THREE ESSAYS ON CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT: EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE
FROM NIGERIA

By

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ABSTRACT

PETER ONAH THOMPSON. Three Essays on Conflict and Displacement: Experimental Evidence from Nigeria (Under the direction of DR. JAMES WALSH)

Establishing peaceful post-conflict communities requires returning and reintegrating those who left during the violence. With the United Nations and other institutions investing substantial resources to rebuild communities that have experienced violence with limited success, there is a need to further examine the dynamics of conflict and displacement.

To do that, I use a series of field experiments in northeastern Nigeria to examine the impact of exposure to conflict on the decision-making of those in transitional communities. The first and second studies explore how war-induced psychological trauma impacts displaced persons' ability to be persuaded to return voluntarily, or formerly displaced persons' to return sustainably. In the third study, I investigate the determinants of the reintegration of former members of violent groups into their communities. In the first two studies, I find that war-related psychological trauma reduces displaced persons' ability to be persuaded. In the third study, I find that contrary to long-held beliefs, traditional leadership efforts to reintegrate former violent members of the community by making peace with them may be counterproductive in some situations. Finally, I discuss the academic and policy implications of my findings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete this project and without whom I would not have made it through my doctoral program! First, my committee members, especially my supervisor, Dr. Jim Walsh, whose leadership, insight, and knowledge of the subject matter guided me through this research. I am also thankful for the time invested in me by the rest of the committee members, Drs. Maestas, Whitaker, and Thill. You all painstakingly went through my materials, asked thought-provoking questions, and gave suggestions that significantly enriched my work's final product.

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I also want to acknowledge the many American friends that accepted me into their homes and lives when I first arrived in this country and continue to be a huge support throughout my academic journey. These people include the Burt family, Susan Musilli, and Sandra Krause. In the same vein, I want to thank my Nigerian "sister", Lilian. Thanks for never complaining about reading my drafts and also never being afraid to tell me when I am not making sense.

A special thanks to my cohort members (Titiksha, Sam, Chris, and Adrienne) for constantly being a pillar of support throughout my formative years in the doctoral program. With them, it was easier to carry the burden of doctoral training. Lastly, I want to appreciate the Army Research Office's funding support that made the fieldwork possible.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my Mom. She never had the opportunity of "formal" education, but she

remains the biggest inspiration for my academic achievements.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict and displacement remain intractable challenges for developing countries. In mid-2021, over 84 million were forcibly displaced worldwide, with nearly 60 percent of them internally displaced (UNHCR, 2021). The more than a decade-long Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria has resulted in over 300,000 fatalities and nearly 3 million displaced (Reuters, 2021; UNHCR, 2020). The economic and social consequences of this large-scale displacement are immense, as governments and institutions battle hard to contain it. As such, scholars and policymakers have invested a significant amount of time and resources in understanding the dynamics of these issues and figuring out ways to improve the lives of those caught up in what Collier et al. (2003) call underdevelopment "traps." Apart from the economic benefits of poverty reduction that come with reduced violence (World Bank, 2020), the sociopolitical benefits of a safe and peaceful society are immense (Fort & Schipani, 2004). For example, compared to violent societies, peaceful societies create conditions that allow sociocultural institutions and personal interactions to thrive in such a way that elevates overall human wellbeing.

One of the fallouts of violence is forced displacement (Sarzin, 2017; Ibáñez & Moya, 2010; Oslender, 2007). Large-scale displacement like the types witnessed during violent conflicts can result in numerous problems for the affected countries and their neighbors, including the propagation of more conflicts (Bohnet, Cottier, & Hug, 2018). To stem this tide, post-conflict societies must transition to peaceful ones quickly. This includes the return of those civilians who fled and the reintegration of those who played active roles during the conflict. But while there has been extensive study on the causes of forced displacement (Davenport, More, &

Poe, 2003; Zolberg, Suhrke, & Aguayo, 1989; Moore & Shellman, 2007; Schmeidl, 1997; Melander, Öberg, & Hall, 2009; Bohra-Mishra & Massey, 2011; Adhikari, 2012; Czaika & Kis-Katos, 2009; Ibáñez, 2008; Lischer, 2007; Lischer, 2009), limited attention has been placed on what happens after displacement.

Therefore, the motivation for this study is to understand what happens after displacement. Specifically, to examine determinants of civilian return and former combatant reintegration into these transitional communities. With over a decade of insurgency in northeastern Nigeria, and the attendant large-scale displacement of people, the Boko Haram situation is a good setup for this type of inquiry.

To ensure that post-conflict societies return to a peaceful and stable state, it is essential that those who fled return voluntarily. Because violent conflict alters the fabric of society, creating uncertainty and general mistrust (Wood, 2008; Colleta & Cullen, 2000; Harpviken, 2009; Adhikari, 2012; Gilligan, Pasquale & Samii, 2014), the price of return is high, and displaced persons need to develop certain mechanisms to help their decision-making. Even though the literature has talked about information as an important determinant of return decisions (Alrababa'h et al., 2020), not all information sources are persuadable to the displaced. The literature has not identified the inherent attributes that make an information source persuadable. In the first study, I examine who can persuade a displaced person to return. A person's decision to return is partly influenced by the weight placed on the information sources. The displaced are more likely to act on information from sources they consider credible (Beaman et al., 2022; Alrababa'h et al., 2020; Webber, 2011).

Furthermore, Civil wars and violent conflicts are transformational experiences that alter one's worldview by making the communal life that engenders the feeling of safety and

cooperation life-threatening and unpredictable (Cassar et al., 2013). Exposures like this cause many to undergo a psychological transformation like anxiety and posttraumatic stress (Yehuda et al., 2015; Canetti et al., 2013). For those who fled this type of situation or are forcefully displaced, studies show that the type of violence they experienced can affect their return decisions (Ghosn et al., 2021). If stressful situations like exposure to violent conflicts can activate psychological mechanisms that impact a person's preferences, how does war stress affect return decision of displaced persons?

To answer these questions, I conducted factorial survey experiments among 822 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northeastern Nigeria. I examine how war-related trauma affects the displaced ability to make these important decisions. I develop and test my theory of how the characteristics of the information source influence decision-making of the displaced. I test my theory of how the psychological state of the displaced person can moderate their ability to distinguish the salient characteristic of the information source. I find that information about the conditions in an area of origin conveyed by a trustworthy source increase displaced people's intentions to return. Also, I find that war-related trauma diminishes the displaced ability to distinguish between trusted and less trusted information sources.

But while many policymakers may be excited about the prospect of the return of the displaced, the reality is that some of those who return get re-displaced, i.e., are forced to make secondary involuntary movements after a return. This reality has led to terms such as "circular migration" and "revolving returnees" (Hammond 2004; Hansen 2005; Hansen 2007). Thus, to reap the benefits of voluntary return, the return has to be sustainable, understood as a situation where the returnee is willing to remain after return and contribute to the socio-economic and political life of the community. In my second study, I test my theory on these returnees (i.e.,

formerly displaced persons) and see how information source and trauma influence their likelihood of a sustainable return. I conducted a factorial survey experiment on 228 formerly displaced persons (returnees) in IDP host communities in Borno State, northeastern Nigeria. In this study, I also find that the characteristic of the information source and the psychological state of the formerly displaced affects their decision on sustainable return.

It should be noted that these two studies are focused on the civilian population of displaced persons. Genuine post-conflict peacebuilding does not only require civilian return, but also the reintegration of former members of violent groups. Over the world, extremist groups like Boko Haram, al-Qaida, and al-Shabab have inflicted untold mayhem on peoples and communities. They recruit thousands to their cause with the promise of a better life both here on earth and in the hereafter. Some of these members see the folly in their ways, repent, and possibly go through deradicalization programs. But after that, there appears to be resistance in many communities to welcome these people back (Nwaubani & Guilbert, 2016; Ugwueze, Ngwu, & Onuoha, 2021). These types of situations can force these repentants back into their militant ways, thereby increasing the likelihood of more violence. Therefore, it is imperative to find ways to improve the conditions for repentant members of violent groups to reintegrate into society in order to reduce the likelihood of recidivism. Scholars have opined that while recidivism reduction is critical in reducing violence by terrorists, the risk to society is greater if former associates of violent organizations are not successfully reintegrated into society (Clubb & Tapley, 2018; Owonikoko & Chan, 2022). Despite how critical this is, our understanding of the phenomena of natural disengagement from an extremist group and reintegration into society is poorly understood (Barrelle, 2015). In my third study, I examine how traditional African leaders

(often touted as an important arbiter for communal reintegration) may affect the possibility of repent members of a violent group being accepted into their community.

The findings in these studies have theoretical and policy implications. First, this study provides a key contribution to the literature on persuasion, violence, and migration by drawing from the theories in political science and psychology. There has been a lot of work in the political science tradition on the attributes of information sources that can persuade a target (Boudreau, 2020; Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2016; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). In the psychological tradition, there has also been a lot of work on the effects of trauma on decision-making processes (Guillory & Geraci, 2013; Pluviano, Della Sala, & Watt, 2020). Throughout in the literature, these attributes have been studied as distinct even though there are grounds to believe that one could influence the other. In this work, I show for the first time how these attributes interact and influence a target's decision-making abilities.

Secondly, this study contributes to the literature on post-conflict return and reintegration by extending the works of Ghosn, Chu, Braithwaite et al. (2021) on how exposure to violence is associated with a higher willingness to return. The authors find that war-related violence increases the likelihood of return for those forcefully displaced. My work extends this study by showing that the personal trauma developed from these exposures affects the displaced ability to process relevant information about their place of origin. Furthermore, I extended my theory of information and psychological processing beyond the voluntary return of the displaced but also to the academic inquiry on sustainable return. The literature on sustainable return seeks to understand the factors that allow returnees to remain, and reintegrate themselves into the political, social, and economic life of the community. I expanded this frontier of inquiry by showing that the source of information about the future condition of the place of return, and the

psychological state of the information recipient are crucially relevant to sustainable return. Irrespective of the pessimistic or optimistic nature of the future conditions of the place of return, returnees are more likely to remain and reintegrate into the community if the information is from a more trusted source.

Even though the voluntary return and reintegration of civilians to transition societies is critical for post-conflict peacebuilding, the reintegration of former combatants or former members of extremist groups is equally crucial. Post-conflict societies in Africa continually grapple with the challenge of return and reintegration of former combatants (e.g., former child soldiers in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo are afraid to return to their communities because they are perceived as criminals (WATCHLIST, 2000; Hobson, 2005), and spouses of Boko Haram fighters in Nigeria are rejected by their family members after escaping from the group (International Crisis Group, 2016). These types of situations increase the prospect of these former associates returning back to rejoin these violent groups. To reduce the prospects of further conflicts, and for more durable post-conflict peacebuilding, these former associates of violent groups need to be fully reintegrated into their communities. My third study examines the factors that affect the return and reintegration of former associates of violent groups into their communities.

Conventional wisdom in African studies shows that traditional/local elites are important to curtail conflicts and violent confrontations (Mboh, 2021; Blench et al., 2006; Akinteye, Wuye, & Ashafa, 1999), the findings from these studies show situations, where this belief, is challenged. The findings appear to support certain claims that when local elites are perceived to be part of a patron-client network of local leaders and a distrusted government, the elite's support of a restorative justice stance for former combatants diminishes the likelihood of the community

accepting these former associates of violent groups. These findings add to the literature on the role of traditional authority in post-conflict peacebuilding.

From an academic standpoint, the theories developed and tested help us better understand the determinants of voluntary and sustainable return of civilians. I show that apart from the external determinants of voluntary return described in the push-pull framework (van Hear, Bakewell, & Long, 2017; Skeldon, 1990; de Haas, 2011; Lee, 1966; Harris & Todaro 1970), the differences in the credibility of a source influence displaced persons' return intentions, and how their psychological state influences their ability to differentiate trusted from less trusted information sources. My work also expands our knowledge of the determinants of reintegrating former members of violent groups by showing that against general beliefs, the endorsement of traditional chiefs may not be helping former associates of violent groups be reintegrated into their communities. By drawing from the knowledge of different academic traditions, this study builds bridges across disciplinary silos to make the finding relevant across many disciplines. From a policy perspective, the findings challenge some conventional wisdom that has guided policy decisions for decades. By putting some of the conventional wisdom of post-conflict return and reintegration to the test, I hope this study opens new lines of inquiry and discourse that will help improve our overall knowledge in this domain.

CHAPTER 1: DATA AND METHODS

Introduction

This chapter presents my positionality and how I conceptualized, developed, and collected the data used to answer the questions in the later chapters. A detailed description of each data is also presented here. Note that there are three main questions that I am interested in, and the investigations related to these questions are presented in three separate chapters. Two of these questions regarding return intentions and sustainable return (chapters 2 and 3) are investigated with factorial experiments, and the third question regarding the reintegration of former members of violent groups is examined with a conjoint experimental design in chapter 4. In general, there are three phases of this process: the conceptualization/design, the approval, and the data collection phases. I did not emphasize the analysis done here because they are already described in each of the later chapters.

Researcher's Positionality/Insiderness:

I had my early education in Kaduna, northern Nigeria, and completed my undergraduate study in Biochemistry and a Master of International Affairs at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. As a result, I am fluent in Hausa, the predominant language in northern Nigeria. Although I had my undergraduate training in Biochemistry, my lived experience in northern Nigeria influenced my decision to pursue graduate studies in public policy. Kaduna, the state where I grew up, had witnessed and continues to witness several episodes of communal and ethnoreligious crises. Some examples of these violent crises include the 1992 Zangon Kataf crises, the 2000 Sharia crisis, the 2002 "Miss World Riots," and the 2014 Zaria Quads massacres. In situations like these, there are short flights (escape) of residence to places

considered safe, and the actual displacement of communities. In the case of short flights, people return within days or a few weeks.

One critical observation during these moments is that people are desperate for information. But unfortunately, we get contradictory information about the situation all the time, and families have to act one way or another. As a child, I saw how my parents had mobilized my siblings and me in the dead of night to flee to safety based on some "credible information" about an impending attack. In other cases, where members are convinced not to escape, I have witnessed people engaged in preemptive attacks with fatal consequences for those attacked. The reason to flee, remain, or "defend" oneself is the information they are acting on. This is why a bishop in Kaduna once said that rumors cause more deaths than guns (Vanguard, 2018).

Growing up in Kaduna left two reoccurring questions in my mind: what will prompt neighbors to become sworn enemies overnight? And what can be done to mitigate these reoccurring episodes of conflict? Seeking answers to these questions became the conduit for my academic pursuit in Nigeria and beyond.

Before leaving Nigeria to pursue graduate studies abroad, I volunteered in different communal efforts to help alleviate the pain of individuals in these communities who had to suffer untold miseries from these incidences. I am currently a Public Policy doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina – Charlotte (UNCC), specializing in Justice and Security policy. My desire to pursue this specialization in my doctoral study is premised on two planks: my personal experiences in communities plagued by ethnoreligious conflicts, and my continued appetite for scholarship. As a child living in perpetual fear of the unknown; and having to "runaway" with my family from our home on several occasions because of rumors of ethnoreligious attacks, I realize the choices people make when they flee their homes or when

they want to return are rational. Still, the reliable information that should help them make these decisions is often absent. My personal experiences in situations like this are the main motivation for this work. Conflict situations like these, I believe, are reinforced by the narratives that shape community or group identities. As Autry (2017) describes, these narratives are often told by "memory entrepreneurs" and are hinged on tales of victimhood or heroism.

In an African society whose heritage is largely preserved via oral tradition, these tales become fertile grounds for sowing seeds of discord and fear of the other for generations to come. They also shape the perceptions of transitional justice in fragile communities and the motivation to act on them, resulting in violent confrontations. Those who control these narratives define the community and determine who should be a friend or foe. The continuing effect of these narratives persists long after it been formed, such that certain people are born into a community and grow up to hate people from another, not because of what they have experienced, but what they have been told has happened to their community and identity in the long past. The information in these narratives and how they are interpreted have the power to reinforce conflicts and the power to reduce their tendencies. As a Peace Scholar motivated by these experiences, I leveraged my knowledge of the place to use this research to explore and generate new understanding of how information and elite cues influence the dynamics of post-conflict return and reintegration. I hope this study can expose a new understanding of how fragile communities can be more stable and more resilient against the forces that constantly threaten the peaceful coexistence of individuals and communities.

The Conceptualization/Design Phase:

The study was conducted in Maiduguri - Borno State, Nigeria, the center of the Boko Haram violent insurgency. By 2014, the terrorist organization Boko Haram had captured Gwoza

in Borno and a swath of area in northeastern Nigeria to set up their caliphate, which at its peak was almost the size of Belgium (Blair, 2015). The group's campaign of violence consisted of suicide bombings as well as a conventional armed assault on both civilian and military targets that resulted in the loss of lives, injury, and destruction of property. In response, the Nigeria Army in coalition with soldiers from Benin, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, launched a counter-offensive that created casualties among both the civilian population and members of the terror group. Many residents fled the towns for safety. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016) reported that the conflict in northeastern Nigeria has resulted in over 2 million IDPs. Since the launch of military attacks, most of the caliphate has been reclaimed by the government and residents have started to return back home. Many of these residents still reside in IDP camps in Maiduguri and other northeastern states.

Figure 1

Map of Boko Haram Territory in Nigeria
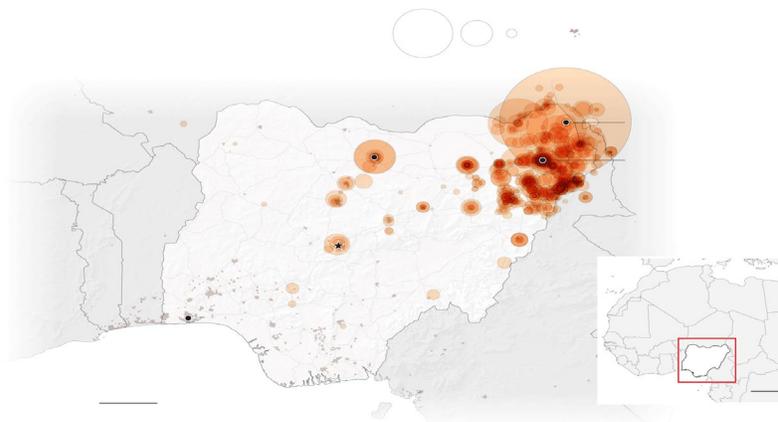
Courtesy: The Washington Post

This setting is well-suited to assess the questions I am interested in. First, many civilians were directly or indirectly victimized by wartime violence. The war has led to the death, injury,

and kidnapping of tens of thousands of civilians and displaced over 2 million people. The conflict has resulted in heavy mental health and psychosocial burden (Kaiser et al., 2020). Second, the conflict is ongoing. Exposure to political violence remains salient to civilians and likely produces immediate psychological distress. Many studies interact with participants long after the violence has ended, raising questions about if exposure to violence in the past, or more recent experiences, produces the psychological distress that participants experience today. Third, much of the violence against civilians is perpetrated by ingroup members; many of Boko Haram's victims are Sunni Muslims. Experiencing violence at the hands of an actor that portrays itself as a member of the victim's ingroup should have a powerful effect on social cooperation, reintegration, and civil society participation (Cassar et al., 2013).

During this period, the federal government of Nigeria and the military established leniency measures called Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) for "low-risk" male combatants who defected, and women that were married to Boko Haram fighters. The report indicates that the OPSC successfully deradicalized and demobilized Boko Haram members. But the communities are unwilling to accept them back for various reasons based on mistrust and palpable fear. Under this condition, some former Boko Haram members rejoin the extremist group they just left. This condition makes Maiduguri a suitable setting to investigate not only civilian return, but also the determinants of combatants' return and reintegration.

After identifying a suitable location for the study, I carried out a focus group interview with community members to find out what type of treatment would mimic a real-world scenario for study participants. In focus group discussion during the pilot stage of the study, I asked respondents about different actors in the camps and host communities, and how the respondents perceive them. About 70 percent of host community members had been displaced before. So, they

are uniquely able to talk about their experiences both as displaced and returned individuals. I understand that there is a generally positive perception of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). However, a few NGOs have gradually lost their goodwill over time because the respondents believe that their actions are becoming questionable. They suspect that the change of attitude of these NGOs is associated with the organizations' dwindling financial fortunes or bowing to political pressures from the state government and other approving authorities. They claimed that those NGOs are there for themselves and protect their operations, but not to help the displaced people. This opinion conforms to reports of government-led anti-NGO measures in Nigeria and other parts of Africa (Wintour, 2019; Musila, 2019). For us, having an entity (in this case, an NGO) that is seen as either prejudiced or objective is an opportunity to test propositions about how the characteristics of an information provider and the expected future conditions of the place of return influence their voluntary and sustainable return prospects.

The Approval Phase:

This project's strength depends heavily on micro-level data gathered through extensive fieldwork in an area affected by violent conflict. Thus, ethical considerations are necessary to ensure that both the participants and enumerators are not put at material and psychological harm at any point during the study. To ensure that the work meets all regulatory and ethical thresholds for human subject studies, I sought the approval of three research institutions: First, I submitted my study plan to the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. After receiving their approval, I submitted the same research plan and the UNC Charlotte IRB approval to the Army Human Research Protections Office (HRPO) for their approval. The Army Research Office is the main sponsor of the study and requires that all human subject research funded by them meet certain ethical standards. After getting approval from the HRPO, I sought

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the approval of the Nigerian government to field the study in Nigeria. The national body responsible for granting human subjects study approval in Nigeria is the National Health Research Ethics Committee of Nigeria (NHREC). I submitted the study plan along with the approvals from UNC Charlotte IRB, and the HRPO. After a careful review of the documents, my study request was approved by the NHREC.

