When to Go? A Conjoint Experiment on Social Networks, Violence, and Forced Migration Decisions in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey

RESEARCH NOTE

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How do heterogeneous patterns of violence affect people's decision to flee? We provide individual-level evidence on flight decision-making in light of violence with a conjoint experiment in Turkey. The results suggest that intense indiscriminate violence nearby forces individuals into the decision to leave. In contrast to previous studies, we find that the fear of repeated violence plays a more important role in flight decision-making than the attack frequency. The survey experiment reveals that violence committed by the government makes a decision to flee abroad more likely than rebel violence. We find that individuals with support networks abroad are less responsive to patterns of violence, making flight decisions more independently and being generally more inclined to move. Our findings contribute to the growing literature on forced migration with individual-level evidence on the decision-making process underlying flight reactions to violence.

¿Cómo afectan los patrones heterogéneos de violencia a la decisión de las personas de huir de su país? Proporcionamos pruebas a nivel individual sobre la toma de decisiones relativas a la huida en contextos de violencia con un experimento conjunto en Turquía. Los resultados sugieren que la violencia indiscriminada intensa en las cercanías obliga a las personas a tomar la decisión de abandonar el país. En contraste con estudios anteriores, hallamos que el miedo a que se repitan los actos de violencia juega un papel más importante en la toma de decisiones relativas a la huida del país que la frecuencia de ataque. El experimento de la encuesta revela que la violencia cometida por el Gobierno es una causa más probable de la decisión de huir al extranjero con respecto a la violencia rebelde. Hallamos que aquellas personas que cuentan con redes de apoyo en el extranjero son menos receptivas a los patrones de violencia y toman decisiones relativas a la huida del país de una manera más independiente y, generalmente, están más dispuestas a mudarse. Nuestras conclusiones contribuyen a la creciente literatura sobre migración forzada aportando pruebas a nivel individual sobre el proceso de toma de decisiones subyacente a las reacciones de huida de la violencia.

Quelle est l'influence de l'hétérogénéité des schémas de violence sur les décisions personnelles de fuir ? À l'aide d'une expérience conjointe en Turquie, nous fournissons des éléments probants à l'échelle individuelle quant à la prise de décisions de fuite dans un contexte de violences. D'après nos résultats, l'intensité des violences aléatoires force quasiment les personnes à prendre la fuite. Par opposition à des études antérieures, nous observons que la peur de subir à nouveau des violences pèse davantage dans le processus de prise de décisions que la fréquence des attaques. Le sondage révèle que les violences commises par un gouvernement renforcent plus encore la probabilité d'une fuite à l'étranger que celles perpétrées par les rebelles. Nous constatons également que les personnes dotées d'un réseau de soutien à l'étranger réagissent moins aux schémas de violence, sont plus autonomes dans leur prise de décisions de fuite et généralement plus enclines à déménager. Grâce à des éléments probants relatifs au processus de prise de décisions qui précède une réaction de fuite face aux violences à l'échelle individuelle, nos conclusions viennent enrichir la littérature sur les migrations forcées, qui connaît déjà une forte croissance.

Introduction

Understanding how individuals decide to flee from armed conflict and how this translates into flight patterns is a central endeavor in forced migration research to anticipate emerging humanitarian needs. However, our understanding of the individual-level decision-making process leading to flights is still limited because many studies only identify predictors of refugee flows at the aggregated global, national, or sub-national level and do not distinguish between different patterns of violence that induce population movements (Schmeidl 1997; Davenport et al. 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004).

We contribute empirically to the literature on forced migration decision-making and population movements by providing individual-level experimental evidence on the effects of violence on the decision to flee.[1] Based on previous aggregated studies, we argue that violence looks sub-

[1] Civil conflicts are the most important causes of forced migration (Schmeidl 1997; Moore and Shellman 2004; Melander et al. 2009). However, we observe significant variation in the volume of displacement that is caused by conflicts.

stantially different across displacement contexts, ranging from individual and targeted killings and abductions to large-scale genocides and mass violence. This heterogeneity should be integrated into our models of forced displacement patterns because different types of violence can push people to flee in divergent ways. When individuals are faced with heterogeneous patterns of violence, they make their decision to flee and choose a destination depending on the extent to which violence directly threatens them. Additionally, social networks in other countries, as feasible outside options, shape how civilians respond to conflict patterns.

We conducted a conjoint experiment in the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey, that have experienced fighting for decades, to understand when individuals make the decision to flee. We asked respondents to evaluate information about carefully drafted and neutral violent scenarios and to hypothetically choose in which scenario they would rather flee than stay and where they would go. We also examine how respondents' social networks affect their response to violence and their choice between fleeing to a location abroad or within the country.[2]

We empirically demonstrate that the type of violence in a country matters to understand if individuals leave their homes and risk the notoriously dangerous journey of people on the move. We find that civilians respond more strongly to nearby violence than to distant attacks but that a fear of violence happening again drives more variation in decisions to flee than how frequently violence occurs. This finding is more nuanced than the existing literature that emphasizes the mere scale of violence as a factor that shapes flight decisions (Davenport et al. 2003; Balcells and Steele 2016; Turkoglu and Chadefaux 2019). Civilians also show more fear for indiscriminate violence and flee from it compared to targeted attacks. Importantly, we find that the perpetrator of violence affects the location to which people decide to flee. In line with Steele (2019), we empirically find that government violence leads to more hypothetical decisions to flee abroad, while rebel violence encourages more relocations within the country. This is likely to stem from the fact that a government cannot easily be contained by the weaker non-state opposition and civilians may only feel safe abroad, while exposure to non-state violence can be mitigated by moving to areas with less activity by these actors.

Focusing on social networks abroad, we then demonstrate that individuals with social networks in other countries have easier access to outside options, which makes flights less costly and more feasible. As a result, individuals in our sample who have social networks in other countries are more mobile and display a higher inclination to move. Their decisions to flee are also less dependent on the different patterns of violence in our conjoint experiment. This suggests that individuals without social networks abroad have to base their decision-making more strongly on the extent of urgency created by violence than those having social capital outside of the country.

