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# Does wartime sexual violence affect social and political behavior?

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# Motivation

## Proximate Psychological effects



Photo: VOA Afrique

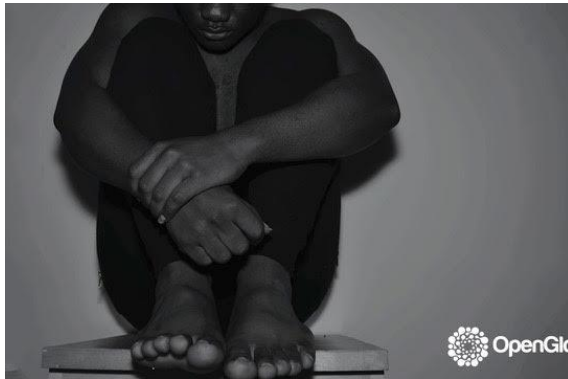


Photo: OpenGlobalRights

## Downstream Mobilization effects



Photo: Washington Post



Photo: BBC

## Research question

Does wartime sexual violence affect social and political attitudes and behavior?

How to collect sexual violence data in surveys?

## Prior quantitative micro-level research

Sexual violence associated with PTSD, domestic violence, and social stigmatization  
(e.g., Johnson et al. 2008, Albutt et al. 2017, Osby/Leiby 2019, Koos/Lindsey 2022)

Sexual violence associated with social investment, political interest, and protective norms  
(Koos 2018, Gonzalez/Trautmüller 2021, Lindsey 2021)

Violence increases in-group prosocial behavior  
(e.g., Bauer et al. 2016)

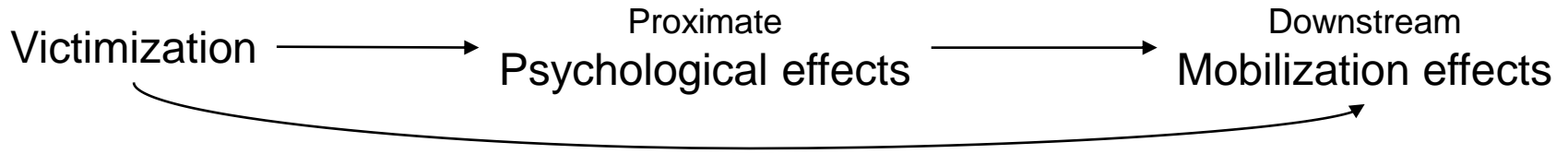
## **Preview of results**

Prevalence twice as high when considering non-disclosure bias (list experiment)

Increase in civic engagement across all three surveys (DRC, Liberia, Sri Lanka)

Effect appears to be driven by non-responders to direct question

# Theoretical effects and potential mechanisms



## 1. Proximate psychological effects

- Mechanisms: PTSD, anxiety, stigmatization
- Expectation: negative effects on social/political engagement

## 2. Downstream mobilization effects

- Potential Mechanisms: threat mobilization, social compensation, necessity  
(Tilly 1977, Shih 2004, Maner/Bolden 2013)
- Expectation: positive effects on social/political engagement

# Data

## **Surveys**

DRC: 1,000 respondents

Liberia: 7,500 respondents

Sri Lanka: 1,800 respondents

## **Key variables**

Exposure to wartime sexual violence

- Conventional direct question (e.g., Peterman et al. 2011, Johnson et al. 2008)
- List experiment (anonymity) (appendix)

Outcomes

- Civic participation (active membership in local associations)
- Perceived intergroup relations (index)
- Trust in political institutions (index)

## Results (1): Sample share exposed to wartime sexual violence

	Direct question	List experiment	% DQ ▶ LE
DRC	6%	12%	100%
Liberia	5%	14%	180%
Sri Lanka	1%	13%	1,200%



## Results (2): Model

### Specification

$$Y_{iv} = \beta_1 WSV_i + X_i + \mu_v + \varepsilon_i$$

$Y_{iv}$  = active member of local association (0, 1)

$WSV_i$  = direct question, list experiment

$X_i$  = pre-exposure social engagement\*, other wartime experiences, gender, age, education, income, household size

$\mu_v$  = ADM3 dummy

### Model

Direct question: logit model

List experiment: two-stage model (Imai et al. 2015)

### Confounding bias

ADM3 fixed effects

Control for historical social engagement (lagged DV)