To minimize the risks of re-traumatization I asked participants only about information necessary to my study (Ford et al., 2009); i.e., exposure to violence, mental health difficulties, and social capital. While I suspect that these questions could potentially be distressing to some participants, I designed the survey instrument to minimize these risks. My research only requires participants to note on an electronic tablet if they were experienced or not, without asking for details, nor to narrate their past experiences. Prior research shows that most individuals favorably balance the potential costs of participation against the personal, community, and scientific benefits (Newman, Risch, & Kassam-Adams, 2006). Furthermore, research suggests that when informed consent procedures are accomplished in line with ethical standards, participants are better able to tolerate trauma-related research (Newman, Walker, & Gefland, 1999). Participants will furthermore be in control of what information they choose to provide, based on their personal assessment of the involved risks and benefits (Wood, 2006).

It should be noted that this process took place prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the advent of Covid-19, the protocol for fieldwork needs to be adjusted to reflect the new precautionary steps to mitigate Covid-19 infection during the fieldwork. I developed a detailed Covid-19 mitigation protocol that incorporates all the public health recommendations of the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC1) and the World Health Organization (WHO). This includes:

(i) Special Covid-19 prevention and implication training conducted for all members of the field team before the fieldwork begins.

(ii) Ensured that the temperature of all enumerators was taken, and they were asked if they were experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms before they were allowed to begin the day's work.

(iii) Insisted that enumerators and research personnel whose temperatures are beyond the normal range are not allowed to continue with the work and advised to isolate themselves. Also, those with symptoms of respiratory ailment like cough would not be allowed to continue working with the team until they are cured, isolated for the mandatory period stipulated by the NCDC, and return a negative covid test.

(iv) All travel arrangements to and from study sites were made in a manner that enumerators are at least 6 feet apart from each other in the car.

(v) All enumerators had and used adequate face-covering throughout their interactions with respondents.

(vi) All enumerators had appropriate alcohol-based disinfectants that they used to disinfect their hands before and after each interaction with a respondent.

After these modifications, new approvals were sought and received from the UNCC-IRB, HRPO, and NHREC.

Data Collection Phase:

The details of the sample, procedure, development of survey instruments, recruiting and participation, and the experimental design have been captured in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 2: VOLUNTARY RETURN OF FORCEFULLY DISPLACED PERSON

Introduction

I know that anxiety influences how people attend to, interpret and respond to potential threats (Wagner & Morisi, 2019). Anxiety leads to more thorough searches for information (Clifford & Jerit, 2018; Alberston & Gadarian, 2015; Merolla & Zechmeister, 2009; Valentino et al., 2009), increases the consideration of choices and alternatives (Banks & Valentino, 2012; MacKuen et al., 2010), and heightens risk aversion (Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Lerner & Keltner, 2001). These consequences of anxiety should influence whether attempts at persuasion—when a source seeks to convince a target to choose to change its behavior or attitudes by transmitting a message (Perloff, 2003)—succeed or fail. Consistent with this line of thinking, Marcus et al. (2005) find that persuasion is more effective among those who are more anxious, and Valentino et al. (2008) conclude that anxiety motivates not only information search, but also leads to increased learning from this information.

I also know that the characteristics of the source influence the success or failure of attempts to persuade. Sources that are viewed as credible, and particularly sources that are seen as trustworthy, have greater success in persuading targets (Chiang & Knight, 2011; Guillory & Geraci, 2013; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; Pluviano, Della Sala, & Watt, 2020). Existing work on anxiety and political decision-making, however, has not considered how variation in the credibility of a source influences the outcomes of attempts to persuade. The work on anxiety and persuasion reported in Marcus et al. (2005) and Valentino et al. (2008) use news media as the source of information, and do not vary the credibility of the source.

In this paper, I investigate how differences in the credibility of a source influence its ability to persuade. I begin with insights from research on persuasion in political science, which

holds that more credible sources are better able to persuade targets. I then draw on work in psychology which finds that high levels of posttraumatic stress generate hypervigilance to threats and reduce trust in others. Building on this research, I theorize that even trustworthy sources will be unable to persuade more anxious targets.

My empirical analysis assesses my hypotheses in the context of decisions by people displaced by conflict to return to their area of origin. This context is relevant for my theory because displaced persons frequently lack reliable information about conditions in their area of origin and must rely on others to fill this gap. Most research to date on conditions influencing voluntary return draws on the push-pull framework, which holds that displaced persons and other types of migrants maximize wellbeing and minimize risk by choosing to return home only when the conditions in their area of origin improve or appear better than conditions in their current place of displacement (Koser, 1997). But incomplete information is a powerful barrier to accurately comparing conditions between areas of displacement and origin. While displaced persons have first-hand knowledge of conditions in their area of displacement, their knowledge of conditions at home are often fragmentary or incomplete. To address this deficit, displaced persons rely on information sources such as government officials, non-governmental organizations, the media, and friends and family in their area of origin. Access to information promises to improve the quality of decisions to return or remain displaced. Recognizing this need, actors seeking to facilitate voluntary return regularly collect information in areas of origin and disseminate this to displaced persons (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1996).

While relying on others for information can address displaced people's information deficit, it raises another problem—they must carefully evaluate the characteristics of the source.

In their study of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Alrababa'h et al. (2020) find that pull factors like economic prospects and social networks in the place of origin influence return intentions, but their effects are moderated by how much confidence the potential returnees have in the value of the information provided about these conditions. In other words, displaced persons were persuaded to consider return more seriously if they had more confidence in the source of information about their area of origin. But we know little about what makes one source more persuasive than another in the minds of displaced people.

I address this gap by building on a well-established theory of persuasion (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). This theory holds that a source persuades a target when it is both knowledgeable—that is, well-positioned to predict the consequences of actions taken by the target of persuasion—and trustworthy—that is, has self-interested reasons to convey true rather than deceptive knowledge to the target. Subsequent research has found that trustworthiness is more important than knowledge for successful persuasion. I use this line of work to hypothesize that information about good conditions in an area of origin conveyed by a trustworthy source increase displaced people's intentions to return.

I also hypothesize that individuals exhibiting symptoms of posttraumatic stress will not be persuaded by even a trustworthy source. Following Canetti-Nisim et al. (2009), I measure posttraumatic stress with a questionnaire that screens for and provides a continuous measure of symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTS). PTS is a mental health condition triggered by witnessing or experiencing a life-threatening event, and leads to disturbing memories, nightmares, and severe PTS[1]. Hypervigilance is a key consequence of PTS, leading those who

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[1] PTS can be distinguished from the emotional state of fear, which is caused by clear and unambiguous threats, and diminishes when the threat recedes (Alberston & Gadarian, 2015; Huddy, Feldman, Taber, & Lahav, 2005). PTS is characterized by the persistence of stress and

report symptoms to be highly attuned to threats in their environment. This is particularly true for situations that remind them of traumatic events they have experienced, such as being displaced. Such reminders lead them to attribute harmful motives to, and be less willing to trust, others.

I test my hypotheses with a factorial survey experiment, drawing participants from residents of internally displaced person (IDP) camps in northeastern Nigeria. These residents were displaced from their homes by the conflict between the government, militia, and Boko Haram rebel forces. My experiment varies the knowledge and trustworthiness of a hypothetical information source. The response variable is how likely someone similar to the IDP participant would be willing to return to their area of origin if they learned this information from this source. I chose this setting in part because at the time I fielded the experiment, the number of violent confrontations between armed groups had declined and the return of displaced persons had begun to increase. This means that return was a plausible outcome for many of my participants (Kwenin, 2016). I find that information from a more trustworthy, but not from a more knowledgeable, source leads to increased return intentions. However, this effect declines as PTS among participants increases. Among participants reporting high levels of PTS, even trustworthy information sources did not change return intentions.

In developing this theory, my paper contributes to a growing body of research on the effects of psychosocial health on political behavior and attitudes. Recent work, for example, has found that individuals experiencing symptoms of depression have lower levels of political participation (Landwehr & Ojeda, 2021; Couture & Breux, 2017). My work is closely related to a number of studies of how psychological distress influences threat perceptions and attitudes towards outgroups (Canetti-Nisim, Halperin, Sharvit, & Hobfoll, 2009; Canetti, Hall, Rapaport,

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anxiety after exposure to trauma and an inability to accept that one is safe even in an environment without threats (McNaughton & Gray, 2000).

& Wayne, 2013; Bonanno & Jost, 2006; Canevello, Hall, & Walsh, 2021). My specific contribution is to theorize that PTS makes attempts at persuasion less likely to succeed by diminishing their targets' ability to consider a source trustworthy.

While my empirical focus is on displaced persons, my theory and findings have important implications for understanding the conditions under which attempts at persuasion succeed or fail in changing behaviors and attitudes. Most people who experience or witness trauma do not develop PTS, and the prevalence of the disorder in representative samples of residents of western countries is in the single digits. But prevalence is considerably higher in sub-populations such as military veterans, civilians in combat zones, displaced persons, and women, and is strongly correlated with the number of traumatic events that an individual experiences over the life course (Yehuda, et al., 2015). In other words, PTS is more likely among the most vulnerable. These vulnerable populations are often the targets of both well-intentioned and malign campaigns of persuasion. Well-intentioned sources seek to persuade those suffering PTS symptoms to seek care, to provide information and resources to victims of crime and violence about rights to legal and social assistance, and to convince individuals impacted by natural disasters and conflicts to take steps to rebuild their lives. Malign sources aim to persuade the same targets to blame outgroups for their plight, to support exclusionary policies, or to engage in violence. My study contributes to understanding the conditions under which attempts at persuasion among targets who have experienced traumatic events do and do not work.

The findings reported here improve our understanding of how PTS influences attempts at persuasion. For example, does PTS moderate the effect of information source characteristics on voting, perceptions of corruption, and other topics where individuals rely on information sources to make judgments and decisions? Sick people are likely to experience higher levels of anxiety.

Do my findings suggest that anxious patients are less willing to follow medical advice, even from health care providers they view as trustworthy? We know from considerable research that poverty produces stress and anxiety (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014; Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013). Does this mean that even trustworthy sources are less able to persuade individuals suffering from poverty? Future research could investigate these important questions.

Information, Posttraumatic Stress, and Decision-Making on Voluntary Return

The push-pull perspective on migration holds that individuals seek to maximize their subjective expected utility, making decisions to migrate by comparing conditions in their current location with those in other locations. A key challenge that displaced persons considering return in particular face in making such comparisons is collecting information about conditions in their area of origin (Koser, 1997). This is one example of the more general problem that individuals often face when making consequential decisions—they lack the ability or willingness to gather relevant information (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). Displaced people, for example, often find it difficult to visit their homes to collect first-hand information. Furthermore, displaced people want to obtain information about multiple dimensions of conditions in their area of origin, including the frequency of armed conflict, the state of their former dwelling and neighborhood, the prices and availability of important goods, the quality of public services, and so on. Even if it is possible for a displaced person to make scouting trips to the area of origin, such visits may not provide sufficient information about these varied conditions to allow for a fully-informed comparison of the areas of displacement and origin.

Instead, displaced persons frequently must rely on others—news sources, social media, government officials, international and non-governmental organizations, and individuals in their

social network—to form a more complete picture of conditions in their area of origin. The role of information in informing return decisions has been recognized in previous work. Hoogeveen, Rossi, and Sansone (2018) find that more highly-educated individuals displaced from northern Mali were less likely to return home. They suggest that this is because those with more education had access to more and better information about the situation in their area of origin, relying more heavily on mobile phones and the internet than what the authors describe as "less reliable" sources such as word of mouth. Alrababa'h et al. (2020) find that pull factors in the area of origin influence the return intentions of refugees from Syria, but that their influence was moderated by the degree to which refugees had high confidence in information about conditions in Syria.

Relying on information sources can alleviate the problem of inadequate information about conditions at home, but raises a new problem: which sources of information should a target believe? One influential theory of persuasion (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998) holds that an information source must have two characteristics to persuade a target to change their actions or intentions. First, the source must be more *knowledgeable* than the target. A knowledgeable source is one that is better able to predict the consequences of a target's actions. In the context of displacement, a knowledgeable source has better information that allows it to predict how conditions in the area of origin will influence the wellbeing of those who return. Second, a source must be *trustworthy*.[2] A trustworthy source is one that the target believes benefits in some way when the target makes a choice that maximizes its utility. In other words, a source is trustworthy when both the source and target prefer that the target make the utility-maximizing

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[2] A perception of trustworthiness can be based on an understanding of the source's interests or character, or external forces, such as institutions that create penalties for lying. My focus is on the former understanding; future research might profitably investigate how external forces influence return intentions. See Lupia & McCubbins (1998, pp. 53-62).

choice for itself. An untrustworthy source, in contrast, is one whose interests lead it to prefer the target to make a choice that does not maximize its utility.

Information sources across a wide range of domains vary in the degree to which they possess better knowledge and are trustworthy (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998). This is the case for sources that provide displaced people with information about conditions in their area of origin. Koser (1997, p. 3) holds that displaced people must use care in evaluating both "the relevance of the information" for their needs as well as "the reliability of the information transmitter". Just as it is difficult for displaced people to collect information about conditions in their area of origin directly, it may also be difficult for information sources to do so. Reporters may not be able to access or have an interest in covering developments in remote areas. Government officials, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations may be working in the area of origin, however, their activities may provide them with access to only a subset of the information relevant to a displaced person's intention to return. For example, a non-governmental organization providing food aid will have information on livelihoods in the area, but may be less informed about security issues or government initiatives on the horizon. Social media and members of a displaced person's social network may be able to provide relevant information from a person's area of origin, but such information may be too superficial to meet their needs. Furthermore, many of these actors might have interests that lead them to encourage return when conditions are unsuitable or to discourage return when conditions are suitable. For example, politicians or non-governmental organizations in locations that host displaced people may wish to see them depart to reduce the need to provide services. Individuals residing in the area of origin might have incentives to discourage return, even when conditions are suitable, because they fear that an influx of former residents would create greater competition for employment,

housing, or social services. Displaced people thus must devote cognitive resources to engage in careful reasoning to estimate an information source's knowledge and trustworthiness before updating their willingness to return. This is a consequential decision, as returning when conditions are poor might threaten the security or livelihood of a displaced person.

Lupia & McCubbins (1998, p. 9) theorize that a source must be *both* knowledgeable and trustworthy to persuade a target, motivating my first hypothesis:

> *H_1: Compared to participants receiving information from sources that are less knowledgeable or less trustworthy, participants receiving information from sources that are both more knowledgeable and trustworthy will have higher return intentions.*

Subsequent research casts some doubt on the conclusion that both knowledge and trustworthiness are necessary for persuasion to occur. A number of studies have found that sources that are trustworthy but not knowledgeable influence preferences and behavior (Chiang & Knight, 2011; Weitz-Shapiro & Winters, 2016; Pluviano, Della Sala, & Watt, 2020). Why might this be the case? Guillory and Geraci (2013) suggest that the effect of knowledge depends on context. Knowledge is most likely to be influential in settings where the participant has little expertise and such expertise is necessary for making good decisions. They hypothesize, for example, that knowledge is more important in contexts such as medical decision making (an example of what is referred to in the economics literature as a "credence goods" market), where a physician has much more knowledge than the typical patient, than in domains such as politics, where participants may conclude (correctly or not) they have sufficient knowledge to make reasoned choices. While this question remains open in the literature, I point out that displaced people typically would have considerable (if perhaps dated) knowledge of the general conditions of their area of origin, since they had lived there and may remain in contact with current residents. This might lead them to conclude that the marginal value of information from a

knowledgeable source was quite small. Based on this, I am more confident in my second hypothesis:

> *H₂: Compared to participants receiving information from sources that are less trustworthy, participants receiving information from sources that are more trustworthy will have higher return intentions.*

Building on these insights from the existing literature, I theorize that anxiety, specifically reporting symptoms of posttraumatic stress, influences targets' ability to persuade. Posttraumatic stress is a form of anxiety that develops after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Individuals with posttraumatic stress repeatedly relive the traumatic event through flashbacks and nightmares, and feel distressed when reminded of the event. They avoid situations and thoughts that bring the trauma to mind. Posttraumatic stress leads to increased arousal, which can include poor sleep, difficulty regulating emotions, and hypervigilance towards potential threats. It is closely associated with negative mood and, in some cases, depression. Onset is frequently delayed until well after the traumatic event. Posttraumatic stress is complex to diagnose; most people who suffer trauma do not develop the disorder, and some trauma victims develop considerable psychological distress but do not meet clinical criteria for diagnosis (Yehuda, et al., 2015). Exposure to war, violence, and displacement lead to psychological distress, including PTS, in some victims (Canetti, Hall, Rapaport, & Wayne, 2013), and such exposure has been shown to influence return intentions among refugees (Ghosn, et al., 2021). For these reasons, I focus on this particular form of anxiety.

While PTS does not impair general cognition (Aupperle, Melrose, Stein, & Paulus, 2012), a central symptom of PTS is hypervigilance, understood as an exaggerated sensitivity to potential threats and a strong focus on the potential for danger in social interactions (Yehuda et al., 2015). Hypervigilance resulting from PTS has important consequences for social cognition in

general and the ability to trust others specifically. Hypervigilance increases generalized perceptions of threat (e.g., Canetti, Hall, Rapaport, & Wayne, 2013) and leaves a neural footprint in the form of exaggerated amygdala responses to threatening stimuli among traumatized individuals (Rauch et al., 2000). This means that individuals experiencing symptoms of PTS are sensitive to information related to their experience of traumatic events. In the context of displaced people, those with symptoms of PTS should be highly attuned to information that reminds them of traumatic experiences in their area of origin, which will activate their hypervigilance. Hypervigilance, in turn, leads individuals to be more suspicious and less trustworthy of others. Individuals with PTS symptoms, for example, make lower investments in trust games with cooperative partners (Bell, Robinson, Katona, Fett, & Shergill, 2019). They also learn more slowly during trust games, indicating an impaired ability to process relevant information about the intentions of others (Cisler, et al., 2015). Other evidence suggests that individuals with PTS symptoms are more likely to attribute hostile intent to others (van Reemst, Fischer, & Zwirs, 2014) and to interpret ambiguous situations as more threatening (Bomyea, Johnson, & Lang, 2016), and that individuals who experience traumatic events or anxiety are less trusting of others (Alesina & Ferrara, 2002; Kijewski & Freitag, 2018; Potts, et al., 2019).

The theory of persuasion discussed earlier requires that people be able to carefully understand and process information regarding a source's trustworthiness. Considerable evidence suggests that the hypervigilance and mistrust associated with PTS symptoms interfere with the ability to do so. Situations or information that remind those with PTS of traumatic events, such as an experience of being displaced, activate this hypervigilance, which in turn undermines their ability to evaluate a source of information as trustworthy. This leads to my third hypothesis:

H₃: Compared to displaced persons experiencing less PTS, the return intentions of those experiencing more PTS will be less influenced by a trustworthy source of information.

While we know that a trustworthy source of information can change attitudes and behavior across diverse social situations, such as voting behavior, this theoretical framework has never been applied to the domain of displaced people's return intentions. To my knowledge, there is no work in any empirical domain that investigates how PTS influences the willingness of a target to act on information provided by a trustworthy source. In what follows, I apply the hypotheses developed above from the literature on persuasion and on PTS to the specific domain of return decisions by displaced people, but suggest that the insight from my third hypothesis, in particular, could apply more generally to other domains in which a source seeks to persuade a target.

Research Design

Participant Recruitment and Sample

I conducted my survey experiment using a sample of 822 adults. Inclusion criteria included being 18 years of age or greater, identifying as an IDP and residence in an IDP camp, and knowledge of Hausa or English. Participants were recruited from 10 randomly chosen IDP camps in Maiduguri and Jere local government areas (LGAs) of Borno State in Nigeria. The sample frame includes all IDP camps in Borno state considered safe by security forces and government officials at the time of the study. Over 90 percent of camps meeting this inclusion criterion are in Maiduguri and Jere. The camps from which I recruited participants vary considerably in size, the areas of origin of resident IDPs, and their status as formal camps approved by the government and informal IDP settlements (see appendix 1). The final size of the sample was dictated by logistical and practical constraints, and is broadly similar in size to those used in published research in locations that have experienced conflict (Mironova & Whitt, 2018)

and involve displaced persons (Ghosn, et al., 2021). Descriptive statistics are provided in appendix 3. The mean and modal value for the age of the participants was between 35 and 44. Slightly more than half (51.3 percent) of subjects identified as male, with the balance identifying as female. Over half of the participants stated that they either had no formal education (16.3 percent) or informal schooling only (42.2 percent). Remaining participants indicated some experience with formal education; of these, the largest group (14.5 percent of the entire sample) had completed primary school. Most participants indicate that their socio-economic status declined after they displaced, and experienced some degree of exposure to wartime violence.

Procedure

Enumerators began at a randomly selected starting point in each IDP camp and recruited participants from every third household. Enumerators first sought to interview the self-identifed head of household. If the head of the household was not available, they interviewed the oldest available adult. If no suitable adults were available, enumerators moved to the next third household. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any time, when offered the opportunity to participate in the study. Those that agreed to participate were presented with a translated consent form. There was no time limit for completing the study; average time to completion was 25 minutes. There was no monetary compensation for participation. The participation rate was over 97 percent.