This study makes important contributions to the literature. First, we complement existing macro-level analyses of flight patterns (Schmeidl 1997; Davenport et al. 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004; Melander et al. 2009) by using a conjoint experiment to study individual-level decision-

making processes. Second, previous research has generally focused on the scale of violence to explain forced migration patterns (Moore and Shellman 2004; Melander et al. 2009; Adhikari 2013; Turkoglu and Chadefaux 2019). We conceptualize violence as a more heterogeneous phenomenon. When researchers predict forced migration, we demonstrate a need to pay closer attention to the different ways that violence forces people to flee. Third, we explore how social networks affect flight decisions. Our associational findings show that social networks lift the burden of high-stake decision-making and broaden the scope of action for populations suffering during conflicts by providing feasible exit strategies.

When and Where to Go: Understanding the Decision to Flee during Violence

Research on forced migration tries to understand where people flee to during armed conflicts (e.g., Weiner 1996; Moore and Shellman 2006; Giménez-Gómez et al. 2019; Steele 2019; Turkoglu and Chadefaux 2019). This growing literature predominantly conducts country-level studies to understand global forced migration patterns. Geographical proximity, ethnic linkages (Rüegger and Bohnet 2018), pre-existing migrant communities (Neumayer 2004), lenient immigration policies (McAuliffe and Jayasuriya 2016), and colonial ties (Moore and Shellman 2007) explain how refugees choose their destinations when armed conflict forces them to leave. Research also investigates how global refugee patterns changed over time, with recent shifts to more geographical dispersion and longer refugee journeys than in past decades (Devictor et al. 2021).

While these country-level studies identify predictors of global refugee patterns, the question remains unanswered when and why individuals flee in the first place. The main reason why households flee during political unrest is violence (Schmeidl 1997; Davenport et al. 2003; Moore and Shellman 2004; Melander et al. 2009). Nevertheless, we empirically observe that most civilians choose to stay in their homes amidst fighting (Ceriani and Verme 2018). What are the determinants of individual decisions to flee? How do we explain variation in whether people leave or not; and does any type of violence result in refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)?

Violence is a heterogeneous phenomenon that varies across conflicts and takes different forms from mass violence to targeted attacks. For example, interviews with displaced persons in Mexico and El Salvador indicate that incidents with immediate or imminent risk were catalysts for people to leave their homes when faced with criminal gang violence (Knox 2017). In other situations, such as in the Karen State in Myanmar, civilians go into hiding from being attacked, trying to return to their fields and villages when troops return to their military base, until the constant disruption to their food supplies and the burning of their homes makes staying in their homeland untenable (Eubank 2008).

Hypotheses on Flight Decisions and Patterns of Violence

We complement aggregated cross-national studies on forced displacement with experimental research on the question of how violence induces variation in flight decisions. Our focus on the heterogeneity of violence directly speaks to recent developments in political science research on forced migration that no longer considers all types of violence as equally causing displacement (e.g., Braithwaite et al. 2021).

While some conflicts generate millions of refugees, others generate fewer refugee numbers or more internal displacement. Thus, it is critical to understand how different violent events have varying effects on forced migration.

[2] It is important to note that this research design cannot track and explain actual flight decisions, but it helps to elicit which features of violence—a nonrandomly assigned treatment in the real world—can provoke particularly strong concerns by ordinary citizens who are faced with the pressure to flee.

The decision to flee is made under high uncertainty: Individuals have to judge whether the utility of staying is higher or lower than the utility of leaving. Violence in their residence increases the risk associated with staying. The risk of leaving includes the probability of experiencing harm during the dangerous journey as well as in the chosen displacement location. Additionally, adjusting to life in a new destination imposes costs (e.g., learning a new language, finding a job). Civilians are more likely to flee if they believe the violence surrounding them is more likely to harm them or their family members than the violence they could experience during the flight or in displacement.

Consequently, a decision to flee is more dominant if attacks intensify and happen regularly. Because individuals feel increasingly threatened, the intensity and frequency of violence increase their likelihood to flee. Similarly, civilians are more likely to flee if violence has reached their immediate surroundings rather than if violence is taking place in other regions of the country.

H1: *Civilians are more likely to flee with increasing proximity and frequency of violence.*

Armed actors can attack civilians indiscriminately (e.g., airstrikes and shelling), or they can target specific disloyal civilians and collaborators with the enemy. In general, civilians fear direct attacks against themselves and their families (Revkin 2021; Knuppe 2022). However, "indiscriminate violence—violence in which people are targeted based not on what they have done, but rather because of their appearance, race, religion, where they live or their proximity to a rebel attack" (Downes 2007) may increase the fear of ordinary citizens that they will become targets of violence and may raise their threat perceptions. Fabbe et al. (2017) show that Syrian civilians who lost their home due to indiscriminate barrel bombing perceive the Assad regime as a greater threat to the country but also as a greater personal threat to themselves. This is likely because indiscriminate violence provides civilians with no means to minimize the risk of attacks to their families. In contrast, in the case of targeted violence by rebels or the government, individuals have the option to actively cooperate with the armed actor conducting attacks, to share local information, and to comply with the rules of armed actors. Since the use of discriminate violence focuses on punishing non-compliers, such behavior may effectively prevent personal harm to those demonstrating their loyalty. We hence assume that indiscriminate violence increases flight decisions compared to more targeted patterns. This connection, however, only applies for the general public, which is the focus of this study. Active participants in rebellion, government officials, or politically mobilized individuals are likely to strongly fear targeted violence because they have clearly sided with one conflict party, while they may have effective hideouts and information channels to protect themselves from indiscriminate shelling and bombings.

H2: *Civilians are more likely to flee if hit by indiscriminate violence rather than by targeted attacks.*

The perpetrator of violence may affect if and where civilians seek shelter. In a conceptual contribution to the discipline, Steele (2019) argues that displaced civilians consider which actors perpetrate violence and choose a safe destination depending on where the perpetrator has the capacity to strike again. Civilians are more likely to try crossing international borders if the state conducts attacks because the government's coercive power is not likely to reach civilians on the soils of another country. In contrast, non-state actors

as perpetrators of civilian victimization are more likely to be constrained by the state, making it more feasible for non-combatants to stay within national borders and to only relocate to a location with less conflict activity. This theoretical argument shows that the perpetrator of violence may play an important role in an individual's decision to flee abroad or within the country, but the argument has not yet been empirically tested with individual-level evidence.

