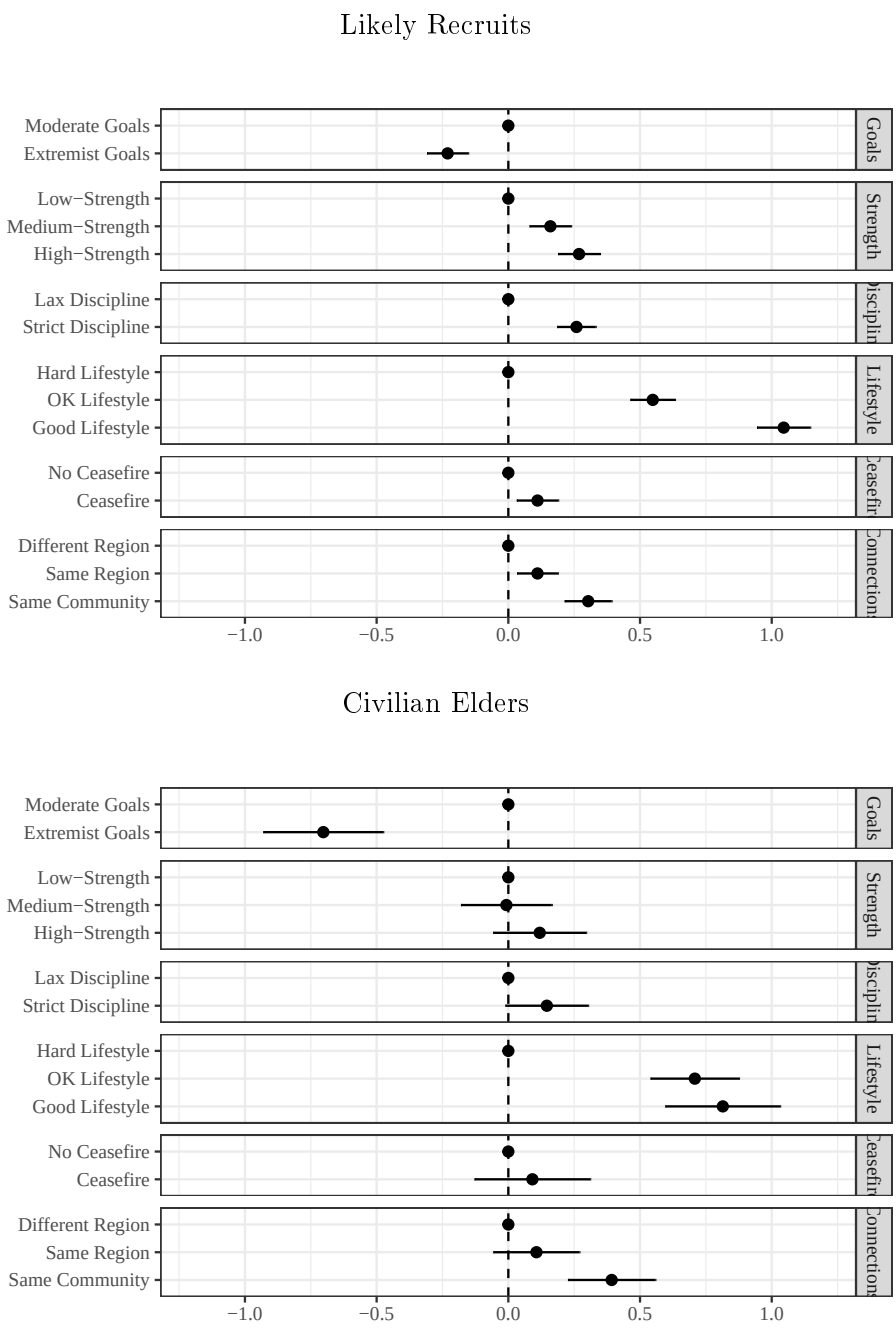
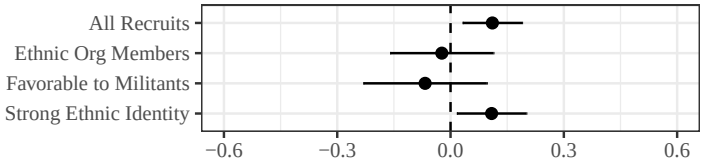
A Additional Results

Figure A1: Overall Effects of Each Attribute



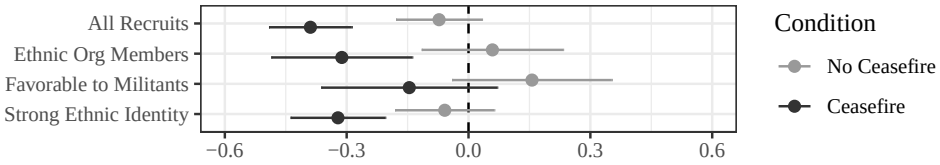
Baseline effects of each treatment (relative to the reference category) on joining or support (on 1-5 scale) from OLS models (Column 1 in Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix). FE for Enumerator-Region pairing. SEs clustered at the respondent level.

