Sectarian Framing in the Syrian Civil War

Daniel Corstange
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Columbia University
daniel.corstange@columbia.edu

Erin York
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Political Science
Columbia University
eay2109@columbia.edu

April 5, 2016

1 Introduction

Does how we frame a civil war affect why people fight in it? Rebels and governments go to great lengths to win not only physical battles over strategic terrain, but also propaganda wars over hearts and minds — themselves a strategic resource. Winning the battle of narratives may help factions to mobilize their own support bases, demobilize their opponents, and attract foreign sympathy and material support.

Has the Syrian civil war become more destructive as it has become more sectarian? Having an answer to that question presupposes that we have an answer to a prior question: *is* the Syrian civil war a sectarian conflict? One might be forgiven for not having a definitive *yes* or *no* to offer, since the Syrians themselves do not agree on why they are fighting. Government and opposition forces compete not only on the battlefields, but also over the very framing of the conflict — the former attributing it to terrorism and foreign conspiracies, and the latter to demands for an end to dictatorship and corruption. Given the dogged efforts of both government and opposition to propagate their preferred narratives, neither considers the framing a semantic nicety, and neither is willing to cede the conflict over the conflict.

Public opinion research demonstrates the importance of controlling the framing of an issue for how mass publics perceive a problem and consider possible solutions to it (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Kinder, 1998; Nelson et al., 1997). Foundational research showed that aptly-framed narratives could alter citizens' opinions dramatically by focusing their attention on different aspects of an issue — contributing to long-standing doubts about basic citizen competence (Druckman, 2001; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Nelson et al., 1997). Later work, however, demonstrated that competitive framing, corresponding to naturally-occurring public debate that exposes citizens to rival narratives, dramatically reduces people's suceptibility to framing effects (Druckman, 2004; Druckman and Nelson, 2003; Sniderman and Theriault, 2004). Competitive framing rests, however, on access to rival narratives, and so may be far more likely to insulate citizens from manipulation in democracies than in autocracies — or in conflict settings (Geddes and Zaller, 1989).

The Syrian civil war is partly a contest of narratives, an important one of which is the

argument that it is *sectarian* at its core — a conflict between a popular supermajority of Sunnis fighting a minoritarian regime that concentrates political power in key communal groups far out of proportion to their demographic weight. Yet the sectarian narrative is not the only one available; rather, it competes for space in Syrian discourse with revolutionary appeals to democracy over dictatorship and counterrevolutionary denouncements of foreign meddling. As normatively distasteful as it is, we nonetheless expect the sectarian narrative to move people in how they view the civil war — and how they think of themselves. Yet we also anticipate that counterframes, by stimulating Syrians to think about the conflict in multiple ways, will limit the degree to which sectarian arguments presented in isolation can manipulate citizens. In a civil war setting such as Syria's, people vary widely in their access to multiple points of view, whether from media sources or from peers, so we suspect that many citizens are subject to either contested and uncontested narratives.

We examine these propositions with a framing experiment embedded in a mass attitude survey of Syrian refugees in Lebanon — one of the first of its kind. We manipulate the description of the civil war to be a conflict over democracy, secularism, foreign intervention, and sectarian differences. We frame these narratives alone, mimicking a one-sided conversation between like-minded people, and in direct contrast to each other, corresponding to the intense discursive competition to define why Syrians are fighting each other — that is, the conflict over the conflict.

We find broad support for some of our expectations, but also uncover a more intricate story than we had anticipated. First, as expected, we find substantial framing effects for the sectarian narrative — but, unexpectedly, only among government supporters. As anticipated, this narrative has large effects when framed alone, but drops in magnitude — and often vanishes — when presented alongside one of the competing narratives. As expected, the sectarian frame caused government supporters to increase the importance they placed on sectarian differences in the conflict. Intriguingly, it had *nearly identical effects on other factors* such as democratic freedoms, minority rights, and the role of religion in politics. We tentatively interpret this complex of findings as evidence that sectarian frames make people

— or at least government supporters, who may, in practice, be less exposed to competing narratives — place greater importance not just on fighting over sectarian differences, but on *fighting in general*.

2 Conflict Framing

Violent conflict, as many scholars have noted, provokes impassioned struggles by the people caught up in it to explain why they are fighting — so much so that part of the contest is over its meaning (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998). This battle of narratives is what Horowitz (1991, 2) has called the metaconflict: "the conflict over the nature of the conflict." Accordingly, civil wars are semantic contests in addition to physical ones, in which "the very use of the term is part of the conflict itself" by conferring legitimacy on, or denying it to, the contenders and their actions (Kalyvas, 2006, 17). Winning the narrative war may help contestants win the physical one by shifting legitimacy, popular support, and material resources to the sympathetically framed side.

Although instances of ethnic violence are rare relative to peaceful relations between groups (Fearon and Laitin, 1996), a large body of empirical evidence suggests that, when ethnic conflicts do spill over into violence, they may be especially protracted and destructive (Sambanis, 2001). Descriptively, a number of studies suggest that ethnic divisions at the aggregate level contribute to civil war onset (Collier and Hoeffler, 1998; Cederman and Girardin, 2007; Cederman et al., 2010), duration (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon, 2004; Wucherpfennig et al., 2012), recidivism (Flores and Nooruddin 2009 Flores and Nooruddin 2016, ch. 7), and destructiveness (Ghobarah et al., 2003; Heger and Salehyan, 2007; Lacina, 2006). Nonetheless, the macrolevel mechanisms and measures are so contested that it is unclear if these studies are identifying causal processes or describing outcomes (Blattman and Miguel, 2010; Fearon et al., 2007; Fearon and Laitin, 2003).

If ethnic divisions do indeed contribute to destructive and intractable conflicts, we have strong incentives to understand the microfoundations underlying participation and support for the warring parties. Yet, if civil war narratives are regularly open to contestation by the

parties to the conflict, attributing *ethnic* meaning to it is part of the metaconflict — both for the people caught up in the fighting and by outside observers trying to make sense of it. As Brubaker and Laitin (1998, 444) observe, "the 'ethnic' quality of ethnic violence is not intrinsic to the act itself; it emerges through after-the-fact interpretive claims," which, in turn, perpetuate the violence by defining who is fighting whom and legitimizing that struggle. Scholars and ordinary people share a normative distaste for ascriptive narratives; many worry that even talking about ethnicity creates and reinforces the very divisions they hope to avoid (Horowitz, 1991, 28–29). There are, however, more practical reasons than semantic squeamishness to understand how communal frames come to encode conflicts. Ascription, if accepted by the people so ascribed, separates groups, hardens boundaries between them, and pitches the conflict as existential with no positive-sum solutions (Bowles and Gintis, 2004; Fearon and Laitin, 1996, 2000; Hardin, 1995; Kuran, 1998).

Explanations for violent conflict, particularly those narrated in an ethnic register, often take on instrumental or socially constructed forms (Eifert et al., 2010; Hardin, 1995; Varshney, 2003). The former privileges elite manipulation but begs the question of why mass followers go along with it; the latter emphasizes context-specific discourse that creates narratives of fear but faces evidentiary challenges and tends to overpredict violence (Brubaker and Laitin, 1998; Fearon and Laitin, 2000; Pearlman, 2013, 2016).

Public opinion research on the psychology of communication and persuasion, mostly conducted with American audiences, provides a partial resolution to these critiques (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Kinder, 1998; Nelson et al., 1997). A "virtual cottage industry" on issue framing has demonstrated the importance of controlling narratives for how mass publics perceive an issue and what to do about it As Chong and Druckman (2007, 104, 106) explain,

> The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue.