H3: *The perpetrator of violence has an impact on civilians' likelihood to flee.*

The following expectations are tested to assess this hypothesis:

Expectation 3a: *If civilians flee, then they are more likely to move abroad when faced with violence perpetrated by the government.*

Expectation 3b: *If civilians flee, then they are more likely to move internally when faced with violence perpetrated by non-state actors.*

Hypothesis on Flight Decisions and Social Networks

The second aim of this study is to reassess how social networks abroad change the decision-making process of individuals and their response to violence in an experimental setting.[3] Do individuals with social networks move more easily or do they tend to stay for longer? Cross-sectional country level analyses have highlighted the significance of transnational ethnic relations in hosting refugees (Moore and Shellman 2007; Rüegger and Bohnet 2018). At the individual level, many scholars have demonstrated that local social networks affect the decision to flee (e.g., Engel and Ibáñez 2007; Harpviken 2009; Adhikari 2013). For example, interviews with Syrians in Turkey reveal that a combination of motivation (e.g., witnessing violence early on in the conflict) and opportunity (e.g., money, and connections to flee) explain earlier exit from Syria during the civil war (Schon 2019). Using individual-level administrative data for adult refugees resettled in the United States between 2000 and 2014, Mossaad et al. (2020) show that refugees prioritize locations with existing networks of co-nationals for secondary displacement. However, we lack individual-level evidence on how networks abroad affect the decision to flee. This study aims to complement the various existing findings on social networks.

Recent research has examined whether connections within the country affects people's decision to migrate when faced with violence (Adhikari 2012; Marston Jr, 2020). Well-connected people are more likely to stay than those without connections as local ties make people more resilient to deal with problems stemming from living in a violent context. We extend this argument to social networks abroad. Compared to an individual that has no ties abroad, individuals with wide social networks to other countries have a more feasible outside option to endure the conflict because social networks abroad reduce the risks and costs associated with fleeing. Social networks abroad provide knowledge on potential flight routes, entry points for shelter, assistance for registration, and employment possibilities, or language classes. Social networks make re-locations more feasible, and

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[3]Beyond the observed pattern of violence and the networks they can turn to for help, many other factors determine a household's decision to flee such as the information environment (Holland and Peters 2020), the pull-effect of liberal displacement policies (Blair et al. 2022), risk preferences (Ceriani and Verme 2018; Mironova et al. 2019), herd behaviour (Epstein and Gang 2006), and financial abilities (Schon 2019). Our study exclusively focuses on social networks and facets of violence.

we should hence see that individuals with social networks abroad are more inclined to move.

We should also expect that those with ties to other countries respond less strongly to different patterns of violence. Civilians without good outside options have to closely monitor the danger imposed by different patterns of violence on their lives. They only flee if certain features of violence strongly increase the perceived urgency to flee. However, individuals with outside options due to social capital elsewhere may leave earlier regardless of the frequency and proximity of violence, and regardless of the type of targeting and the perpetrator of violence.[4]

H4: *Civilians with more social connections outside of their country make different flight decisions than civilians with fewer connections.*

The following expectations are tested to assess this hypothesis:

Expectation 4a: *Civilians with more social connections outside of their country are more inclined to move compared to civilians with fewer connections.*

Expectation 4b: *Civilians with more social connections outside of their country respond less to violence compared to civilians with fewer connections.*

Forced Displacement Patterns in Turkey and Its Neighborhood

We study decision-making on forced displacement in the context of eastern and southeastern Turkey, inhabited by many Kurds. Kurds in Turkey—that make up around 18–20 percent of the population—have been historically excluded from power and experienced repression since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Since 1984, Turkey is in conflict with the leftist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a rebel group formed in the end of the 1970s that strives to establish an independent Kurdish state. Throughout the conflict, the armed parties have killed many civilians (Ayata and Yükseker 2005; Tezcür 2010; Belge 2016). In the 1990s, forced village evacuations by the government and rebels were quite common, particularly between 1991 and 1994. The government used these forced relocation practices to control territory, whereas the main purpose of rebels was to police and silent dissent (Ayata and Yükseker 2005; Tezcür 2010; Belge 2016). Many people also left their homes due to problems caused by the fighting and because of the deprived conditions in the region (Icduygu et al. 1999).

The long-standing conflict in the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey, bordering Syria, Iraq, and Iran, has caused large-scale displacement and civilian victimization in the region. While there is no consensus on the number of displaced people, estimates of internally displaced persons range from 378,335 (a parliamentary report) to three to four million (NGO reports). While some people fled to another country, the number of refugees was not as large as the number of IDPs. In the 1990s, there were around 50,000 and at the beginning of the 2000s around 200,000 refugees from Turkey (UNHCR 2020).

In 2015, peace negotiations between Turkey and the PKK broke down. Since then, violence has flared up in the

southeastern urban districts and has then gradually moved to more rural areas in Turkey's southeast. Compared to the higher civilian deaths in the 1990s, intentional civilian killings by insurgents and the government were more limited. Nevertheless, in particular, since the coup attempt in 2016, the Turkish President Erdogan increasingly cracked down on dissidents and arrested suspects (Center for Preventive Action 2022). The Turkish military also increased air strikes on PKK militants in southeastern Turkey.

Most recently, the Turkish military has pushed PKK rebels out of Turkey, shifting the battleground to northern Iraq and intensifying violence across the border (Mandıracı 2022). The conflict between Turkey and the Kurdish nationalist movement is not inactive but has spatially shifted to Syria and northern Iraq. In 2021, the conflict reached a new peak in violent incidents—including airstrikes, firefights, and roadside bombings—that also harm civilians although these attacks are less frequent within Turkey (Mandıracı 2022). In addition to the ongoing conflict and displacement, Turkey has experienced a significant refugee inflow from Syria. Since 2014, Turkey hosts the largest number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate in the world with more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees by 2019 (UNHCR 2020). Almost all of the refugees entered Turkey through the southeastern part of the country and many Syrians stayed in the region.