The enumerators were local residents, fluent in English and Hausa languages, familiar with local customs, and had extensive experience carrying out similar research. The enumerators received ethical training regarding human subjects research and fieldwork instructions from the survey firm under the supervision of the first author and an independent consultant. The

enumerators worked in teams of two. Each team included a male and a female enumerator. Female enumerators were used when approaching female participants. Interviews were conducted in private in the homes of the respondents.

The instrument collects self-reports of exposure to violence and symptoms of posttraumatic stress. Camp, community, and local leaders, as well as participants in my focus groups and pre-testing, indicated that the risk to participants in terms of inducing further distress was low, which is consistent with the findings of a meta-analysis of participant responses to trauma research (Jaffe, DiLillo, Haikalis, & Dykstra, 2015). Participants were provided with the research team's contact information and asked to follow up if they felt that their participation may have resulted in some form of psychological distress so that the team could refer them to counseling or other resources. None did so. Prior to data collection, I sought and obtained approval from the National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) of Nigeria and a university institutional review board in the United States. The data collection protocol included procedures and training to minimize the risk to enumerators and participants posed by COVID-19. I further obtained the approvals of IDP camp, community, and local government leaders.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument can be found in Appendix 2. Participants first were asked about their exposure to violent conflict. I measured exposure to five different types of violence: death of family member, physical injury of family member, physical injury of the participant, home destroyed or severely damaged by warfare or a combatant, and forcible displacement by a combatant. These five dichotomous measures were summed to create the variable *exposure to violence*, an approach used regularly in similar studies (Voors, et al., 2012; Blattman, 2009). The survey instrument then measured demographic characteristics. I next measured participants'

symptoms of posttraumatic stress using the six-item abbreviated PTS Checklist-civilian version PCL-C (Lang & Stein, 2005; Weathers, Litz, Herman, Huska, & Keane, 1993). The PCL-C is a self-report scale designed to access the severity of DSM-IV symptoms of PTS, and the six-item version has been shown to have adequate psychometric properties for the same screening purposes (Lang & Stein, 2005). Participants were asked to rate how much each posttraumatic symptom bothered them during the past month on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). These values were then summed to create the variable posttraumatic stress (*PTS*). Prior work demonstrates that, among IDPs, the PCL-C has high internal consistency (Ibrahim, Ertl, Catani, Ismail, & Neuner, 2018; Pfeiffer & Elbert, 2011; Thapa & Hauff, 2005). This was the case in my sample as well ($\alpha = .84$).

Experimental Design

My experiment manipulates the degree to which an information source is trustworthy and knowledgeable. In designing the experiment, I needed a type of information source that my participants could realistically view as either having or not having one or both of these characteristics. I chose to use a hypothetical nongovernmental organization (NGO) as the information source. In focus group discussions during the pilot stage of the study, I asked IDP participants how they gathered information about conditions in their area of origin and perceptions of different actors. Most of the participants indicated that they collected information from multiple sources; chief among them are family and friends, NGO staff, security personnel, and the Hausa version of the BBC. Camp leaders where generally distrusted; IDP participants accused the camp leadership of siphoning off resources that were meant for them for personal use. While they had more positive views of family, friends, and neighbors, they viewed information from these sources as often inconsistent and based on unverifiable information or

rumors. This led some participants to probe these more trusted sources for details when they provided information, and to take more seriously information that was based on eyewitness accounts or direct experiences.

Participants generally had positive perceptions of NGOs that provide assistance and information to IDPs. They also indicated that the NGOs working with them were a valuable source of information about current and future conditions in their area of origin. Focus group participants stated that some NGOs have worked with them for years, while others are relatively new in the area. Some participants further indicated they believed some NGOs were motivated less by a desire to help IDPs than by the need to protect their operations and finances and respond to political pressures from the state government and other authorities. These responses are consistent with reports of government-initiated pressure on NGOs in Borno state, as well as other parts of Africa (Musila, 2019; Wintour, 2019).

The final survey instrument included a 2x2 factoral survey experiment that manipulates the trustworthiness and knowledge of a fictional NGO—Action Against Violence (AAV) — providing information to IDPs about conditions in their areas of origin. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four vignettes. The responses during the focus groups informed the wording of these vignettes. The experiment manipulates the degree to which an information source is knowledgeable and trustworthy. The nuanced attitudes towards NGOs among the focus group partipants provided an opportunity to realistically manipulate these two dimensions. Specifically, focus group participants indicated that NGOs varied in their knowledge of the conflict which, following comments from some of the focus group participants, I proxied with the location of the NGO staff (local or distant) and the length of time the staff had worked with local conflict-affected communities. For the conditions in which AAV was less knowledgeable,

the vignette began with "Action Against Violence (AAV) is a registered NGO with an office in Lagos. They recently started operations in Borno and their staff occasionally visit displaced communities in Maiduguri from Lagos." For the conditions in which AAV is more knowledgeable, the vignette begins with "Action Against Violence (AAV) is a registered NGO with an office in Maiduguri. For many years, their staff has lived in and worked with communities experiencing violence in Borno state." The motivation for this manipulation is that an NGO with a long presence in the area from which IDPs displaced would be perceived as having access to more and better information about local conditions.

Focus group participants thought that most NGOs were motivated primarily to help IDPs, but also indicated some wariness towards NGOs that they suspected might alter their operations for financial or political reasons. This allowed us to manipulate the trustworthiness of the fictional NGO by varying the degree to which the NGO is believed to be motivated by financial concerns or the interests of IDPs. For the less trustworthy treatment conditions, AAV was described in the following terms: "When talking about this organization, some formerly displaced persons have said that the NGO is always short of funds, and for this reason encourages displaced persons to return home even when they believe that the condition might not be suitable for people to return." In the more trustworthy conditions, the experiment stated that "When talking about this organization, some formerly displaced persons have said that the NGO encourages displaced persons to return home only when they believe that the condition at home is suitable for people to return." The inclusion of "only" is an important modifier, as it indicates that the NGO would provide information suggesting that return is safe and viable when this is actually the case. Focus group participants also indicated that they rarely had first-hand information about the true knowledge and motives of NGOs. In my experimental treatments, I

mimic this fact by suggesting that the information they receive about the NGO comes from formerly displaced people.

After being presented with one of these four treatment conditions, participants were then asked "Imagine that the staff of this NGO tells a displaced person like you that the security and general condition in your area of origin have improved in recent months, and that this improvement is expected to be sustained into the future. How likely do you think that someone like you may consider returning to your place of origin based on the information from this NGO staff?" Answers to this question serve as my response variable, *return intentions*, and ranges in value from one (very unlikely to return) to five (very likely to return).

Covariates

The survey instrument also measures participants' age, gender, educational level, and socioeconomic status. The *Age* variable is an ordinal measure that ranges from 1 to 7. *Gender* takes a value of 1 for male participants and 2 for female participants. *Education* is an ordinal measure ranging from no formal education, informal schooling including Qur'anic education, primary education, secondary education, to tertiary education. To measure respondents' socioeconomic status, they were asked to imagine the Nigerian society as arranged on a scale where those who are worst off have a value of zero and those who are best off have a value of ten. Participants were asked to rate their socio-economic status on this scale both before the beginning of the conflict with Boko Haram and when the survey was fielded. The variable *SES Change* measures the difference in these two variables and captures the degree to which the participants believe their socio-economic status had declined or improved.

Descriptive Statistics

Figure 1a summarizes the response variable for all participants in the experiment. Over 58 percent indicate that, if in the position of a displaced person like themselves, they would be likely or very likely to return, while 32 percent state they would be very unlikely or unlikely to return. Figure 1b visualizes the percentage of participants reporting each possible level of PTS. Most subjects report values between 10 and 20, indicating a moderate to high level of PTS, and almost 8 percent report the highest possible level of PTS. Over 75 percent of the participants report a score of fourteen or higher, meaning they have screened positive for PTS-*D* using this measure.

Figure 1a

Voluntary Return Intentions
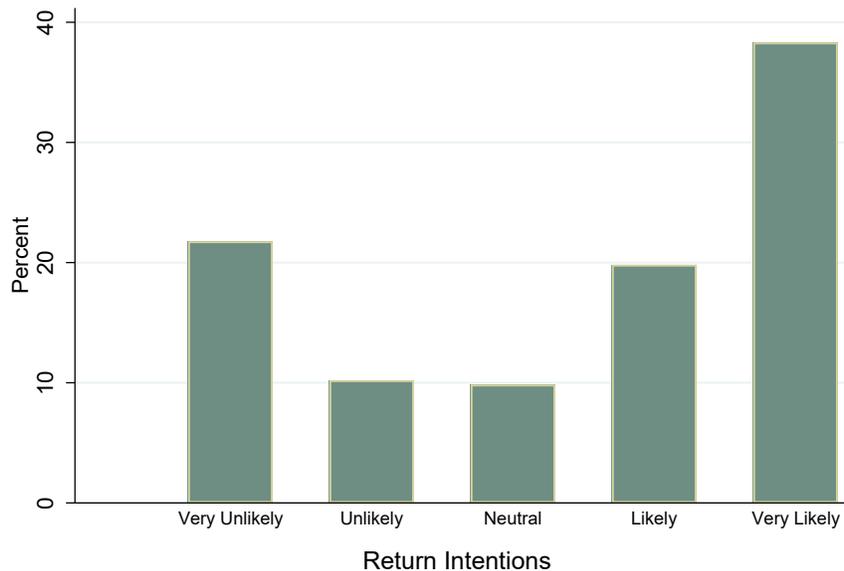
Appendix 4a summarizes the covariates for each of the four treatment conditions. These observable characteristics appear quite well-balanced across the conditions. To test this proposition more systematically, I conducted a multinomial logistic regression using treatment assignment as the response variable (setting less knowledgeable and less trustworthy as the base outcome) and the covariates as the explanatory variables. Results are reported in Appendix 5.

None of the covariates have a statistically significant relationship to treatment assignment, which is further evidence that the sample is balanced on observables across treatment conditions.

Figure 1b

Distribution of Posttraumatic Stress
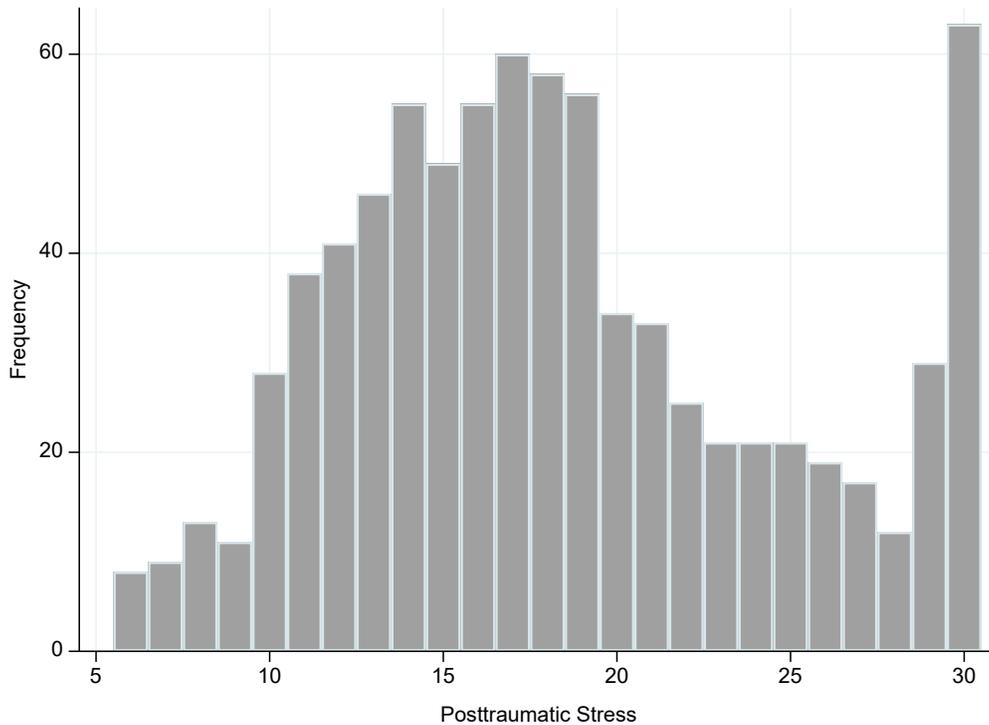
Analysis

Hypotheses 1 and 2 hold that information provided by a sender who is more trustworthy or knowledgeable will increase return intentions. Figure 3 plots *return intentions* for each treatment condition. Red dots depict each observation, black dots the mean for each condition, and black bars the 95 percent confidence intervals around each mean. Recall that *return intentions* ranges from 1, indicating being very unlikely to return, to 5, indicating being very likely to return. The conditions with the highest mean values for *return intentions* both include a

more trustworthy source of information. These means are statistically distinguishable from the conditions that include a less trustworthy source. Notice as well that the means for the two conditions that include more trustworthy information are quite similar, and that the confidence intervals around these means overlap. This suggests that an information source that is both more trustworthy *and* more knowledgeable does not further increase return intentions compared to a source that is more trustworthy but less knowledgeable. In other words, being more trustworthy alone is sufficient to increase return intentions. Figure 1c thus provides support for hypothesis 2 that a more trustworthy source increases return intentions, not for hypothesis 1's claim that both knowledge and trustworthiness influence return intentions.

Figure 1c

Return Intentions by Treatment Conditions
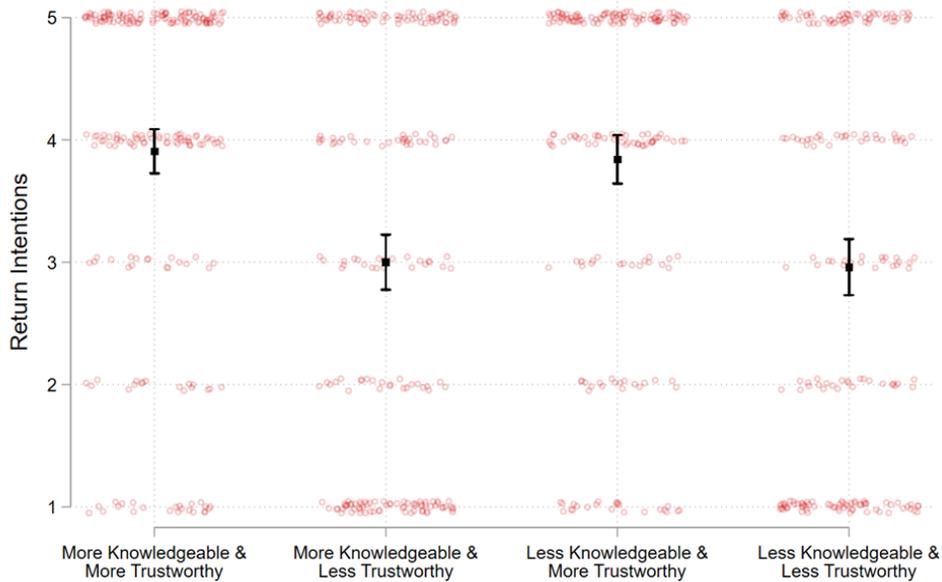
These conclusions are borne out by the statistical analyses provided in table 1, which reports the odds ratio results of generalized ordered logistic regression.[3] In the model, *return intentions* is the response variable. The model adds the following covariates: *exposure to violence, age, gender, education,* and *SES change*, with interactions between treatment conditions and *PTS*.

Table 1

Information, Posttraumatic Stress, and Voluntary Return Intentions

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely
More Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy	34.55***	48.81***	39.08***	20.92***
	(33.27)	(39.87)	(29.29)	(14.75)
More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy	1.33	2.57	1.67	2.59
	(1.06)	(1.97)	(1.21)	(1.91)
Less Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy	10.84***	11.58***	8.52***	10.72***
	(9.19)	(8.85)	(6.03)	(7.62)
Posttraumatic Stress	1.05	1.07**	1.08***	1.08***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
More Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy*PTS	.9**	.88***	.89***	.89***
	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)
More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy*PTS	.99	.95	.98	.96
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Less Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy*PTS	.94	.93*	.95	.93**
	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)
Exposure to Violence	1.09	1.01	1.02	1.19***
	(.07)	(.05)	(.05)	(.06)
Age	.87**	.99	.97	1.05
	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)
Gender	.95	.95	1	1.02
	(.18)	(.16)	(.15)	(.16)
Education	1.15**	1.12**	1.15***	1.06

[3] Appendix 6a replicates the models reported in table 1 using ordinary least squares regression. The results are robust to this alternative model specification.

	(.07)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)
SES Change	1.13	1.64***	1.81***	1.68***
	(.13)	(.16)	(.16)	(.14)
_cons	.44	.12***	.05***	.01***
	(.37)	(.09)	(.03)	(.01)
Observations	822	822	822	822

Note: Cell entries are odds ratios. Robust Standard errors are in parentheses. Excluded category for treatment is Less Trustworthy condition
*** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Turning first to the hypotheses about the characteristics of an information source, the treatments in which the source is more trustworthy have a positive and statistically significant relationship to *return intentions*. The results of this relationship in the generalized ordered logistic model are similar to the OLS regressions results. Because of this similarity, I report the substantive effect sizes of the OLS models (in Appendix 6a) because these are simpler to report and communicate. From the OLS model, the substantive effect is sizeable. Recall that *return intentions* ranges from 1 to 5, and have a mean of 3.43 for the entire sample. In model 2, for example, the expected value of *return* intentions increases by .88 (for a less knowledgeable and more trustworthy source) and .94 (for a more knowledgeable and more trustworthy source). The coefficient for the more knowledgeable and less trustworthy condition, however, is small and not statistically significant. This indicates that, when comparing sources of information that are less trustworthy, a source that is knowledgeable has no greater influence on *return intentions* than a source that is not knowledgeable. These results hold regardless of the combinations of covariates or interactions included in the models.

My third hypothesis concerns how higher levels of *PTS* moderate the effects of trustworthiness cues. Model 4 assesses this proposition by interacting each treatment condition with *PTS*. The interaction terms indicate that higher levels of *Posttraumatic Stress* reduce the effect of a more trustworthy source of information. This relationship is visualized in figure 4,

which plots the marginal effect of *Posttraumatic Stress* for each of the three treatment conditions compared to the Less Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy condition. Consistent with the results reported above, assignment to the More Knowledgeable and Less Trustworthy condition does not influence *return intentions* regardless of the value of *PTS*. But among participants assigned to a condition with a more trustworthy source, those reporting low levels of *PTS* have much higher predicted levels of *return intentions* than do those assigned to the excluded condition, and these predicted levels of *return intentions* decline with increases in *PTS*. Among participants with high levels of *PTS*, the effects of a more trustworthy source of information disappear— these participants' return intentions are statistically indistinguishable from those of participants in untrustworthy information source conditions.

In models 3 and 4, *exposure to violence* has a positive relationship with return intentions. This raises the possibility that it is *exposure to violence,* rather than *PTS,* that reduces persuasion by more trustworthy sources in my experiment. While exposure to violence might cause increased levels of posttraumatic stress, it is also possible that Posttraumatic Stress is the result of other experiences, including experiences while displaced. The proposition that it is *exposure to* violence, rather than *PTS,* that reduces the effect of persuasion from a more trustworthy source is difficult to test cleanly because all of the participants, who were residents of IDP camps, reported being exposed to some form of wartime violence. This means that I lack a group of participants who did not experience violence and could serve as a control group. With this limitation in mind, it is possible that greater *exposure to violence* might reduce persuasion by a trustworthy source. To assess this possibility, I first calculated the Pearson's r bivariate correlation between these variables. The correlation is 0.21, providing some evidence that *PTS* is independent of *exposure to violence* in my sample. In appendix 7, I re-estimate model 4, but

interact *exposure to violence* with treatment conditions and include *PTS* as a covariate. None of the coefficients on the interaction between *exposure to violence* and the treatment conditions are statistically significant, and figure A2 in appendix 7 indicates that increases in *exposure to violence* are not associated with statistically meaningful declines in *return intentions*. This leads me to conclude that it is likely *PTS* rather than *exposure to violence* that moderates the effects of the treatment conditions on *return intentions*.

Figure 1d

Marginal Effects of Posttraumatic Stress on Information
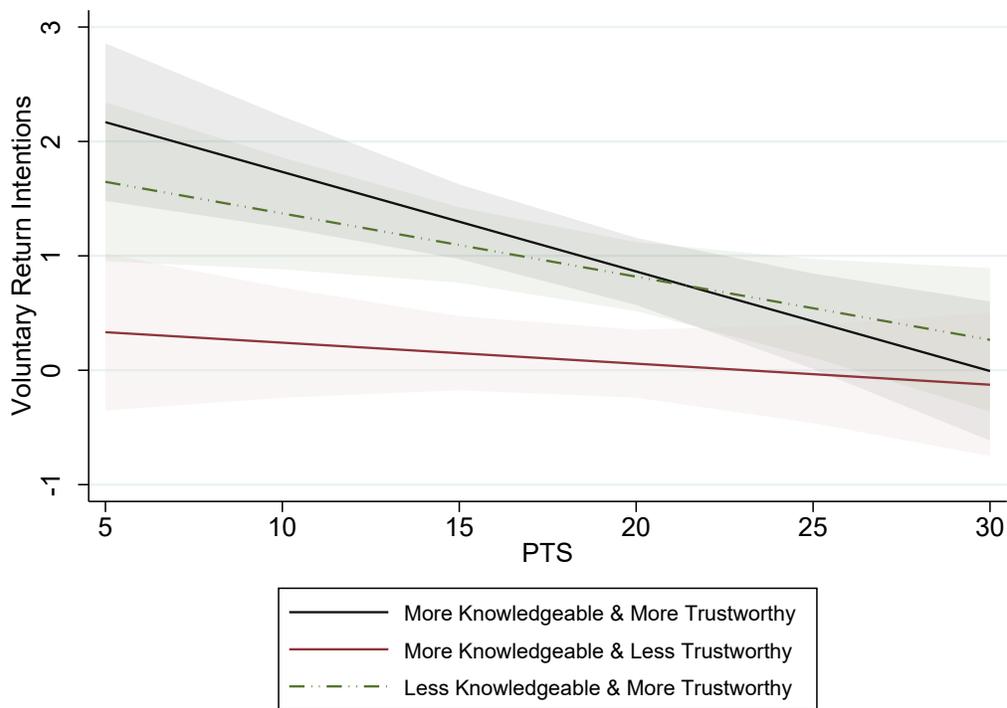
Conclusion

Individuals often rely on others to provide them with information about which choice will advance their interests. Such choices are particularly consequential for those displaced by violent conflict and contemplating returning to their area of origin. Remaining in the area of displacement requires adjustment to a new environment, one that may lack resources, opportunities, and connection with the displaced person's family and friends. Returning to the area of origin might allow the displaced to reconstruct their former lives, regain property, and reconnect with their social network. But return can be especially risky because displaced persons often face difficulties in gathering good information about conditions in their area of origin.