Sensitivity analyses to unobserved confounders (Cinelli/Hazlett 2019)

# Results (3): Associations between wartime sexual violence and local civic engagement

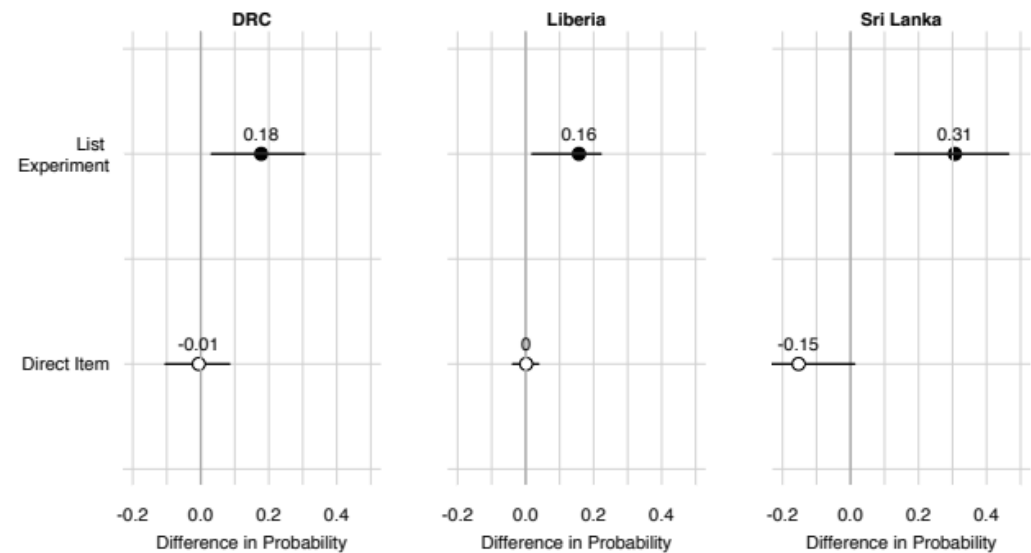
16 to 31% more likely to be active members of local associations

Direct question no effect

Effect driven by non-disclosers

No gender differences

Robustness (confounder quantification)



# **Conclusion**

## **Take-away messages**

“Suggestive” evidence for mobilization effects\*

Accounting for disclosure bias matters

Consistent across three diverse cases

## **Implications**

Adverse proximate psychological effects remain

Optimistic evidence for reconciliation and social cohesion

## **Limitations and future research**

Do our results reflect agency, conformity pressure, or necessity to survive?

What types of support and assistance most effective (see appendix slides)

Thank you for your time and attention

Carlo Koos (University of Bergen)  
Richard Traumnüller (University of Mannheim)

## **Supplementary slides**

# Direct question wording

Table 1: Direct questions

DRC	Liberia	Sri Lanka
Have you or anyone else in your household ever been raped by armed groups since 2002, that is physically forced to have sexual intercourse?	Were you a victim of sexual violence during the civil war?	During the period of war, from 1983 to 2009, which of the following things did you personally directly experience, see or witness with your own eyes and ears, directed at you, your family, or community? You becoming sexually assaulted.