The last time that the eastern and south eastern areas of Turkey—that are studied in this paper—experienced violent events the most intensively was in 2015 and 2016. Attacks and fighting continue in the direct neighborhood and are intertwined across the region. Population movements across the border also shape civilian life. Given this recent history of violence, territorial conflict and displacement, and its exposure to political instability and refugee flows in the direct neighborhood, the southeastern and eastern parts of Turkey provide good conditions to study forced migration decisions as households in the region have plausible experiences with the difficulties of moving and fleeing under the pressure of conflict.

Research Design

We conducted an online conjoint experiment with 1,011 respondents in the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey.[5] The survey took place in September/October 2020. We ask respondents to read two short information sets on hypothetical violent events and to evaluate in which situation they would be more likely to flee than to stay and whether they would move abroad or within Turkey, using a similar empirical approach as Holland et al. (2020). The following sections outline the sample selection and the setup of our survey experiment.

Case Selection and Sampling Procedure

We invited members of an online panel of Turkish citizens[6] to participate in our study if they were over 18 years old and lived in the nineteen administrative districts we sampled.[7] Figure 1 displays the sample areas in the eastern and south-

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[4] Another relevant factor is the social embeddedness in their own communities as those with stronger ties at home may be less likely to move because they can make use of a support network at home (Gilligan et al. 2014). In the pre-registered survey experiment, we wanted to additionally test the effect of social networks within the country on flight decisions, but there is not enough variation in our sample to test this hypothesis and we have dropped these results from the main paper.

[5] The survey design and theoretical argument were pre-registered under the registration number 20200927AA in the EGAP registry.

[6] We teamed up with Benderimki, which hosts the leading online panel in Turkey and is widely used. Only Turkish citizens are invited and the survey was administered in Turkish. Given that the panel members of Benderimki are proficient in Turkish, we were advised by the company to administer the survey only in Turkish. Respondents were not paid for their participation but they received bonus points from Benderimki.

Figure 1. Sampled areas in Turkey (in dark gray).

eastern parts of Turkey, bordering Syria and Iraq and historically populated by a substantial proportion of Kurds. We recruited a total of 1,011 respondents of which 37.3 percent identified as Kurdish, 58.7 percent as Turkish, and 4 percent as other ethnic groups. Descriptive statistics of our sample population can be found in the Online Appendix (Table A.4). We made the conscious decision to sample a population that is under pressure to move but has not (yet) left their country or area to counteract the known bias in migration research to focus on "leavers" rather than "stayers" (Scheel, 2020). We discuss ethical implications of our research and the vulnerability of our sample in the appendix.

Conjoint Experiment

Our conjoint experiment asks respondents to read two information sets about hypothetical violent events. Attributes of these scenarios vary along four dimensions of violence: perpetrator, intensity/frequency, spatial proximity, and target (discriminate and indiscriminate).[8] We ask respondents to identify the information set in which they would be more likely to flee rather than to stay at home. We also ask respondents to evaluate whether they would go abroad when faced with this type of violent scenario or if they would move within Turkey. Respondents evaluated five pairs of information sets and we randomized the order of attributes in these scenarios. This is a "forced-choice" design that aims at identifying flight preferences given the fact that staying at home is a dominant strategy for civilians during armed conflict.[9] Table 1 summarizes the attributes that randomly vary, their dimensions in our conjoint setup, and the hypothesized effect on the likelihood of fleeing. Table A.3 in the Online Appendix demonstrates an example conjoint setup. When assessing hypotheses 1 and 2 on the proximity, frequency and the targeting patterns of violence, our dependent vari-

Table 1. Attributes of violence for the conjoint experiment

Attributes	Pr(fleeing) for each of the two/three attribute levels
H1: Frequency	Repeatedly/frequently > Sometimes/rarely > First time
H1: Proximity	Hometown > Neighboring city > Distant border city
H2: Targeting pattern	Indiscriminate > Discriminate*
H3: Perpetrator	Government = PKK Pr(fleeing abroad | Government) > Pr(fleeing abroad | PKK)

* Indiscriminate: Civilians who were working on their farmland died through airstrikes and bombings.
Discriminate: Civilians helping the other side died in attacks by ground forces.

able is whether respondents considered a flight (1) or not (0). When assessing hypothesis 3 on the effect of the perpetrator of violence on the flight destination, our dependent variables are whether the respondent would flee abroad (1) or stay at home (0) and whether the respondent would flee internally (1) or stay at home (0). We expect the effect of government violence on flights abroad to be larger than the effect of rebel violence.

Heterogeneous Treatment Effects along Social Networks

To examine hypothesis 4, we ask respondents if they have any relatives or friends living abroad or within different areas of Turkey and how often they interact with these individuals. We define well-connected respondents as individuals that have a friend or family member living abroad that they are in touch with at least once a month. Individuals that do not have a contact or are less often in touch with their network abroad have a weak network. By this definition, 29.7 percent of respondents have a network abroad (291 respondents), while 70.3 percent have no or weak ties abroad (687 respondents).

Empirical Strategy and Subset Analysis

Following Hainmueller et al. (2014), we estimate the probability that an individual flees in the forced choice design via:

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[7] Due to the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020, in-person surveys were not possible at the time of the survey.

[8] Following the suggestions of Abramson et al. (2022) on using fewer attributes in the design, we only randomize the characteristics of violent events.