Like others who lack complete information about which choice is best for them, displaced people can rely on others to fill this gap. We know that more credible sources of information about conditions in the area of origin can increase displaced persons' intentions to return (Alrababa'h, Masterson, Casalis, Hangartner, & Weinstein, 2020). I investigate what makes such sources credible to targets. Drawing on existing theories of persuasion, I hypothesize that sources that are trustworthy will be particularly influential. The findings from our survey experiment are consistent with this hypothesis—trustworthy sources that convey information about good conditions in the area of origin lead displaced persons to support returning.

This finding is consistent with much of the existing literature on persuasion. I draw on theory and findings in psychology on the consequences of posttraumatic stress on social relations to hypothesize that greater posttraumatic stress increases sensitivity to threats and reduces willingness to trust others. My findings are consistent with this hypothesis. Although my results are an important step in the direction of understanding how information source characteristics and psychological dispositions influence preferences, future work could probe the

generalizability of these findings among displaced persons in other settings, other types of individuals that are at a higher risk of experiencing traumatic events such as military veterans and victims of violent crime and sexual violence, and other measures of posttraumatic stress.

Also, the study contributes to the literature on post-conflict return and reintegration by extending the works of Ghosn, Chu, Braithwaite et al. (2021) on how exposure to violence is associated with a higher willingness to return. The authors find that war-related violence increases the likelihood of return for those forcefully displaced. My work extends this study by showing that the personal trauma developed from these exposures affects the displaced ability to process relevant information about their place of origin.

These findings have implications for practice. A key implication is that expertise alone does not always make an information source the most credible messenger. In humanitarian settings, a premium is often justifiably placed on expert opinion as an influential source of information. My findings call into question the efficacy of relying primarily on expertise to persuade. Instead, governments, multinational aid organizations, and other institutions can also enlist sources that can be perceived as trusted messengers. It also implies that those working with vulnerable groups like IDPs and refugees should intentionally explore ways to improve and sustain their trustworthiness within the communities they serve. Mental health interventions that alleviate anxiety in general and PTS specifically, apart from improving personal wellbeing, could help people exposed to trauma better determine which sources of information are most useful. If these interventions reduce the prevalence of posttraumatic stress, they might also reduce overall distrust in the community, and could ultimately improve the effects that trusted information sources will have on behavior and attitudes.

CHAPTER 3: SUSTAINABLE RETURN OF FORMERLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examine how the characteristics of an information source influence a source's ability to persuade; and how the target's psychological state moderates persuasion. Even though the chapter speaks to the more general interests of persuasion of vulnerable people, the study also provides a reasonable explanation to the specific questions of when and why do persons displaced by violent conflict decide to return to their area of origin voluntarily.

But, while most studies on the return intentions of displaced persons have concentrated on the conditions facilitating the return, few have focused on sustainable return. Sustainable return is a situation where the individual has a limited likelihood of secondary involuntary movement or repeated displacement (Bettocchi & Freitas, 2003: Harild et al., 2015). Conversely, a return is unsustainable if the returnees (i.e., formerly displaced) cannot remain and feel productive in the community due to actual or perceived threats to their wellbeing. Most returns are supported by external programs by governments, INGOs, and similar institutions with the ultimate aim that the returnee can become self-reliant. But, when these supports are removed, not all those who returned can continue to remain productive in the community. This chapter contributes to this emerging literature by evaluating sustainable return in Maiduguri in northeast Nigeria based on a factorial experimental study of 228 formerly displaced residents. The main objective of this chapter is to extend the information-decision-making and psychological state theory of displaced persons that was developed in the previous chapter to formerly displaced residents. Unlike displaced persons who are still not back to their original place of habitation, formerly displaced persons are previously displaced but have returned to their permanent

habitation. They also differ from the non-displaced persons because the non-displaced never left their place of permanent habitation. The material conditions for displaced and formerly displaced persons are distinct, and therefore, it is vital to examine if my theory will hold for this category of people.

This study is significant in a number of ways. First, it contributes to the existing literature on sustainable return and reintegration, particularly among internally displaced persons as most sustainable return studies are among refugees (Porobič, 2016; Harild, Christensen, & Zetter, 2015; Crisp, 2000; Chimni, 1999). Second, while there are few studies on sustainable return, there are even fewer empirical studies (Porobič, 2016). By using a factorial experimental design, this research applies an innovative method to add to the empirical evidence underpinning our knowledge of sustainable return. Moreover, compared to the existing literature that is primarily qualitative, this innovative approach attempts to establish causal relationships. My primary finding is that information and psychological state influence on displaced persons' decision to return is similar to its effect on formerly displaced persons' decision to resist re-displacement. Unlike displaced persons who are still not back to their original place of habitation, formerly displaced persons are previously displaced but have returned to their permanent habitation. They also differ from the non-displaced persons because the non-displaced never left their place of permanent habitation. Lastly, the recommendations are crucial for policy and practice, as returnees in other transitional and post-conflict communities confront similar challenges to sustainability-related insecurity, prejudice, and poverty.

In post-conflict contexts, those who fled will seek to return when they believe that the conditions favor their return. But, they are also aware that in returning, they have to not only navigate their ways through physical locations, but also through historical grievances that had

resulted in the violence in the first place. Depending on how much the expectations and reality of the conditions they find when they return overlap, those who return may be forced to consider leaving again if there are significant differences between their reality and expectations.

So, while governments and institutions are interested in voluntary returns, and may be happy to see those who fled come back to rebuild their community, there is a growing awareness that focusing on return alone may not be enough to gauge the long-term stability of fragile and transitional communities (Kälin, 2008). This is because, while there has been the general assumption that internal displacement ends when displaced persons (IDPs) return to their place of habitual residence, the reality is that a return is not always permanent, durable, or sustainable.

While some studies have been conducted on the return intentions of displaced persons, there is the possibility of repeat displacement even after a return. Repeat displacement (the secondary involuntary movement of formerly displaced persons away from their place of permanent habitation) may aggravate the initial conditions that cause conflict in the first place. For example, returnees may compete for scarce jobs with residents, which may promote violent clashes; or, the suspicion of a near-future state that possesses a significant risk to the returnees' safety and wellbeing could motivate the returnee to leave. Those who return do so based on trusted information that their place of habitual residence is safe and conducive (or at least the conditions in the place are within their acceptable risk band). Whether it is the actual violent clash between residents and returnees over scarce resources or the suspicion of grave risks, returnees would have to choose whether to stay or be re-displaced. Therefore, understanding the determinants of return and successful reintegration is of critical importance to scholars and practitioners in the areas of migration, human rights, and post-conflict stabilization.

Despite the relevance of sustainable return to policymakers, practitioners, and academics, there is paltry knowledge of it and to my knowledge, no study has examined how psychosocial conditions affect sustainable return. This study intends to fill this gap. The main question here is "what causes persons displaced by conflict to return to their country or area of origin and to stay and integrate, contributing to local prosperity and post-conflict reconciliation once returned?" The literature on sustainable return though scanty provides some insights.

Literature Review

While voluntary return is an easily understood and measured concept, the same cannot be said of sustainable return. Sustainable return is a "slippery concept." Kuschminder (2017) argues that while the primary goal of the migration management policies of most countries is to achieve a sustainable return, the dart of research in this area makes the concept lack a standard definition or common understanding. The understanding of the concept could be as broad as the IOM's model that involves both the reintegration of the individual returnees in their home communities and the individual's return impact on the economic and political life of the community (Black & Gent, 2006). On the other hand, it could also be narrow as the simplistic understanding of the mere permanence of return.

Following from IOM concept, most studies focused on the positional relationship within the community of returnees, and the structural effects of the return environment. For example, Getachew (1996) study of returning Ethiopian pastoralists from Somalia observed that they could not remain at their place of return because they were settled among adversaries and away from life-sustaining resources like water.

Beyond identifying what constitutes a narrow or wide definition of sustainable return, studies have also attempted to understand the adaptable features of returnees in their locations.

Toth (2003) and Hutchinson & Dorsett (2012) find that forceful displacement triggers not only a physical response but also a psychological one as well that develops capacities for adaptability and perseverance. These adaptive capabilities may lower the psychological cost of repeat displacement compared to those never displaced. Using the Kurdish saying: "I have crossed so many rivers, I no longer get wet," Rhema (2014) describes how the traumatic and challenging experiences of being displaced cause an elevated level of psychological resilience.

But also, some studies show the psychosocial challenges of reintegration after displacement (Fonseca, Hart, & Klink, 2015; Ruben, van Houte, & Davids, 2009). These studies suggest that displaced persons adjust their identities to fit into their place of displacement and would have to readjust their identities to fit into their place of return. The attempt to adapt identities has a significant psychological toll on these individuals. These studies generally focus on the psychological effects of group identity formation of the displaced or the returned. The individuals' decision to remain after return depends not only on socio-cultural factors within the community but also on how they perceive their place. This perception heavily depends on the information available to the returnee and their ability to process it. While the psychological studies of sustainable return suggest the psychological dimensions of group identities and reintegration, it has not been able to address how the traumatic events of forced displacements could affect not only individuals' decision to return voluntarily, but also how it affects their decision to remain after return. This study attempts to fill that void.

Like earlier alluded, some understand sustainable return to be an idea of permanence. Yet, the reality of the experiences of displaced persons and returnees are not always that. This had led to terms such as "revolving returnees," "circular migration," and "part-time returnees" (Hammond 2004; Hansen 2005; Hansen 2007), which contradicts the notion of permanence.

Furthermore, the assumption of a fixed and clear "home" for returnees is problematic because there is a difference between "home" and "homeland" (Black & Gent 2006; Allen & Morsink 1994; Black & Koser 1999). A return to the homeland may not feel like home for returnees depending on their positional relationship in the new community and other external factors. It could also depend on their psychological state that affects identity formation as well as their positionality in the community. Some argue that the complexity of the IOM model makes it hard to draw a causal relationship between returnees' experience the factors affecting their decisions (David & van Houte 2008). Therefore, I rely on the narrow notion of sustainable return in my quantitative estimations of sustainable return for ease of measurement.

Theory: Information, Posttraumatic Stress, and Decision-Making on Sustainable Return

It should be noted that the factors that drive return decisions also influence return sustainability. This suggests that if factors identified in the existing literature as influencing return decisions improve or deteriorate, returnees are less or more likely to leave or undergo secondary involuntary movement away from their place of habitation. The literature on return of displaced persons finds that displacement is propagated by ethnic, economic, and political exclusion (van Houte, Siegel, & Davids, 2014), and violence (Adhikari, 2013; Ibáñez & Vélez, 2008; Czaika & Kis-Katos, 2009). That resettlement of displaced persons is facilitated by receptive social networks and established migratory routes (Rüegger, 2013), that the return prospects of displaced persons vary by gender (kaya & Luchtenger, n.d; Richards et al., 2017), and cultural factors limit durable return for women compared to men (Deitrich & Carter, 2017). These factors either "pull" or "push" the displaced person (Kunz, 1973; Radu & Straubhaar, 2012; James & Mayblin, 2016; Kang, 2020). The "pull-push" model holds that the displaced compare the conditions in their current location with those in other locations when deciding

whether and where to go (Steele, 2019). Simply put, a change in the material condition of the place of return would influence formerly displaced persons' decision to remain or leave.

Reestablishing group ties is a big motivation for return and reintegration. But research suggests that altruism can be parochial during violent conflicts to heighten the ingroup ties of ethnic groups (Fearon & Laitin, 2000; Lake & Rothchild, 1996), such that ingroup allegiance and outgroup antagonism not only ensure a sense of communal security for the individual, it also rewards the individual with social esteem (Hartman & Morse, 2015) in the community. Hence, displaced persons with strong historical ties to their communities, have a higher incentive to want to return to where they may enjoy some social flourishing and self-esteem. Also, the material and psychological cost of migrating out of one's place of habitual residence is very high (Schweitzer et al., 2006). Therefore, combining a high benefit of return and the high cost of leaving, I expect returnees to be less willing to leave.

From the literature, I expect that if returnees have optimistic expectations of the future condition of the place (i.e. maintained or improved security, economics, social networks, and sociocultural institutions), they are more likely to remain. If they expect a pessimistic future, they are more likely to leave. While I expect decisions to be made depending on the expected future, we know nothing about how the attributes of the information source relied upon will affect the individuals' ability to be persuaded by it. In the previous chapter, I show that trusted information sources are persuadable sources of voluntary return. Also, I show that violence-induced trauma affects a person's decision-making by lowering the effects of trusted sources. For those formerly displaced and who have returned, their ability to avoid a secondary involuntary movement depends equally on the quality of the information they receive about the future conditions of the place. This is because their initial return hinged on certain expectations of

security and wellbeing. If information about the future condition of the place runs contrary to these expectations, I expect the individual to consider leaving. However, like in the first chapter, the degree to which the formerly displaced person will take the information seriously will depend on the level of trust that the formerly displaced person place in the information source.

Thus, by the same theoretical explanation, I expect that:

H_{2a}: Compared to information sources that are less trustworthy, sources that are more trustworthy will increase formerly displaced persons' sustainable return intentions.:

H_{2b}: Compared to formerly displaced persons experiencing less posttraumatic stress, the sustainable return intentions of those experiencing more posttraumatic stress will be less influenced by a trustworthy source of information.

Research Design

Participant Recruitment and Sample

I conducted my survey experiment using a sample of 228 adults. Inclusion criteria included being 18 years of age or greater, identifying as a formerly displaced person, resident in Borno state, and having knowledge of Hausa or English. Participants were recruited from 10 randomly chosen communities in Maiduguri and Jere local government areas (LGAs) of Borno State in Nigeria. The sample frame includes all formerly displaced persons in Borno state considered safe by security forces and government officials at the time of the study. Over 90 percent of communities meeting this inclusion criterion are in Maiduguri and Jere. Descriptive statistics are provided in Appendix 4b. More than half (55.3 percent) of subjects identified as male, with the balance identifying as female. About 27 percent of the participants either had no formal training or only had informal/Qur'anic education. About half of the participants had completed high school or higher education (Completed High School 20.2%, Post-Secondary 14.5, completed university 13.6). Generally, this set of participants appears to be better educated

than those still displaced. Like the displaced participants in the earlier chapter, most participants in this study indicate that their socioeconomic status declined after they were displaced, and experienced some degree of exposure to wartime violence.

Experimental Design

My experiment manipulates the degree to which an information source is trustworthy and the future condition of the place of return (or permanent habitation). To capture (un)trustworthiness in the vignette, I either describe a scenario where the informant has been suspected of falsifying information, or if the informant is objective all the time. As for the future conditions of the place, I described either an optimistic or pessimistic scenario. For the optimistic scenario, I explain that the NGO staff expects that the security and general condition of the place will be better than the current situation in the near future. For the pessimistic scenario, I explain that the NGO staff expects that the security and general condition of the place will be worse than the current situation in the near future. This setup allows me to create a 2X2 factorial experiment of 2 levels "future conditions" by 2 factors "source of information," and randomly assign participants to one of the four conditions. The decision to use an NGO as the information source is based on reports from the focused group pilot study described in the first chapter.

After receiving the treatment, subjects were asked, "how likely do you think that someone like you may consider leaving your new community to another place based on the information from this NGO staff?" Answers to this question serve as my response variable, (i.e. sustainable return), and range in value from 1 "very unlikely" to 5 "very likely".

Covariates

Similar to the study in the first chapter, the survey instrument also measures participants' age, gender, educational level, and socioeconomic status. The *Age* variable is an ordinal measure that ranges from 1 to 7. *Gender* takes a value of 1 for male participants and 2 for female participants. *Education* is an ordinal measure ranging from no formal education, informal schooling including Qur'anic education, primary education, secondary education, to tertiary education. To measure respondents' socioeconomic status, they were asked to imagine the Nigerian society as arranged on a scale where those who are worst off have a value of zero and those who are best off have a value of ten. Participants were asked to rate their socioeconomic status on this scale both before the beginning of the conflict with Boko Haram and when the survey was fielded. The variable *SES Change* measures the difference in these two variables and captures the degree to which the participants believe their socioeconomic status had declined or improved.

Descriptive Statistics

Figure 2a summarizes the response variable for all participants in the experiment. About 48 percent indicate that under the hypothetical condition, they would be likely or very likely to leave their current place of abode, while about 33 percent state that they would be unlikely or very unlikely to leave. Figure 2b visualizes the percentage of study participants reporting each possible level of posttraumatic stress. Most subjects report values between 6 and 14, indicating a low to moderate level of stress, with half of the participants having a score between 9 and 14. About 45 percent of the participants report a score of fourteen or higher, meaning they have screened positive for PTS-*D* using this measure.

Figure 2a

Sustainable Return Intentions
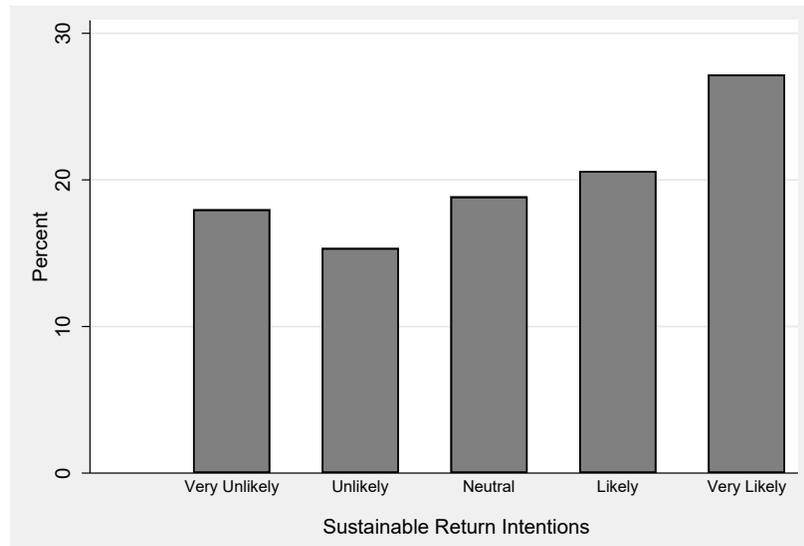
Because I am interested in the role of information source, I collapsed the location's

pessimistic and optimistic future conditions into one (i.e., a 2X1 treatment) during the analysis.

The decision to collapse the future conditions was partly borne out of logistical challenges of

limited samples that can affect the statistical power of my analysis. Appendix 4b summarizes the

covariates for each of the two treatment conditions. The majority of the respondents in these

communities are either individuals who were never displaced by the Boko Haram crisis or their

displaced relatives living with them. Even though this may appear to be a shortcoming in my

design, collapsing the two conditions into one improves the statistical power of my analysis.

The observable characteristics of the covariates appear quite well-balanced across the

conditions. To test this proposition more systematically, I conducted a multinomial logistic

regression using treatment assignment as the response variable (setting trustworthy as the base

outcome) and the covariates as the explanatory variables. Results are reported in Appendix 5b.

None of the covariates have a statistically significant relationship to treatment assignment, which is further evidence that the sample is balanced on observables across treatment conditions.

