Threat and the Dynamics of Low-Intensity Intercommunal Violence: Evidence from the West Bank

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Abstract: Low-intensity intergroup violence sometimes takes the form of large-scale civilian mobilization and severe acts of violence (*communal defense*); while on other occasions, it takes the form of attacks by a small number of hardcore radicals against sites that represent the target group's culture (*zealotry*). What accounts for this variation? This article argues that the form low-intensity intergroup violence takes is a product of the type of threat ethnic groups perceive in their environment; the perception of physical threats tend to produce *communal defense*, while the perception of social threats tend to produce *zealotry*. In order to test the argument, variation in the frequency, severity, and target choices of Israeli settler violence against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank is examined. Single equation error correction model (ECM) and penalized maximum likelihood estimation (PMLE) are employed using an original hand coded dataset that records violent and nonviolent contentious events in the West Bank from 2010 through 2018, including over 4,800 incidents of Israeli settler violence against Palestinians. The results indicate that Palestinian attacks resulting in settler fatalities tend to produce more frequent settler attacks than Israeli evacuations of Jewish settlements. Deadly attacks also tend to trigger severe acts of violence such as firebombings of Palestinian civilian homes. Israeli territorial concessions to Palestinians, in contrast, produce less frequent attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians, but significantly increase attacks against symbolic sites that represent Palestinian culture, such as Palestinian places of worship. These results have implications for policymakers considering alternative strategies of conflict management. Namely, the results suggest that conflict management strategies based on incremental concessions may reduce civilian suffering in the short-term while undermining intergroup reconciliation in the long-term.

Introduction:

Early in the morning of September 5, 2011, Israeli authorities raided the northern West Bank outpost of Migron and demolished three homes built illegally by Jewish settlers on privately owned Palestinian land. Within hours, a group of Israeli settlers raided the nearby Palestinian village of Qusra, rolled burning tires into a local mosque, smashed the buildings windows, and spray painted 'Muhammed is a pig' and 'Aley Ayin and Migron = social justice' on the exterior walls. On September 8 and 9, Israeli settlers vandalized two additional mosques in the West Bank villages of Yatma and Beir Zeit and attempted to set fire to a mosque in the Palestinian village of Deir Istya before being repelled by village residents.

On July 31, 2015, in the midst of a wave of attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians in the West Bank, a masked Israeli settler by the name of Amiram Ben-Uliel infiltrated the Palestinian village of Duma and threw a Molotov cocktail through the bedroom window of a Palestinian home, killing three members of a single family. Following his arrest, Ben-Uliel confessed to his interrogators that the attack was a response to the murder of his friend, Malachi Rosenfeld, by Palestinian assailants a month earlier.

What accounts for variation in patterns of low-intensity intergroup violence? Low-intensity violence is non-militarized violence that is rarely fatal and, hence, does not reach the levels of lethality that characterize civil wars (Balcells, Daniels & Escribà-Folch, 2016). Examples include destruction of property, attacks on symbolic sites such as places of worship, physical assaults, and occasional acts of non-militarized lethal violence. Low-intensity intergroup violence is prevalent in many ethnically divided societies such as Israel-Palestine (Alimi & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2012), Northern Ireland (Balcells, Daniels & Escribà-Folch, 2016), Liberia (Blair, Blattman & Hartman, 2017), and India (Brass, 2011). Recent research has highlighted the deleterious political and economic effects of low-intensity intergroup violence, as

well as its contribution to conflict escalation (Balcells, Daniels & Escribà-Folch, 2016; Blair, Blattman & Hartman, 2017).

Many studies of ethnic violence highlight the central role of threat perception (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998). Extant explanations of ethnic violence, however, tend to conflate two types of threat that often occur simultaneously within ethnic conflicts: *physical threat*, which is threat to physical safety and *social threat,* which is threat to sociopolitical status. I argue that while both physical and social threats increase the overall frequency of ethnic violence, they do so differently. In short, physical threat tends to produce violence meant to impose immediate costs on the perceived source of threat, while social threat produces attacks that aim to undermine social relations between identity groups. Consequently, physical threats tend to elicit more frequent and severe attacks against ethnic rivals by a relatively large number of people (*communal defense*), while social threats tend to trigger attacks by a relatively small number of intolerant radicals against symbolic sites that are highly valued by ethnic rivals (*zealotry*).

To test my argument, I examine variation in the frequency and severity of Israeli settler attacks against Palestinian civilians and their property in the West Bank. I employ a single equation error correction model (ECM) and penalized maximum likelihood estimation (PMLE) using an original hand coded daily dataset of over 50,000 violent and nonviolent contentious events in the West Bank from 2010 through 2018. The West Bank Contentious Events Dataset v.1 (WBCED) is a subnational dataset that includes a number of variables that capture Israeli government concessions to and repression of both the Jewish and Palestinian communities in the West Bank, Palestinian violence and protest activities, and Israeli settler activities such as violence against Palestinian civilians and their property.

The article makes three central contributions. First, the study contributes to the literature on ethnic violence by developing a generalizable theoretical framework to explain why low-intensity intergroup violence is sometimes characterized by frequent attacks by a relatively large proportion of the population and severe acts of non-militarized violence, while at other times it is characterized by 'symbolic' attacks by a small number of intolerant radicals. Second, the article analyzes patterns of low-intensity violence against ethnic minorities with original micro-level event data from within the West Bank, extending the empirical evidence for this type of violence to a new case. Finally, a significant number of quantitative studies have examined various dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (e.g. Brandt, Colaresi & John, 2008; Haushofer, Biletzki & Kanwisher, 2010; Zeitzoff, 2018). While these studies have provided many important insights, they tend to overlook the violent behavior of Israeli settlers. This is problematic given the significant impact Israeli settler violence has had on the dynamics of the conflict. This article therefore represents an initial step toward incorporating the violent behavior of Israeli settlers into the quantitative study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Threat and ethnic violence:

Threat plays a central role in explanations of communal violence. The general consensus is that groups perpetrate violence against ethnic rivals when they perceive a threat to their physical security and sociopolitical status. Scholars, for example, have argued that weakening central authority (Lake & Rothchild, 1996), demographic polarization (Horowitz, 1985), niche economic competition (Olzak, 1992), and contested border areas (Balcells, Daniels & Escribà-Folch, 2016) all increase the likelihood of ethnic violence by increasing the perceived level of threat among competing ethnic groups. As such, events that signal an increase in the perceived

level of threat to an ethnic group should significantly increase the likelihood that they perpetrate violence against their ethnic rivals (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Goldstone & Tilly, 2001).

Threat is best understood as a 'multidimensional concept as individuals and collectives differentiate among different domains in which they can appraise security' (Bar-Tal, Halperin & de Rivera, 2007: 449). Specifically, ethnic groups face two distinct types of threat: *Physical threat*, which is defined as a threat to the physical safety of members of a particular community, and *social threat*, which is defined as a threat to the sociopolitical status of a group (Kaufman, 2015). Despite acknowledging the multidimensional nature of threat, however, existing scholarship does not test the unique effects of physical and social threat on patterns of intergroup violence when they occur contemporaneously.

How events that increase the perception of physical threat produce ethnic violence:

Violence against civilians significantly increases support for retaliatory violence among the targeted community by way of three mechanisms: a) vengeance seeking, b) vigilante violence, and c) forced costs. First, ethnic violence tends to trigger *vengeance seeking* through an affective process. A sense of physical threat activates negative emotions such as fear and anger, which produce tendencies toward distrust, aggression, and confrontation and in extreme cases lead to dehumanization of out-groups (Kaufman, 2015; Maoz & McCauley, 2008). It does so by reminding people of their own mortality, which generates an unconscious cognitive response focused narrowly on self-preservation (Burke, Martens & Faucher, 2010).

Second, by increasing the number of people personally affected by violence and the number of people who view the government's response as insufficient, civilian targeting by ethnic rivals increases the perceived legitimacy of intergroup violence. Consequently, civilian

targeting by ethnic rivals increases the likelihood of *vigilante violence* against the offending community. Those who have been personally victimized by violence are particularly likely to view retaliatory violence as legitimate. However, even those only indirectly affected may come to see retaliatory violence as legitimate because (*i*) even indirect exposure can heighten perceptions of inter-group threat and (*ii*) dissident violence may indicate that the state is unwilling or unable to apply the necessary level of repression needed to suppress the threat (Abrahams, 1998; Della Porta, 2013; Gazit, 2015; Koopmans & Olzak, 2004; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1976: 7; Schmid & Muldoon, 2015; White, 1993).