[9] There is some evidence that forced choice conjoint experiments come closer to real-world behavior (Hainmueller et al. 2015) and that the question format encourages deeper cognitive processing (Smyth et al. 2006). The conjoint setup is also useful to boost statistical power.
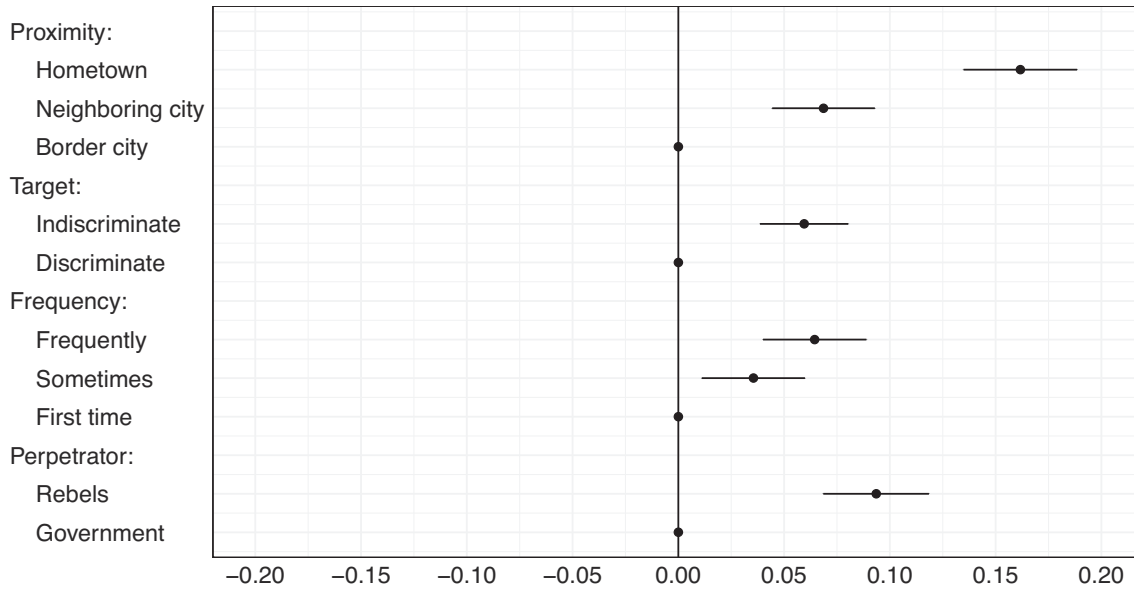
Figure 2. Effects of violence attributes on the probability that respondents choose a scenario to flee. Dots refer to AMCEs and horizontal lines to 95 percent confidence intervals clustered by respondents. Dots without a horizontal line denote the reference categories. $N = 10{,}110$.

$$Flight_{ijk} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1\, HighFrequency_{ikj}$$
$$+ \gamma_2\, CloseProximity_{ikj} + \gamma_3\, IndiscriminateTarget_{ikj}$$
$$+ \gamma_4\, RebelViolence_{ikj} + \epsilon_i, \quad\quad (1)$$

where i indicates the respondent, k indicates the round, and j indicates the scenario. In our setting, $i \in \{1, 2, \ldots, 1{,}011\}$, $k \in \{1, \ldots, 5\}$, and $j \in \{1, 2\}$. Each respondent i yields 10 observations: 5 rounds, and 2 choices per round. The unit of analysis is the hypothetical flight scenario, the outcome is a binary indicator for whether the respondent would flee, and the explanatory variables are the attributes of violence. Because each violence attribute is randomly assigned, the unbiased estimate of the average effect of each attribute on the likelihood that the respondent would choose to flee is given by the equation above. We cluster standard errors at the respondent level.

When assessing whether individuals would flee abroad or within Turkey, we estimate the probability of fleeing abroad (with the alternative of staying at home) and the probability of fleeing within Turkey (with the alternative of staying at home) separately.

$$FlightAbroad_{ijk} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1\, HighFrequency_{ikj}$$
$$+ \gamma_2\, CloseProximity_{ikj}$$
$$+ \gamma_3\, IndiscriminateTarget_{ikj}$$
$$+ \gamma_4\, RebelViolence_{ikj} + \epsilon_i, \quad (2)$$

$$FlightWithin_{ijk} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1\, HighFrequency_{ikj}$$
$$+ \gamma_2\, CloseProximity_{ikj}$$
$$+ \gamma_3\, IndiscriminateTarget_{ikj}$$
$$+ \gamma_4\, RebelViolence_{ikj} + \epsilon_i. \quad (3)$$

We analyze the effect sizes for well-connected and less-connected individuals by splitting the sample.

Analysis and Findings

Figure 2 presents the main results. While points denote the Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE) of attributes on the probability of choosing a scenario to flee, horizontal lines refer to 95 percent confidence intervals clustered by respondents. Dots without confidence intervals are reference categories. Compared to the reference category, we find that rebel violence, indiscriminate violence, violence in neighboring cities or the hometown, and frequent or repeated violence increases the probability that a respondent chooses flight.

In our first hypothesis, we are interested in the proximity and frequency of violence. The results corroborate our first hypothesis regarding the proximity of violence: We presented three different options to respondents—violence in the hometown, in the neighboring city, and in a distant border city—and we expected a hierarchical relationship between those attribute levels. This is confirmed in our experiment as all attribute levels are significantly different from each other. Compared to attacks in a distant border city, attacks happening in the hometown increase the probability of choosing a scenario to flee by around 16 percent. The effect of attacks in a neighboring city compared to a distant border city is around 7 percent. The difference in the effect of attacks in the hometown compared to a neighboring city is around 9 percent. As expected, the proximity of violent events plays a significant role in the decision to flee and respondents are more likely to relocate the closer violence occurs.