Figure 2b

Distribution of Posttraumatic Stress
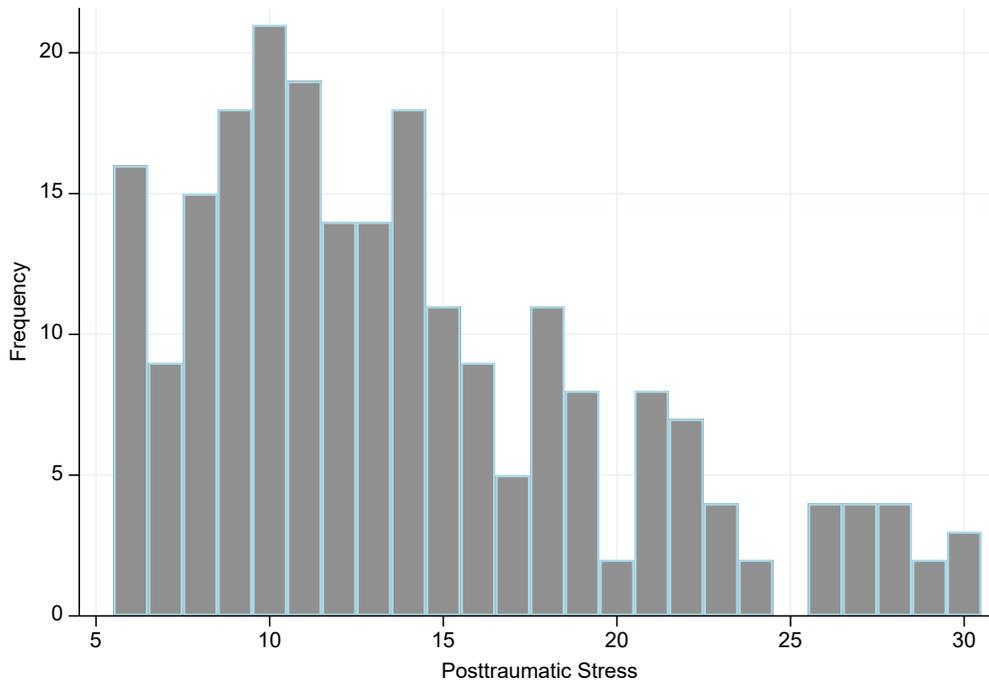
Analysis

Hypothesis 2_a holds that a trusted information source will improve sustainable return irrespective of the pessimistic or optimistic nature of the future condition of the place. Figure 2a plots sustainable return intentions for each condition. Red dots depict each observation, red cycle the mean for each condition, and red bars the 95 percent confidence intervals around each mean. Recall that sustainable return intentions range from 1, being very unlikely to leave, to 5, indicating being very likely to leave. Untrustworthy sources have the highest mean values for *sustainable return intentions* and are statistically distinguishable from trustworthy information

sources. This suggests that my hypothesis 2_a holds, which is, the information about the future condition of a place by a trustworthy source improves the sustainable return intentions of formally displaced persons.

This conclusion is supported by the statistical analysis shown in table 2, which reports the odds ratio results of generalized ordered logistic regressions. I also conducted several robustness checks, including multiple OLS regression models, to examine how the core regression coefficients estimates behaved under various modifications (Appendix 6b). The results are robust to this alternative model specification. The results of this relationship in the generalized ordered logistic model are similar to the OLS regressions results. Because of this similarity, and the OLS results being simpler to interpret and communicate, I report the substantive effect sizes of the OLS models (in Appendix 6b). In each model, *sustainable return intentions* is the response variable. The first model has as explanatory variable the treatment condition, Less Trustworthy as the excluded category. The second model adds my measure of posttraumatic stress, the continuous variable *PTS,* as a covariate. The third model adds the remaining covariates: *exposure to violence, age, gender, education,* and *SES change*. The fourth model adds bivariate interactions between the treatment condition and *PTS*. Looking at the first hypothesis about the characteristics of an information source, the treatments in which the source is more trustworthy have a positive and statistically significant relationship to *sustainable return intentions*. The substantive effect is sizeable. Recall that *sustainable return intentions* range from 1 to 5, and have a mean of 3.24 for the entire sample. In model 2, for example, the expected value of *sustainable return* intentions increases by .87 (for a less trustworthy source) and is statistically significant.

Figure 2c

Sustainable Return Intentions by Treatment Condition
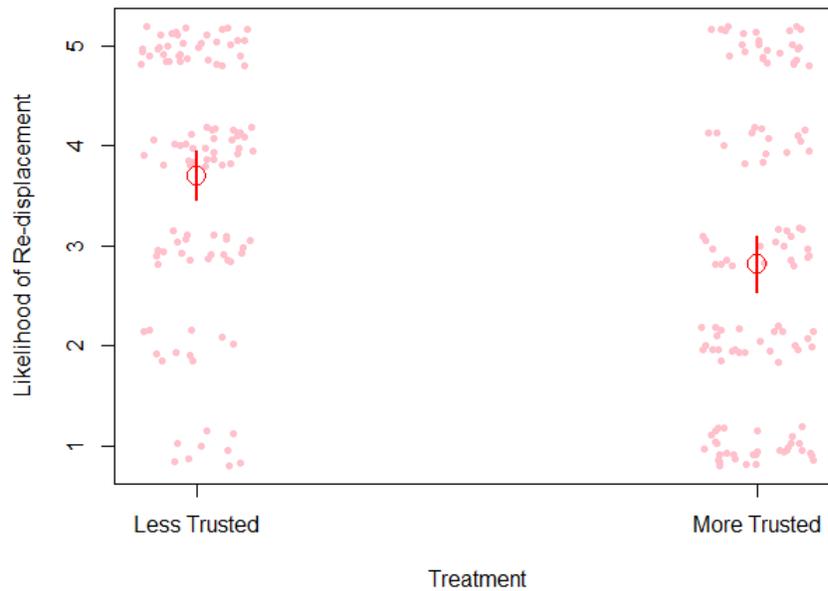
My second hypothesis (2b) concerns how higher levels of *PTS* moderate the effects of

trustworthiness cues. Model 4 assesses this proposition by interacting the treatment condition

with *PTS*. The interaction terms indicate that higher levels of *posttraumatic stress* reduce the

effect of a more trustworthy source of information. This relationship is visualized in figure 2d,

which plots the marginal effect of *posttraumatic stress* for the Less Trustworthy treatment

conditions compared to the More Trustworthy condition. Consistent with the results reported

earlier, assignment to the More Trustworthy condition increases *sustainable return intentions*

regardless of the value of *PTS*. Also, among participants assigned to a condition with a more

trustworthy source, those reporting low levels of *PTS* have much higher predicted levels of

sustainable return intentions than do those assigned to the excluded condition, and these

predicted levels of *sustainable return intentions* decline with increasing *PTS*. Among participants

with high levels of *PTS*, the effects of a more trustworthy source of information decrease—these participants' sustainable return intentions are statistically indistinguishable from those of participants in untrustworthy information source conditions.

Table 2

Information, Posttraumatic Stress and Sustainable Return Intentions

	Unlikely	Neutral	Likely
More Trustworthy	.17	.07***	.08***	.13**
	(.22)	(.06)	(.06)	(.12)
PTS	1.01	.89***	.9***	.83***
	(.07)	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)
More Trustworthy*PTS	1.03	1.08	1.10*	1.12
	(.08)	(.06)	(.06)	(.08)
Exposure to Violence	.97	1.06	.99	1.2
	(.11)	(.11)	(.10)	(.16)
Age	.77	1.12	1.17	1.2
	(.12)	(.16)	(.16)	(.18)
Female	.44*	1.16	1.24	.78
	(.19)	(.37)	(.38)	(.28)
Education	.97	1.04	.97	.93
	(.09)	(.07)	(.06)	(.07)
SES Change	1.11	1.3	1.56***	1.72***
	(.27)	(.23)	(.26)	(.31)
_cons	73.15***	5.92	1.85	1.08
	(113.7)	(7.21)	(2.16)	(1.5)

*Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The method of estimation is Generalized Ordered Logistics regression. Excluded category for treatment is the Less Trustworthy condition *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1*

These findings are similar to what I saw in the previous study on voluntary return intentions. However, unlike the voluntary return study that finds that *exposure to violence* has a positive relationship with return intentions, this study shows that there is no relationship with sustainable return. This may be because majority of the respondents have lower levels of trauma

compared to those still displaced. Those who are still displaced are still dealing with the challenges of losing both material and social support like their homes and livelihoods. However, by returning, formerly displaced persons have regained some of what they had lost. This may explain why violence-related trauma seems to have little or no effect on their decision to stay or leave.

Figure 2d

Marginal Effects of Posttraumatic Stress on Information
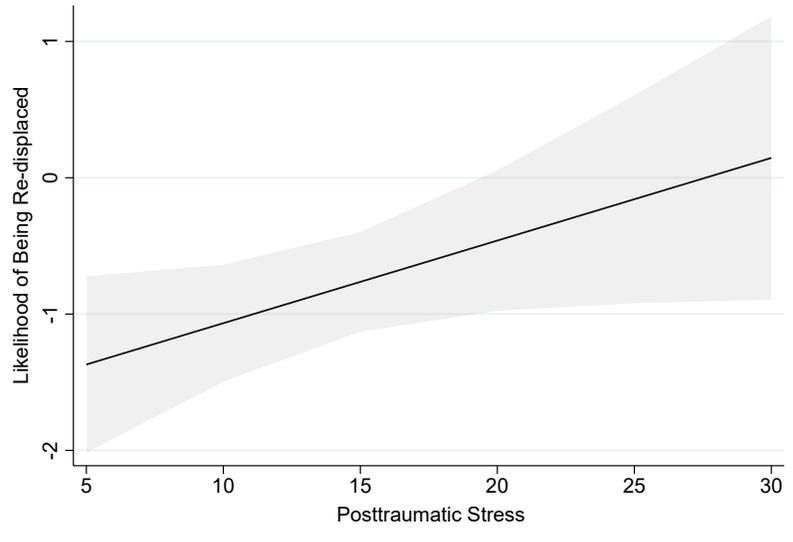
Conclusion

Suggested durable solutions to forced displacement in the literature are anchored in three approaches - voluntary return, local integration in the host community, or resettlement in a third community (Harild, 2015). While the focus in the previous chapter is on the first approach (voluntary return), in this study the focus is on the second approach (local integration) and by extension the third too. Building on the same theoretical foundation developed in the previous chapter that shows how consequential the information source and psychological dispositions of

the information recipient are for those contemplating return, this study shows that the same factors remain critical even after return. These factors play a crucial role in sustaining return and potentially influence reintegration.

These factors remain relevant even against the backdrop of the expected future conditions of the place. Irrespective of the information source, I expect that formerly displaced persons will be less likely to leave if the present and future conditions of the place will be beneficial to them, and more likely to leave if it is otherwise. I controlled for this benefit-burden effect on the decision-making of formerly displaced persons by randomly assigning both conditions to my respondents. I find my theory to hold despite these controls. This may lead to the question of why individuals will be less willing to leave even when the future conditions are expected to be pessimistic or more burdensome. Information from a trusted source reduces uncertainty around the range of options for the individual. With a fair amount of certainty of what may happen in the future, the formerly displaced person can adequately plan and invest in measures to mitigate the expected ills. In other words, a trusted information source reduces the overall cost associated with the future poor condition of the area. But when the source is less trusted, the ambiguity associated with such a situation makes it more difficult to plan accurately. Thus, it appears safer for the individual to leave the community another location.

CHAPTER 4: THE ROLE OF LOCAL (TRADITIONAL) AUTHORITY IN PROMOTING
SOCIAL COHESION IN POST-CONFLICT COMMUNITIES

Introduction

What are the determinants of the return and reintegration of former members of violent extremist groups in post-conflict communities? In this chapter, I examined factors that affect communal reintegration after violent conflicts. While many studies on societal healing from violence have focused on transitional justice mechanisms that seek to promote either retributive or restorative forms of justice, little emphasis has been placed on how communal healing and acceptance can stem from the local authority's attitudes toward the "offender." Many conflict studies are interested in why individuals are attracted to and participate in activities of violent groups (Swann et al., 2009; Weeraratne, 2015; Benmelech & Klor, 2018: Mitts, 2018:), but limited work focuses on how former members of these groups reintegrate into society (Blair et al., 2021).

In most cases, former members of violent groups faced a lot of difficulties from their families and communities when they want to return and reintegrate into the communities they left (Denov, 2010; McKay & Mazurana, 2004). The case of former Boko Haram members in northeastern Nigeria is no different as there are reports of communities being antagonistic to their returning (Bukarti, 2019). Creating the conditions for the return and peaceful reintegration of former members requires a large-scale attitudinal change of the community prior to their return. Community leaders are essential for rebuilding communities in post-conflict settings (Joireman, 2014). In the work of Blair et al. (2021), the authors find that messages of forgiveness from local religious leaders increase the likelihood of members of communities plagued by violence accepting former members of violent organizations. While these types of studies are important to show a potentially low-cost scalable approach to communal reintegration of post-

conflict societies, religious leaders are not the only important local authority in these types of communities. Do other local authorities like traditional leaders have a similar effect on their communities?

I answer this question by using conjoint experiments on members of IDP-hosting communities in Maiduguri, northeastern Nigeria. I find that while communities plagued by violence are antagonistic to former members of the violent group, the attitude of these former members and the attitude of local authorities have significant effects on the community's willingness to accept them. Also, the nature of the former member's recruitment into or involvement with the violent group is consequential to their (in)ability to be reintegrated.

My findings have both policy and academic implications. Against the backdrop of recent violence in many parts of the world, including homegrown terrorist attacks in Europe and the United States, and violent conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Kenya, and Nigeria, individuals formerly affiliated with extremist groups such as al-Shabab, al-Qaida, and Boko Haram are attempting to reintegrate into society. This violence results in communal disintegration, and the death and forced displacement of millions; governments and policymakers face the arduous task of reconstructing and rebuilding post-conflict societies. One important aspect of societal rebuilding is the return and reintegration of those who may have participated in the atrocities. This is to ensure a durable condition for peace and development. Yet, ensuring this peace requires creating a viable alternative for the members of violent groups, and rejoining the social and economic life at home is a great option (Brinkerhoff, 2005; Muggah, 2005).

The challenge with achieving this goal is the heightened suspicion and grievances in these communities; especially when members of the community participate in causing the pains endured by many. Finding an effective way to address this trend remains a significant challenge

for governments and policymakers. The insights from this study can provide critical clues that can help the reintegration process on a large scale. From an academic perspective, the study expands our understanding of the nature of return and reintegration of former members of extremist groups. It also provides a nuanced understanding of the role of local leaders in peacebuilding and communal healing. The findings support certain claims that local elites are often part of the patron-client networks (Ebiede, Langer, & Tosun, 2020; Ebiede, 2017), which could influence their "blessings" on former combatants.

Communal Acceptance and Traditional Leaders as Trusted Authorities

As stated earlier, the Boko Haram conflicts wreaked a great deal of havoc on individuals and communities in northeastern Nigeria (Serrano & Pieri 2014; Imasuen 2015; Atsa'am, Wario, & Okpo 2020; Onapajo 2020). The Nigerian military launched its offensive against the terrorist group to dislodge them. Some defected group members were captured and taken to deradicalization centers to deradicalize, rehabilitate, and reintegrate them into society (Onuoha 2020). In 2016, the Nigerian government established a deradicalization program called Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) as part of a national strategy to degrade militant activities in the northeast (International Crisis Group, 2021). The OPSC program encourages members to abandon the extremist group and seek return and reconciliation. Apart from efforts such as these, some members had abandoned the group and wanted to return home. Yet, the prospect of return is bleak for those associated with Boko Haram. This is because those harmed still hold grudges against them, do not trust the sincerity of their repentance, or believe that their acts had desecrated the community and deserved banishment.

But finding a lasting solution to conflicts requires that former members of these extremist groups are reintegrated into the sociopolitical and economic fabric of society. Creating the

conditions for successful reintegration requires a large-scale willingness on the part of the aggrieved members of the community. When an offense is committed, the ultimate rationale of the African moral philosophy is to restore broken relationships rather than punish the offender. This rationale is premised on the *Ubuntu* foundation that every other person is an extension of oneself, and to seek the overall harmony of society is first to seek the harmony of self (Letseka, 2012). Thus, when harm like violent conflict befalls a community, harmony is distorted, and the underlying motivation is to restore it. One primary way of restoring harmony is to reconcile the community with the offender. This can be achieved through outright forgiveness of the offender, or demanding acts of penance from the offender, or even banishment. Ensuring that social order and harmony is restored and maintained is a primary function of elders and local leaders.

Prevailing knowledge in political science and psychology indicates that cues from the elite in society can influence individual attitudes and social norms (Zaller, 1992; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Against these backgrounds, traditional and religious leaders play critical roles in conflict resolutions in many African societies (Kariuki, 2015; Basedau, 2011). Because of the central role these leaders play in preserving societal sanctity, members of the community usually take cues from their leaders on how to address a particular challenge. In Africa, there are evidence of where traditional and religious leaders' words and actions have influenced the decision-making of their subjects. For example, these elites helped reduce the resistance by local communities to certain health interventions (Nasir et al., 2014: Onuekwue, 2021: Oyo-Ita et al., 2021; van der Windt & Voors, 2020). Also, local elites like traditional chiefs are instrumental in dispute resolution (Maiangwa, 2020), whereby parties are willing to accept these elders' decisions to preserve societal harmony.

In many parts of Africa, reports indicate that traditional leaders have popular legitimacy compared to elected/government officials (Logan & Katenda, 2021). Traditional leaders like local chiefs and elders get their authority based on the people's traditions of the past. They differ from elected political leaders because their authority is hereditary in most cases. They have a varying degree of recognition by the country and remain an essential player in the local administration of the people. Even though they may appear to be incompatible, African societies have successfully integrated these different institutional structures (Logan, 2008).

The legitimacy of these traditional leaders stems from how they are appointed in the first place. Most of them are selected by members of the community and are believed to be of impeccable character. In northern Nigeria, the religious roots of local authority during the prime of the Islamic Caliphate allow these traditional leaders to hold both temporal and spiritual primacy over their subordinates. The traditional head of community-based administrative system is the *sarki* (Wall, 1988; Reynolds, 1997). In precolonial time, the *Sarki* and his acolytes allocated land to community members for economic activity. They adjudicated the legal and sociopolitical aspects of the lives of those in their communities. The advent of colonial administration and western-styled political institutions has modified their roles. Some of these responsibilities are codified in some states' laws, and some are transferred to the purview of elected political and judicial authorities. Whether recognized formerly by state laws or not, the *Sarki* and its traditional institutions still hold sway in most parts of northern Nigeria (Vermeer et al., 2015).

In post-colonial times and the introduction of western-style governance structures, the divergence of the spiritual and temporal roles/influence became more acute. Despite this divergence, traditional leaders are always involved in communal reintegration and dispute

resolution mechanisms (NRC, 2018). This is because they are often selected from among members of the community, seen as the "fathers" of their communities, and have vested interests in preserving its sanctity. Thus, traditional authorities are critical in resolving many local disputes in their communities. Maiangwa (2020) describes them as "... sages and griots who possess wisdom and knowledge of the foundation, philosophy, and history of their communities. … [thus], initiate rituals and hold community dialogues to resolve tension between families and among friends, especially over the long-standing issue…" (p.116). In essence, the community trusts local traditional leaders to act in their best interests, especially during disputes/conflicts (Nwosile 2005).

In the context of northern Nigeria, common conflict resolution mechanisms include oath-taking, exile or ex-communication, and the obligation to forgive and forbear evil suffered. The preeminence of Islam over the cultural practices of many ethnic groups in northern Nigeria has made the practice of *sulhu* (conciliation or peacemaking in Islam) a viable practice (Suleiman 2019). Also, Among the Kanuri people, the *sawari* a traditional conflict resolution mechanism has been used to reintegrate women who were considered Boko Haram "wives" (Hassan & Tyvoll 2018). It is crucial to reiterate that these conflict mediation and resolutions are midwifed by religious and traditional leaders.

Maiangwa (2020) remarks that among the Fulanis and other communities in northern Nigeria, traditional leaders resolve conflicts in many ways, including issuing a warning and paying compensation, which was used as placatory measures. If the alleged perpetrator accepts responsibility for wrongdoing, the victim would be expected to forgive the wrongdoing. In this way, the restoration of the relationship prevails over seeking punishment proportionate to the crime. Furthermore, traditional leaders' acceptance of certain acts and gestures by the culprit(s)

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cues the rest of the community that such an act or gesture is enough to begin the process of

healing and to mend the broken relationship. So based on this, I expect that the attitudes and

actions of traditional leaders towards former members of violent groups that have harmed the

community will greatly impact the general opinion attitudes of the members of the community.

Because the expectations that the leaders' attitude is driven by the desire to restore sanctity, I

will expect that if a traditional leader cue that he is willing to accept the offender, the community

will pick that cue and will be more likely to accept the offender. Thus, my first hypothesis is:

H_{1a}: *Community members are more likely to accept a former offender when a traditional leader forgives the offender*

But, violent conflicts often leave people with traumatic experiences that can make it

difficult for those offended to forgive or even move on with their lives. This has made it difficult

for the offenders to be accepted back into society, and in many cases, traditional leaders have

been used to preach forgiveness and help the society to heal. Their actions allow for warring

factions to find common grounds to engage. Those offended may not indeed be willing to forgive

and accept the offenders into their fold, but may be pressured by societal expectations to do so.

While they may appear to have forgiven in public because of the mediation of elders and local

leaders, their true intent might be the opposite.

Secondly, the influence of traditional authority may have waned over time because of

their relationships with political leaders, and how their actions are perceived by the locals. Prior

to the advent of colonial forms of government, traditional institutions in African societies were

an indigenous sociopolitical arrangement whereby the community appointed those with proven

records of integrity as their traditional leaders (Peter 2014). But that changed when the people

inherited a different governance structure from their colonial masters. The introduction of

western-styled government system that put the power to appoint traditional leaders in the hands of politicians has made some traditional leaders pander more to the needs of their benefactors than their subjects. Suppose subjects perceive that the leaders do not represent their interests. In that case, the action of a traditional leader (especially if it is a benevolent one) towards an offender may be viewed with great suspicion. In this case, if a traditional leader cues that he is willing to forgive the offender, the community will be least likely to accept the offender in protest of the leader's action.

Thirdly, government actions towards the victims and the offenders can affect the influence of traditional authority on conflict resolution and reintegration. If there are instances where the violent group appears to receive special treatment by governments in order to pacify them to stop wreaking more harm on the community, without commensurate support to the victims by the government; those who are victims will be so angry with the government's unequal treatment that they will expect their local leaders to reflect their anger as well. If the local leaders cue a conciliatory tone of forgiveness, they will be so disappointed in their leader, which will fuel resentment toward the offender.