Finally, targets of violence often engage in reciprocal violence strategically in order to deter their opponents from perpetrating additional attacks (*forced costs*) (Alimi, Bosi & Demetriou, 2012; Maney, McCarthy & Yukich, 2012). As the perceived level of physical threat rises, it becomes increasingly likely that people will participate in intergroup violence even if the actual probability of violence is negligible because 'a low probability event with drastic consequences has a high expected disutility' (Weingast, 1998). In sum, civilian targeting significantly increases support for retaliatory or 'tit-for-tat' violence by increasing affective tendencies toward aggression, increasing the perceived legitimacy of that violence, and increasing the perception that retaliatory violence is strategically expedient.

How events that increase the perceived level of social threat produce ethnic violence:

Social goods such as group status are central to ethnic conflicts and numerous scholars have directly linked social threats to ethnic violence (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Horowitz, 1985; Horowitz, 2001; Peterson, 2002). The general consensus in the literature is that coercion by ordinary citizens becomes an important mechanism of political power and 'social control' when

the sociopolitical position of an ethnic group is threatened (Gazit, 2015: 2; Goldstone, 2004; Horowitz, 1985: 212; Horowitz, 2001: 119-121; Luders, 2003; Mitchell, 2000: 153; Rosenbaum & Sederberg, 1976; Weisburd, 1989).

The sense of social threat is particularly acute when governments offer concessions to rival ethnic groups (Kaufman, 2015). Governments provide concessions as part of their conflict management strategy (Dugan & Chenoweth, 2012; Goldstone & Tilly, 2001; Lichbach, 1987; Rasler, 1996) because accommodation works to decrease grievances, it reduces the scale and intensity of ethnic conflicts by channeling them into mainly nonviolent forms of contention, and it increases the capacity of the government to combat violent dissidents by increasing collaboration by moderates (Bueno De Mesquita et al., 2005; Davies, 2014: 124; Goldstone & Tilly, 2001: 191-192).

In ethnically divided societies, concessions produce intergroup violence through a mechanism called *see-saw violence* (Maney, 2005; Maney, 2016). While concessions may help governments to manage intercommunal conflicts, concessions to one group tend to be perceived as socially threatening by their ethnic rivals. Consequently, concessions to ethnic rivals provide an opportunity for radicals to mobilize members of their own group who are alarmed by the concessions (Maney, 2005; Maney, 2016; Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996: 1638; Mitchell, 2000; Olzak, 1992; Weidmann, 2011; Zald & Useem, 1987). Even where concessions are objectively minor, they may be perceived as significant because concessions certify the legitimacy of group claims and signal the government's 'desire to resolve disagreement and…[to] lay the foundation for additional cooperation[…]' (Mattes, 2018). Concessions, in other words, indicate that the tactics of ethnic opponents are succeeding. Consequently, even minor concessions by governments may trigger attacks by ethnic rivals designed undermine communal reconciliation.

The relative effects of physical and social threat on low-intensity intergroup violence:

The previous discussion suggests that physical threats produce violence meant to impose immediate and severe costs on the perceived source of threat, while social threats trigger attacks that aim to undermine relations between identity groups. As such, I posit that physical threats tend to produce both relatively frequent and severe acts of violence against ethnic competitors by a relatively large number of people (*communal defense*), while social threats produce attacks against symbolically significant sites belonging to ethnic rivals by a relatively small number of hardcore radicals (*zealotry*).

Threat and the frequency of low-intensity intergroup violence:

Earlier, I explained that the perception of physical threat significantly increases public support for ethnic violence by producing an aggressive affective response (*vengeance seeking*), by increasing the perceived legitimacy of reciprocal violence (*vigilante violence*), and by increasing the perceived strategic expediency of violence (*forced costs*). All three of these factors are likely to be muted in response to social as opposed to physical threat. First, while people surely care deeply about their social status, threats to social status do not trigger the same type of cognitive survival response that physical threats do (Kaufman, 2015). Second, social threats affect fewer people directly in the way that violence does, which acts as a damper on the radicalization process. Finally, social threats are not immediate and existential and therefore require different tactical choices to combat them. To deter social threats, the community must convince the government to embrace their agenda; to deter physical threats, rival ethnic groups must be deterred from carrying out additional violent attacks. The former requires negotiation

with the government, the latter requires direct confrontation with the threatening community. On the whole then, events that increase the perception of physical threat should produce more support for ethnic violence and, in turn, produce more frequent attacks than events that increase the perceived level of social threat.

H1: Events that increase the perception of physical threat have a greater effect on the frequency of ethnic violence than events that increase the perception of social threat.

Threat and the severity of low-intensity intergroup violence:

The perpetration of severe forms of violence such as killings, requires a belief that the targeted community tends to engage in this type of behavior and a normative view that extreme forms of violence are morally acceptable (Kaufman, 2001: 38). Events that trigger an increase in the perceived level of physical threat such as attacks by ethnic rivals are likely to have a greater impact on both factors than events deemed socially threatening such as concessions to ethnic opponents. This is because dissident attacks reinforce the belief that dissidents engage in severe acts of violence and, as discussed previously, will have a greater impact on the perceived legitimacy of retaliatory violence. In addition, the aggressive affective response to physical threats significantly increases indifference to the other group's suffering (Kaufman, 2015: 15), reducing the cognitive barriers to perpetrating severe forms of violence. I therefore expect that,

H2: Events that increase the perception of physical threat elicit more severe forms of ethnic violence than events that increase the perception of social threat.

Threat and symbolic targeting:

Within ethnically divided societies, groups sometimes seek to desecrate sacred or symbolically charged spaces because these spaces are key symbols representing the rival community (Gaborieau, 1985; Kruetz & Croicu, 2018). In the case of India, for example, Hindus have long targeted Muslim places of worship because for 'Muslims the main symbols are: the Qur'an, the Prophet and his relics, mosques, tombs of saints and more generally cemeteries…' (Gaborieau, 1985: 9). The wave of black church arsons by white supremacists in the American South in the 1990s (Soule & Dyke, 1999), the torching of mosques and churches by Jewish extremists in Israel-Palestine (Eiran & Krause, 2016), the torching of mosques by Buddhist mobs in Myanmar (Kyaw, 2016), and destruction of churches in Indonesia (Wilson, 2008) provide additional examples of this phenomenon. This type of violence may be less severe in terms of physical harm to the victims, but may exacerbate conflict in the medium and long-term by increasing social polarization and intolerance among the affected communities (Kruetz & Croicu, 2018).

While social threats may be less likely than physical threats to elicit a violent response, they may be more likely to elicit violence against cultural symbols of the adversarial group. This is because social threats tend to have a greater influence on attitudes toward rights and liberties of rival ethnic groups than do physical threats (Canetti-Nisim et al., 2009). In ethnically divided societies, territorial concessions should be particularly likely to elicit violence against symbolic targets. The reason is that contested territory acts as a powerful source of identity for those who (desire to) occupy it (Schnell & Mishal, 2008; Tir & Singh, 2015; Toft, 2003; Toft, 2014). For this reason, 'an attack on land that one perceives as rightfully belonging to one's group is

perceived as a direct threat to the epitome of one's identity' (Tir & Singh, 2015: 479). Territorial concessions, in other words, tend to trigger a significant sense of social threat in those who feel an attachment to that territory (Toft, 2002) and, as a result, tend to significantly increase social intolerance – that is, 'a general tendency to see group differences as undesirable and a desire to avoid contact and interpersonal relations' with individuals from outgroups (Tir & Singh, 2015: 478). For this reason, even small alterations in territorial boundaries in a rival ethnic group's favor tend to be viewed as a significant social threat (Maney, 2016). Consequently, events that increase the perceived level of social threat, such as territorial concessions, do not just trigger a perceived need to change the behavior of ethnic rivals benefiting from the concessions; they also trigger feelings of animosity toward the culture, values, and traditions of the threatening group.