We also hypothesized that increases in the frequency of violence would increase decisions to flee but we only find partial support for this. We indeed find that attacks happening frequently increase the probability of respondents choosing a scenario to flee by around 6.5 percent compared to attacks happening for the first time. Attacks that happen sometimes and occasionally increase flight decisions by around 3.5 percent. However, while this relationship is statistically significant, there is no significant difference between violence happening frequently and sometimes. In other words, respondents did not differentiate between attacks
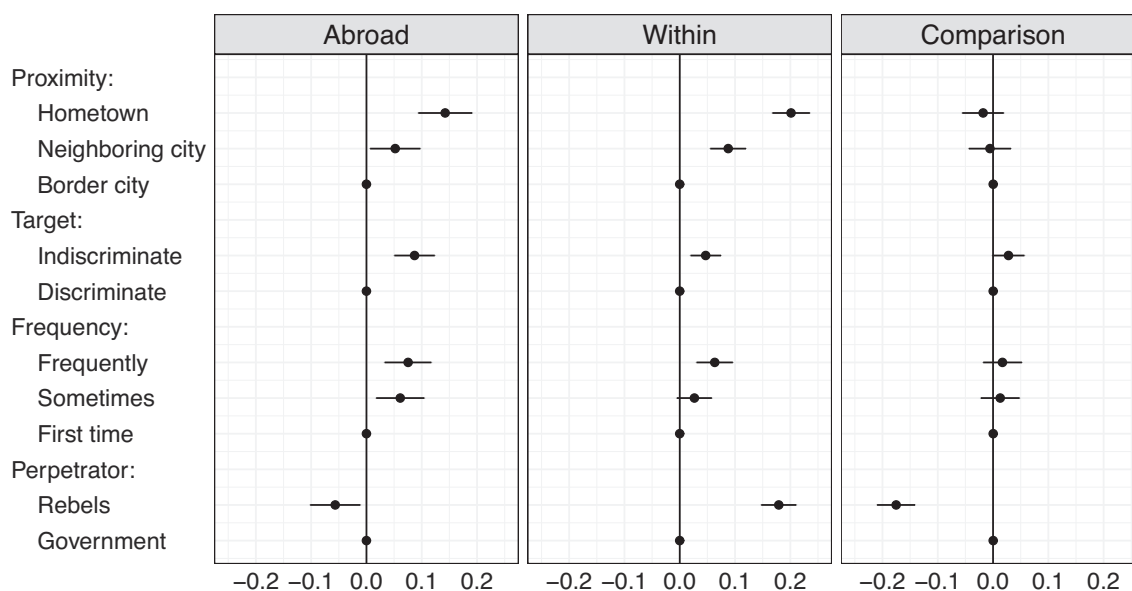
Figure 3. Effects of violence attributes on the probability that respondents choose a scenario to flee abroad, within the country, and their comparison. Dots refer to AMCEs and horizontal lines to 95 percent confidence intervals clustered by respondents. Dots without a horizontal line denote the reference categories. *N* for Abroad is 3,236, *N* for Within is 5,724, and *N* for Comparison is 4,480.

happening frequently or sometimes. This result could suggest that persistent threats might be more important for civilians to make flight decisions than the exact frequency of violence but more evidence with higher statistical power is needed.[10]

The implication that threat perception is more important than the exact frequency of events relates to an ongoing debate in the literature: Previous studies have generally measured the frequency of violence with the number of deaths (Davenport et al. 2003; Melander et al. 2009; Balcells and Steele 2016; Turkoglu and Chadefaux 2019). The understanding is that the more attacks happen, the more threatened people feel and the more likely they are to flee. In contrast, other research argues that not only past violence but also expected future violence impacts decisions to flee (Fearon and Shaver 2020).[11] Since fleeing is costly, people might be cautious about fleeing if attacks happen for the first time as this might be a one-time incident. However, if attacks happen at certain intervals (frequently or sometimes), people are more likely to flee due to the persistence of a threat. It might happen twice a week or twice a month. As long as the threat persists, people consider migration.

The results on the effect of the type of violence support our argument (hypothesis 2). Compared to discriminate violence (death of those who collaborate with armed groups), scenarios with indiscriminate violence (death of farmers) increase the probability of choosing to flee by around 6 percent. When armed groups perpetrate discriminate violence, civilians can mitigate the potential harm to their families by obeying the rules and supporting armed groups. However, when indiscriminate violence is employed, civilians are constantly at risk and the main solution to eliminate threats is to leave the conflict zone.

When it comes to the perpetrator of violence, we have argued that the perpetrator affects decisions to flee by alternating the destination choice (hypothesis 3). We strongly follow Steele (2019)'s argument: while government violence increases the number of refugees, rebel violence increases the number of IDPs. Our main results in figure 2 do not

differentiate between the choice of destination. The results suggest that attacks perpetrated by rebels, compared to government-induced violence, increase the probability of fleeing. However, this result likely stems from the fact that within-country relocation is a much more dominant strategy than fleeing abroad in our sample. In almost 64 percent of our observations, respondents preferred fleeing within the country. Only in 36 percent of decisions to flee, respondents favored fleeing abroad. This is a plausible finding as internal displacement is much more common worldwide than refugee movements.

To fully examine the effect of the perpetrator of violence on displacement decisions, we have to analyze our respondent's choice to flee within Turkey or abroad (see equations 2 and 3). More specifically, for internal displacement, we only kept rounds in which respondents preferred to flee within Turkey and for flight abroad, we only kept rounds in which respondents preferred to flee abroad. We then estimated ACMEs by using the equations 2 and 3. We also compared scenarios in which they would flee abroad to those in which they would flee internally. The results are presented in figure 3.

In terms of frequency, proximity, and the type of violence, the decision to flee abroad or within Turkey does not seem to be different. The effects of these attributes have the same direction for a flight abroad and within the country. The comparison panel in figure 3 also displays that there is no difference between fleeing abroad or within the country (as the confidence intervals include zero). The main difference is observed with respect to the perpetrator of violence. This finding is compatible with our expectations and existing studies (Steele 2019).

When attacks are carried out by rebels, respondents are more likely to choose internal displacement and when the perpetrator is the government, people are more likely to

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[10] Statistical power of our study for the frequency attribute is around 78 percent.

[11] See the generalizability section for further discussion on the frequency of events.

Table 2. Logistic Regression of Thinking about Displacement on Network

	(1)	*(2)*
Network abroad	0.636***	0.520**
	(0.148)	(0.189)
Observations	959	614
Log-likelihood	−645	−391
Akaike Information Criterion	1,294	809
Pseudo R^2	0.015	0.029
Controls	NO	YES

The dependent variable is a binary indicator whether respondents have thought about migrating or have talked to someone about migrating. We report robust standard errors in parentheses. Control variables include urban/rural, gender, education, marital status, religiosity, age, household size, employment, income, and ethnicity. More than 200 respondents did not share the income information, explaining the drop in observations in Model 2. $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$.

favor fleeing abroad.[12] Compared to the government, attacks perpetrated by rebels decrease the probability of choosing to flee abroad by around 5.6 percent and increase the probability of fleeing within the country by around 17.9 percent. In conclusion, the results support our third hypothesis.

Role of Social Networks

Our fourth hypothesis is related to the moderating effect of social networks. We argue that civilians with social connections abroad are more mobile and respond less to violence compared to people without connections because social networks to other locations facilitate flight decisions.