Against this backdrop, I hypothesize that

H_{1b}: *Community members are less likely to accept a former offender when a traditional leader forgives the offender*

Beyond these, I expect that the actions of the offenders should be influential in whether the community is willing to accept them or not. As earlier stated, the African moral philosophical stand to maintain communal harmony at all times, and therefore strive to re-establish the relationship between the victim and the offender. In most African traditional societies, the act of reconciliation begins by asking the offender to accept responsibility for wrong-doing, express

sorrow and regret, and seek forgiveness (Andrieu 2009; Maiangwa 2020). A sincere acknowledgment of wrong can have cathartic effects on the victim (Clark, 2012) and reduce the victim's resistance to allow the offender back into harmony with the community.

In the justice literature, there is an established finding that offenses percieved to be severe or intentional recieves harsher jusgement (Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Darley & Huff, 1990; Walster, 1966). Therefore, forgiveness should be more difficult to the degree to which the intentionality and severity contributes to peoples' perception of injustice. Boko Haram members have caused so much pain to many people in these communities which makes their offense severe, and for many, even intentional. One way, to reduce this perceived injustice is to offer repayment through apology (Exline et al., 2003), and the tendency to seek retributive justice decreases (and that of forgiveness increases) when the offender apologizes (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agaric, 1989; Darby & Schlenker, 1982). Against this backdrop, I expect that:

H₂: Offenders who seek forgiveness will have a higher chance of communal reintegration than those who do not

Forgiveness is a key restorative value and a necessary step to reconciliation (Orejuela & Restrepo-Plaza, 2021; Exline et al., 2003) because it encourages the alleviation of negative emotions in the victim by activating intrinsic affects such as empathy (Ohbuchi & Takada, 2002). Beyond the African moral philosophy, psychological studies show that humans are more likely to forgive the offender when the person apologizes, regardless of whether the harm was intentional or not (Tavuchis, 1991). But irrespective of whether the individual seeks forgiveness or not, the nature of the harm (intentional or unintentional) is also an important predictor of whether the offender deserves the victim's forgiveness (Ohbuchi & Takada, 2002).

In moral judgment theories, individuals judge intentions associated with the commission of harm; and forgiveness is easier when the harm caused is unintentional or under coercion (Fischbacher & Utikal, 2013). While those associated with a violent group can endear hatred and ostracization from the community by the victims of their acts, the nature and circumstances that led to individuals joining these groups can affect the degree of the victims' willingness to reconcile. Those who volunteered out of their own volition to be part of the group should be treated differently than those who were coerced.

Previous research has devoted significant attention to the question of why individuals are attracted to, support, and/or become members of violent and extremist groups (Moghaddam, 2005; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Borum, 2011; Horowitz, 2015; Scull et al., 2020; Gomez et al., 2021). These studies highlight a number of factors that they describe as need, narrative, and network; or simply called the 3N model (Kruglanski et al., 2018; Belanger et al., 2019; Lobato et al., 2021; Gomez et al., 2021). By these studies, individuals seeking to satisfy basic needs like the desire to be valued and respected by others (Kruglanski et al., 2018), or social alienation, personal or collective grievances can result in one's loss of a sense of purpose in life. The basic need to restore purpose or self-worth can be a crucial motivating factor to associate with these groups (Belanger et al., 2019).

Violent groups promote a shared reality through an ideological narrative that legitimizes violence (Hardin & Higgins, 1996). Charismatic or oratorical leaders typically exhort these narratives, and these narratives can be exceptionally appealing to those who hold strong grudges against a particular individual, group, or institution. For example, the emergence of the Boko Haram group was possible partly because of the group's charismatic leader's appeal to the poor in the immediate society who sees the government as very corrupt, and failing in its basic

responsibilities to its people (Suleiman & Karim, 2015; Thomson, 2012). The group seized on the widespread dissatisfaction among its people to advocate for a puritanical form of Islam, including violence to restore order to the system (Suleiman & Karim, 2015). The group's message resonated very well with a significant part of the population because of its appeal to their shared experiences. Thus, shared experiences or values with other members of the group and the narrative of a common enemy can lead to a fusion of identities, such that the individual sees the group as an extension of themselves (Whitehouse et al., 2017; Gomez et al., 2020).

The drivers of the 3N model are anchored compliance and internalization pathways (Gomez et al., 2021). Compliance is when individuals are coerced to join these groups, and internalization is when they voluntarily participate because they see the group as an extension of themselves. Therefore, the individual's pathway to becoming a part of the extremist group should be critical to whether the community should grant forgiveness and acceptance. The inability of the community to accept former extremists is because they are blamed for the harm to the community or individuals.

Blame serves both a cognitive and social function, and the perceiver must first establish that the agent caused the hurtful outcome. When the agent's acts are perceived to be intentional or voluntarily carried out, the person is considered a morally eligible agent (Malle, Guglielmo & Monroe, 2012). Under this condition, the blame is full. But when the agent's act is perceived to be unintentional or done under coercive circumstances, blame will not be assigned or substantially diminished (Scanlon, 2016). In their study of child soldier's involvement in conflicts, some scholars argue that the age and coercive nature of their recruitment diminish the moral responsibility related to the violent conduct of the child soldier (Fisher 2013), and for those who express guilt, they deserve to be forgiven (Thomason 2016). In the case of Boko

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Haram, because those who join their ranks do so voluntarily or by coercion, I expect that the pathway of their membership will determine the moral justification of their deservedness for acceptance. Thus, I hypothesize that

H₃: It will be more likely to accept former members of extremist organizations who were coerced into it than those who volunteered

Research Design

I employ a choice-based conjoint experimental design to test my hypotheses. In a conjoint experiment, the subject is given two options and asked to choose between them. The choice made is the dependent variable. We require a choice between each pair of potential returnees to simplify the decision task, because of the limits of short-term memory (Krosnick 1999). In this experiment, the enumerator first provides a short introduction explaining the exercise, then using a computer-assisted survey instrument, presents the respondents a screen with profiles of two potential returnees as displayed in Figure 3a. The instructions asked the respondents to choose between the two options, which of the displaced persons they would prefer to settle in their community.

Immediately after the potential returnee's profiles, I measured the outcome in two ways. The first is the forced-choice preference where the respondent must make a choice between the two options. I coded the responses to this question as a binary variable, *Accepted*, which is 1 if the respondent preferred the returnee's profile, and 0 for the rejected profile. This variable is the outcome variable of interest. This experimental design that forces the respondents to make a choice has the advantage of eliciting the trade-offs that the respondent makes. I also conducted robustness checks by asking respondents to rate each returnee profile on a 7-point scale of 1 "Absolutely accept" to 7 "Definitely not accept". I recoded the 7-point

scale to a binary variable of *Preferred* (i.e. 1 if the rating is below the midpoint and 0 if at the midpoint or above).

The design of experiments assigns the characteristics of each potential returnee at random. This means that one can reasonably conclude that any relationship between a potential returnee's characteristics, the action taken by the returnee, the action taken by the traditional authority, and the subject's preferences is a causal one. The experimental methodology behind this has recently been introduced in the political science literature (Hainmueller, Hopkins, & Yamamoto, 2014; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2015). Importantly, choices made between hypothetical options has been shown to be closely related to subjects' real-world behavior (Hainmueller, Hangartner, & Yamamoto, 2015).

Each respondent evaluates six comparisons between pairs of potential returnees, each displayed on a new screen. I randomly vary the two returnees' profiles on four potentially influential attributes in determining if they will be accepted or rejected. The attributes are *Religion*, *Ethnicity*, *Action of the returnee*, and *Recruitment (i.e., Relation of the returnee with a violent promoting/ reducing group)*. From the literature and focused group interviews, these attributes are expected to influence community members' acceptance/rejection decisions. Each attribute can take more than one value. For example, *Ethnicity* has two values ranging between 1"displaced person is of the same ethnicity with you" and 2 "displaced person is of different ethnicity with you." For Attribute *Action of returnee,* there are three values 1 "Publicly apologize for affiliating with the armed group described above and the apology accepted by the *sarki*" 2 "Publicly apologize" 3 "Did not apologize." For each profile, I randomly assign the values of each attribute such that the two returnees' profiles vary within and across binary comparisons. Table 3 contains the full list of all attribute values. The

attributes and values have about 140 unique returnee profiles that allow me to access the relative relevance of each attribute to communal acceptance.

This design has some advantages over other observational studies. First, the randomization of attributes in the study design allows us to identify the relative effect of each returnee's attribute on the probability of being preferred to be admitted into the community. In other words, the design allows us to disentangle the effects of correlated attributes like ethnicity and religion. It also allows us to identify the conditions under which some attributes are more or less important.

The design allows me to test the influence of four attributes of former members of a violent group seeking to reintegrate into its community. The literature on group identity indicates that individuals would be more likely to welcome into their fold those they perceived to have higher shared characteristics like race, ethnicity, and religion (Prentice, Miller, & Lightdale, 1994; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Marty & Appleby, 1997). Therefore, I will expect respondents to be more sympathetic to those with similar ethnicity and religion. But on the contrary, it could also be that respondents would hold those they share similar group traits with in higher standards, such that they would be more disappointed and express less sympathy towards them, resulting in less willingness to accept. So, it is essential to control for this influence in the decision-making of my respondents.

Figure 3a

Experimental Design

ATTRIBUTES	IDP #1	IDP #2
IDP was	Forced to be an informant for an armed extremist group	Volunteered to be a fighter for the civilian JTF
Religion	Different religion with you	Same religion as you
Ethnicity	Same ethnicity as you	Same ethnicity as you
Action Taken	Publicly apologized for his/her action and apology accepted by the *Sarki*	Did not apologize[4]

	IDP-1	IDP-2
If you are to choose between these two options, which of these displaced persons would you prefer to settle in your community?	⬭	⬭

On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating that the community should absolutely accept the displaced person and 7 indicating that the community should definitely not accept the displaced person, how would you rate **IDP #1** above?

1 Absolutely accept	2	3	4	5	6	7 Definitely not accept
⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

Using the same scale, how would you rate IDP #2

1 Absolutely accept	2	3	4	5	6	7 Definitely not accept
⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

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[4] There will be restrictions on the "values" combinations such that "Did not apologize" will only combine with "Not associated with neither BH, JTF, or NA".

As already described earlier, I expect the nature of recruitment (coerced vs volunteered) to influence respondent choices. While Boko Haram has been described as a violent group, a significant portion of the population in Borno had experienced violence from other groups as well. As the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian State unfolded, community members mobilized themselves into vigilante groups to support the military efforts in providing security to their communities (Agbiboa, 2018). These mobilized groups are locally known as *yan gora* (men with sticks), *yan banga* (vigilante), or *kungiyar maharba* (hunters). The general term for this security-providing supporting cast is the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). However, some community members reported that the violent and extrajudicial methods employed by the CJTF had resulted in the harm and killing of many innocent people (Center for Civilians in Conflict, 2018). At some point, some CJTF members had lost their credibility among its people, lost their homes, or fled for fear of Boko Haram. Those who fled under any of these circumstances may be seeking to return to the community at some point. In a similar vein, there are also reports of the military fighting Boko Haram in the region that have violated the lives and livelihood of many civilians. Therefore, armed conflicts had allowed violence to be meted out to civilians by Boko Haram, CJTF, and the Nigeria Army. The association of individuals with Boko Haram, the CJTF, or the Nigeria Army is typically by being an informant, a fighter, or a spouse. These associations are also either coercive or voluntary. Thus, I created 12 levels for this attribute. In the *Nature of recruitment* attribute, I captured these core associations to tease out how these associations affect respondent choice.

Also, the *Action of former member* attribute hinges on the notion that the action of a potential returnee is crucial to whether the former member is more likely to be accepted back or not. Individuals associated with any of the groups identified in the earlier paragraph may feel

ashamed for the action of the group and publicly seek forgiveness from the community, or not

feel that an apology is necessary. There may also be situations where the public apology is

accepted by the traditional authority. Based on this, I created three levels for this attribute.

Table 3

Attributes for a Potential Returnee Profiles in Conjoint Experiment

| Attributes	Values
IDP was	- Forced to be an informant for an Armed extremist group - Volunteered to be an informant for an Armed extremist group - Forced to be a spouse for a soldier of an Armed extremist group - Volunteered to be a spouse for a soldier of an Armed extremist group - Forced to be a fighter for an Armed extremist group - Volunteered to be a fighter an Armed extremist group - Forced to be an informant for government forces - Volunteered to be an informant for government forces - Forced to be an informant for the Civilian JTF - Volunteered to be an informant for the Civilian JTF - Volunteered to be a fighter for the Civilian JTF - Not associated with neither BH, JTF or NA
Religion	- Same religion as you - Different religion with you
Ethnicity	- Same ethnicity as you - Different ethnicity with you
Action of IDP	- Publicly apologize for affiliating with the armed group described above and the apology accepted by the *Sarki* - Publicly apologize - Did not apologize[5]

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[5] There will be restrictions on the "values" combinations such that "Did not apologize" will only combine with "Not associated with neither BH, JTF, or NA".

Analysis

Figure 3b presents the regression results where I estimated the average marginal component estimator (AMCE) of the likelihood of the community's acceptance of former members of an extremist group. The AMCE is the marginal effect of the attribute averaged over the joint distribution of the remaining attributes. In this study, I first evaluate the influence of a traditional authority on the community's acceptance of a former member of an extremist group. Based on my first set of hypotheses (H_{1a} & H_{1b}), my primary independent variable is a local authority's response to a plea of forgiveness by a former member of an extremist group. Contrary to expectations, my results indicate that a positive response by the *Sarki* or traditional authority reduces the likelihood of acceptance. This result is inconsistent with the commonly accepted norm that a traditional authority's benevolent gestures are cues that the community should take to come closer to reintegration. It is also distinct from the findings by Blair et al. (2021), who find that local religious leaders positively affect the choice of residents in post-conflict communities to accept former members of extremist organizations. One possible criticism of that study is that it is impossible to separate the effect of the preaching itself from the preacher. My study does not have that ambiguity as the methodological approach separates the offender's actions (i.e., when they do not seek forgiveness, when they sought forgiveness, and when a traditional authority forgave them).

Figure 3b

Effects of Returnee Attributes on Probability of Being Preferred for Community Acceptance
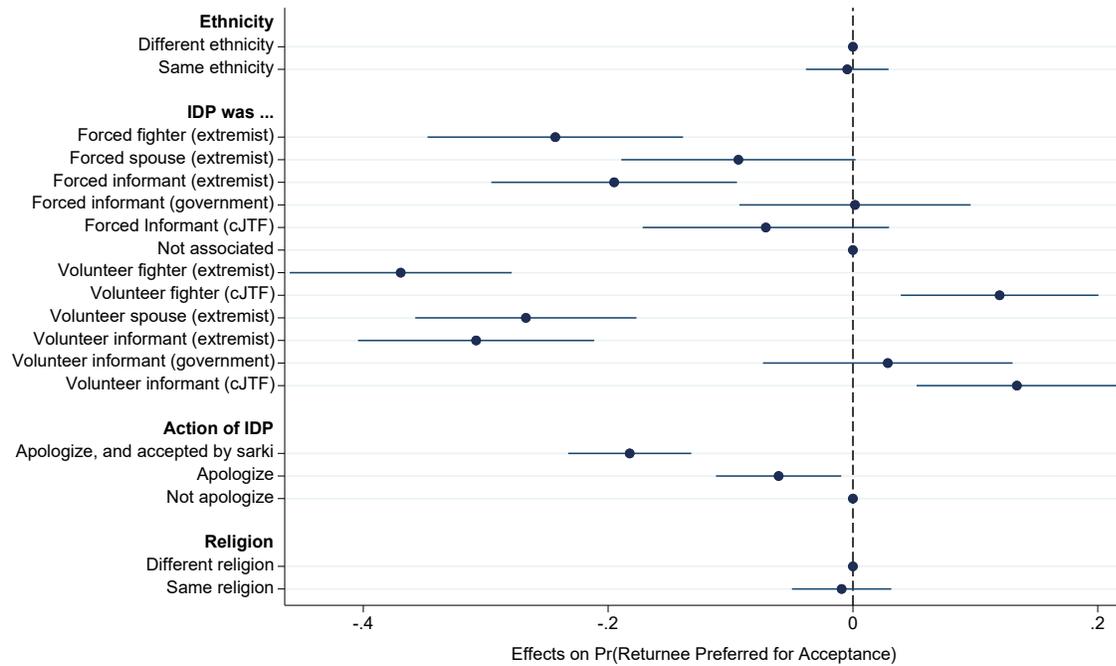
I also see that contrary to my expectations in H$_2$, those who asked to be forgiven were less likely to be accepted compared to those who did not seek forgiveness. As I articulated earlier, this may be because community members do not trust that former members of Boko Haram are sincere in their seeking for forgiveness. During my daily debriefing of the enumerators and their supervisors, some of the enumerators reported that some respondents think aloud as they consider their choices during the conjoint experiment. In thinking aloud, they appear to be suspicious of any type of request for forgiveness as well as being angry that the government's OPSC deradicalization program had chosen to treat former fighters much better than those who are the victims. In their paper, Owonikoko and Chan (2022) interviewed residents that refused to welcome former members into their communities. The residents expressed strong suspicion of the true intent of the former members, speculating that they may be

spies for the terrorist organization. Others contend that their return was not due to actual guilt but because of the economic hardship they suffered in the forest and that their return is to seek temporal relief. Still, if presented with the same opportunity to cause harm, the former Boko Haram members are more likely to repeat their acts.

As for my third hypothesis, where I expect that the condition of the individual's involvement with a violent group should impact the likelihood of acceptance. My results show that perceived voluntary and involuntary membership in violent organizations has distinct impacts depending on the types of duties performed. Those who were forced to be fighters for the extremist groups are more likely to be accepted into the community than those who volunteered to fight.[6] Those who are forced to be spouses for the soldiers of the violent group are more likely to be accepted compared to those who volunteered. But those who were forced to be informants are not statistically different from those who volunteered.

I see that just mere association with a violent group and how they are recruited (i.e., coerced or volunteered) alone does not explain the decisions of those in the community, but the role that the former member plays is crucial. While volunteers are less likely to be accepted than those coerced, volunteer fighters are the least likely to be accepted. This may be because from moral judgment theories, society attributes greater blame to acts done voluntarily than those done either unintentionally or under duress. Also, fighters are primarily responsible for most of the harms committed by Boko Haram, and so it is expected that they bear the largest share of the blame.

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[6] This position is more clearly seen in Appendix 8. Where I repeated my analysis three times, and in each case used a separate refence category of "forced to be a fighter for the extremist," "forced to be a spouse for the extremist", and "forced to be an informant for the extremist".

To better understand the substantive meaning of these results, Figure 3c illustrates the predicted probabilities of being preferred for acceptance into the community from my baseline model for returnees' profiles that correspond to the 1st, 25th, 75th, and 99th percentiles of estimated support. The first percentile is occupied by a returnee who is of the same ethnicity and religion as the respondent. The returnee also volunteered to be a fighter for the extremist group, publicly apologized, and the Sarki accepted the apology. Such a returnee would win support in 13 percent of the pairings. On the other extreme is a returnee who is of different ethnicity and religion as the respondent. The returnee also volunteered to be an informant for the CJTF, and did not apologize. Such a returnee would win support in 83 percent of the pairings. My findings show that community members' views of returnees vary dramatically depending on their attributes.

Figure 3c

Estimated Probability of Being Preferred for Community Accepatnce for Selected Returnee Profiles
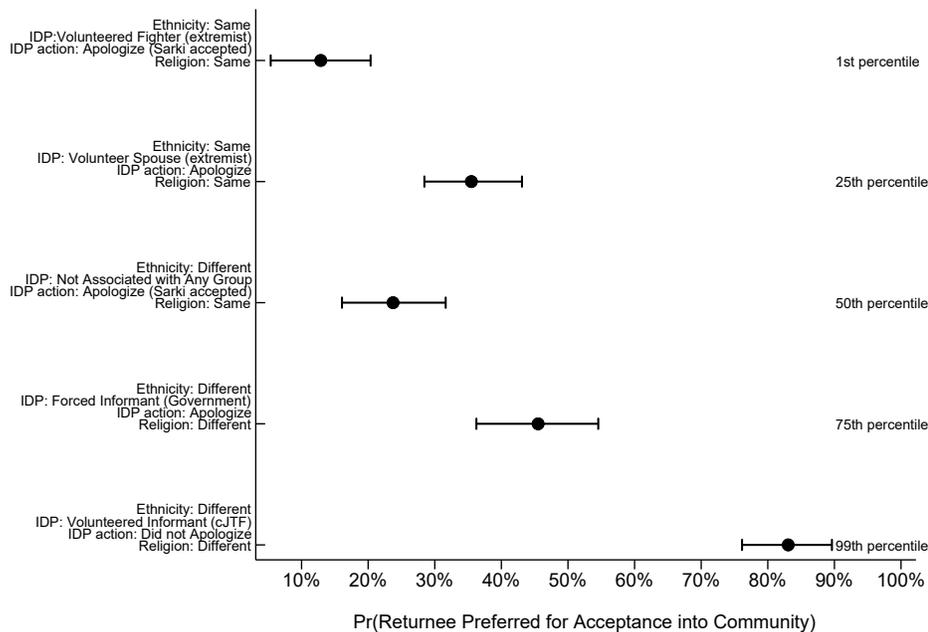
Overall, the combination of grievances against the former members of Boko Haram, the anger towards the government on their perceived government's preferential treatment of the offenders over them, the outright distrust of the intentions of the former members to return, and a palpable fear of living next to these people appears to overwhelm whatever effect traditional leaders may have over their decision regarding accepting former members of the group. Also, I suspect that the community's trust in their traditional authority has significantly diminished even though reintegration efforts have constantly assumed that the type of influence they used to have still existed.