Early work in this tradition showed that aptly framed narratives could move people's ex-

pressed opinions in a dramatic fashion by calling attention to certain aspects of an issue and submerging other aspects — contributing to concerns about elite manipulation and basic citizen competence (Druckman, 2001; Kuklinski et al., 2001; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Nelson et al., 1997).

These initial studies were normatively disquieting, in part because they depicted people as passive automata with easily manipulated opinions. Subsequent work, however, has come to more optimistic conclusions about citizen resilience to framing effects by highlighting the fact that political discourse is usually a debate rather than a monologue. These latter works demonstrate that counterframing, by exposing people to rival narratives and possible to new information, dramatically reduces their susceptibility to manipulation (Druckman, 2004; Druckman and Nelson, 2003; Lenz, 2009; Sniderman and Theriault, 2004).

Competitive framing, a naturally-occurring component of political debate, may therefore help short-circuit the capacity of one party or another to manipulate the mass public — *if* the parties can get their messages out, and the public can receive them. To the degree that they exist, the normatively salutary effects of counterframing rest on access to rival narratives, and so may be far more likely to insulate citizens from manipulation in democracies than in autocracies (cf. Geddes and Zaller, 1989; Sniderman and Theriault, 2004; Wedeen, 1999). Analogously, there may be fewer opportunities to counterframe in conflict settings, during which normal public debate may be curtailed. Applied to civil war, the incentive to present a hegemonic narrative helps to account for efforts to seize control of centralized media sources, extreme examples of which include identity-based conflicts in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Somalia (Hardin, 1995, ch. 6). Doing so not only frames the conflict in terms favorable to those in control, but also disrupts the dissemination of counternarratives and hampers the generation of common knowledge of dissent (Chwe, 2001). Meanwhile, hardened group boundaries and security concerns may compel people to interact only with like-minded others, limiting their exposure to dissenting views and and increasing their susceptibility to elite framing (Druckman and Nelson, 2003; Fearon and Laitin, 1996; Hardin, 1995).

We expect to observe many of these dynamics in operation in the Syrian civil war. The

warring parties have offered a variety of explanations for the causes of the conflict — some believable, some less so — and use them to justify their own activities while demonizing their opponents. Some people have regular access to these competing narratives, while others huddle with like-minded peers. We expect that people exposed only to sectarian explanations of the conflict will adopt that frame and use it to make sense of the civil war. Yet we also expect that people exposed to competing narratives at the same time will be more difficult to manipulate — and, consequently, less susceptible to sectarian framing effects.

3 Framing the Syrian Civil War

Since its inception in early 2011, the Syrian civil war has been profoundly destructive for the country and its neighbors, killing an estimated quarter of a million people and displacing more than half the population internally and across its borders. Consistent with the sectarian narratives that have emerged over time, the Syrian civil war is sometimes cast as the latest installment of a broader Sunni–Shia struggle for dominance in the Middle East: the inevitable next chapter to the sectarian strife in Iraq, Bahrain, and Yemen, and tied to the ongoing rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Many descriptions of the conflict, polemical and non-polemical alike, highlight Alawi dominance of a ruling regime at the head of an "alliance of minorities" that rules over a demographic supermajority of Sunnis — all true statements as far as they go, but not necessarily *relevant* ones until people decide that they are.

Yet the sectarian narrative of the conflict is not the only one, nor is it even the most prominent. Initially, the Syrian uprising, like so many others inspired by the hopeful early days of the Arab Spring, originated in protests against harsh authoritarian rule. Having broken the barrier of fearful submission to an unaccountable police state, the protests voiced an escalating series of demands for political reform and eventually the overthrow of the regime in favor of a democratic government. Decentralized and leaderless local coordinating committees attempted to channel the demonstrations toward civically-oriented demands for democratic freedoms and good governance, while discouraging divisive rhetoric that could alienate potential sympathizers within Syria's minority communities (Droz-Vincent, 2014;

Hokayem, 2013; Pearlman, 2013, 2016).

Opposition narratives, at least initially, focused on universalist appeals for human dignity and democratic freedoms and rejection of the country's rampant corruption and dictatorial rule. The government responded with vaguely specified promises of reform — quickly rejected by the opposition as cosmetic — and highlighted foreign conspiracies against Syria while portraying the demonstrators as criminals, extremists, and, eventually, terrorists. As the protests spread across the country and government security services adopted increasingly draconian measures to disperse them, demonstrators began to fight back and the conflict began to militarize.

In the process, religious extremists began to flow into the country and, in conjunction with their Syrian counterparts, began to target citizens among Sunni loyalists and the country's minority groups while voicing increasingly bigoted and menacing rhetoric directed against the latter. As the perpetually divided and ineffectual political opposition lost control over the armed wing of the rebellion, and as the various battalions failed to coordinate beyond a shifting set of alliances, well-funded jihadi organizations began to eclipse the mainstream rebel groups (Droz-Vincent, 2014; Fisk et al., 2014; Jones, 2013; Hokayem, 2013; Landis and Pace, 2007; Lister, 2016). Government statements highlighted the atrocities committed by opposition terrorists and portrayed itself as the protector of Syria's minority communities. The divided opposition, meanwhile, continued to press a democratic theme that increasingly shared narrative space with denouncements of government attrocities directed against *Sunni* civilians and the intervention of *Shia* militias from Lebanon and Iraq.

In summary, an uprising that began with peaceful demands for reform and democratic freedoms met with a harsh and uncompromising government response, which denounced its opponents as criminals and foreign agents. As the uprising militarized and more extreme actors came to the fore, the rhetoric on either side became more polemical and increasingly sectarian. Despite the intemperate language that might suggest otherwise, none of the narratives has achieved hegemonic status among Syrians. We seek to understand how these different and competing ways to explain the conflict affect how Syrians make sense of the

conflict and how they see themselves, with potentially important ramifications for who they support in the war and the sort of Syria they expect to see when it ends.

How can we examine the effect of these narratives on the Syrian population most directly affected by them? As a practical matter, large swaths of Syria proper are inaccessible to even the most dedicated of humanitarian organizations; even if we could get access to the country, we would defer to the humanitarians whose tasks take precedence over ours. Instead, we study the effect of the war narratives among displaced Syrians in neighboring Lebanon, where an estimated 1.5 million people have taken refuge from the war.

4 Refugee Sample

Sampling from the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon is challenging for conceptual and operational reasons. We use the term "refugee" inclusively to refer to Syrians displaced by the civil war, regardless of whether or not they are registered formally with the United Nations (UNHCR). This target population in Lebanon nests, in turn, within a wider conceptual population of displaced Syrians in the Middle East and the rest of the world. Although we believe that our findings speak broadly to this super-population, we caution that refugee experiences differ from host country to host country and warn against cavalier generalizations from our data.

4.1 Sample

The refugees constitute a transient population for which there is no sample frame. UNHCR has registered roughly two-thirds of the displaced Syrians in Lebanon and regularly issues updated data on the spatial location of the registered refugees. The displaced population congregates in space, regardless of registration status, partly for family reasons and partly due to housing costs. We therefore use area sampling techniques to extrapolate from the UNHCR data to locate refugee households. We sample from each province (*muhafaza*s) in proportion to the number of refugees registered with UNHCR, and then sample localities

within districts (*qada*s) where displaced Syrians concentrate.[1] Enumerators used random walk patterns within sampled neighborhoods to select households, and then randomized within households according to the next adult birthday. Ultimately, we drew a sample of 2000 adult subjects between 19 May and 12 June 2015 with a response rate of 91 percent.[2]

Although this design yields a reasonable sample in light of the practical limitations, it is not perfectly representative of the underlying population. First, it almost certainly undersamples Syrians at either end of the wealth spectrum: the most destitute and transient Syrians are not easily located, while wealthier Syrians do not live in the low-income neighborhoods where registered refugees concentrate.[3] Second, as expected with a population holding traditional gender views, we undersample women — who constitute 40 percent of the sample — due to about 10 percent of householders demanding that enumerators interview a male in place of a randomly-selected female. The replacements tend to be older and less educated than the rest of the sample, but, surprisingly, are otherwise very similar.[4] Lastly, security constraints imposed by the Lebanese army around the time of our fieldwork prevented us from sampling in the border town of Arsal. Hence, although we focus empirically on the internal validity of the experiment, we believe that this sample allows us to make cautious generalizations to the underlying population of displaced Syrians.