As a first step to test this hypothesis, we assess in observational regressions if individuals with social networks abroad are generally more inclined to move than individuals without a network abroad. Individuals in our survey are coded as having a close network if respondents have a relative or friends abroad that they are in touch with at least once a month and less well-connected otherwise. In the survey, we asked respondents whether they have thought about migrating/fleeing or have talked to someone about it. Using this question, we created a binary indicator for the inclination to flee or migrate and we predict this variable using our network variable and other controls.[13] The results are reported in Table 2. Model 1 is a mean comparison of the inclination to flee between those with social networks abroad and those without. Model 2 includes demographics as control variables. In the bivariate and multivariate model, having a friend or family abroad that people keep in touch with increases the probability of thinking about fleeing. Individuals

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[12] Given the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey, Kurdish and Turkish participants might react differently to our scenarios, in particular, with regards to the perpetrator of violence. We ran the analysis separately for Kurdish and Turkish participants in Online Appendix figure A.7 but there are no significant differences between these two groups. We also explore subgroup differences by gender (Online Appendix figure A.8), education (Online Appendix figure A.9), income (Online Appendix figure A.10), and rural–urban division (Online Appendix figure A.11). In general, subgroups are similar to each other. We mainly observe differences in the effects of the frequency of attacks with regard to education and rural–urban division. While the frequency of attacks matters for university-educated participants, for those with a high school or lower level education, there are no significant differences between the different frequencies of attacks. Similarly, for those living in urban areas, the frequency of attacks impacts decisions, whilst it does not affect participants living in rural areas.

[13] We report a logistic regression but we obtain similar results with a linear probability model.

with networks seem to lean more toward flight/migration than those without networks. This is in line with other studies on networks and flight decisions (e.g., Schon 2019).

In a second step, we argue that this moderating effect of social networks abroad means that patterns of violence are less important in their decision to flee for individuals with networks abroad. To test our argument, using equation 2, we estimated ACMEs for fleeing abroad, while splitting the sample into respondents that have a reliable social network abroad or not. The AMCEs for this subset analysis are reported in figure 4.

The results for the subset of respondents without external networks are remarkably similar to the overall results in figure 3. Attacks by rebels decrease the probability of choosing a scenario to flee abroad and indiscriminate attacks increase it. The closer the attacks to where respondents live, the more likely for them to pick the scenario to flee and scenarios with a persistent threat of violence are more likely to be preferred compared to scenarios with attacks for the first time.

However, when it comes to the subset of our respondents with networks, there is no such clear pattern. There is no significant difference regarding the frequency, the perpetrator, and the type of violence. We only observe a significant difference if violence is happening in their hometown compared to attacks in distant border cities.

The results in figure 4 suggest that people with networks abroad are more indifferent toward the frequency, perpetrator, and targeting pattern of violence. They seem to make their choice to flee with less urgency than less resourceful individuals. Given the smaller sample size, the analysis is likely underpowered and the confidence intervals are larger, which might reduce our trust in the results. However, the substantive effect of attributes (i.e., AMCEs) for the subgroup of respondents without social networks is almost double the effect for those with social networks. For instance, while the AMCE of attacks sometimes happening for participants with network is around 0.033, it is around 0.084 for those without a network. Similarly, the AMCE of rebel attacks for participants with network is around −0.021, it is around −0.072. Overall, we tentatively conclude that individuals with social networks seem less responsive to violent patterns because individuals who have connections abroad have a higher probability to leave earlier and more easily than individuals without social networks.

Robustness Checks

We conducted several robustness checks to increase confidence in our results. First, we ran diagnostic tests with respect to carryover and profile order effects as suggested by Hainmueller et al. (2014), but we do not find that the order of profiles and rounds strongly affects our findings. We also do not find significant interaction effects when interacting the different features of violence in our conjoint analysis (e.g., indiscriminate violence by rebels) as suggested by Egami and Imai (2019). Given the risks with regards to satisficing in online survey experiments, we dropped respondents that finished the survey very quickly and our results still hold. We also present results from marginal means rather than AMCEs (see Online Appendix figure A.12, A.13, and A.14) in the appendix and recode some of our heterogeneous effect analyses (see Online Appendix figure A.6) to alleviate further methodological concerns (Leeper et al. 2020). Finally, we explore selection effects into who has social networks (see Online Appendix for details) but we find limited concerns with selection bias.
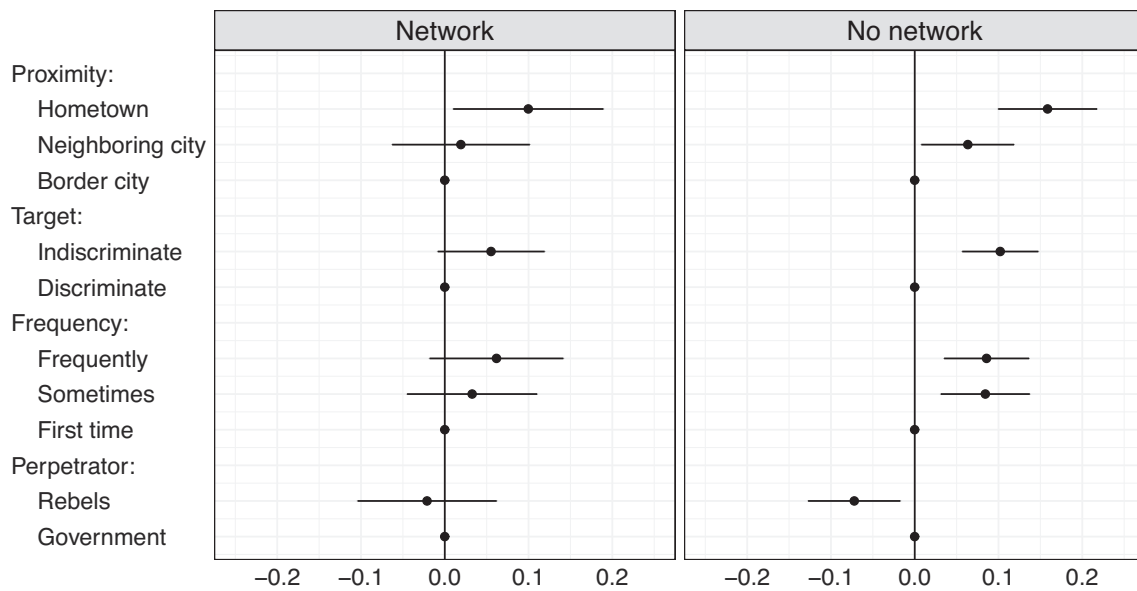
Figure 4. Effects of violence attributes on the probability that respondents choose a scenario to flee for the group of respondents with and without social networks. Dots refer to AMCEs and horizontal lines to 95 percent confidence intervals clustered by respondents. Dots without a horizontal line denote the reference categories. *N* for Network is 984 and *N* for No Network is 2,192.