I therefore propose that while events that increase the perceived level of physical threat may motivate a large number of people to perpetrate violence against those deemed responsible for the threat, socially threatening events motivate a smaller number of intolerant radicals to perpetrate violence against targets that symbolize the culture, values, and traditions of the opposing group. Said formally,

> H3: Events that increase the perception of social threat are more likely to elicit violence against symbolic targets belonging to the rival ethnic group than events that increase the perception of physical threat.

The case of Israeli settler violence:

Jewish violence against Palestinians dates back to the early twentieth century when Jews and Palestinians began to compete for control of the territory known today as Israel-Palestine. In

1948, following the establishment of the state of Israel, Jews outside of Israel's security forces largely ceased their violent activities against Israel's Arab population. Upon Israel's capture of the West Bank in 1967, however, Jewish civilians began to settle the newly acquired territory and violent inter-communal violence between Jews and Arabs in the West Bank quickly reemerged. While largely non-militarized, Israeli settler violence has included physical assaults, destruction of property, the destruction of fruit bearing trees, stone throwing, attacks on Palestinian places of worship, shootings, and the firebombing of civilian homes (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2009; Sprinzak, 1999).

While persistent, the frequency and severity of Israeli settler violence has varied over time. During some periods, such as the period following the signing of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt in 1978 and during the first and second Palestinian intifadas in 1987 to 1993 and 2000 to 2005 respectively, Israeli settler violence increased significantly in its frequency and severity. During other periods, such as the mid-1980s and the 1990s, the frequency and severity of settler violence was lower, but low-intensity violence against Palestinians continued (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2009; Sprinzak, 1999).

Following the cessation of the second intifada in 2005 and the subsequent unilateral Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip, Hamas wrested control of Gaza away from the Palestinian Authority. Since that time, militarized conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has largely been confined to Gaza. However, Palestinians in the West Bank have continued to resist the Israeli occupation using both non-violent tactics such as organized protests and non-militarized acts of violence ranging from stone throwing to sporadic attacks resulting in military and civilian casualties. At the same time, Israeli settlers have continued to wage a low-level violent campaign against the Palestinian population in the West Bank as they have responded to

Palestinian violence and Israeli overtures to Palestinians in the form of territorial concessions, most notably the full or partial evacuation of Jewish settlements and outposts.

Data:

In order to test my hypotheses I use an original dataset of contentious interactions in the West Bank from 2010 through 2018 called the West Bank Contentious Events Dataset v.1 (WBCED). I compiled the dataset using a combination of daily situation reports produced by the Palestinian Authority (PA), Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs reports on Israeli civilian fatalities, and three English language Israeli newspapers from across the ideological spectrum. For the current analysis, the data is aggregated to the week.

To code Israeli settler violence I use daily situation reports produced by the Palestinian Monitoring Group, an inter-agency group of Palestinian civilian ministries and security agencies, under the auspices of the Negotiations Affairs Department (NAD) of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). NAD was established in 1994 in Gaza in order to follow up on the implementation of the Interim Agreement signed between Israel and the PLO, but operates under the daily auspices of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

While media reports are the most common source of violent event data, these reports often suffer from under and selective reporting that can bias the results of statistical analysis (Davenport & Ball, 2002; McCarthy, McPhail & Smith, 1996; Oliver & Maney, 2000). One solution to the problem of media bias is to rely on alternative sources when they are available. In the context of political violence, official government/military reports have gained traction (Alimi & Maney, 2017; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2009; Kocher, Pepinsky & Kalyvas, 2011; Loyle, Sullivan & Davenport, 2014), but governments are often reluctant to release information about the violent

behavior of pro-government actors, such as Israeli settlers, for fear of damaging their own reputations.

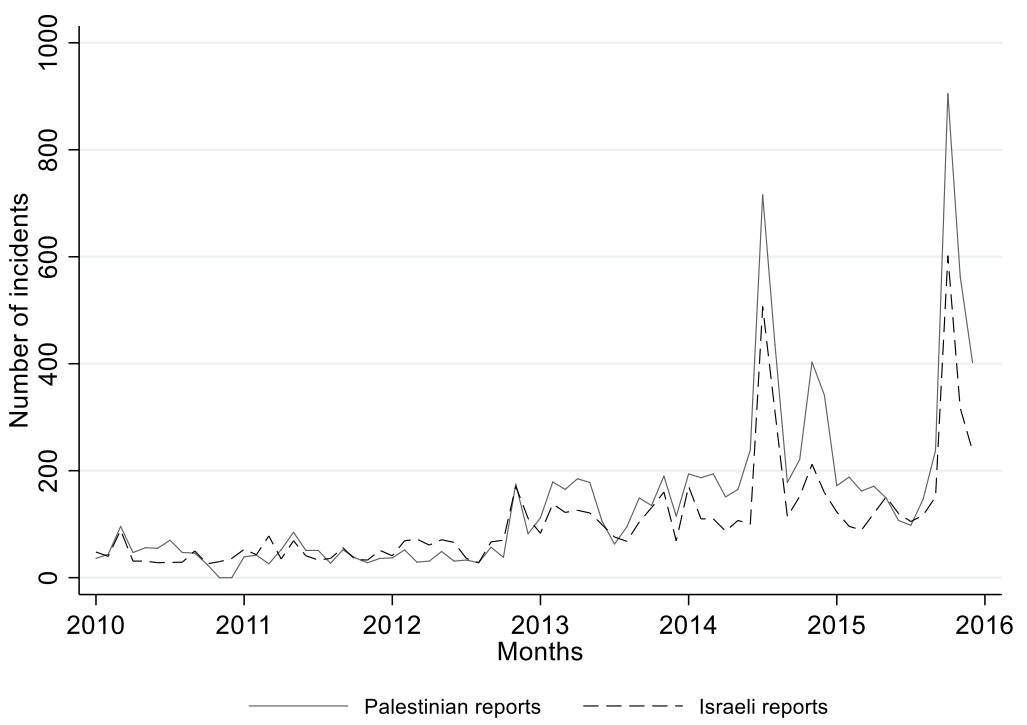
An alternative to government reports when examining the behavior of pro-government actors is reports produced by opposition groups. Opposition groups, unlike governments, have incentive to report as many incidents of violence against their own community as possible and to make this information public. Like government reports, however, opposition sources may bias their data in order to fit their strategic objectives. Specifically, opposition groups may over-report violent events by pro-government actors. Over reporting is preferable to underreporting, however, when descriptive information about events is available because observations can easily be dropped if they do not fit predetermined selection criteria. As I discuss below, I adopt this approach here.

Given potential incentives for biased reporting, data from opposition groups and government sources should be compared whenever possible to determine whether systematic bias exists. If opposition and government data are positively and significantly correlated, confidence in the data is increased. Unfortunately, the Israeli government does not make available data on the majority of event types in the NAD reports, including Israeli settler violence. However, the Israeli Internal Security Services (ISS) does publicly publish monthly statistics on Palestinian violence in the West Bank, including low-level violence such as the throwing of Molotov cocktails and improvised explosives such as pipe bombs. Figure 1 represents a monthly time-series of incidents of Palestinian violence in the West Bank as reported by the ISS and the NAD reports (2010-2015).[1] The two variables produce a correlation coefficient of 0.97. While this is not a formal test of the validity of the NAD reports as a whole,

[1] The NAD reports tend to report a higher level of violence overall. This is not surprising given that the NAD reports also include incidents of stone throwing by Palestinians.

the extraordinarily high level of consistency between the two sources increases my overall confidence in them.

Figure 1. Incidents of Palestinian violence, 2010–2015



Dependent variables:

Hypothesis 1 posits that events that increase the perception of physical threat increase the frequency of intergroup violence more than do events that increase the perception of social threat. The dependent variable for hypothesis 1 is *settler attacks*. The measure is a count of all events in which Jewish Israelis in the West Bank attack Palestinian civilians and incidents in which Israeli Jews in the West Bank directly target and damage Palestinian property. Incidents not meeting these criteria, including incidents of harassment or territorial encroachment in which

no physical contact or property damage occur, are not included. There are 4,841 incidents of settler violence recorded in the dataset with an average of approximately 10.5 attacks a week.