Figure A2: Effect of Ceasefires on Mobilization/Support, Highly Committed Likely Recruits



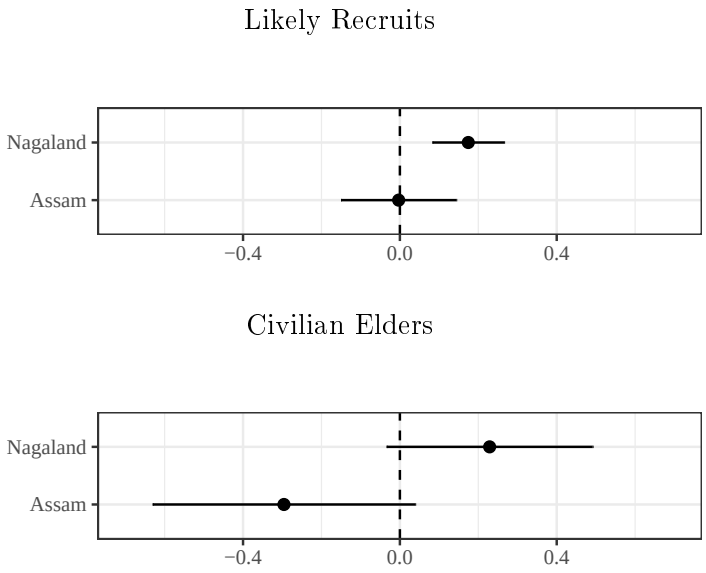
Baseline effects of each treatment (relative to the reference category) on interest in joining (on 1-5 scale), replicating OLS model from Table A1 (Column 1) among subsets of respondents based on prior survey questions. FE for Enumerator-Region pairing. SEs clustered at the respondent level.

Figure A3: Effect of Ceasefires on Preference for Extremist vs. Moderate Groups, Highly Committed Likely Recruits



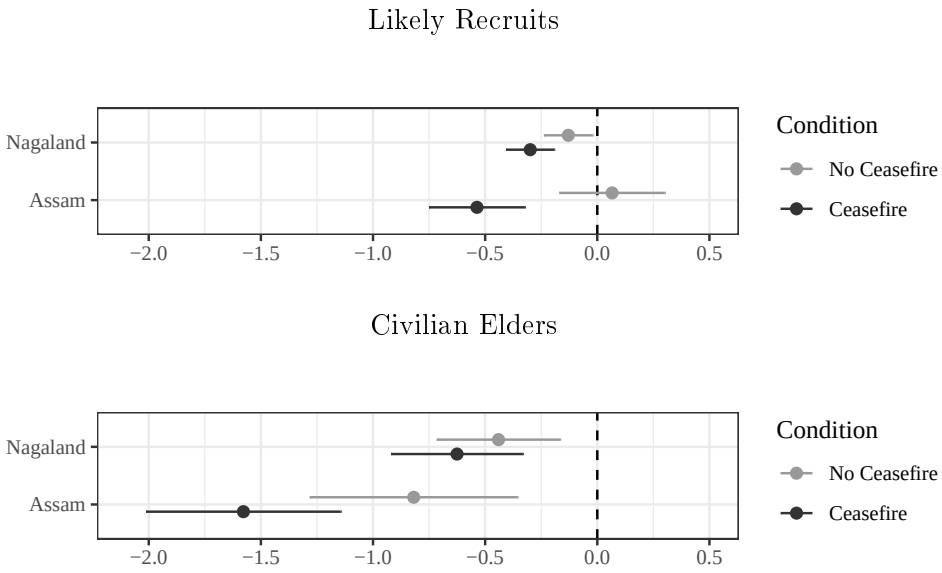
Interaction effects effects between ceasefire offer and each treatment (relative to the reference category) on interest in joining (on 1-5 scale), replicating OLS model from Table A1 (Column 2) among subsets of respondents based on prior survey questions. FE for Enumerator-Region pairing. SEs clustered at the respondent level.

Figure A4: Effect of Ceasefires on Mobilization/Support by Region



Baseline effects of each treatment (relative to the reference category) on interest in joining or support (on 1-5 scale), replicating OLS model from Tables A1 and A2 (Column 1) among subsets of respondents from each region. FE for enumerator. SEs clustered at the respondent level.

Figure A5: Effect by Ceasefires on Preference for Extremist vs. Moderate Group, by Region



Interaction effects effects between ceasefire offer and each treatment on interest in joining or support (on 1-5 scale), replicating OLS model from Tables A1 and A2 (Column 2) among subsets of respondents from each region. FE for enumerator. SEs clustered at the respondent level.