Generalizability

In this study, we offered evidence from the Turkish case. Many of our findings, for example on the proximity and type of violence, are intuitive and may apply to a range of contexts. Other findings may be harder to generalize.

Our finding that government violence leads to more external displacement than rebel violence is based on the logical argument that civilians can find safer places within the country to escape rebels, while this may not be the case when the asymmetrically stronger government perpetrates attacks. The underlying logic has territorial conflicts in mind—such as secessionist conflicts—and may not easily apply to contexts where violence is less localized. While this may be a scope condition for this finding, a broader cross-sectional analysis by Turkoglu (2022) supports our findings by demonstrating that government violence has a greater effect on external displacement and rebel violence on internal displacement.

An additional concern with our case selection is the fact that the Turkish government is a relatively strong government in comparison to other conflict-prone societies, in particular, in Sub-Saharan Africa. In conflict settings with weaker governments, where the asymmetry between rebels and governments is less strong, our findings may not replicate.

Another concern is that we are consciously focusing on an area that currently sees less civilian victimization that most active conflict zones, such as in Syria. For individuals in active conflict zones the likelihood of repeated, close, and indiscriminate violence is higher. Such repeated "treatments" would imply that the different features of violence overlap and less clear choice patterns emerge or that one dimension of violence (e.g., distance) overshadows other features. New methodological concerns that conjoint experiments not always easily translate into the majority choice highlight the need for researchers to get the distribution of randomized attributes exactly right (Abramson et al. 2022). One methodological weakness in this study is certainly that our conjoint experiment does not reflect the true distri-

bution of violent events in Turkey or other conflicts and may hence not generalize. Nevertheless, we have some confidence that our results translate to active conflict zones: We do not find significant differences between respondents close to the border—that are potentially more exposed to the recent violence by the Turkish military—compared to those further away.

For our finding that the threat of repeated violence matters more than the actual frequency of events, we conducted an exploratory cross-sectional examination using the replication data of Turkoglu (2022) to identify if we can replicate our finding in cross-sectional data. In this observational analysis, we operationalized conflict frequency in two different ways to predict the numbers of displaced people. First, following the general practice in the literature, we employed the number of battle deaths (log-transformed) as a proxy for attack frequency. Second, we used the percentage of the first-level administrative units that experienced more than one attack, which may proxy for the threat of repeated violence. The logic is that this indicator differentiates between administrative units that are continuously under threat of violence (repeated attacks) and those that are not under threat of continued violence (no attacks or just one). In the results of our replication regression models, both are positively and significantly correlated with the number of displaced people but an examination of out-of-sample cross-validation reveals that the model with the percentage of admin units outperforms the model using battle deaths.[14] This provides some support that the threat of repeated violence as opposed to one-time violence is relevant to individuals making decisions to flee across different contexts because such an indicator can explain more variation in displaced persons than a numeric count of attacks in the data of Turkoglu (2022).

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[14] The median absolute error for the model without battle deaths is 135,015. When battle deaths are included, it drops to 128,066. Adding the percentage of first-level administrative units instead of battle deaths, the median absolute error is 113,082. The lower the error term, the more successful the model in predicting displacement (Chadefaux 2014).

Conclusion and Discussion

Our study examines individuals' decisions to flee in light of different facets of violence through a conjoint experiment in Turkey. We identify not only that certain features of violence drive decisions to flee but also that individuals embedded in social networks make decisions to move differently from individuals who have no relatives or friends abroad. While our conjoint experiment cannot trace back actual flight decision, it elicits that the consideration to flee may be driven by the observed patterns of violence. These experimental results complement and reconfirm observational evidence (e.g., Braithwaite et al. 2021).

More interestingly, however, we find that individuals do not distinguish clearly between how often violence happens but mostly focus on whether it is likely to happen again and poses a persistent threat. The question of how different patterns of violence invoke different threat perceptions requires further research.

Regarding the question of how the perpetrator of violence shapes flight decisions, we find that government violence is more likely to lead to individuals' decision to move abroad, while rebel violence tends to lead to relocation within the country. This empirical finding is important because it confirms Steele's (2019) theoretical argument that the less constrained nature of government violence will drive individuals abroad to seek protection, while rebel violence leaves the possibility open to flee to areas under the protection of the government or other actors. Our individual-level findings also match observational evidence from cross-country regressions that government violence is associated with refugee flows and rebel violence is linked to IDP movements (Turkoglu 2022).

Finally, our study contributes to the growing literature on the role of social networks in flight decisions (e.g., Schon 2019). We find that individuals with social networks abroad are more indifferent toward observed patterns of violence. In combination with our observational evidence that individuals with networks are more inclined to flee, we preliminarily conclude that individuals with social networks make their choice to flee or stay more easily, more independently, and less driven by violence. This finding has an important implication for policymakers: To enable communities and individuals to make good choices amid conflict and violence, social networks seem crucial as they reduce the pressure under which vulnerable populations have to make decisions.

While our findings shed light on the importance of easing pressure for individuals, they are at the same time generated by an abstract online research design. In the real world, civilians gather information about their situation and the possibilities to go to other areas or other countries before making a decision (Holland and Peters 2020). Their choices are also impacted by high stress and impeded by practical considerations, for example, by the significantly higher amounts of money needed to flee abroad rather than internally. We hence encourage further work on the link between displacement intentions and actual flight behavior.

Most crucially, our study informs future research that tries to explain and predict forced migration patterns: We encourage researchers developing models of human mobility to discern how different varieties of violence as a push factor change how much displacement we should expect, when this displacement occurs, and where people choose to go.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available in the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

Data Statement

The data underlying this article are available on the ISQ Dataverse, at https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/isq.

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