In order to test whether physical threats elicit more severe forms of violence (H2), I include a binary variable indicating whether a firebombing of Palestinian home occurred in a given week (*firebombings*). These attacks tend to occur in the middle of the night while Palestinian civilians are sleeping. They generally involve the use of Molotov cocktails, which attackers throw through a window in order to set the house alight and thereby create the greatest amount of damage possible. This tactic has received significant attention in Israel-Palestine. These attacks are also relatively rare, with 27 incidents in the reporting period occurring during 22 separate weeks. While it is impossible to determine with certainty whether perpetrators intended to kill their targets, killing civilians is, at the very least, considered an acceptable outcome. I therefore consider firebombings to be a particularly severe form of violence.

According to hypothesis 3, social threats are more likely than physical threats to elicit violence against symbolically charged sites such as places of worship. In order to test this proposition, I include a model that measures the effects of the independent variables on the likelihood that Israeli settlers will perpetrate at least one attack on a Palestinian place of worship (*attacks on mosques*).[2] The dataset records 34 attacks on mosques occurring during 30 separate weeks. Most of these attacks include an attempt to firebomb a Palestinian mosque and/or the spraying of racist graffiti such as ‘death to Arabs’ and ‘Kahane was right!’ referencing the late Rabbi Meir Kahane who advocated ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population.

[2] While 31 attacks (82%) targeted Palestinian mosques, seven attacks (18%) targeted Palestinian churches. For the sake of simplicity, I use the term mosques to refer to all Palestinian places of worship.

Table I provides summary statistics for the dependent variables.

Table I. Summary statistics for Israeli settler violence

Variable	Total events	# weeks > 0	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Settler attacks	4,841	467	10.51	8.06	0	62
Firebombings	35	34	0.07	0.26	0	1
Attacks on mosques	39	31	0.07	0.25	0	1

Time-series plots indicate that overall, *settler attacks* is marked by notable week-to-week variation, with intermittent spikes in violence that quickly dissipate (Figure 2). No clear time trends are immediately apparent in the data. In addition, the plots indicate that attacks on mosques become less common (Figure 3), while firebombings become more common following the 2012 Israel-Gaza War (Figure 4). I return to this disparity in my discussion following the presentation of the regression results.

Figure 2. Israeli settler violence against Palestinians, 2010-2018

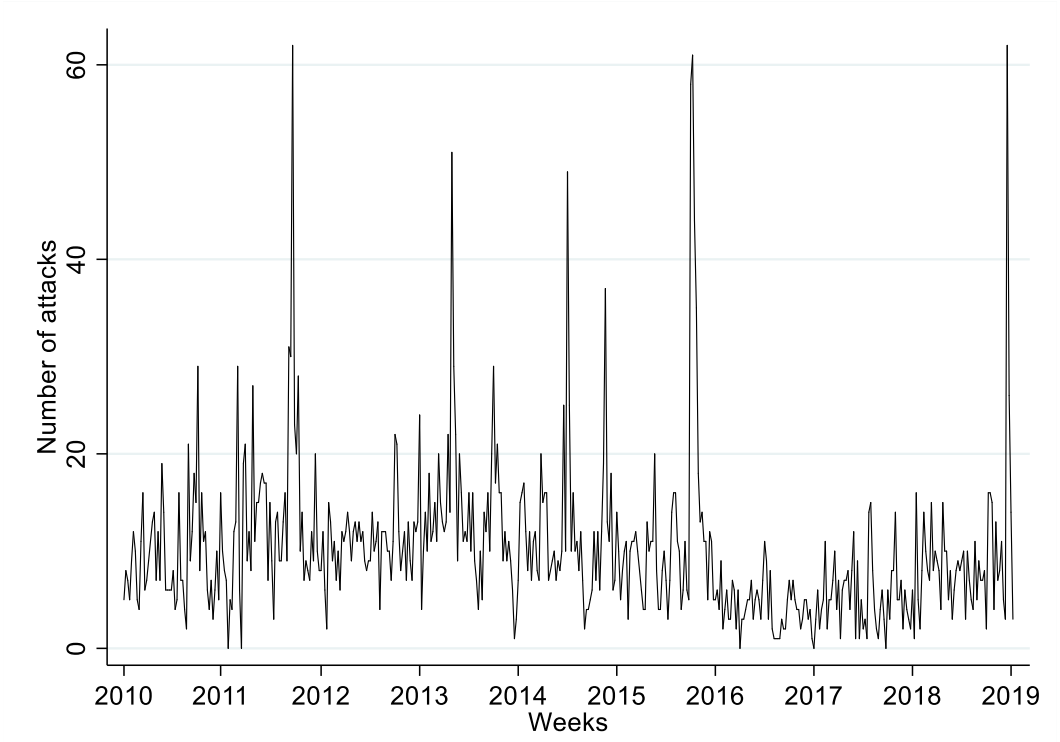


Figure 3. Attacks on mosques, 2010 – 2018

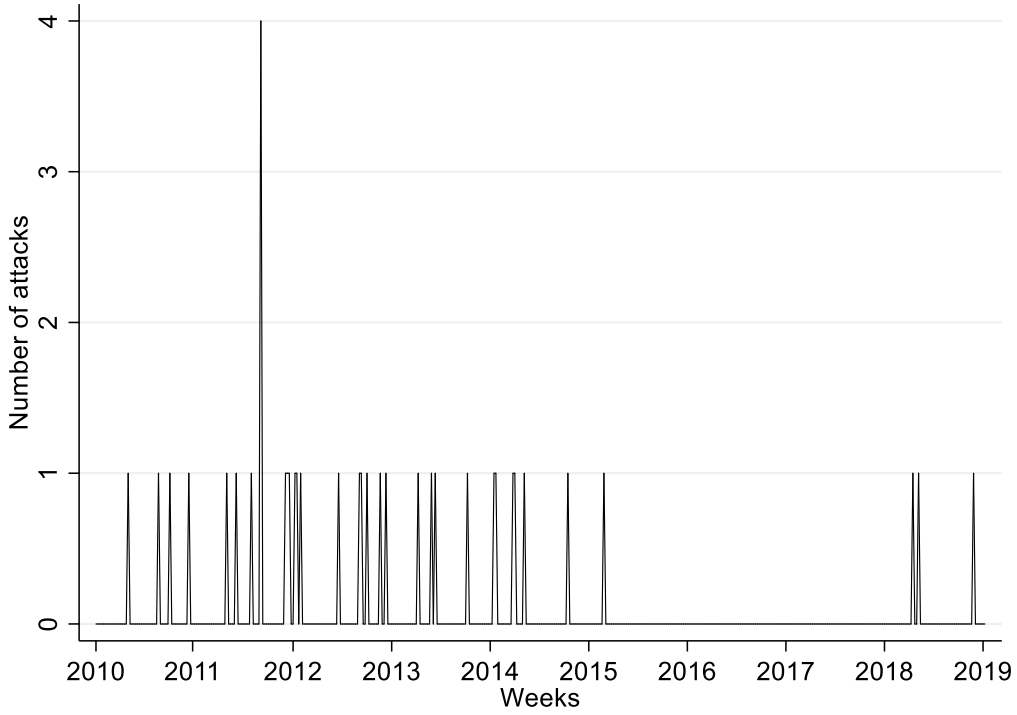
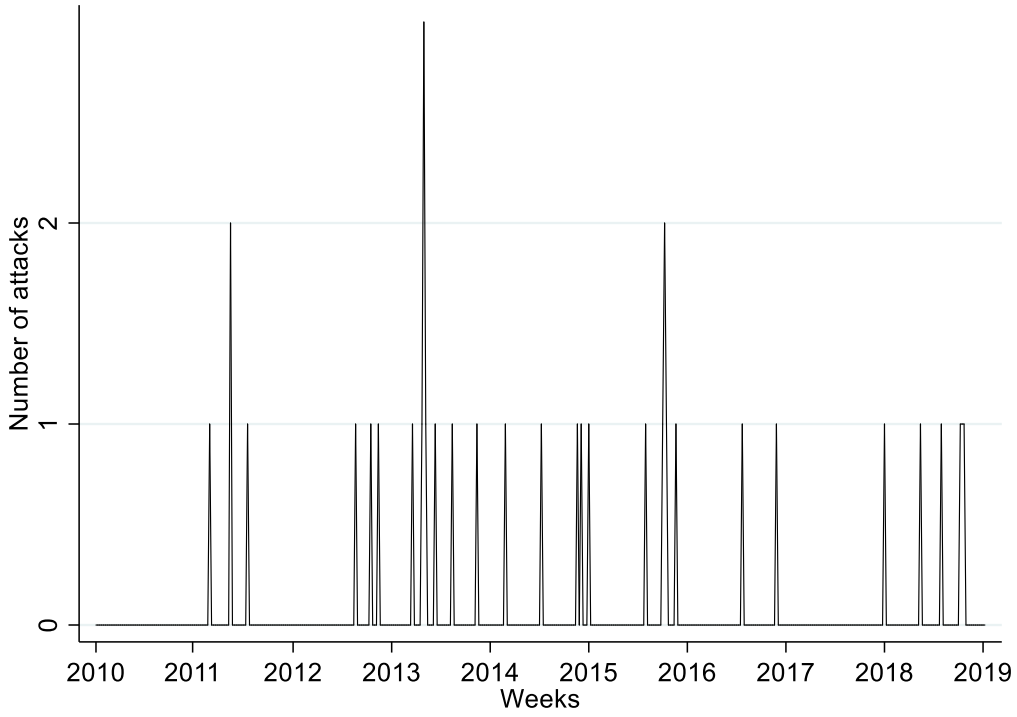


