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Pre-Analysis Plan
Does Conflict Undermine Female Political Leadership? Experimental Evidence from
Afghanistan

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I. Overview

This project explores whether and how conflict undermines preferences for female political leaders in conflict environments. We examine these processes in Afghanistan. Our identification strategy consists of randomly priming some Afghan survey respondents with information about deepening insecurity in Afghanistan. It then asks all respondents to complete a conjoint exercise of leadership profiles.

We hypothesize that respondents who receive the “conflict” prime will be less supportive of female leaders in the conjoint experiment than respondents who receive the neutral “control” prime. We expect these patterns to vary depending on respondents’ gender and ethnic group. We test these hypotheses using existing survey data (Bhatia 2017). This PAP registration follows an analysis of descriptive statistics and manipulation checks of the conflict prime from the survey data.

II. Motivation and Theory

Scholars have long pointed to gender inequality as a harbinger of conflict (Caprioli 2005; Paffenholz 2016; Melander 2005; Regan and Paskeviciute 2003). Less work assesses the impact of conflict on gender inequality, especially with regards to voters’ assessment of candidates. Survey respondents generally view male politicians as better suited to manage defense and security issues than female politicians (Dolan 2010). Scholarship is divided, however, over whether gender stereotypes substantially influence voters’ evaluations of male and female candidates (Brooks 2013; Lawless 2004; Ono and Burden 2019, p. 586). Recent studies have focused on female political leadership in conflict settings (Tripp 2015; Berry 2017; Dahlerup & Nordlund 2004; Hadzic & Tavits 2020). We hope to contribute to this burgeoning literature by providing experimental evidence on how conflict shapes citizens’ attitudes towards female leaders. Confirming whether conflict penalizes female leaders in states that are hobbled by insecurity could justify measures like gender quotas that help balance the political playing field between male and female candidates.

We expect conflict to weaken respondents’ preferences for female leaders for two reasons. First, men monopolize “law and order” institutions like the military and police force. Priming respondents with information about conflict may make them more likely to value male candidates, whose gender may signal a greater capacity to

lead male-dominated security institutions and impose order. Second, many stereotypes privilege men as being more qualified to lead during conflict than women. Priming respondents with information on the severity of conflict may remind survey respondents of these stereotypes, dampening their preferences for female leaders. This expectation counters an alternative “benevolent sexism” hypothesis. A prevailing stereotype casts women as being more capable of building and sustaining peace. Conflict may push citizens to prefer female leaders as a means to obtain peace. Nevertheless, based on our knowledge of Afghanistan, we expect the former hypothesis to be more likely than the latter.

We anticipate the effect of the conflict prime on respondents’ preferences for female leaders to vary across two subgroups. First, we expect female respondents to be less susceptible to patriarchal stereotypes than male respondents. Female respondents may exhibit a greater gender affinity for female leaders. Though female respondents primed with conflict information should be less supportive of female leaders than female respondents in the control group, overall we expect female respondents to be more supportive of female leaders than male respondents. We predict that the conflict prime will have a larger negative effect on respondents’ preferences for female leaders among men (male respondents with prime treatment vs. male respondent with control treatment) than women (female respondents with prime treatment vs. female respondents with control group).

Second, we suspect that respondents’ coethnic ties to a female leader may mitigate negative gender stereotypes invoked by the conflict prime. Respondents may expect leaders to privilege their coethnic constituents. They might also anticipate coethnic intermediaries and networks to influence if not control coethnic leaders, regardless of the leader’s gender. Research in the United States suggests the voters view party affiliation as an “insurance” that candidates will act in the voters’ interests irrespective of the candidates’ gender (Ono and Burden 2019). We expect leaders’ ethnicity to serve a similar “insurance” function in Afghanistan, where ethnicity is politically salient. We predict that the conflict prime will have a larger negative effect on respondents’ preferences for female leaders among respondents who do not belong to a hypothetical leader’s ethnic group (non-coethnic respondent with prime treatment vs. non-coethnic respondent with control treatment) than respondents who do (coethnic respondent with prime treatment vs. coethnic respondent with control treatment).