[1]Unsurprisingly, displaced Syrians concentrate in the border provinces, while relatively few have migrated to Beirut proper, where the cost of living is beyond most refugees' means. Proportionally, the border provinces of Bekaa and the North constitute 35 and 24 percent of the sample, respectively. The heavily Shia provinces of Nabatieh and the South host 5 and 7 percent of the sample, while 3 percent is in Beirut proper. The remaining 26 percent lives in Mount Lebanon, primarily in the districts surrounding Beirut.

[2]Beirut-based Information International drew the sample based on data from UNHCR. Enumerators solicited interviews from randomly drawn household members 20-years old or older, and included one follow-up visit in case the selected member was not home before declaring a unit non-response.

[3]Consistent with existing narratives about the conflict, our data show that wealthier Syrians tend to support the government, while their poorer counterparts tend to support the rebels. If we assume that the same relationship holds at either end of the wealth spectrum and that there are more destitute Syrians than wealthy ones, then our sample underrepresents rebel sympathizers.

[4]More precisely, we sampled all *households* randomly, but 11 percent of them prevented us from completing the randomization *within* the household: 5 percent are males who entered after a female relative refused to participate, while 6 percent are males who entered after a male refused to allow a female relative to participate. Other than being older and less educated, we find surprisingly few imbalances between these replacement males and the rest of the sample in terms of location and length of time in Lebanon, sect and degree of religiosity, political engagement, and factional sympathies in the war.

4.2 Descriptives

Overall, the sample leans poor, uneducated, Sunni Arab, and religious — none of which are surprising findings given what we think we know about the civil war and its refugees. The median respondent has completed no more than primary school, and only 20 percent have a secondary education. Rather than use inapplicable income measures, we proxy material well-being with household room density, with a median of 2.5 residents per bedroom and ranging up to 12.[5] Sunni Arabs predominate among the refugees, with only 12.5 percent of the sample belonging to one of Syria's minority communities (Kurds, non-Sunni Muslims, and Christians) as against roughly 30 percent of the pre-civil war population. In terms of personal religious practice, three quarters pray daily, and half read the Quran or Bible weekly.

In simplified terms, 39 percent of respondents support the sitting government, 53 percent sympathize with the rebels, and the remainder express no preference. To measure factional leanings, we asked subjects to rank their top three choices from a list of six groups: the Free Syrian Army (FSA), the Syrian government, Syrian Islamist groups, foreign Islamist groups, Kurdish groups, and Hizballah.[6] People's first choices split almost entirely between majority support for the FSA — which respondents used as a catch-all category for the rebels — and a substantial minority in favor of the government. People supporting the Kurdish groups invariably expressed support for the government, so we group them together.

Descriptively, people's factional preferences follow patterns consistent with what we think we know about the Syrian civil war. Virtually all minorities support the government, while

[5]Technically, we calculate the room density as resident family members per bedroom plus one — the latter to account for families living in single-room dwellings or tents in which the main dwelling area serves as the family's collective bedroom. As expected, people's living standards have deteriorated since fleeing Syria: the median respondent lives in a household that is 50 percent more crowded in Lebanon (median 2.50 people) than the one left behind in Syria (median 1.67 people).

[6]The question wording reads: "I'm going to read you a list of some of the groups fighting in the conflict right now. In general, with which one do you sympathize most? How about second-most? And how about third-most?" We chose this question format in part because of the complexity of the factional choice set, and in part because we were not certain ahead of time that people would be comfortable expressing political preferences. We hoped that giving them the opportunity to express second and third choices would allow them to select socially desirable or otherwise "safe" first choices and then give us more nuance with the rest of the answers.

Sunni Arabs split two to one in favor of the rebels. Based on multivariate models (not reported), people of higher socioeconomic status lean toward the government, while the religiously devout lean toward the opposition. Our survey data's confirmation of numerous qualitative assessments of the government and rebel support bases increases our confidence in the measures and the sample itself (Abboud, 2015; Droz-Vincent, 2014; Fisk et al., 2014; Hokayem, 2013; Pearlman, 2016).

5 Experiment

Control group subjects received an innocuous prompt before answering questions about the reasons people fight in the war:

> People have explained the Syrian conflict to us in a number of different ways.

Immediately following the control prompt, subjects in the treatment conditions received a randomized framing of the conflict. Those treated with a *single frame* in isolation heard:

> People have explained the Syrian conflict to us in a number of different ways. For example, many people have described it as a conflict between *FRAME.*

where *FRAME* (with its shorthand label) was one of the following:

- "Sunnis and Alawis" (*Sectarianism*),
- "democracy and dictatorship" (*Democracy*),
- "religion and secularism" (*Secularism*), or
- "foreign forces fought on Syrian soil" (*Foreigners*).

Finally, we contrasted the *Sectarianism* frame against a competitor from the the above list. Subjects treated with *competing frames* (one of which was always *Sectarianism*) heard:

> People have explained the Syrian conflict to us in a number of different ways. For example, many people have described it as a conflict between *FRAME 1*, and a few people have described it as a conflict between *FRAME 2*.

Note that we randomized the *many people* versus *a few people* quantifiers on the expectation that a frame with widespread support would be more persuasive than one with a small number of adherents. We were wrong. We find little evidence that subjects reacted to the quantifiers, so we pool the *many/few* conditions to conserve statistical power in the main comparisons between the frames. As such, we have one control group, four single frame conditions, and three competing frame groups, for a total of eight experimental conditions.

The treatment conditions attempt to capture some of the most widely used narrative tropes about the Syrian conflict while also keeping them short, to the point, and non-inflammatory. The frame in which we are most interested highlights "Sunnis and Alawis" as the orthodox supermajority against the heterodox minority from which the president and much of the security elite derive. There are, of course, other communal groups in Syria, but this formulaic statement is common shorthand to invoke sectarianism. The "democracy and dictatorship" frame uses the normatively appealing rhetoric from the early days of the uprising when Arab Spring-inspired activists attempted to direct a peaceful, non-sectarian revolution against an authoritarian government. As the uprising progressed and Islamist groups rose to prominence, arguments over the proper role of "religion and secularism" rose to prominence with them. Finally, early, government-inspired rhetoric about foreign conspiracies against Syria took on greater relevance as foreign funds and fighters poured into the country in support of, or in opposition to, the rebellion. We capture this narrative with the "foreign forces" frame.

We are interested in how the content of the frames affects how people think about the civil war — and, particularly, how a sectarian narrative of the conflict colors people's adopted reasonings. Yet the frames themselves do not exist in splendid isolation of one another, but rather sit alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, each other. As such, we seek to assess the effect of the frames invoked alone and in competition with others. The single frame corresponds, in a rough sense, to like-minded individuals rehashing grievances and trying to make sense of the conflict in the absence of opposing viewpoints. The competing frames correspond to the wider debate within Syrian society about how they became engulfed in

a massively destructive conflict. In practice, not everyone is so insular as to hear only one, dominant message, but neither is everyone the model, civically-minded deliberator open to views inconsistent with his or her own.