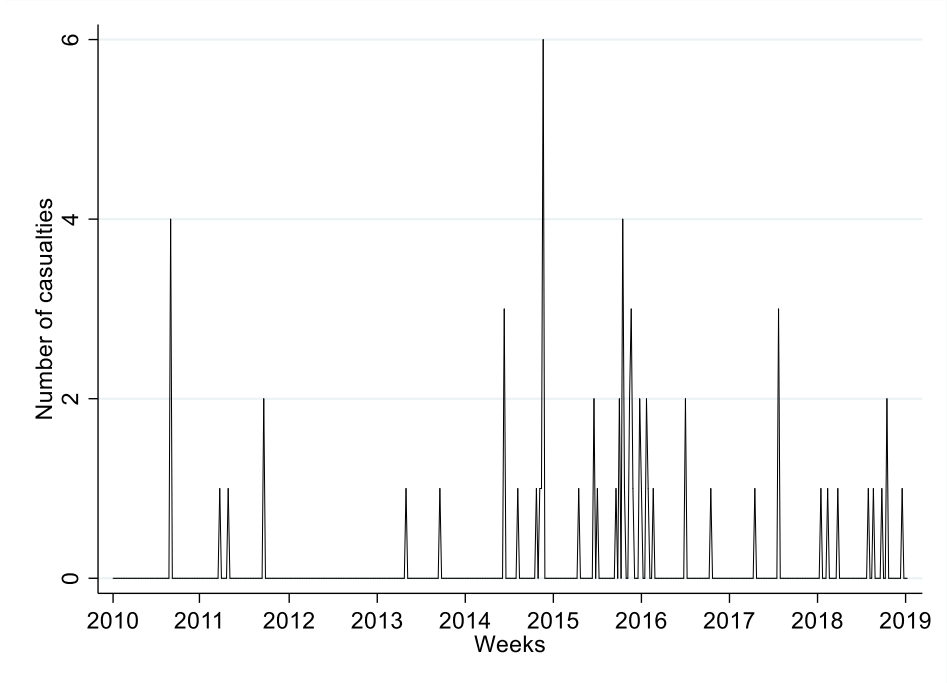
Figure 4. Firebombings, 2010-2018



Independent variables

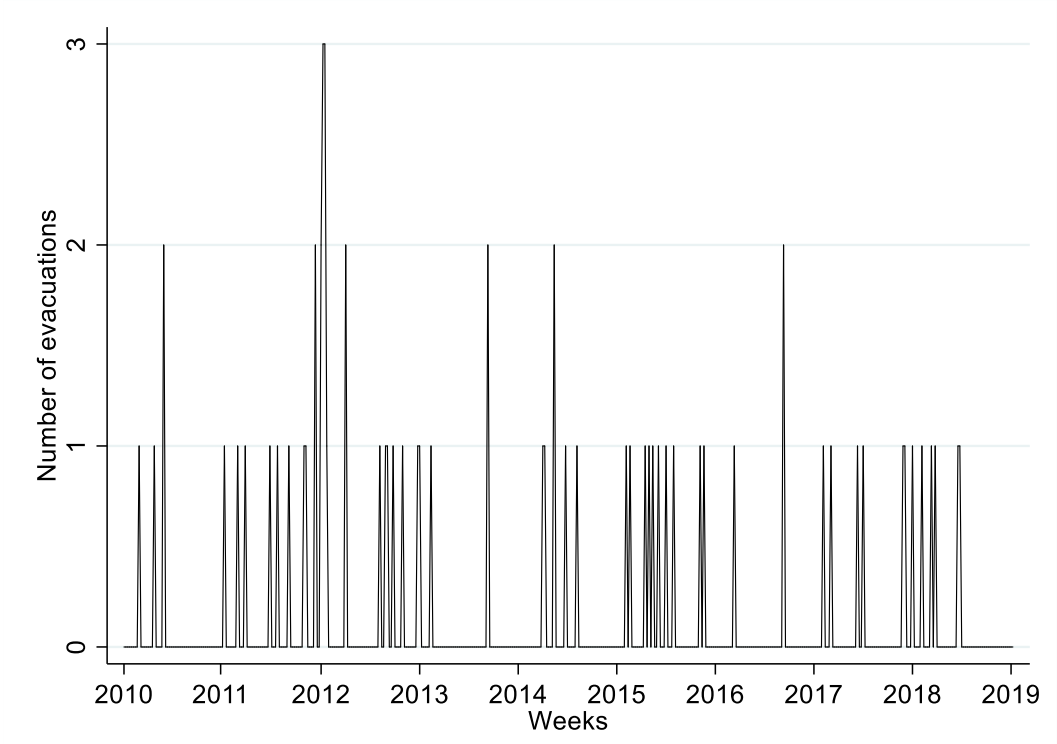
Settlers killed is included to assess the effect of physical threat on the dynamics of Israeli settler violence. *Settlers killed* is a binary variable indicating whether at least one Jewish civilian was killed in a Palestinian terror attack in a given week. If the individual is a Jewish settler, but was on active duty in the military at the time of his death, the event is not included. If the individual was Jewish and visiting, volunteering, or staying in the West Bank with Israeli settlers, the event was included. Information for this variable comes from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) website. The MFA maintains a publically available list of all Jewish fatalities at the hands of Palestinians in Israel and the Palestinian territories. The list includes the name of the victim(s) and a description of the event. During the reporting period, Palestinians killed 64 Jewish civilians in the West Bank. These attacks occurred during 39 separate weeks. Figure 5 represents a time series of Jewish civilian casualties in the West Bank from 2010 through 2018.

Figure 5. Settler casualties, 2010-2018



Settlement evacuations, which represent territorial concessions to Palestinians, is included as a proxy for events that elicit is a sense of social threat among Israeli settlers. *Settlement evacuations* is a binary variable indicating whether the Israeli government carried out a full or partial Jewish settlement or outpost evacuation in a given week. Evacuation here refers to the forced removal of Jewish settlers from a given location or the demolition of settler homes and or communal structures. These evacuations do not represent a physical threat to Israeli settlers, but settlers perceive them as socially threatening because they affirm the legitimacy of Palestinian claims to the land (Eiran & Krause, 2016). The information on settlement/outpost evacuations was collected by searching the online databases of three Israeli English language media sources: Haaretz, The Jerusalem Post, and Arutz 7. The three sources span the ideological spectrum on the issue of Jewish settlement in the West Bank; Haaretz on the left, Jerusalem Post on the center-right, and Arutz 7 on the far right. The search terms 'evacuation,' 'dismantle,' 'demolish,' were used in the online databases of all three sources. The results were then searched for information pertaining to incidents of forceful evacuation and/or destruction of part or all of a Jewish settlement or outpost in the West Bank. The dataset includes 66 settlement/outpost evacuations, which occurred during 55 separate weeks. Figure 6 represents a time series of settlement evacuations within the temporal scope of the analysis.