III. Background on Afghanistan Survey

This survey was conducted between August 2016 and January 2017 in three provinces in Northern Afghanistan: Balkh, Kunduz and Sar-e-Pul. The complete survey interviewed 2,485 respondents. Surveys were conducted in respondents’ households.¹ Afghanistan is a data-poor environment under the best of

¹ The survey’s sampling design relies on 80 sampling points selected by random draw per province, with a quota of 10 surveys per sampling point (half male, half

circumstances, and the household surveys were collected in the midst of an ongoing uptick in insecurity in some areas of the country. Elections in Afghanistan are also notoriously subject to large-scale fraud and voter coercion; electoral data is therefore an unreliable indicator of public leadership preferences. The dataset is therefore a unique opportunity to explore respondent leadership preferences, and how these preferences are influenced by insecurity.

For the main analysis, we will only examine respondents from the survey who received a “conflict” prime (659) and a neutral “control” prime (640). This generates 1,299 total survey respondents. As a robustness check, we will run analyses replacing the neutral “control” prime respondents with respondents who received other primes (invoking extortion and nepotism) who are excluded from the main analysis. There is no pure control in this survey.

We did not conduct a power analysis because the survey was implemented before we started this project (May 2020). Though data from this survey has been used for other projects (Bhatia 2017), this is the first use of this survey to assess how conflict influences respondents’ preferences for female leaders. We have run descriptive statistics and a balance test of demographic characteristics between the treatment and control groups (see Appendix). We also conducted a manipulation check to assess whether the conflict prime increases respondents’ political preferences for security as a test of the prime’s effectiveness (see below). We have not run any analysis testing our hypotheses.

IV. Measure Index and Construction

A. Independent Variable: Conflict Prime

The first part of the survey experiment primes treated respondents to think about the severity of conflict in Afghanistan through a vignette. Before the conjoint portion of the survey, enumerators read treated participants the following text, which was based on news reports at the time:

“The past year is believed to have been the most difficult year for Afghanistan in terms of insecurity since 2001. Last year, the level of civilian casualties rose to unprecedented levels. Officials recently implored “those inflicting this pain on the people of Afghanistan to take concrete actions to protect civilians and to put a stop to the killing and maiming of civilians.”

Enumerators read the following “neutral” text to respondents in the control group:

“Afghanistan has a population of about 33 million people, making it the 41st largest

female respondents). Enumerators began at a central landmark in the village and sampled every third house using a random walk method. Enumerators selected adult household members using the Kish Grid method.

country in the world. There are 34 provinces and nearly 400 districts in Afghanistan. Afghanistan shares a border with six different countries in Central and South Asia, including a 76km border with China. There are four major rivers in Afghanistan: the Amu Darya, the Hari River, the Kabul River, and the Helmand River.”

Enumerators then gave treated and control respondents a manipulation check to verify whether they understood the vignettes’ information. Eighty-seven percent of respondents’ answered the manipulation check correctly. We will include participants who failed the manipulation check as “treated” as excluding them may introduce other types of bias into the results (e.g. by excluding a disproportionate number of respondents with no education). Robustness checks will exclude them from our analysis.

Six hundred and fifty nine respondents received the conflict prime (Treatment Group). Six hundred and forty respondents received the control prime (Control Group). The balance table in the Appendix finds few differences between respondents in the control and treatment groups, suggesting that the conflict prime was successfully randomized.

The prime experiment is a hard test for our theory. All of the survey respondents are likely to be thinking of conflict when evaluating hypothetical leaders’ profiles given that they live in a conflict setting. Respondents are also likely to have already forged attitudes about the suitability of women in leadership positions. Afghanistan’s gender quota system in parliament, as well as international efforts to include Afghan women in government, is well known within the population. It has prompted controversy and debate over the role of women in politics in Afghanistan (Broadbent 2010). We do not expect large effect sizes.