This suspicion is consistent with the findings of some African studies scholars that local elites are often part of the patron-client networks (Ebiede, Langer, & Tosun, 2020; Ebiede, 2017), and this could influence the effect of their "blessings" on former combatants. For example, using elections as a case study, Baldwin (2016) shows that politicians are more likely to have higher votes in communities where the traditional authority, which has attracted developmental pork to the community, speaks in favor of the politician. Baldwin (2016) argues that local chiefs can gain influence over their communities if they are seen as bringing some developmental "pork" to their communities. Therefore, I will expect that in northeastern Nigeria where socioeconomic development is low and "pork" is scarce, the *Sarki* or traditional chiefs should have limited influence. Secondly, the somewhat cordial nature of the relationship between traditional leaders and civil authority may signal to the average citizen that these traditional leaders are using their position to gain personal benefits for themselves and not to seek the overall interests of the communities. For example, in the northern state of Zamfara in Nigeria, the state government donated over 250 latest models of Cadillac SUVs to traditional leaders in the state for maintaining peace (Salaudeen, 2022), and lavishly renovated their palaces. This is at

a time when the residents of the state are forced to pay taxes to bandits and other terrorists (Hassan-Wuyo, 2022). The presence of these types of relationships between traditional leaders and the government, as well as the absence of developmental "pork" from traditional leaders, could stir disrespect and resentment for the *Sarki* and other traditional leaders. Many Sarkis are viewed as both ineffective in securing pork from the federal and state government, and are focused on their power and perks rather than policies that improve the welfare of the community.

This means that *Sarki* endorsement of a policy—such as accepting a displaced person— may be unlikely to lead to greater citizen willingness to accept the displaced person. The findings suggest that the general notion that traditional authority is critical for post-conflict communal reintegration needs to be reevaluated. It is crucial to investigate under what conditions traditional authorities would be a positive force for reintegration and under what condition their actions undermine it.

Figure 3d

Preferrence of Accepting Potential Returnee (by Gender)
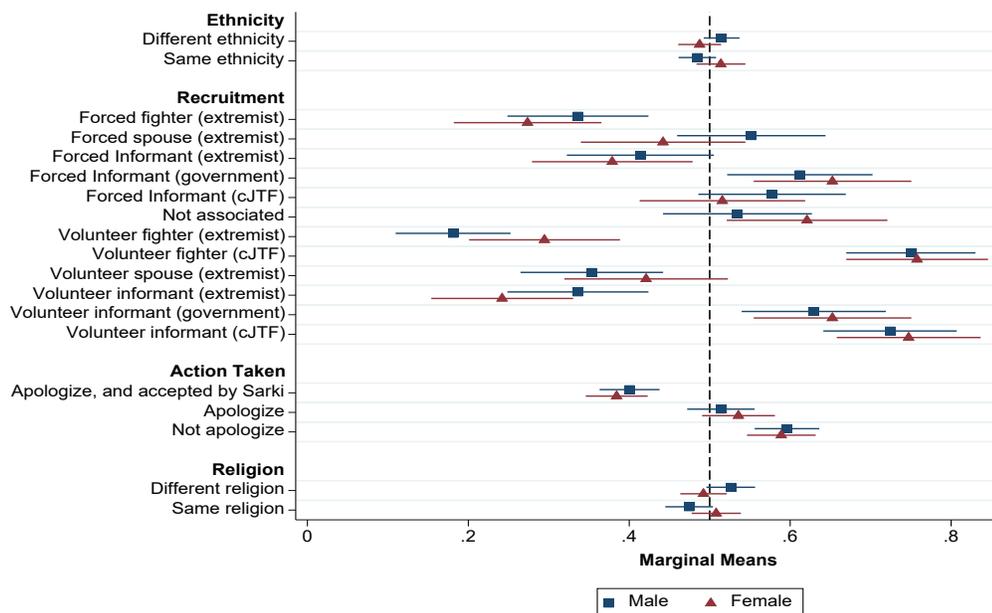
Figure 3e

Preference of Accepting Potential Returnee (by PTS Status)
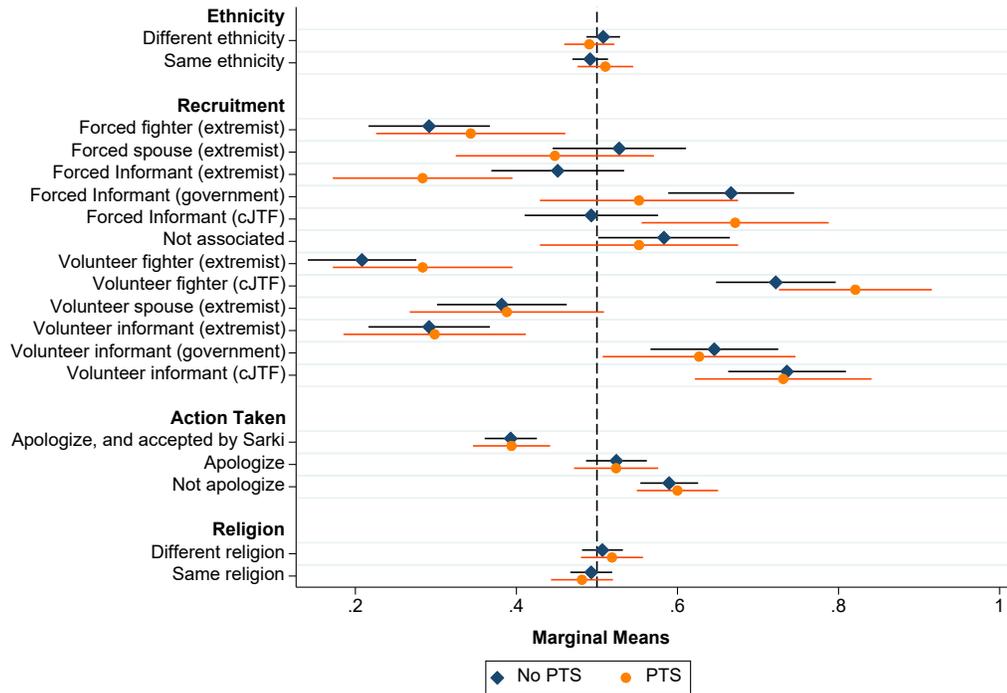
While it was not part of my hypotheses, I observed that those who were forced to be spouses of a violent group were not significantly different from those who are not associated with any group. That was a surprise because the gender-based violence related to the act should endear greater sympathy for the girls and women. A good example is the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in 2014 that almost single-handedly draw the world's attention to the Boko Haram crisis. The then leader of the group later threatened to sell the girls as slaves if the government fail to grant their wishes. There is a general global denouncement of forced marriages, and especially in situations like these, the popular sentiment is one of (pity) and seeing the spouses as victims that must be supported at all cost. Yet, my study indicates that the expected higher

likelihood of acceptance was not there. Is this outcome driven by a subgroup in my sample? To answer this question, I examined respondents' decisions based on their demographic attributes.

To make subgroup comparisons, I estimated the marginal means of the likelihood of the community's acceptance of former members of an extremist group. The results are shown in Figure 3d-e. From the results, we see that there is no meaningful difference in the demographics of my respondents.

Conclusion

Many studies in Africa have advocated for indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms (Alemie & Mandefro, 2018; Bello & Olutola, 2016; Mengesha, Yesuf, & Gebre, 2015). Traditional leaders like local chiefs are often touted as principal actors for effective post-conflict peacebuilding and communal reintegration (Quinn 2014). For example, the *Gachacha* model of peace and reconciliation in Rwanda, and the *mato oput* in Uganda are revered transitional justice mechanism presided over by local chiefs (Huyse & Salter 2008; Quinn 2014) based on the belief that these traditional leaders local elite that members take a cue from them to forge a path for the future. These studies have assumed that the decisions reached during reconciliation are those that both the aggrieved and the offender desire. While it may appear that community members may outwardly accept a decision, that decision may not be what the individual desires.

With respect to the Boko Haram situation in Nigeria, a study has examined the role of local religious leaders. But religious leadership is not the only form of local leadership, it is important to see how well other forms of local leadership like the local chiefs (i.e. *Sarki*) will fare. This study shows that traditional leaders' acceptance of the olive branch from a former member of a violent group may be counter-productive in terms of the peace process. Individuals are less likely to accept a former member of a violent group when a traditional leader signals that

he is willing to forgive. These results challenge the generally held belief that these traditional authorities always positively influence post-conflict reintegration. While traditions and customs may still have an important role in the lives of the average African, this study draws our attention to evaluate which actor(s) will have the moral clout to persuade locals to welcome those willing to abandon their violent ways. The absence of these studies may have explained why there have been mixed results in some of these alternative dispute resolution programs (Sosnov 2007). Future studies could examine what attributes in traditional leaders can improve the likelihood of their positive influence.

While membership of violent groups plays different roles and duties, it is commonly assumed that acceptance or rejection is primarily determined by one's membership alone. In this study, I show that other nuances are equally important. Those who are coerced are more likely to be accepted back than those who voluntarily join these groups. This is important for how the narratives of former members of violent groups are crafted. Individuals and groups working to reintegrate former members could be vocal in describing the forms of membership of those who are coerced, and be silent in describing the form of membership of those who volunteer. This approach may improve the chances of a subset of former members of violent groups. Similarly, distinguishing violent from non-violent members, a subset of these people (i.e., non-violent) may have a better chance of reintegration.

CONCLUSION

Understanding what happens after displacement is increasingly becoming an explicable interest of academics and policymakers. The knowledge academics develop helps inform policymakers' decisions to address the complex challenges associated with large-scale movement of people and societal stability. Communities transitioning from conflict to post-conflict era are typically fraught with many difficulties, including coping with reduced social and communal trust. The return of displaced persons to their area of origin is an indication of growing stability and communal resilience during the post-conflict period. While some governments and institutions may be incentivized to force displaced persons to return, the resilience and stability of a community are greatly at risk when that happens. On the contrary, communities and societies that have experienced conflicts are more likely to advance towards peace and enjoy sustainable reintegration when those displaced from such communities return voluntarily (UNHCR, 2008). Current knowledge advocates a number of factors that are responsible for voluntary return on the assumption that all potential returnees have the right information to make rational decisions about their return. However, the uncertainty during conflicts and immediately after makes it harder for such assumptions to hold. Knowledge of how the asymmetrical nature of information during and in post-conflict situations may impact displaced persons' decision to return is still scantly known. In this study, I attempt to shed more light on this topic.

While studies suggest that violence is an important indicator of displacement and return in conflict-prone communities, there are violent communities that have witnessed differing responses to violence. Some members of the community leave while others stay (Engel & Ibáñez 2007). The choice to leave or stay is predicated on one's expectations of the current and future conditions of the place; and information shapes expectations (Geers & Rose, 2011; Rose et al.,

2014). The current literature on post-conflict societies has not adequately addressed how information shapes these expectations, and how the characteristics of different types of information may influence the fragility or resilience of these transitional communities. This study aims to bridge that knowledge gap.

In this study, I have attempted to engage in this scholarly debate by asking questions about the role of information and violence-induced trauma in the decision-making of those forcefully displaced. Particularly, my work advances other important works in the voluntary return of forcefully displaced persons (e.g., Alrababa'h et al., 2018; Ghosn, Chu, Braithwaite et al., 2021). Drawing from multiple disciplinary traditions in the social sciences, I develop and test a theory about how the provision of information in areas of origin influences voluntary return and the reception of returnees by local communities, and test this with multiple survey experiments in Borno state Nigeria which have witnessed a significant number of IDPs because of the ongoing Boko Haram conflict (UNHCR, 2022). I find that trustworthiness as a characteristic is crucial in persuading displaced persons to return. I also find that the effect of trustworthiness diminishes with increasing level of violence-induced posttraumatic stress.

Globally, governments and institutions are investing significant resources in tackling the challenges of forced displacement. Providing information is a lot less expensive/difficult than some other things that governments and NGOs could do. By developing and testing a theory of the conditions under which information influences return, this study could provide guidance and inform policymakers about which actors can most effectively influence displaced persons to make appropriate decisions about return. The study also opens new pathways for understanding displaced persons' return decision-making by exploring the effects of the internal dynamics of war-related trauma in return decision making. While prior works have focused on the external

factors responsible for return, this research is the first to have a systematic examination of the interactions of the external and internal factors by showing how trauma affects individuals' ability to differentiate between trusted and less trusted information sources.

The study also makes an important contribution to the broader research agenda of understanding post-conflict peacebuilding initiatives in Africa by exploring the role of traditional authorities in the return and reintegration of non-civilian (i.e., former members or associates of violent groups) into the communities. Against the backdrop of the notion that a social control system that is best suitable for Africans should not be the import of the colonialists, but rather, it should be one that develops from the peoples' customs and traditional laws (Okafor, 2007). Traditional African systems place a lot of influence on local/traditional authorities to maintain harmony in the community, to reconcile warring factions, and restore peace during crises. It is these expectations that have made governments and international institutions encourage traditional authorities to play prominent roles to quell tensions and restore peace after many unrests (Ibrahim, 2010).

In this study, I examined if the *Sarki*, a traditional authority in northeastern Nigeria, could help restore relationships between former associates of violent groups and their communities, by improving the chances of members of the community accepting these former associates. The findings in my study challenges some conventional wisdom and examine the nuanced ways local authorities may be pro(de)moting post-conflict reintegration efforts. I find that forgiveness of former associates of violent groups by the *Sarki* (a restorative justice mechanism) reduces the likelihood of former associates of the violent groups reintegrating back into their communities. I theorize that the *Sarki* is having a negative effect on reintegration because of the peoples' dissatisfaction with how the government has handled the welfare of the community, and the

traditional leader is not seen to be doing enough to truly fight for them. This may suggest that any endorsement of reconciliation by the *Sarki* will be severely resisted.

Despite these important contributions the study has some limitations. First, I measure respondents' intentions to return, remain, or accept former combatants into their communities, and not the actual behavior. That is, I recognize for example that the intention to voluntarily return is not the same as actual return itself, and therefore, should not be construed as such even though, studies have shown the strong correlation between migration intention and migration flow (Tjaden, Auer, & Laczko, 2018). While one of the goals of this study is to examine the characteristics of the information source in influencing voluntary/sustainable return decisions, the question remains if the intentions stated in the study can be attributable to evidence of actual behavior. Given the brevity of treatments in the study and the magnitude of the observed effects on attitudes, or intended behavior, I believe that there are good grounds for expecting similar outcomes in "the real world."

From a more general perspective, this study also had to contend with a challenge associated with doing research in fragile and conflict settings – (in)security. Working with multiple partners including local authorities and security agencies, I restricted my fieldwork research to only locations deemed safe by security agencies and the local research organization I worked with. This restriction affects my ability to generalize my findings beyond the two local government areas where the study was conducted. Although, the demographic characteristics of respondents in my study are similar to displaced persons in the other states of the northeastern region of Nigeria (e.g., Abiama et al., 2021), and similar to published studies of displaced populations in other parts of Nigeria (e.g., Sheik et al., 2014; Chukwuorji et al., 2017), it is

important to replicate similar studies across other settings to firmly establish the generalizability of the theories developed in this work.

Furthermore, the safety and other social desirability concerns of respondents could influence the responses of our respondents. Much of what we know about human behavior comes from self-reported measures; and studies show that people are very likely to be biased when they report their experiences (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002; Devaux & Sassi, 2015). The brutal campaign of Boko Haram terrorist group and other groups implicated in the conflict could instill a certain degree of fear in the minds of our respondents that could affect their responses that could lead to systematic bias, especially social desirability bias. To limit the influence of this challenge, I use third-person indirect questioning in my treatments. and choose to use more generalized terms of "extremist groups" rather than specific terms of Boko Haram, since the name Boko Haram can evoke fear in the minds of some people. Indirect questioning has been shown to reduce social desirability bias and allow respondents to report what is more reflective of their true position on issues (Fisher, 1993; Lawson et al., 2012: Winters & Weitz-Shapiro, 2013; Esaiasson & Muñoz, 2014).

Apart from these measures, we decided not to compensate our subjects for their time financially. This is against observations by the survey firm I engaged in the study. They observed possible financially-induced bias in the responses from subjects that are financially compensated during previous works done by other researchers in the field sites. The argument is that if money is involved, it will be hard to determine if the subjects are saying what they are saying because they feel they have to say the "right" thing they might assume we might be looking for evidence against (or in support of) the government or local authorities. In addition, qualitative data during focus group interviews indicates that residents are really angry with Boko Haram and are not

scared of calling out their names. Though, they agree that the risk threshold varies across individuals, and some may still be uncomfortable talking openly about them. Also, many residents were very willing to talk about their struggles, as they say, that in their current condition, they have little or nothing else to lose. For example, they openly apportion blame to the camp authorities for alleged corruption, the government not doing enough to alleviate their pains, their desire to see Boko Haram members punished, and hoped that studies such as mine would bring to light their plight. In essence, there is no indication that the opinions expressed are systematically biased because of social desirability, but the rigor of the study requires that the steps identified in the methodological design described above should reduce the effects of social desirability bias if it existed. Nevertheless, we may assume that there may be a potential for systematic error due to social desirability bias.

Furthermore, the design of this study and the findings open new lines of inquiry. For example, will the effects of information sources vary by the levels or degree of information networks that the respondents have? Will people with more casual acquaintances be influenced differently by information sources compared with those with closer familial bonds? Taking protest acts as an example, Larson (2021) theorized that:

> *"... a person's individual threshold for protesting is met if she believes that enough others are planning to protest. Since different people can reasonably have different thresholds, how individuals are distributed throughout a given network also matters. If high-threshold (highly hesitant) people are surrounded by only other high-threshold people, all will likely stay home. Whether low-threshold people motivate high-threshold people depends on whether the high-threshold people are linked to them."*

Noting that in fragile settings, individuals' motivation for action (whether to resist (protest) or migrate) is moderated by their social networks (Claridge, 2018), it will be exciting to see if high-threshold trusted information sources will have differing effects to low-threshold trusted sources.

We also need to note the challenges that a field research during Covid-19 pandemic portends. The pandemic made it impossible for me to travel to Nigeria and be on ground with the team, and therefore, I had to assemble and supervise the research team and every phase of the fieldwork remotely. To ensure a high-quality fieldwork, I had to set up the task in a way that as each unit seeks to protect their interests, the overall interest of the fieldwork is protected. I provided a more detailed explanation of this in the methods chapter.

Lastly, apart from the academic and policy-relevant questions examined in this study, this research has also generated an important new dataset on voluntary return intentions of displaced persons from a geographic region that has a substantial number of displaced persons, yet lacks quality empirical data about their intentions to voluntary return. This dataset allows for a reexamination of extant findings with more relevant data, as well as the exploration of new, policy-relevant questions, such as the relationship between voluntary return and return sustainability. The need for this type of dataset is even more pertinent today in the wake of the growing frequency of the farmer-herder violent conflicts exacerbated by climate change, which is causing many rural communities in Africa and Asia to become increasingly fragile (Rupert, 2019). Beyond Africa, the growing migration challenges in Europe because of the Ukrainian war makes some of the findings in this study crucial. With a lot of dis(mis)information about local events in Ukraine, people who are displaced will be desperate for information about their area of origin. It will be important to see how the psychological trauma from the war affects displaced individuals' ability to different trusted from untrusted sources, as they make their decision about remaining, returning, or migrating elsewhere.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Survey Location

Survey Instrument Layout and Plan

PART 1

Part 1 (To be administered to ALL respondents)

QP1_15. Which of these best describe the respondent's current place of residence? [To be filled by enumerator]

◯ IDP camp

◯ Host community

Part 1 (To be administered to ALL respondents)

QP1_17. *Have you experienced any of the following by __Armed extremist group__, __civilian JTF__ or the __Nigerian army__?*

	I was physically injured	I was forcibly displaced from my home	Close family member physically injured	Close family member killed	Home destroyed or severely damaged
By Armed extremist group	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
By Civilian JTF	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
By Nigeria Army	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Respondents' Demographic data
Please answer a few questions about yourself.

X→ X→

QP1_1 What is your gender?

◯ Male

◯ Female

X→ X→

QP1_2 What is your age (in years)?

○ 18 - 24

○ 25 - 34

○ 35 - 44

○ 45 - 54

○ 55 - 64

○ 65 - 74

○ 75 - 84

○ 85 or older

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X→ X→

QP1_3. What is your ethnicity?

○ Hausa

○ Fulani

○ Kanuri

○ Babur

○ Shuwa-Arab

○ Other

QP1_4. What is your religion?

○ Muslim Sunni

○ Muslim Shiites

○ Muslim Izala

○ Muslim Ansarudeen

○ Christian

○ Traditionalist

○ Other

QP1_4b. How important is your religion to you?

○ Very important

○ Somewhat important

○ Not very important

○ Not at all important

QP1_12. What is your highest level of education you have completed?

○ No formal education

○ Informal schooling only (including Koranic schooling)

○ Some primary education

○ Primary school completed

○ Some intermediate school or some secondary school (high school)

○ Secondary school/ high school completed

○ Post-secondary qualifications, other than university e.g. polytechnic or college diploma

○ Some university

○ University completed

○ Post-Graduate education

○ Don't know

QP1_13. Imagine Nigerian society as arranged on a scale like the one shown below, where the worst off socially and economically are on the left (0) and the best off are on the right (10).
Please move the slider to select the place where you feel you stood **before** the conflict with Boko Haram.