Figure 6. Settlement evacuations, 2010-2018



In order to test my hypotheses about the effects of events that increase the perception of physical and social threat on the frequency of Israeli settler violence (hypothesis 1), I estimate a single-equation error correction model (ECM). The ECM, a variant of ordinary least squared models (OLS), directly estimates the rate at which the dependent variable returns to equilibrium when a change in the independent variable occurs. The ECM is beneficial here because it allows for the calculation of the long run multiplier (LRM), which provides information about the size of the effects over time (De Boef & Keele, 2008).

$$\Delta\ settler\ attacks = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 settler\ attacks_{t-1} + \beta_0 \Delta settlers\ killed_t + \beta_1 settlers\ killed_{t-1} + \beta_2 \Delta settlement\ evacuations_t + \beta_3 settlement\ evacuations_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t \quad (1)$$

Equation (1) represents my ECM model for *settler attacks*. Δ indicates that the variable is differenced – that is, the measure reflects the numerical variation in the number of events from time t-1 to time t. The rate at which the system returns to equilibrium after a change in the independent variables is represented by the ECM adjustment coefficient, α_1. The coefficients β_0 and β_2 refer to the immediate effects of the respective independent variables at time t on the dependent variable. The coefficients β_1 and β_3 refer to the effects of the respective variables at time t-1 on the dependent variable at time t (De Boef & Keele, 2008).

$$firth\_logit(Firebombings) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 firebombins_{t-1} + \beta_2 settlers\ killed_t + \beta_3 settlers\ killed_{t-1} + \beta_4 \Delta settlement\ evacuations_t + \beta_5 settlement\ evacuations_{t-1} + time + time^2 + time^3 + \varepsilon \quad (2)$$

$$firth\_logit(Attacks\ on\ mosques) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 attacks\ on\ mosques_{t-1} + \beta_2 settlers\ killed_t + \beta_3 settlers\ killed_{t-1} + \beta_4 \Delta settlement\ evacuations_t + \beta_5 settlement\ evacuations_{t-1} + time + time^2 + time^3 + \varepsilon \quad (3)$$

I use penalized maximum likelihood estimation (PMLE) proposed by Firth (1993: to assess how *settlers killed* and *settlement evacuations* affect the odds of *firebombings* (Equation (2)) and *attacks on mosques* (Equation (3)). Given that both firebombings and settlement evacuations are binary, a categorical model based on logistic regression is appropriate. I choose to use PMLE rather than a simple logistic regression given that PMLE has been shown to exhibit less bias than alternative approaches in cases with a skewed distribution on the dependent variable (i.e. rare events) (Leitgöb, 2013). Both firebombings and attacks on mosques are rare

events, with firebombings occurring during 11.7% and attacks on mosques occurring during 8.3% of weeks respectively. In addition, PMLE overcomes the problem of 'separation,' which occurs when the presence of one or more covariates perfectly predicts success or failure in the outcome of interest (Zorn, 2005).[3] I include a lagged dependent variable in Equations (2) and (3) to control for possible autocorrelation in the dependent variables (Keele & Kelly, 2006). I also control for temporal dependence in the PMLE models by including three temporal measures: *time*, which indicates the number of weeks since the last event, and both $time^2$ and $time^3$ (Carter & Signorino, 2010). Carter and Signorino (2010: show that this approach is preferable to the time dummies and splined time approaches (Beck, Katz & Tucker, 1998) because time dummies can induce estimation problems due to separation and splined time is an overly complex approach, which can lead to model misspecification.

Results:

Table II presents the effects of *settlers killed* and *settlement evacuations* on the overall frequency of *settler attacks*.[4]

[3] When running a simple logistic regression, separation occurred in the *firebombings* model because *settlement evacuations*$_{t-1}$ perfectly predicted failure in *firebombings*. In other words, a firebombing never occurred the week after a settlement evacuation. Similarly, in the *attacks on mosques* model, *settlers killed* perfectly predicted failure in *attacks on mosques*. This is consistent with my theoretical expectation that settlement evacuations are more likely to elicit symbolic attacks (i.e. attacks on mosques), while deadly attacks are more likely to elicit severe attacks (i.e. firebombings).

[4] Four augmented dickey-fuller (DF) tests were conducted for *settler attacks*. The first suppresses the constant term in the regression, the second is a simple augmented DF test, the third includes one lagged difference, and the fourth includes a trend term in the regression. The results (not

Table II. Fatal attacks and territorial concessions, 2010-2018 (DV = settler attacks)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Settler attacks$_{t-1}$	-0.48***	-0.49***	-0.48***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)
Δ Settlers killed	7.78***		7.78***
	(2.42)		(2.43)
Settlers killed$_{t-1}$	6.05**		6.08**
	(2.40)		(2.40)
Δ Settlement evacuations		0.56	0.40
		(0.83)	(0.91)
Settlement evacuations$_{t-1}$		0.72	0.68
		(1.27)	(1.30)
Constant	4.56	5.05	-4.48
	(0.62)	(0.72)	(0.62)
Observations	469	469	469
R^2	0.32	0.25	0.32

$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

The effects of physical and social threats on the frequency of low-intensity intercommunal violence:

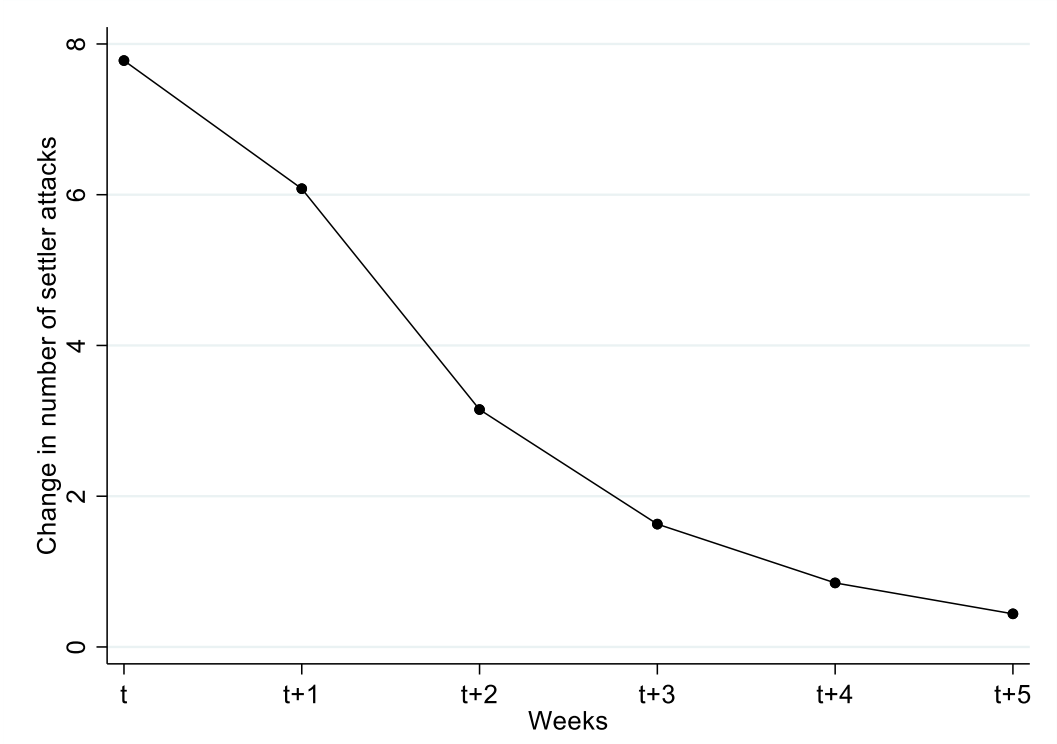
Hypothesis 1 posits that events that increase the perception of physical threat have a greater impact on the frequency of intercommunal violence than events that increase the perception of social threat. The results support this proposition in the case of the West Bank. First, while neither Δ*settlement evacuations* nor *settlement evacuations*$_{t-1}$ are insignificant in Model 2 and Model 3, both the differenced and lagged measures of *settlers killed* are statistically significant in Model 1 and Model 3. The total effect of *settlers killed* can be determined by

shown) indicate that the null hypothesis that the variable contains a unit root can be rejected. These results indicate that *settler arrests* generated by a stationary process. As De Boef and Keele (2008) point out, ECMs are appropriate for both stationary and non-stationary data. I therefore conclude that an ECM is suitable to test the immediate and lasting effects of my independent variables on *settler violence*.