Nevertheless, we anticipate statistically significant differences in respondents’ preferences for female leaders across relevant subgroups. Exploratory analysis reveals that the conflict prime does make treated respondents on average value leaders who prioritize peace and security more than respondents in the control group. The difference is slight. On a scale from one to six from least to most important political attributes, treated respondents rank political leaders who provide peace and security on average 5.78 out of 6. Respondents in the control group rank political leaders whom provide peace and security on average 5.67 out of 6. This mean difference is statistically significant at the five percent level. We hypothesize that treated respondents’ heightened valuation of leaders who provide peace and security will translate into a weaker preference for female leaders.

As robustness checks, we will also compare respondents from the less secure Kunduz Province to respondents in the more secure Balkh and Sar-e-Pul provinces. The provincial capital of Kunduz was briefly occupied by the Taliban in September 2015 and almost fell to the Taliban again in October 2016. Respondents from Kunduz were more proximate to violence than respondents in Balkh and Sar-e-Pul at time of data collection. Admittedly, provincial location is not randomly assigned. However, if Kunduz respondents’ leadership preferences mirror the

leadership preferences of respondents in the treatment group, this would bolster the survey experiment's external validity. Excluding respondents from Kundoz as an additional robustness check may strengthen the effect of the conflict prime by removing respondents in the control group who had recently experienced conflict by living in Kundoz.

B. Dependent Variable: Support for female leaders

We measure support for female leaders with a conjoint experiment of leaders' profiles.

After receiving the treatment or control prime, respondents were read the following text:

Now I am going to show you a few pairs of profiles of potential leaders and ask you to choose, between the two, the one that you think would be the best advocate for you. Given a choice between these two profiles, which person would you prefer as a leader?

The enumerator then read leaders' profiles with the following attributes and values:

Attribute	Values
Gender	Male, Female
Age	28, 37, 49, 57, 68
Education	High School, Madrassa, University Degree Abroad, University Degree Afghanistan
Ethnicity	Hazara, Pashtun, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek
Place of Birth	Balkh, Kabul, Kandahar, Saripul
Professional Experience	Business Owner, Donor Agency Employee, Government Employee, Military, Private Sector Employee

The survey randomized the attributes' value and the order they were read. There were three constraints in the randomization of leadership attribute values to ensure that all profiles were plausible. No hypothetical female leader had a military professional background. Leaders born in Kandahar were Pashtun. Hypothetical leaders younger than 30 could not have had less than a High School education.

V. Estimation Procedure

We estimate the effect of the conflict prime on support for female leaders. We measure candidate preferences through a forced choice conjoint experimental design, where respondents choose between two potential profiles of leaders with randomized attributes. Respondents had to choose between three pairs of

leadership profiles. They also had to rank each profile from 1 to 5. This produces 7,800 profile-observations.

We measure respondents' support for female leaders in terms of their likelihood of choosing a profile with a female leader and his or her ranking of profiles with female versus male leaders. Our estimands will be both Marginal Means (MMs) and Average Marginal Interaction Effects (AMIEs), as specified in Leeper, Hobolt and Tilly (2020) and Egami and Imai (2019). We will use the R packages **FindIt** (Egami, Ratkovic and Imai 2019), **cregg** (Leeper 2018), and **FactorEx** (De la Cuesta, Egami, Imai 2019). We will cluster standard errors at the respondent level to account for the repeated number of observations per respondent.

We are interested in whether the conflict prime generates a statistically significant negative difference in respondents' preferences for female leaders across relevant subgroups. We have no a priori expectation about the size of this negative difference. As discussed before, we anticipate the magnitude of this negative difference to be small. We will reject the null hypothesis if the p value is less than 0.05.

The next section lists six hypotheses. We will use False Detection Rate (FDR) adjustments to test for possible false positives. We will use the Benjamini-Hochberg (BH) and Holm's procedures.

VI. Hypotheses

Our confirmatory hypotheses are:

H1: Respondents who receive the conflict prime (treatment group) will have lower preferences for female leaders than respondents who receive the control prime (control group).

We expect this effect to differ across subgroups and be subject to a number of interaction effects, specified in the following secondary hypotheses:

H1a: Male respondents in the treatment group will have lower preferences for female leaders than male respondents in the control group.

H1b: Female respondents in the treatment group will have lower preferences for female leaders than female respondents in the control group.