Post-treatment, the core outcome measure asks subjects to assess, on a four-point scale of importance, why people are fighting in the conflict. The battery includes eight reasons:[7]

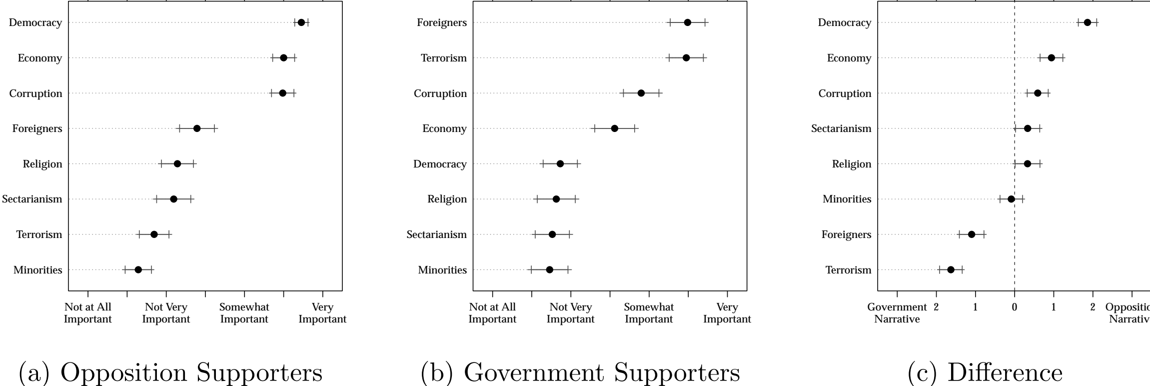
- Democratic freedoms,
- Sectarian differences,
- International rivalries,
- The role of religion in politics,
- Minority rights,
- Terrorist activity,
- Declining living standards, and
- Corruption.

Some of these reasons — e.g., *democratic freedoms* and *sectarian differences* — are clearly connected to the experimental frames, and, if our mild rhetorical framing is to move people on anything, it should be these items. Other reasons in the battery, however, have no obvious connection to the treatment frames. For example, *declining living standards* and *corruption*, although sometimes cited as grievances that contributed to people's decisions to protest early in the uprising, largely fell out of the narrative over time as the conflict militarized and the fighting became existential. We include these items to discriminate between reasons that are plausibly connected to the frames and those that are not.

To provide some substance to the very different narratives that opposition and government supporters have for the Syrian civil war, Figure 1 plots the mean responses on each of the outcome variables from the control group. The former place great stress on democratic freedoms, declining living standards, and corruption, while the latter give pride of place to

[7]The question wording reads: "Why do you think people are fighting in the conflict? Let me list off some possibilities. For each of them, please tell me if you think it is very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important at all."

international rivalries and terrorist activities. Neither faction cites sectarian differences, religious politics, or minority rights as particularly important; if anything, opposition supporters place greater emphasis on these factors, but the differences are modest in magnitude.



(a) Opposition Supporters (b) Government Supporters (c) Difference

Figure 1: Importance of Various Factors for the Fighting (Control Group)

6 Findings

6.1 Sectarian Framing and the Importance of Sectarianism

If a sectarian framing affects how people understand the Syrian civil war, we should be able to observe subjects placing greater importance on sectarian differences as a cause of the fighting. Table 1 reports the average treatment effects in the full sample and broken down by opposition and government supporters. Figure 2, in turn, reports the marginal effect of the sectarian frame when presented alone and alongside competing frames about democracy, secularism, and foreign forces fighting in Syria.

The sectarian frame has no detectable effect on the importance people place on sectarian differences in the full sample, whether alone or paired with a competing frame (Table 1 first column, Figure 2 first row). As a testament to the wide gaps in the government and opposition narratives of the conflict, however, we observe systematically different responses to the sectarian frame between the two constituencies. While opposition supporters barely

	Full Sample	Opposition	Government
(Intercept)	−0.01	0.12	−0.17
	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.13)
Democracy	−0.04	−0.09	−0.03
	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.18)
Secularism	0.03	−0.04	0.12
	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.18)
Foreigners	−0.07	−0.30**	0.18
	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.18)
Sectarianism	0.11	−0.16	0.38**
	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.16)
Sectarianism × Democracy	−0.05	0.15	−0.11
	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.22)
Sectarianism × Secularism	−0.19	0.02	−0.38*
	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.22)
Sectarianism × Foreigners	−0.02	0.33*	−0.37*
	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.22)
R^2	0.00	0.01	0.01
N	1970	1051	766

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.10$

Table 1: Effect of Conflict Framing on the Importance of Sectarian Differences

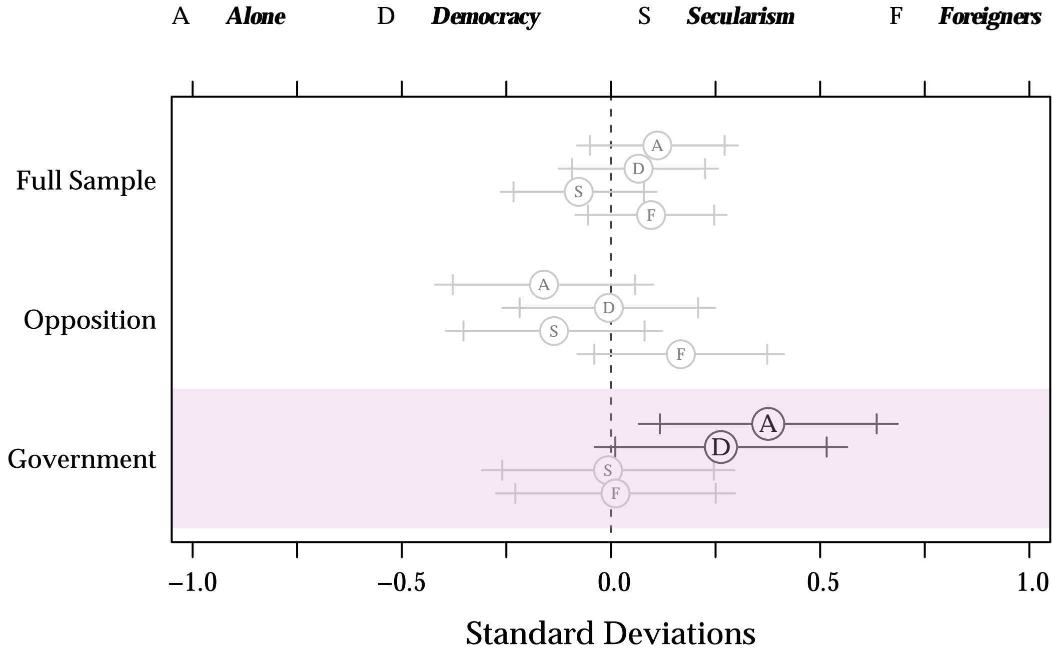


Figure 2: Marginal effect of sectarian framing on the importance of sectarian differences for the fighting. Sectarianism framed alone and alongside competing frames.

react to it,[8] their government counterparts respond strongly and in the anticipated direction: placing greater importance on sectarian differences for the fighting.

As expected, the sectarian frame had its largest impact when isolated from competing narratives. Framed alone, it caused government sympathizers to increase the importance they place on sectarian differences by nearly .4 standard deviations — a substantively large effect that more than overcame the baseline gap between government and opposition supporters.[9] In contrast, when presented alongside two of the three competing narratives — secularism and foreign forces — the effect of the sectarian frame *vanishes*. Although moved substantially by sectarian arguments when they were presented alone, government supporters did not move at all when those arguments were paired directly with alternate explanations of the conflict.

Counternarratives eliminate the effect of the sectarian frame in two of the three instances, but not, interestingly, when the counterframe invokes democracy versus dictatorship. Although the marginal effect of sectarianism drops by about 25 percent when paired against the democracy frame, the latter does not drive the effect to 0 as did the other competitors. To be clear, we did not anticipate this result. One possible explanation, of course, is that the "democracy versus dictatorship" trope has been repeated *ad nauseam* throughout the uprising and can no longer move people — but, then again, we could say exactly the same thing about the sectarianism narrative.