calculating the long run multiplier (LRM) and adding the LRM to the immediate effect of *settlers killed* (i.e. the coefficient for Δ *settlers killed*) (De Boef & Keele, 2008). The LRM represents the total effect of the respective independent variables on the dependent variable over time and is calculated by $\frac{\beta 1}{\alpha 1}$. Model 3 indicates that the occurrence of at least one fatal Palestinian attack against Israeli settlers in a given week increases the frequency of settler attacks by an average of approximately 7.8 attacks during the same week. In addition, the LRM for *settlers killed*, $\frac{6.08}{0.48} = 12.67$ indicates that over time a minimum of one settler casualty in a given week increases the number of settler attacks by almost another 13 attacks on average.[5] Figure 4 represents the estimated lag distribution for settlers killed. It indicates that the number of settler attacks increases by approximately 7.78 attacks the week of a deadly attack and about 6.08 attacks the following week. The size of the effect then decreases by approximately 48% each subsequent week. By week t+6, when over 99% of the effect has been experienced, the size of the effect is negligible at approximately .44 attacks on average.

[5] Standard errors of the LRMs computed by Bewley transformation indicate that the LRMs are significant for *settlers killed* ($p<0.01$), but failed to reach conventional levels of significance for *settlement evacuations*.

Figure 7. Estimated lag distribution for *settlers killed*



Overall, then, deadly attacks against Israeli settlers increase the number of settler attacks by nearly 20 attacks, while settlement evacuations do not have a significant effect on the frequency of settler violence. These findings provide support for hypotheses 1.

The effects of physical and social threats on the severity of low-intensity intercommunal violence:

Hypothesis 2 posits that events that increase the perceived level of physical threat increase the severity of intercommunal violence more than events that increase the perceived level of social threat. To test this proposition, Table III measures the effects of the independent variables on the odds of *firebombings*.

Table III. Fatal attacks and territorial concessions, 2010-2018 (DV = firebombings)

	Model 4	Model 5
Firebombings$_{t-1}$	3.366**	1.196
	(1.86)	(0 .703)
Settlers killed	3.304*	5.993**
	(1.55)	(3.718)
Settlers killed$_{t-1}$	1.80	2.563
	(0.96)	(1.772)
Settlement evacuations	1.38	1.806
	(0.75)	(1.161)
Settlement evacuations$_{t-1}$	0.10	0.117
	(0.01)	(0.180)
Time		0.563**
		(0.112)
Time^2		1.011
		(0.024)
Time^3		0.975
		(0.365)
Constant	0.06***	0.331***
	(0.01)	(0.095)
Observations	469	469
Adjusted R^2	0.09	0.31

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Odds ratios reported. Standard errors in parentheses.

The results indicate that *settlers killed* significantly increases the odds of a firebombing attack in the same week. Model 5 indicates that on average, the occurrence of at least one deadly attack against Israeli settlers in a given week increases the odds of a firebombing attack occurring in the same week by a factor of 5.99, holding all other variables constant. In contrast, the relationship between *settlement evacuations* and *firebombings* is insignificant. These results indicate that events that increase the perceived level of physical threat among Israeli settlers tend to trigger severe attacks against Palestinians meant to injure or kill, while events that increase the perceived level of social threat do not. These results provide support for hypothesis 2.

The effects of physical and social threats on target choice of low-intensity intercommunal violence:

In order to test whether social threats are more likely to elicit attacks against symbolic targets than physical threats (H3), Table IV tests the effects of the independent variables on the odds of Israeli settlers carrying out an attack against a Palestinian mosque. The results of Model 7 indicate that on average the occurrence of at least one settlement evacuation increases the odds of an attack by a factor of 4.28 the following week, holding all other variables constant. In contrast, *settlers killed* has no effect. Overall, these results support the argument that events that increase the perceived level of physical threat tend to trigger severe forms of violence such as firebombings, while events that increase the perceived level of social threat tend to produce targeting of symbolic sites belonging to minorities, such as places of worship.

Table IV. Fatal attacks and territorial concessions, 2010-2018 (DV = attacks on mosques)

	(4)	(5)
Attacks on Mosques$_{t-1}$	2.65*	0.52
	(1.31)	(0.29)
Settlers killed	0.17	0.94
	(0.24)	(1.42)
Settlers killed$_{t-1}$	0.58	2.73
	(0.50)	(3.27)
Settlement evacuations	1.42	1.27
	(0.69)	(0.86)
Settlement evacuations$_{t-1}$	3.37**	4.28*
	(1.38)	(2.59)
Time		0.35***
		(0.65)
Time^2		1.01***
		(0.00)
Time^3		0.96***
		(0.01)
Constant	0.06***	1.812
	(0.01)	(0.70)
Observations	469	469
Adjusted R^2	0.02	0.40

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Odds ratios reported. Standard errors in parentheses.

Threat and the level of popular participation in low-intensity intergroup violence:

While these results support hypotheses 1-3, my theoretical argument went beyond an expected correlation between social threats and violence against symbolically charged targets. I argued that physical threats tend to elicit more frequent acts of violence by a greater number of people than social threats, while also triggering severe attacks by hardcore radicals (*communal defense).* Social threats, in contrast, tend to provoke lower levels of popular participation in violent activities, but are more likely than physical threats to trigger attacks against symbolically charged targets by a small and intolerant subsection of the population (*zealotry*). If my argument is correct, those acts of violence most often perpetrated in response to physical threats, (i.e.

firebombings) should tend to correlate with the overall frequency of settler violence, while those attacks primarily triggered by social threats (i.e. *attacks on mosques*) should not be any more likely to occur when the overall level of settler violence is high. This is because large spikes in Israeli settler violence indicate widespread participation in these activities.

Dozens of original interviews conducted with Israeli settlers in the West Bank in 2016 and 2017 support the proposition that significant increases in the frequency of Israeli settler violence indicate a large increase in the level of participation in violent activities. A high-ranking security representative in a prominent West Bank settlement, for example, explained that the frequency of settler attacks tends to spike when 'a large number of youth from surrounding settlements descend on the roadways and Palestinian communities to exact a cost for perceived Palestinian transgressions.' Speaking to the types of attacks perpetrated by Israeli settlers, one resident of the central West Bank clarified that 'severe attacks tend to be committed by a small number of hilltop youth [Jewish radicals], but many Jewish residents participate in less severe forms of violence when the community is threatened.' Describing the events surrounding the spike in Palestinian violence in October 2015, which led to a particularly large spike in Israeli settler violence (Figure 2), one member of a southern West Bank settlement explained that 'this period felt a lot like the intifada, with [Palestinians] stoning Jewish vehicles and confronting [settlers] on a daily basis. It was understandable, given the level of Palestinian violence, that many settlers responded forcefully. [The Palestinians] had to understand that they could not get away with such behavior with impunity.'

Table V is a correlation matrix of the three settler violence variables. Consistent with my expectations, the table indicates that *firebombings* correlate positively with the overall frequency of Israeli settler violence ($\rho = 0.29$). In contrast, the level of correlation between *attacks on*

mosques and *settler violence* is significantly lower ($\rho = 0.09$). This means that relative to firebombings, attacks on mosques do not tend to occur when the overall frequency of settler violence is high. Interestingly, the results also indicate that *firebombings* and *attacks on mosques* are negatively correlated. This suggests that the same hardcore radicals may be carrying out both types of attacks, but their tactical choice is dependent on the type of threat motivating their behavior. More specifically, this is consistent with the argument that events that increase the perception of physical threat tend to trigger attacks meant to injure or kill in order to create immediate costs for ethnic rivals. In contrast, events that increase the perception of social threat tend to trigger attacks against symbolically significant sights belonging to ethnic rivals in order to undermine social relations in the long-term.