	Worst off					Best off					
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

My place before the conflict with Boko Haram: ()
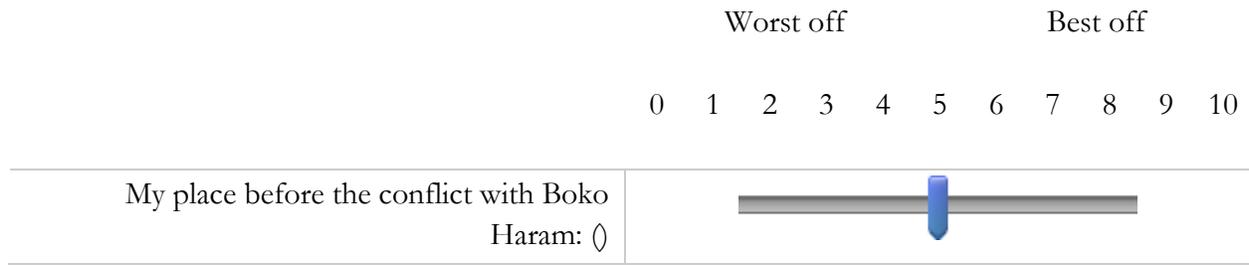
QP1_14. Imagine Nigerian society as arranged on a scale like the one shown below, where the worst off socially and economically are on the left (0) and the best off are on the right (10).
Please move the slider to select the place where you feel you stand now.

	Worst off					Best off					
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

My place now: ()
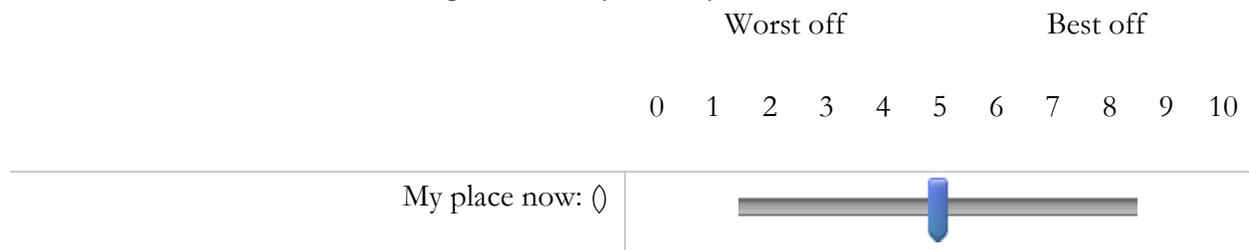
QP2_1. For each of the statements below, please indicate the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result of the Boko Haram conflict.

	Not at all Babu	To a very small degree	To a small degree	To a moderate degree	To a great degree	To a very great degree
I changed my priorities about what is important in life.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am able to do better things with my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have a greater sense of closeness with others.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have established a new path for my life.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I know better that I can handle difficulties.	○	○	○	○	○	○

I have a stronger religious faith.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.	○	○	○	○	○	○
I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.	○	○	○	○	○	○

QP2_2. Below is a list of problems and complaints that people sometimes have in response to stressful life experiences. Please indicate how much you have been bothered by each problem in the last month.

	Not at all	A little bit	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely
Repeated, disturbing memories, thoughts, or images of a stressful experience from the past?	○	○	○	○	○
Feeling very upset when something reminded you of a stressful experience from the past?	○	○	○	○	○
Avoid activities or situations because they remind you of a stressful experience from the past?	○	○	○	○	○
Feeling distant or cut off from other people?	○	○	○	○	○
Feeling irritable or having angry outbursts?	○	○	○	○	○
Having difficulty concentrating?	○	○	○	○	○

QP1_5. In the context of the Boko Haram conflict, many people have been displaced (i.e. forced to flee their homes). Which of these is applicable to you?

      a. Never displaced

      b. Displaced

 (If respondent's answer above is "b" i.e. displaced)

QP1_5a. With regards to your displacement characteristics, which of these best describe your

current status

      a. Still displaced

      b. No more displaced (i.e. forced to flee but have returned back to my community or

          settled in my new community)

 (If respondent's answer above is "a" i.e. still displaced)

QP1_5b. How long have you been displaced?

      a. Less than one month

      b. Less than six months

      c. Less than one year

      d. More than one year

QP1_8. In the last 10 years, how many times have you been displaced because of armed conflict?

      a. Never

      b. 1 time

      c. 2 times

  d. 3 times

  e. More than 3 times

QP1_9. What **year** did you first displace from your area of origin because of conflict?

○ 2009 or earlier

○ 2010

○ 2011

○ 2012

○ 2013

○ 2014

○ 2015

○ 2016

○ 2017

○ 2018

○ 2019

○ Never displaced

X→ X→

QP1_10. What **month** did you displace from your area of origin?

○ January

○ February

○ March

○ April

○ May

○ June

○ July

○ August

○ September

○ October

○ November

○ December

○ Never displaced

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QP1_11. What is the name of the district from which you displaced?

_____

PART 2

Topic 1 (IDPs' return intentions)

[To be administered to IDPs only or those that answered "b" to QP1_5]

[There are four treatments (t), and respondents will be randomly assigned to one of them]

Framing Experiment 1

Treatments:

Knowledgeable/Trustworthy (t1). **Consider the following hypothetical NGO working with IDPs**

Action Against Violence (AAV) is a registered NGO with an office in Maiduguri. The NGO provides financial services to displaced persons in the State. For many years, their staff has lived in and worked with communities experiencing violence in Borno state, and they have good information about the conditions throughout the state.

When talking about this organization, some formerly displaced persons have said that the NGO encourages displaced persons to return home only when they believe that the condition at home is suitable for people to return.

Knowledgeable/Untrustworthy (t2). **Consider the following hypothetical NGO working with IDPs**

Action Against Violence (AAV) is a registered NGO with an office in Maiduguri. The NGO provides financial services to displaced persons in the State. For many years, their staff has lived in and worked with communities experiencing violence in Borno state, and they have good information about the conditions throughout the state.

When talking about this organization, some formerly displaced persons have said that the NGO is always short of funds, and for this reason encourages displaced persons to return home even when they believe that the condition might not be suitable for people to return.

Unknowledgeable/Trustworthy (t3). **Consider the following hypothetical NGO working with IDPs**

Action Against Violence (AAV) is a registered NGO with an office in Lagos. The NGO provides financial services to displaced persons in the State. They recently started operations in Borno and their staff occasionally visit displaced communities in Maiduguri from Lagos.

When talking about this organization, some formerly displaced persons have said that the NGO encourages displaced persons to return home only when they <u>believe</u> that the condition at home is suitable for people to return.

Unknowledgeable/Untrustworthy (t4). **Consider the following hypothetical NGO working with IDPs**

Action Against Violence (AAV) is a registered NGO with an office in Lagos. The NGO provides financial services to displaced persons in the State. They recently started operations in Borno and their staff occasionally visit communities in Maiduguri from Lagos.

When talking about this organization, some formerly displaced persons have said that the NGO is always short of funds, and for this reason encourages displaced persons to return home even when they believe that the conditions might not be suitable for people to return.

[Everyone in this section will be asked the DV question, irrespective of which treatment they got]
DV question:

How likely do you think that someone like you may consider returning to your place of origin based on the information from this NGO staff?
1. Very unlikely
2. Unlikely

3. Neutral
4. Likely
5. Very likely

Topic 2 (community's willingness to accept IDPs)

[Each respondent will be given 5 treatments]

Please consider the description of these potential Internally Displaced Persons seeking to return to your community. Then, please indicate which of the two IDPs you would personally prefer to see being allowed to settle in your community.

Conjoint 2a Survey Experiment Attributes and Values

Attributes	Values
IDP was	Forced to be an **informant** for an Armed extremist group Volunteered to be an **informant** for an Armed extremist group Forced to be a **spouse** for a soldier of an Armed extremist group Volunteered to be a **spouse** for a soldier of an Armed extremist group Forced to be a **fighter** for an Armed extremist group Volunteered to be a **fighter** an Armed extremist group Forced to be an **informant** for government forces Volunteered to be an **informant** for government forces Forced to be an **informant** for the Civilian JTF Volunteered to be an **informant** for the Civilian JTF Volunteered to be a **fighter** for the Civilian JTF Not associated with neither BH, JTF or NA
Religion	Same religion as you Different religion with you
Ethnicity	Same ethnicity as you Different ethnicity with you
Action of IDP	Publicly apologize for affiliating with the armed group described above and the apology accepted by the *Sarki* Publicly apologize

Did not apologize[7]

QT2_5. If you are to choose between these two options, which of these displaced persons would you prefer to have settled in your community?

- o IDP #1
- o IDP #2

QT2_5i

On a scale from 1-7, with 1 indicating that the community should absolutely accept the displaced person and 7 indicating that the community should definitely not accept the displaced person, how would you rate IDP #1 above?

Absolutely accept						Definitely not accept
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

QT2_5ii

Using the same scale, how would you rate IDP #2?

Absolutely accept						Definitely not accept
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Topic 3 (sustainable returns)
 [To be administered to people in host communities only or those that are returnees. i.e. answered "b" to QP1_5a]
[There are four treatments (T), and respondents will be randomly assigned to one of them]

T1. **Consider the following hypothetical scenario**
Global Relief is an NGO with an office in Maiduguri and has been working with people in communities like yours for many years. People in these communities, though, say that the group always provide accurate information.
Imagine that the staff of this NGO tell people in your community that in 6 months' time, the security and general condition of your community will get much better.

---

[7] There will be restrictions on the "values" combinations such that "Did not apologize" will only combine with "Not associated with neither BH, JTF, or NA".

T2. **Consider the following hypothetical scenario**

Global Relief is an NGO with an office in Maiduguri and has been working with people in communities like yours for many years. People in these communities, though, say that the group does not always provide accurate information.

Imagine that the staff of this NGO tell people in your community that in 6 months' time, the security and general condition of your community will get much better.

T3. **Consider the following hypothetical scenario**

Global Relief is an NGO with an office in Maiduguri and has been working with people in communities like yours for many years. People in these communities, though, say that the group always provide accurate information.

Imagine that the staff of this NGO tell people in your community that in 6 months' time, the security and general condition of your community will get worse.

T4. **Consider the following hypothetical scenario**

Global Relief is an NGO with an office in Maiduguri and has been working with people in communities like yours for many years. People in these communities, though, say that the group does not always provide accurate information.

Imagine that the staff of this NGO tell people in your community that in 6 months' time, the security and general condition of your community will get worse.

[Everyone in this section will be asked the DV question, irrespective of which treatment they got]

DV question:

How likely do you think that someone like you may consider leaving your new community to another place based on the information from this NGO staff?

1. Very unlikely
2. Unlikely
3. Neutral
4. Likely
5. Very likely

Concluding remark:

This study is now concluded. Thank you very much for taking part in it. Your participation will help us gain a deeper understanding of how internally displaced persons and members of communities that host displaced people cope with their experiences during displacement.

Appendix 3: Descriptive Statistics

Appendix 3a: Descriptive Statistics (Voluntary Return)

	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Return Intentions	822	3.43	1.59	1	5
Posttraumatic Stress	822	18.33	6.22	6	30
Exposure to Violence	822	3.61	1.03	1	5
Age	822	3.19	1.32	1	7
Gender	822	1.49	.50	1	2
Education	822	2.90	1.65	1	10
SES Change	822	-2.22	4.72	-10	8

Appendix 3b: Descriptive Statistics (Sustainable Return)

	Observation	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Sustainable Return Intentions	228	3.24	1.46	1	5
Posttraumatic Stress	228	13.95	6.01	6	30
Exposure to Violence	228	4.50	1.47	3	10
Age	228	3.10	1.17	1	6
Gender	228	1.45	.49	1	2
Education	228	5.10	2.53	1	10
SES Change	228	1.72	.91	1	3

Appendix 4: Descriptive Statistics for Treatment Groups

Appendix 4a: Descriptive Statistics for Treatment Groups (Voluntary Return)

More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy

	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Return Intentions	215	3.91	1.35	1	5
PTS	215	18.63	6.33	6	30
Exposure to Violence	215	3.65	.99	1	5
Age	215	3.10	1.26	1	7
Gender	215	1.49	.50	1	2
Education	215	2.71	1.56	1	8
SES Change	215	-2.16	4.70	-10	8

More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy

	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Return Intentions	211	3.00	1.69	1	5
PTS	211	18.11	6.27	6	30
Exposure to Violence	211	3.57	1.06	1	5
Age	211	3.34	1.40	1	7
Gender	211	1.47	.50	1	2
Education	211	2.97	1.75	1	10
SES Change	211	-2.26	4.61	-10	7

Less Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy

	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Return Intentions	195	3.84	1.41	1	5
PTS	195	18.22	6.37	6	30
Exposure to Violence	195	3.54	1.07	1	5
Age	195	3.16	1.36	1	7
Gender	195	1.50	.50	1	2
Education	195	2.91	1.63	1	8
SES Change	195	-2.18	4.85	-9	8

Less Knowledgeable & Less Untrustworthy

	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Return Intentions	201	2.96	1.65	1	5
PTS	201	18.36	5.94	7	30
Exposure to Violence	201	3.69	.99	1	5
Age	201	3.18	1.27	1	7
Gender	201	1.48	.50	1	2
Education	201	3	1.66	1	7

SES Change	201	-2.27	4.74	-9	8

Appendix 4b: Descriptive Statistics for Treatment Groups (Sustainable Return)

	Observation	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Less Trustworthy					
Sustainable Return Intention	108	3.7	1.25	1	5
Posttraumatic Stress	108	13.64	5.55	6	30
Exposure to Violence	108	4.34	1.25	3	9
Age	108	3.09	1.26	1	6
Gender	108	1.44	.50	1	2
Education	108	4.98	2.45	1	9
SES Change	108	1.81	.93	1	3
More Trustworthy					
Sustainable Return Intention	120	2.82	1.5	1	5
Posttraumatic Stress	120	14.22	6.4	6	30
Exposure to Violence	120	4.64	1.63	3	10
Age	120	3.1	1.09	1	6
Gender	120	1.46	.50	1	2
Education	120	5.17	2.6	1	10
SES Change	120	1.63	.89	1	3

Appendix 5: Multinomial Logistic Regression of Treatment Condition Assignment

Appendix 5a: Multinomial Logistic Regression of Treatment Condition Assignment (Voluntary Return)

	More Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy	More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy	Less Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy
PTS	0.01	-0.00	0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Exposure to Violence	-0.02	-0.10	-0.13
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Age	-0.07	0.09	-0.02
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Gender	-0.04	0.01	0.07
	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.21)
Education	-0.12*	0.00	-0.02
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
SES Change	0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	0.62	0.15	0.46
	(0.64)	(0.64)	(0.65)
Observations	822	822	822

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Less knowledgeable and less trustworthy is the base category.

Appendix 5b: Multinomial Logistic Regression of Treatment Condition Assignment (Sustainable Return)

	Less Trustworthy
PTS	-.009
	(.026)
Exposure to Violence	-.124
	(.102)
Age	-.031
	(.12)
Female	-.064
	(.279)
Education	-.04
	(.058)

SES Change	.015
	(.031)
Constant	1.006
	(.896)
Observations	228

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Less knowledgeable and less trustworthy is the base category. *Standard errors are in parentheses* *** *p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1*

Appendix 6: OLS Regressions

Appendix 6a: OLS Regression of Information, Posttraumatic Stress, and Voluntary Return Intentions

	2	3	4	5
More Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy	0.95**	0.94**	0.96**	2.57**
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.47)
More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.39
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.51)
Less Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy	0.88**	0.88**	0.91**	1.91**
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.49)
PTS		0.02*	0.01	0.05**
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)
More Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy*PTS				-0.09**
				(0.02)
More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy* PTS				-0.02
				(0.03)
Less Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy* PTS				-0.05*
				(0.03)
Exposure to Violence			0.18**	0.18**
			(0.05)	(0.05)
Age			-0.02	-0.03
			(0.04)	(0.04)
Gender			0.00	-0.01
			(0.11)	(0.11)
Education			0.08*	0.08*
			(0.03)	(0.03)
SES Change			0.07**	0.07**
			(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	2.96**	2.62**	2.04**	1.37**
	(0.12)	(0.20)	(0.35)	(0.46)
Observations	822	822	822	822
R-squared	0.08	0.08	0.14	0.16

*Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The method of estimation is ordinary least squares. Excluded category for treatment is the Less Knowledgeable and Less Trustworthy condition. ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05*

Appendix 6b: OLS Regression of Information, Posttraumatic Stress and Sustainable Return Intentions

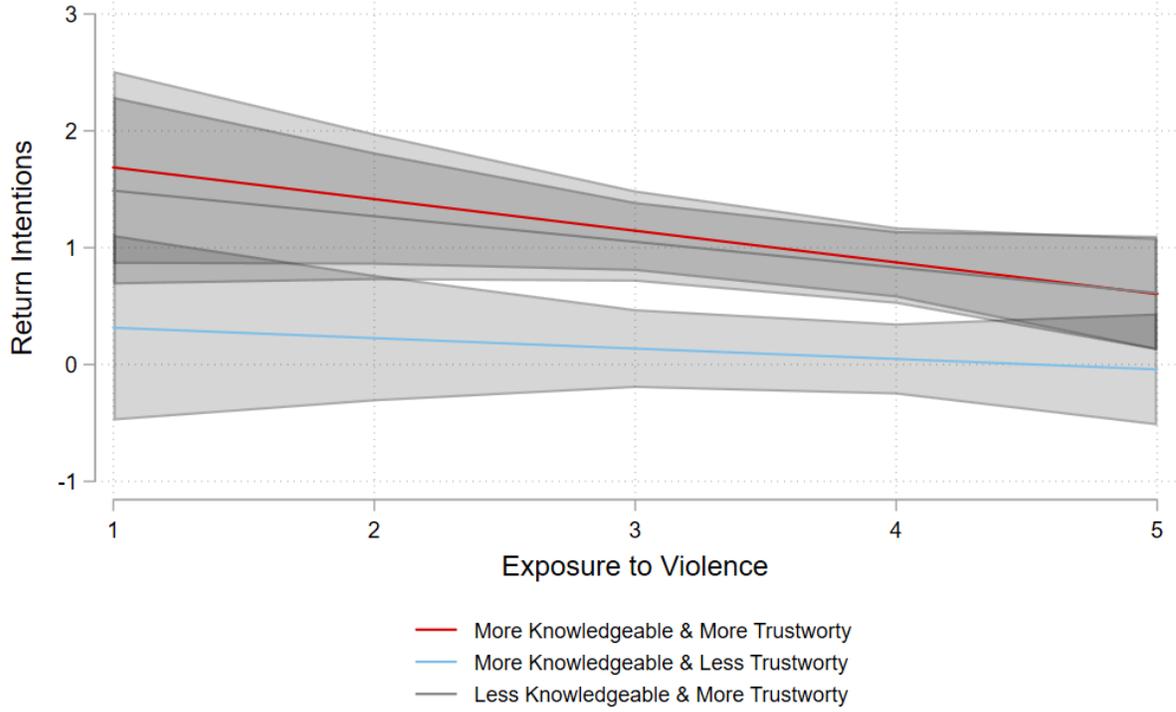|	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
More Trustworthy	-0.89***	-0.87***	-0.83***	-1.67***
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.46)
PTS		-0.03**	-0.04**	-0.07***
		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
More Trustworthy*PTS				0.06**
				(0.03)
Exposure to Violence			0.05	0.05
			(0.07)	(0.07)
Age			0.05	0.06
			(0.08)	(0.08)
Female			-0.17	-0.17
			(0.19)	(0.19)
Education			-0.03	-0.03
			(0.04)	(0.04)
SES Change			0.23**	0.23**
			(0.10)	(0.10)
Constant	3.70***	4.14***	3.77***	4.24***
	(0.13)	(0.25)	(0.67)	(0.71)
Observations	228	228	228	228
R-squared	0.09	0.11	0.14	0.16

Note: Robust standard errors are in parentheses. The method of estimation is ordinary least squares.
*Excluded category for treatment is the Less Trustworthy condition *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$*

Appendix 7: Exposure to Violence (Voluntary Return)

	9
More Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy	1.63**
	(0.54)
More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy	0.72
	(0.51)
Less Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy	1.73**
	(0.54)
Exposure to Violence	0.07
	(0.09)
More Knowledgeable & More Trustworthy*PTS	-0.13
	(0.10)
More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy*PTS	-0.12
	(0.09)
Less Knowledgeable & Less Trustworthy*PTS	-0.16
	(0.10)
Age	-0.02
	(0.04)
Gender	0.01
	(0.11)
Education	0.08*
	(0.03)
SES Change	0.07**
	(0.01)
Constant	1.51**
	(0.47)
Observations	822
R-squared	0.15

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Excluded category for treatment is the less knowledgeable and less trustworthy condition. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Figure A2: Marginal Effects of Exposure to Violence on Information

Return Intentions

Exposure to Violence

More Knowledgeable & More Trustworty
More Knowledgeable & Less Trustworty
Less Knowledgeable & More Trustworty

Appendix 8: Discrete Choices of Different Demographic groups

Appendix 8a: Discrete Choice of Fighters (AMCEs)

Appendix 8b: Discrete Choice of Spouses (AMCEs)

Appendix 8c: Discrete Choice of Informants (AMCEs)