Instead, we speculate that the minimal attenuation from the democracy frame is due to the fact that it is not a very flattering narrative for government sympathizers, who are on the wrong normative side of the "democracy versus dictatorship" contrast. Whereas opposition

[8]As the second row of Figure 2 shows, the marginal effect of the sectarian frame is variable and never statistically detectable among opposition supporters. We say "barely" because the sectarian frame eliminates the unanticipated negative effect of the foreigners frame — i.e., the marginal effect of the foreigners frame is a statistically detectable $-.30$ standard deviations when presented alone, but an indetectable .03 standard deviations when presented alongside the sectarian frame. We are hesitant to attribute much substantive merit to this stray finding given the general absence of treatment effects among opposition supporters on other outcome variables.

[9]For a sense of magnitude, the difference in intercepts — corresponding to the mean of the control group — between government and opposition supporters is just under .3 standard deviations. Compared to their opposition counterparts, government sympathizers go from placing substantially less importance on sectarian differences in the control condition to substantially *more* in the isolated sectarian frame condition.

to religious extremism and to foreign forces fighting in Syria may reflect well on government supporters, backing a despotic government guilty of massive human rights abuses does not — and a frame that reminds them of this fact may, accordingly, be ignored.

6.2 Sectarian Framing and the Importance of Other Factors

The most straightforward explanation of the role of sectarian discourse in the civil war is that sectarian framing causes people to place more importance on sectarian differences. A more intricate account incorporates contestation over how to frame the violence in light of competing narratives offered by people on different sides of the conflict. Based on the above findings, these data appear to support both the simpler and the more complex explanations, at least for people on one side of the war. In effect, however, we have explained sectarianism with sectarianism — nice, as far as it goes, but not exactly an earth-shaking conclusion.

Had we asked subjects only about the importance of sectarian differences, we would have concluded that sectarian discourse works much as expected. As it happens, we would have been wrong — at least in a simple sense. Fortunately, respondents assessed the importance of many factors for the fighting beyond sectarianism, and all of their assessments were, in principle, subject to the influence of the frame into which we randomized them. The picture that emerges from these other factors tells a decidedly more interesting story than the simple one we envisioned when we designed this experiment.

What happens when we change the outcome? How, for example, does sectarian framing of the conflict affect the importance that people place on fighting over the role of religion in politics — the closest cognate outcome to "sectarian differences," at least for those inclined to impute religious content to a communal conflict? We repeat the same procedures from the previous section, but swap out the outcome variables. Figure 3, the exact analog to Figure 2, summarizes the findings.

The results in Figure 3 match those in Figure 2 almost perfectly. The only noticeable difference is that the sectarianism frame presented alone now has a statistically detectable effect in the full sample, but this finding is driven *entirely* by the stronger effect among

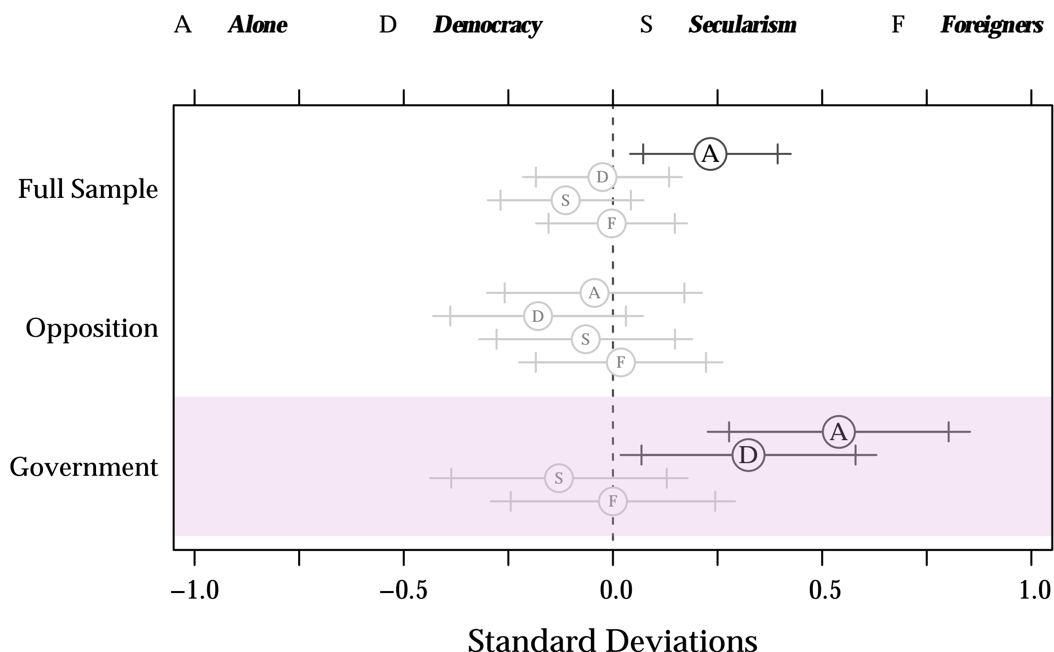


Figure 3: Marginal effect of sectarian framing on the importance of religion in politics for the fighting. Sectarianism framed alone and alongside competing frames.

government supporters. We also observe the same mitigating effect of counternarratives: the effect of sectarianism vanished when presented alongside the secularism and foreign forces frames, while diminishing but remaining detectable when paired with the democracy and dictatorship frame.

Meanwhile, the marginal effect of the secularism frame — "a conflict between religion and secularism" — has little detectable influence on the importance people place on fighting over the role of religion in politics. Again, we observe no effects among opposition supporters. We observe a positive but statistically indetectable effect when framed alone, and a large, *negative* effect when framed alongside sectarianism. If we are being generous, we might be willing to attribute the lack of evidence on the former to an underpowered comparison. We cannot, however, tell a non-convoluted story about the large negative effect when secularism is paired against sectarianism.[10]

[10]Among opposition supporters, the marginal effect of the secularism frame alone is an estimated $-.05$ standard deviations ($s.e. = .15$, $p = .75$), and $-.07$ ($s.e. = .10$, $p = .50$) when presented alongside the

More generally, we replicated these procedures for each of the outcome variables and found largely consistent patterns. Table 2 reports model results for government supporters only, while Figure 4 distills the key findings. First, even with overindulgent standards for statistical detectability, we can find almost no framing effects among opposition supporters. Second, we find almost no evidence that the non-sectarian frames, by themselves, influence the importance people place on the various factors behind the fighting — even for those outcomes that are closest conceptually to the frames themselves.[11]

Lastly, we find that the sectarian frame causes government supporters to increase the importance they place on most of the factors presented to them for assessment. To summarize, Figure 4 distills the marginal effects of the sectarian frame on a normalized additive index of all eight outcomes, along with the effect on each of its constituent components. When framed alone, sectarianism causes people to place greater importance on five of the eight factors for the fighting.. More importantly, the effect on the index — nearly a half a standard deviation — suggests that sectarianism simply increases the importance that people place on *fighting*. Meanwhile, we see much the same counterframing pattern as we described previously: the effect of sectarianism vanishes when presented alongside the secularism or foreign forces frames, but attenuates only a little when counterframed with democracy versus dictatorship.