Table IV. Fatal attacks and territorial concessions, 2010-2018 (DV = attacks on mosques)

	(4)	(5)
Attacks on Mosques$_{t-1}$	2.65*	0.52
	(1.31)	(0.29)
Settlers killed	0.17	0.94
	(0.24)	(1.42)
Settlers killed$_{t-1}$	0.58	2.73
	(0.50)	(3.27)
Settlement evacuations	1.42	1.27
	(0.69)	(0.86)
Settlement evacuations$_{t-1}$	3.37**	4.28*
	(1.38)	(2.59)
Time		0.35***
		(0.65)
Time^2		1.01***
		(0.00)
Time^3		0.96***
		(0.01)
Constant	0.06***	1.812
	(0.01)	(0.70)
Observations	469	469
Adjusted R^2	0.02	0.40

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Odds ratios reported. Standard errors in parentheses.

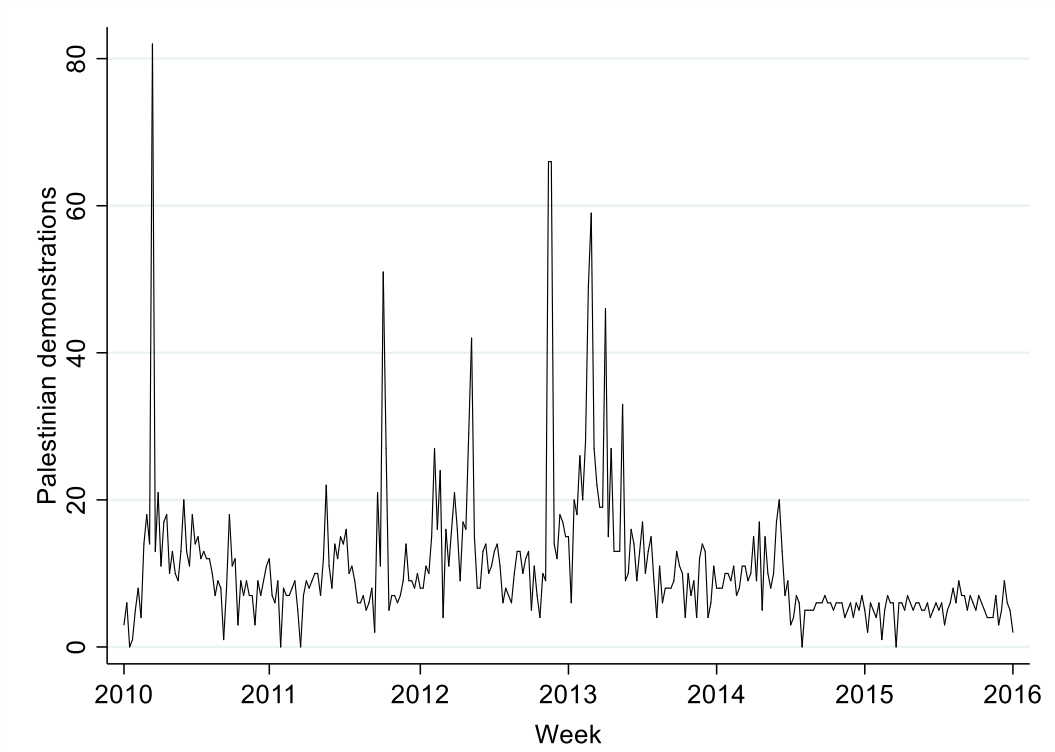
Overall, these results suggest that physical threats elicit a significant increase in less severe forms of violence by a relatively large proportion of the settler community and severe acts of violence by hardcore radicals (*communal defense*). Social threats, in contrast, tend to elicit far less participation in violent activities and tend to shift the attention of hardcore radicals away from ethnic minorities themselves and toward symbols of the their community's culture (*zealotry*).

Discussion:

Following the 2005 Israeli disengagement from Gaza and portions of the northern West Bank, there was a palpable sense that Israel may be willing to make major territorial concessions to the Palestinians (Nir, 2011). Following the disengagement, the Israeli government payed lip service to the peace process, acceded to the United States' demand for a settlement freeze in the West Bank in 2009 and 2010, and continued small-scale evacuations of Jewish settlements and outposts in the West Bank. In addition, Palestinians appeared emboldened, carrying out regular organized demonstrations against the occupation (Figure 8).[6] While Israeli settlers were palpably frustrated, it was difficult for the community to legitimize severe acts of violence against Palestinians given that the level of Palestinian violence was quite low (Figure 1) and deadly attacks were relatively rare (Figure 5).

[6] Data on Palestinian demonstrations comes from the NAD daily reports. Data is currently available for the period 2010-2015.

Figure 8. Palestinian demonstrations, 2010-2015



Beginning with the 2012 Israel-Gaza War, which was fought from November 14 through November 21, the dynamic of the conflict in the West Bank shifted. Palestinian violence in the West Bank began to rise as Palestinians increasingly confronted both Israeli security forces and Jewish settlers (Figure 1). While organized demonstrations initially spiked during and directly following the 2012 Israel-Gaza War, the frequency of organized Palestinian demonstrations declined markedly by mid-2013 (Figure 8). The heightened frequency of Palestinian violence persisted, however, spiking during the 2014 Israel-Gaza War and again in October 2015 (Figure 1). In addition, Palestinian violence against both Israeli settlers and security forces became increasingly deadly as organized Palestinian demonstrations dwindled following the 2014 Israel-Gaza War (Figure 5).

Overall, then, the period before the 2012 Israel-Gaza War was marked by a greater degree of social rather than physical threat for Israeli settlers, while the period after the 2012 Israel-Gaza War was increasingly marked by physical threat. Consistent with the argument presented in this article, the shift in the primary form of threat produced a tactical shift among hardcore Jewish radicals in the West Bank. Specifically, following the 2012 Israel-Gaza War, radical settlers increasingly perpetrated severe acts of violence meant to injure or kill Palestinians (figure 2b), while decreasing their frequency of attacks against symbolic Palestinian targets (figures 2c).

While the precise size of the affect the targeting of mosques had on the rise in Palestinian violence and the souring of relations between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership is debatable, it is clear that the underlying objective had been accomplished. Relations between Jews and Palestinians had deteriorated considerably by 2013 and the peace process was officially frozen. In addition, Palestinians increased the frequency and severity of their attacks on Jewish settlers, motivating both popular participation in anti-Palestinian violence and severe acts of violence by hardcore Jewish radicals. Consequently, following the 2012 Israel-Gaza war, settler violence increasingly shifted from *zealotry* to *communal defense*.

Conclusion:

In this article, I have developed a theoretical argument to explain why low-intensity intergroup violence sometimes takes the form of large-scale mobilization against ethnic opponents and severe acts of violence by extremists (*communal defense*), while on other occasions low-intensity intergroup violence is limited to attacks by intolerant radicals against symbolic targets that represent the culture of their ethnic opponents (*zealotry*). I argued that events that increase the perception of physical threat tend to trigger *communal defense*, while

events that increase the perceived level of social threat are likely to produce *zealotry.* The former, I contend, is primarily meant to impose immediate costs on ethnic rivals in order to alter their short-term behavior, while the latter primarily aims to undermine intergroup relations in the medium to long-term.

In order to test my hypotheses, I employed a single equation error correction model (ECM) and penalized maximum likelihood estimation (PMLE) using original data on contentious interactions in the West Bank (2010-2018). This approach enabled me to tease out the relative effects of physically and socially threatening events on the dynamics of Israeli settler violence against Palestinians. Overall, the results provide support for the theoretical argument developed here and suggest that the framework may help scholars better understand the dynamics of low-intensity intergroup violence both in Israel-Palestine and in other cases where it represents an ongoing concern.

The results also have implications for policymakers. The study suggests that while producing less short-term suffering, *zealotry* can have devastating effects on the development and hardening of prejudicial and intolerant attitudes among ethnic minorities. These attitudes, in turn, make the recurrence of ethnic violence more likely and make conflict management and resolution far more difficult (Kaufman, 2001). Governments and third party mediators must consider this when deciding whether to pursue comprehensive or incremental strategies of reform. This study suggests that adopting an incremental approach to conflict management, in which limited concessions are extended in order to temper violent dissent, may help governments manage conflicts in the short-term (Asal et al., 2018; Dugan & Chenoweth, 2012), while simultaneously making conflict management and resolution more difficult in the long-term.

All analyses were conducted using STATA 15.

Data replication: The dataset, codebook, and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets.

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