We recognize that there may be competing mechanisms underlying the conflict prime's impact on female respondents' preferences for female leaders. On the one hand, female respondents may reason that, under conditions of violence, female leaders could less effectively provide security – men tend to dominant security institutions and are more strongly associated with order and military prowess. On the other hand, female respondents may be more motivated to support a female leader if they perceive that women's rights are more at risk as a result of conflict.

We predict the former mechanism to be more influential than the latter. Nevertheless, we expect the two countervailing mechanisms to mitigate the negative effect of the conflict prime among female respondents. Male respondents will not experience these countervailing mechanisms, resulting in a larger negative effect of the conflict prime on their preferences towards female leaders.

H1c: The negative effect of the conflict prime on respondents' preferences for female leaders will be smaller among female respondents than male respondents.

Our theory predicts preferences for female leaders to be ranked (from strongest to weakest preferences) according to the following subgroups:

1. *Female Respondent + Control Group (Strongest Preference for Female Leaders)*
2. *Female Respondent + Treatment Group*
3. *Male Respondent + Control Group*
4. *Male Respondent + Treatment Group (Weakest Preference for Female Leaders)*

However, due to sample size and the limited anticipated effect of the conflict prime, we do not expect our analysis to be sufficiently powered to find statistically significant differences in respondents' preferences for female leaders across these four subgroups. These are lower tier hypotheses that we hope future work will test.

We also anticipate that the size of the effect of the conflict prime on respondents' preferences for female leaders will vary depending on whether a respondent and a hypothetical leader belong to the same ethnic group.

H1d: The negative effect of the conflict prime on respondents' preferences for female leaders will be smaller among respondents from the same ethnic group of a hypothetical leader than respondents from a different ethnic group of a hypothetical leader.

Our theory predicts that respondents' preferences for female leaders will be ranked (from strongest to weakest preferences) according to the following subgroups:

1. *Coethnic Respondent + Control Group (Strongest Preference for Female Leaders)*
2. *Coethnic Respondent + Treatment Group*
3. *Non-Coethnic Respondent + Control Group*
4. *Non-Coethnic Respondent + Treatment Group (Weakest Preference for Female Leaders)*

We do not expect our analysis to be sufficiently powered to find statistically significant differences in respondents' preferences for female leaders across these four subgroups. These are lower tier hypotheses that we hope future work will test.

Finally, if men's monopolization of security institutions undergirds respondents' preferences for male leaders in conflict settings, we predict:

H2: Respondents who receive the conflict prime will have greater preferences for leaders with military experience than respondents who receive the control prime.

Because only male leaders could receive the military professional background attribute in the conjoint survey, we will only test this hypothesis among male leadership profiles.

VII. Procedures for Data Issues

A number of procedures were put in place before, during and after data collection to mitigate data issues:

- A small number of sample test surveys were completed in the Nuffield Centre for Computational Social Sciences (CESS) in early 2015.
- Translations were double checked for accuracy by a third party
- A fully translated pilot survey (n=50) with Afghan respondents was completed in May 2015 in Kabul, Afghanistan. Based on resulting feedback, several questions were adjusted.
- Non-response rates for the full field survey conducted in Afghanistan were low (<10%).
- We included a manipulation check to see if respondents understood the Treatment variable. The vast majority (87%) of respondents answered correctly.
- We have multiple empirical strategies to measure our independent variable (conflict). In addition to the prime, we will exploit subnational variation in exposure to violence and secondary survey research to supplement our findings and to use as a robustness check
- We also have multiple empirical strategies to measure our dependent variable (candidate preferences). In addition to forced choice questions, respondents evaluated each profile for suitability as a leader on a scale of 1-5.

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Appendix

Balance Table

Treatment/Control Balance Test

	Control	Treatment	p-value
Respondent Age	36.3	37.33	0.2510
Respondent Education Levels	2.51	2.44	0.5320
Gender	1.51	1.56	0.1090
Voted in Last Election	1.24	1.26	0.2700
Income	6.26	6.29	0.7270
Economic Change	3.81	3.81	0.9080
Access to Public Services	17.5	17.6	0.7750