6.3 Sectarian Framing and Self-Identification

So far, these data have suggested that framing the conflict in sectarian terms makes at least some people more likely to identify sectarian motivations for the fighting — but also to increase the importance of many other factors as well. Moreover, counterframing with other narratives either mitigates the sectarian effect or eliminates it entirely. As a final point, we

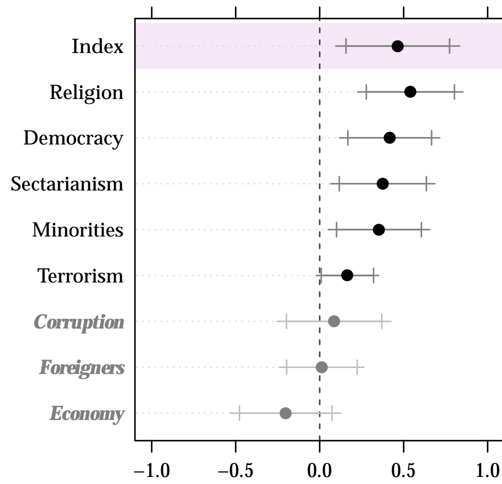
sectarianism frame. For government supporters, the two marginals are .28 ($s.e. = .18$, $p = .13$) and $-.39$ ($s.e. = .13$, $p < .01$), respectively. The former estimate is moderately sized but imprecisely estimated, which is why we are more inclined to cite it as absence of evidence rather than evidence of absence.

[11] We have already discussed the (mostly) non-effect of the secularism frame on "the role of religion in politics." We also find nulls all around for the democracy frame on "democratic freedoms" and the foreign forces frame on "international rivalries."

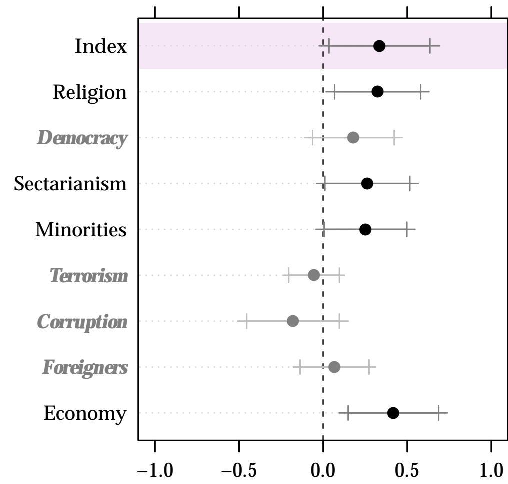
	Sect	Religion	Democracy	Minorities	Terrorism	Foreign Forces	Economics	Corruption
(Intercept)	−0.17	−0.29**	−1.00***	−0.10	0.67***	0.54***	−0.45***	−0.41***
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Democracy	−0.03	0.06	0.08	−0.03	0.24**	−0.11	−0.36*	0.16
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Secularism	0.12	0.28	0.22	0.03	0.14	−0.13	−0.03	0.08
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.19)	(0.20)
Foreigners	0.18	0.46**	0.23	0.25	0.20*	−0.06	−0.08	0.17
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Sectarianism	0.38**	0.54***	0.42***	0.35**	0.17*	0.01	−0.20	0.09
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.09)	(0.13)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Sectarianism × Democracy	−0.11	−0.22	−0.24	−0.10	−0.22*	0.06	0.62***	−0.26
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Sectarianism × Secularism	−0.38*	−0.67***	−0.56***	−0.32	−0.18	0.06	0.13	−0.28
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Sectarianism × Foreigners	−0.37*	−0.54**	−0.51**	−0.44**	−0.24*	−0.09	0.29	−0.18
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.13)	(0.17)	(0.23)	(0.24)
R^2	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01
N	766	766	766	766	766	766	766	766

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.10$

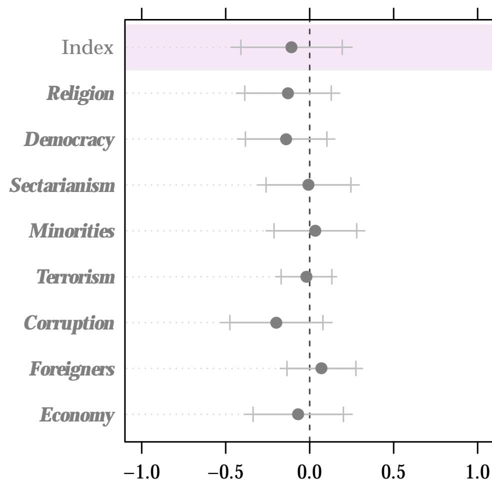
Table 2: Effect of Conflict Framing on Reasons for Fighting (Government Supporters)



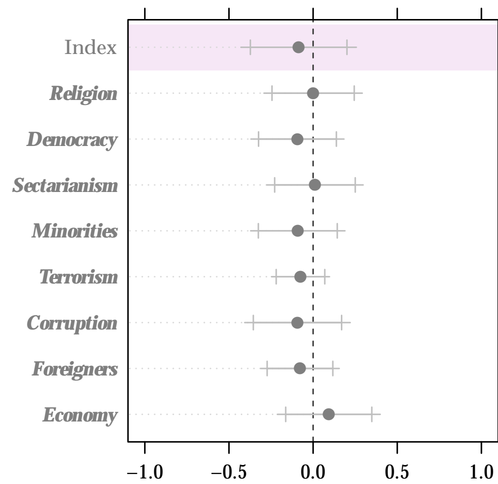
(a) Sectarianism Frame Alone



(b) Paired with the Democracy Frame



(c) Paired with the Secularism Frame



(d) Paired with the Foreign Forces Frame

Figure 4: Marginal Effect of Sectarian Framing on Reasons Given for the Fighting (Government Supporters)

might also wonder whether or not the sectarian narrative affects not just the reasons people identify for the fighting, but also, at a more basic level, how people identify *themselves*.

We measure self-identification with an open-ended question, modeled after its frequently-used counterpart from the Afrobarometer project:

> We have spoken to many Syrians and they have all described themselves in different ways. Some people describe themselves in terms of their origins, such as being Arab or Kurdish, their religion, such as being Christian or Druze, or in economic terms, such as being from the middle class or a farmer. *Besides being a citizen of Syria*, which specific group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?

Rather than impose closed-form categories on people, the open-ended format allows subjects to propose any group identity they consider relevant. Enumerators took down their responses exactly, which allows us to organize people into the most common categories, such as class, occupation, ethnicity, religion, sect, and so on. Importantly, nearly 75 percent of subjects answered with some variant of "Syrian only" — *despite the fact that the question explicitly tells them not to do so.*

Do the treatment frames cause people to self-identify in different ways? We dichotomize the self-identification question into "Syrian only" or not and explain it with the same model setup as previously (note that doing so implies a linear probability model, but results are qualitatively similar with a probit link function). As with the *fight* outcomes, we observe no treatment effects among opposition supporters. In contrast, we do see government sympathizers responding to the sectarian frame, as summarized in Table 3.