Table A1: Main Results for Recruits, OLS vs Ordered Probit

	DV: Likelihood of Joining (1-5 Scale)			
	OLS		Ord. Probit	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ceasefire	**.11*** **	.19**	**.13*** **	.25**
	(.04)	(.09)	**(.05)**	(.12)
Extremist	-.23***	-.07	-.28***	-.10
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.06)
CF * Extremist		**-.32*** **		**-.36*** **
		(.07)		**(.08)**
OK Life	.55***	.48***	.68***	.61***
	(.04)	(.05)	(.06)	(.07)
CF * OK Life		.14**		.15*
		(.06)		(.08)
Good Life	1.04***	1.01***	1.22***	1.21***
	(.05)	(.06)	(.07)	(.08)
CF * Good Life		.06		.04
		(.07)		(.08)
Med Strength	.16***	.21***	.19***	.25***
	(.04)	(.06)	(.05)	(.07)
CF * Med Strength		-.09		-13*
		(.07)		(.09)
Hi Strength	.27***	.31***	.32***	.37***
	(.04)	(.06)	(.05)	(.07)
CF * Hi Strength		-.07		-.10
		(.08)		(.09)
Strict	.26***	.25***	.29***	.28***
	(.04)	(.05)	(.04)	(.05)
CF * Strict		.03		.03
		(.06)		(.07)
Same Region	.11***	.10*	.12***	.11*
	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.06)
CF * Same Region		.04		.04
		(.07)		(.08)
Same Community	.30***	.24***	.35***	.28***
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.07)
CF * Same Community		.13*		16*
		(.08)		(.10)
Enumerator-Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Choices)	3664	3664	3664	3664
N (Respondents)	369	369	369	369

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

Table A2: Main Results for Civilians, OLS vs Ordered Probit

	DV: Support (1-5 Scale)			
	OLS		Ord. Probit	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ceasefire	**.09**	.10	**.11**	.12
	(.11)	(.22)	**(.11)**	(.21)
Extremist	-.70***	-.54***	-.66***	-.51***
	(.12)	(.13)	(.12)	(.12)
CF * Extremist		**-.31*** **		**-.31*** **
		(.121)		**(.12)**
OK Life	.71***	.68***	.67***	.64***
	(.09)	(.11)	(.08)	(.10)
CF * OK Life		.08		.09
		(.16)		(.15)
Good Life	.81***	.82***	.78***	.79***
	(.11)	(.15)	(.11)	(.14)
CF * Good Life		.03		.03
		(.16)		(.15)
Med Strength	-.01	-.12	-.00	-.11
	(.09)	(.12)	(.08)	(.12)
CF * Med Strength		.20		.18
		(.17)		(.16)
Hi Strength	.12	.14	.12	.13
	(.09)	(.13)	(.09)	(.13)
CF * Hi Strength		-.04		-.03
		(.17)		(.17)
Strict	.15*	.19*	.16**	.20*
	(.08)	(.12)	(.08)	(.12)
CF * Strict		-.07		-.07
		(.16)		(.15)
Same Region	.11	.09	.11	.09
	(.08)	(.12)	(.08)	(.11)
CF * Same Region		.03		.03
		(.16)		(.15)
Same Community	.39***	.26**	.39***	.26**
	(.09)	(.11)	(.09)	(.11)
CF * Same Community		.26		.26
		(.18)		(.17)
Enumerator-Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Choices)	990	990	990	990
N (Respondents)	99	99	99	99

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

Table A3: Main Results, First Five Responses Only

	Recruits		Civilians	
	DV: Joining (1-5)		DV: Support (1-5)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Ceasefire	**.13****	.26**	**.00**	.25
	(.06)	(.13)	**(.16)**	(.34)
Extremist	-.13**	.01	-.62***	-.49***
	(.05)	(.08)	(.12)	(.19)
CF * Extremist		**-.28*****		**-.27**
		(.11)		**(.24)**
OK Life	.53***	.51***	.70***	.55***
	(.05)	(.08)	(.11)	(.15)
CF * OK Life		.03		.37
		(.11)		(.22)
Good Life	1.02***	1.06***	.83***	.76***
	(.06)	(.09)	(.15)	(.24)
CF * OK Life		-.09		.21
		(.13)		(.30)
Med Strength	.18***	.24***	.01	-.03
	(.05)	(.07)	(.12)	(.16)
CF * Med Strength		-.12		.09
		(.10)		(.24)
Hi Strength	.31***	.31***	.12	.18
	(.06)	(.08)	(.13)	(.21)
CF * Hi Strength		.00		-.13
		(.11)		(.27)
Strict	.27***	.23***	.20*	.41**
	(.05)	(.06)	(.12)	(.17)
CF * Strict		.08		-.41*
		(.10)		(.22)
Same Region	.14***	.17**	.04	.21
	(.05)	(.07)	(.12)	(.17)
CF * Same Region		-.05		-.34
		(.10)		(.23)
Same Community	.29***	.22***	.34***	.27
	(.07)	(.09)	(.12)	(.17)
CF * Same Community		.14		.12
		(.12)		(.25)
Enumerator-Region FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N (Choices)	1833	1833	495	495
N (Respondents)	369	369	99	99

** p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*