In summary, framing the conflict in sectarian terms does not make government supporters more likely to self-identify with their sects or other sub-national identity groups, but rather more likely to identify as *Syrian only.* This finding is difficult to see in the list of coefficients in the fully interactive model, in part because we do not observe the same counterframing dynamic as before (the *Sectarianism* coefficients are jointly significant, with $F = 2.77, p = .03$). In particular, it appears to be the case that people attend largely to the presence or

	All Supporters		Minorities Only	
	Interactive	Pooled	Interactive	Pooled
(Intercept)	0.62***	0.64***	0.48***	0.47***
	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.10)	(0.08)
Democracy	0.12	0.02	0.02	−0.05
	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.16)	(0.10)
Secularism	0.02	0.04	−0.00	0.05
	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.15)	(0.09)
Foreigners	0.03	0.04	0.02	0.06
	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.15)	(0.09)
Sectarianism	0.11	0.08**	0.21	0.22***
	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.13)	(0.07)
Sectarianism × Democracy	−0.17*		−0.11	
	(0.10)		(0.21)	
Sectarianism × Secularism	0.03		0.07	
	(0.10)		(0.19)	
Sectarianism × Foreigners	0.02		0.05	
	(0.09)		(0.18)	
Sectarianism Joint Significance (F)	2.77**	...	2.97**	...
R^2	0.02	0.01	0.06	0.06
N	788	788	219	219

$^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.10$

Table 3: Self-identification as "Syrian Only" among government supporters (linear probability model)

absence of the sectarian cue, regardless of what else we cue alongside it.[12] For clarity, we also present a simpler, pooled model with dummy explanatory variables indicating whether or not subjects received the named frame, either alone or alongside another one. This specification shows that the sectarian frame increased the rate of self-identification as Syrian only by nearly 10 percentage points. Note, however, that this increase appears to be driven almost entirely by minority supporters of the government, among whom the increase is more than 20 percentage points — nearly a 50-percent relative increase off of their baseline.[13]

6.4 Discussion

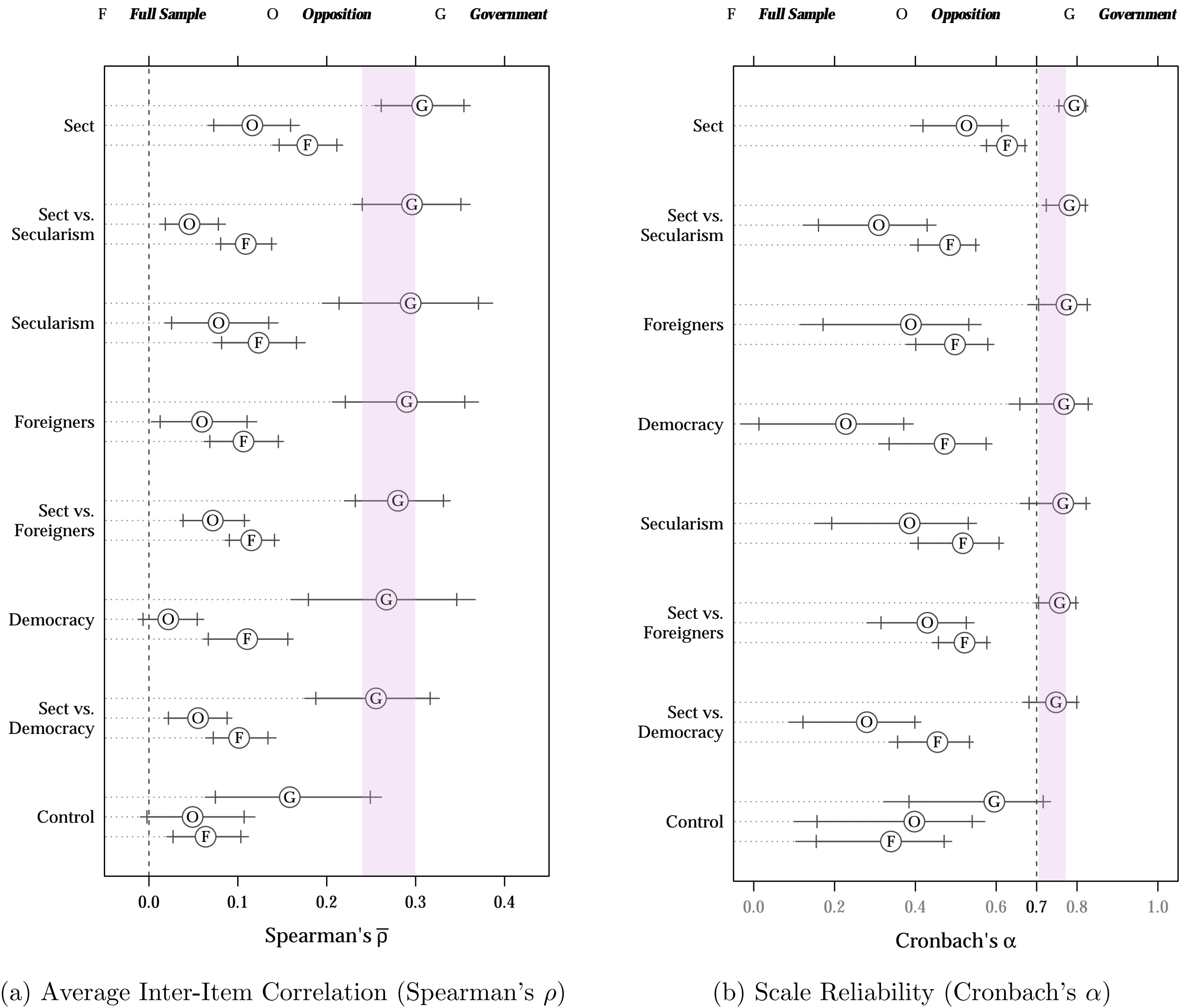
Let us take stock. To summarize, we anticipated that sectarian framing of the civil war would induce Syrians to think more in terms of sectarian differences. In light of the competing narratives about the conflict, however, we expected that people would be much more resistant to framing effects when confronted with the sectarian narrative and a counterframe side-by-side. Our experimental data suggest a more intricate story. We do see sectarianism causing people to narrate the conflict to themselves as more sectarian — but only among government supporters. We also found that counterframing does eliminate the effects of the sectarian narrative, but not, curiously, when that counterframe was democracy versus dictatorship: the original narrative of the Syrian uprising. Finally, the effects of the sectarian frame on the sectarian outcome were not unique: we saw very similar reactions on outcomes such as minority rights, the role of religion in politics, and democratic freedoms. Ultimately, we were partly right and partly wrong — but wrong in an interesting way.

What could explain these patterns? One possibility is that the outcomes in question are a syndrome, at least for government supporters. Consistent with this view, the *Fight*

[12]The marginal effect of the sectarian frame alone is .11 standard deviations ($s.e. = .07$, $p = .11$), .14 ($s.e. = .07$, $p = .04$) when presented alongside the secularism frame, and .12 ($s.e. = .07$, $p = .06$) alongside the foreign forces frame. The exception, as before, is with the democracy counterframe, for which the marginal effect of sectarianism is $-.06$ ($s.e. = .07$, $p = .37$).

[13]Among minorities in the fully interactive model, the marginal effect of the sectarian frame alone is .21 standard deviations ($s.e. = .13$, $p = .11$), .28 ($s.e. = .13$, $p = .04$) when presented alongside the secularism frame, .26 ($s.e. = .12$, $p = .03$) alongside the foreign forces frame, and .10 ($s.e. = .16$, $p = .53$) alongside the democracy frame.

battery of outcomes is far more internally consistent for these Syrians than it is for opposition sympathizers. Figure 5 plots, by experimental condition, the average inter-item correlation and Cronbach's α for the two constituencies. Both indicators demonstrate that the outcomes are much more internally related to each other for government supporters than for their opposition counterparts, for whom they are weakly related.



(a) Average Inter-Item Correlation (Spearman's ρ) (b) Scale Reliability (Cronbach's α)

Figure 5: Internal consistency of the *Fight* battery. Vertical bars denote the 95-percent confidence intervals across experimental conditions for the government supporter subsample.

To put concepts to the data, many of the factors behind the fighting have unsettling implications that point in the same direction for government sympathizers. It is not partic-

ularly surprising that a sectarian narrative can induce this constituency to see the fighting in sectarian terms: they are, as it happens, supporting a minoritarian regime, and are much more likely to be from one of Syria's "alliance of minorities" themselves. But, as such, it should also not be surprising that a sectarian narrative spills over into their views about minority rights — because it is not, in fact, a spillover, but rather another implication of sectarian conflict in Syria. One could also say the same for the role of religion in politics, in which secularism provides a safeguard for minority rights in a sea of Sunnis, many of whom are religiously devout and at least some of whom are militantly committed to imposing religious law over the country.

In these terms, it is also comprehensible that a sectarian narrative would affect the importance people place on democratic freedoms. Government supporters have an agonizing relationship with democracy insofar as they find themselves in the awkward position of supporting a dictator whose commitment to civil and political rights was low even in the best of times, and whose regime has committed massive human rights abuses over the course of the civil war. Many Syrians are ambivalent backers of the government, supporting it not out of conviction, but as the lesser of two evils.

The challenge is that democracy itself has sectarian connotations in Syria. At a minimum, it means the overthrow of the ruling, minoritarian regime. More worrisome, it means majority rule, and, what is potentially much worse, rampant *majoritarian* rule. Despite efforts by elements of political opposition to reassure minorities that a democratic Syria will safeguard minority rights, they are in no position to make credible commitments to these rights in the future, particularly in light of the virulent anti-minority rhetoric and behavior of the extremist jihadi organizations fighting in the conflict.

The reasons for the war may be contested, but so, too, is the meaning of "democracy" — the alleged solution to the conflict, if Syrians could only get there. As Masoud (2015) observes, "just because people tell a survey enumerator that they want democracy does not mean they really do, or that they know what it means, or that what it means to them is the same as what it means to us." Syrians have a war to fight, as well as a conflict over

what the conflict itself is about (Horowitz, 1991, ch. 1). Resolving it in a permanent fashion will likely require Syrians to resolve the metaconflict as well — and what democracy, that favorite panacea of policymakers and scholars alike, actually means for Syria.

References

Abboud, S. (2015). *Syria.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Blattman, C. and E. Miguel (2010). Civil war. *Journal of Economic Literature 48*(1), 3–57.

Bowles, S. and H. Gintis (2004). Persistent parochialism: Trust and exclusion in ethnic networks. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization 55*(1), 1–23.

Brubaker, R. and D. D. Laitin (1998). Ethnic and nationalist violence. *Annual Review of Sociology 24*, 423–452.

Cederman, L.-E. and L. Girardin (2007). Beyond fractionalization: Mapping ethnicity onto nationalist insurgencies. *American Political Science Review 101*(1), 173–185.

Cederman, L.-E., A. Wimmer, and B. Min (2010). Why do ethnic groups rebel? *World Politics 62*(1), 87–119.

Chong, D. and J. N. Druckman (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science 10*, 103–126.

Chwe, M. S.-Y. (2001). *Rational Ritual: Culture, Coordination, and Common Knowledge.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Collier, P. and A. Hoeffler (1998). On economic causes of civil war. *Oxford Economic Papers 50*(4), 563–573.

Collier, P. and A. Hoeffler (2004). Greed and grievance in civil war. *Oxford Economic Papers 56*(4), 563–595.

Droz-Vincent, P. (2014). 'State of Barbary' (take two): From the Arab Spring to the return of violence in Syria. *Middle East Journal 68*(1), 33–58.

Druckman, J. N. (2001). The implications of framing effects for citizen competence. *Political Behavior 23*(3), 225–256.

Druckman, J. N. (2004). Political preference formation: Competition, deliberation, and the (ir)relevance of framing effects. *American Political Science Review 98*(4), 671–686.

Druckman, J. N. and K. R. Nelson (2003). Framing and deliberation: How citizens' conversations limit elite influence. *American Journal of Political Science 47*(4), 729–745.

Eifert, B., E. Miguel, and D. N. Posner (2010). Political competition and ethnic identification in Africa. *American Journal of Political Science 54*(2), 494–510.

Fearon, J. D. (2004). Why do some civil wars last so much longer than others? *Journal of Peace Research 41*(3), 275–301.

Fearon, J. D., K. Kasara, and D. D. Laitin (2007). Ethnic minority rule and civil war onset. *American Political Science Review 101*(1), 187–193.

Fearon, J. D. and D. D. Laitin (1996). Explaining interethnic cooperation. *American Political Science Review 90*(4), 715–735.

Fearon, J. D. and D. D. Laitin (2000). Violence and the social construction of ethnic identity. *International Organization 54*(4), 845–877.

Fearon, J. D. and D. D. Laitin (2003). Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war. *American Political Science Review 97*(1), 75–90.

Fisk, R., P. Cockburn, and K. Sengupta (2014). *Syria: Descent Into the Abyss.* London: Independent Print Limited.

Flores, T. E. and I. Nooruddin (2009). Democracy under the gun: Understanding post-conflict economic recovery. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 53*(1), 3–29.

Flores, T. E. and I. Nooruddin (2016). *Elections in Hard Times.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Geddes, B. and J. Zaller (1989). Sources of popular support for authoritarian regimes. *American Journal of Political Science 33*(2), 319–347.

Ghobarah, H. A., P. Huth, and B. Russett (2003). Civil wars kill and maim people — long after the shooting stops. *American Political Science Review 97*(2), 189–202.

Hardin, R. (1995). *One for All: The Logic of Group Conflict.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Heger, L. and I. Salehyan (2007). Ruthless rulers: Coalition size and the severity of civil conflict. *International Studies Quarterly 51*(2), 385–403.

Hokayem, E. (2013). *Syria's Uprising and the Fracturing of the Levant.* London: Routledge.

Horowitz, D. L. (1991). *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jones, S. G. (2013). Syira's growing jihad. *Survival 55*(4), 53–72.

Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). *The Logic of Violence in Civil War.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kinder, D. R. (1998). Communication and opinion. *Annual Review of Political Science 1*, 167–197.

Kuklinski, J. H., P. J. Quirk, J. Jerit, and R. F. Rich (2001). The political environment and citizen competence. *American Journal of Political Science 45*(2), 410–424.

Kuran, T. (1998). Ethnic norms and their transformation through reputational cascades. *Journal of Legal Studies 27*(S2), 623–659.

Lacina, B. (2006). Explaining the severity of civil wars. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 50*(2), 276–289.

Landis, J. and J. Pace (2007). The Syrian opposition. *Washington Quarterly 30*(1), 45–68.

Lenz, G. S. (2009). Learning and opinion change, not priming: Reconsidering the priming hypothesis. *American Journal of Political Science 53*(4), 821–837.

Lister, C. (2016). *The Syrian Jihad*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Lupia, A. and M. McCubbins (1998). *The Democratic Dilemma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Masoud, T. (2015). Has the door closed on Arab democracy? *Journal of Democracy 26*(1), 74–87.

Nelson, T. E., R. A. Clawson, and Z. M. Oxley (1997). Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance. *American Political Science Review 91*(3), 567–583.

Nelson, T. E., Z. M. Oxley, and R. A. Clawson (1997). Toward a psychology of framing effects. *Political Behavior 19*(3), 221–246.

Pearlman, W. (2013). Emotions and the microfoundations of the Arab Spring. *Perspectives on Politics 11*(2), 387–409.

Pearlman, W. (2016). Narratives of fear in Syria. *Perspectives on Politics 14*(1), 21–37.

Sambanis, N. (2001). Do ethnic and nonethnic civil wars have the same cause? *Journal of Conflict Resolution 45*(3), 259–282.

Sniderman, P. M. and S. M. Theriault (2004). The structure of political argument and the logic of issue framing. In W. E. Saris and P. M. Sniderman (Eds.), *Studies in Public Opinion*, pp. 133–165. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Varshney, A. (2003). Nationalism, ethnic conflict, and rationality. *Perspectives on Politics 1*(1), 85–99.

Wedeen, L. (1999). *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wucherpfennig, J., N. W. Metternich, L.-E. Cederman, and K. S. Gleditsch (2012). Ethnicity, the state, and the duration of civil war. *World Politics 64*(1), 79–115.