# List experiment wording

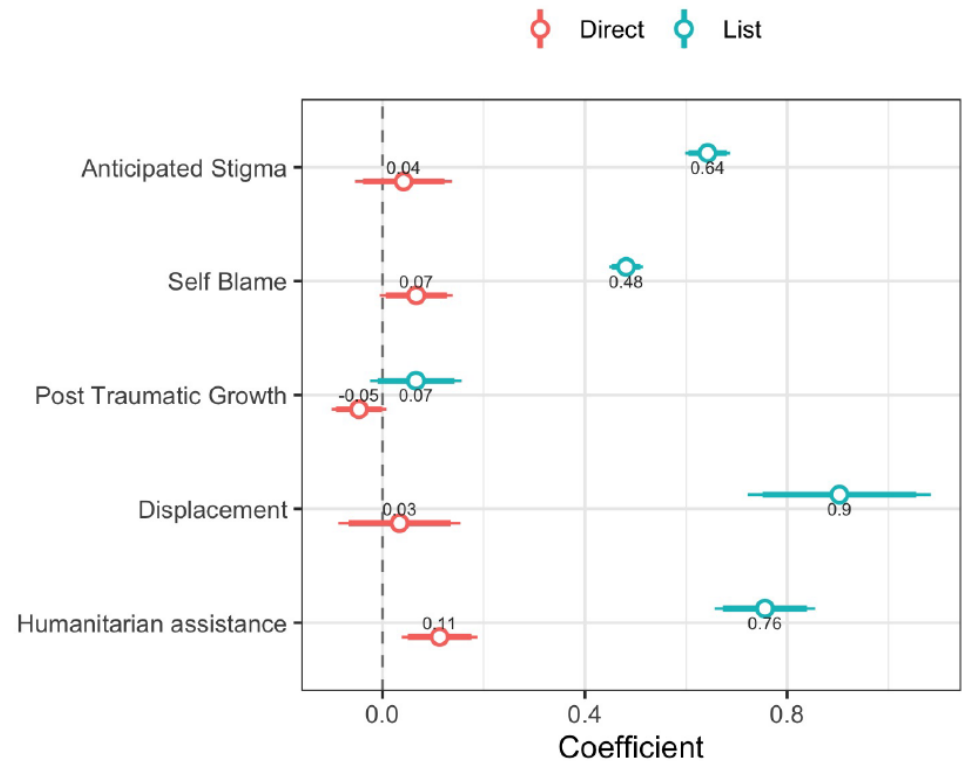
Table 2: List experiment

	DRC	Liberia	Sri Lanka
Control	(1) I moved away from my original place of birth. (2) I have lost a family member in an armed group attack. (3) I have experienced looting or theft of my house or property.	(1) I had to flee because of fighting. (2) I have lost family members. (3) I killed someone to protect myself.	(1) I won money in a lottery or competition. (2) I was involved in an accident. (3) I received help from a stranger.
Treatment	(4) I or a member of my household has been raped by an armed group.	(4) I was a victim of sexual violence.	(4) I was personally sexually assaulted.

# Suggestive evidence on mechanisms from DRC (with Summer Lindsey)

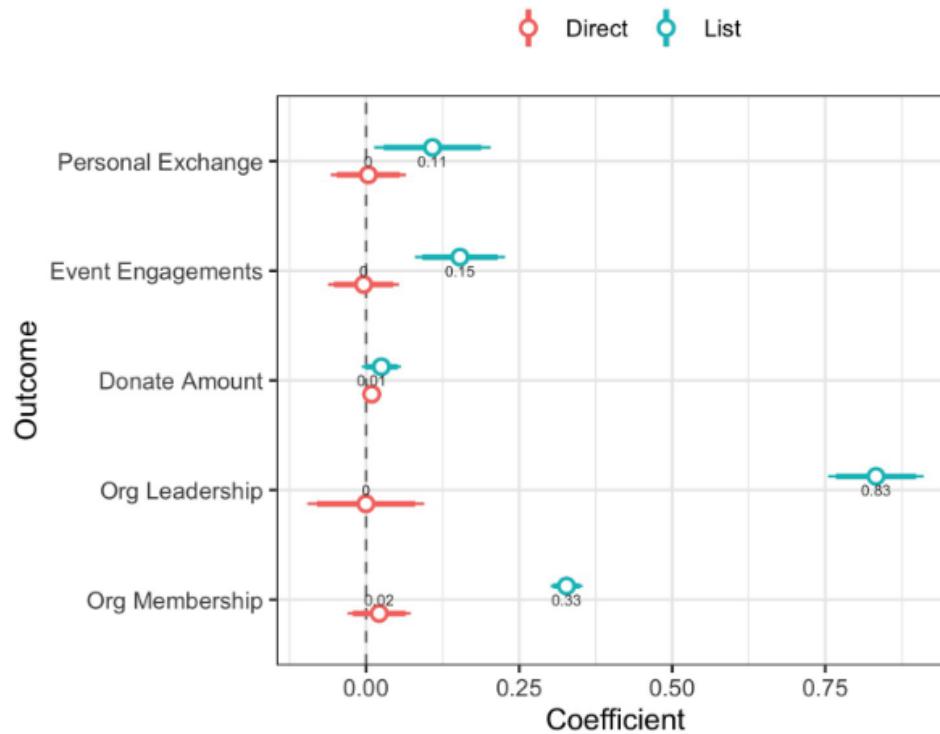
Social mobilization driven by those not reporting to the direct question

Non-disclosure associated with stigma, self-blame, displacement and access to humanitarian assistance

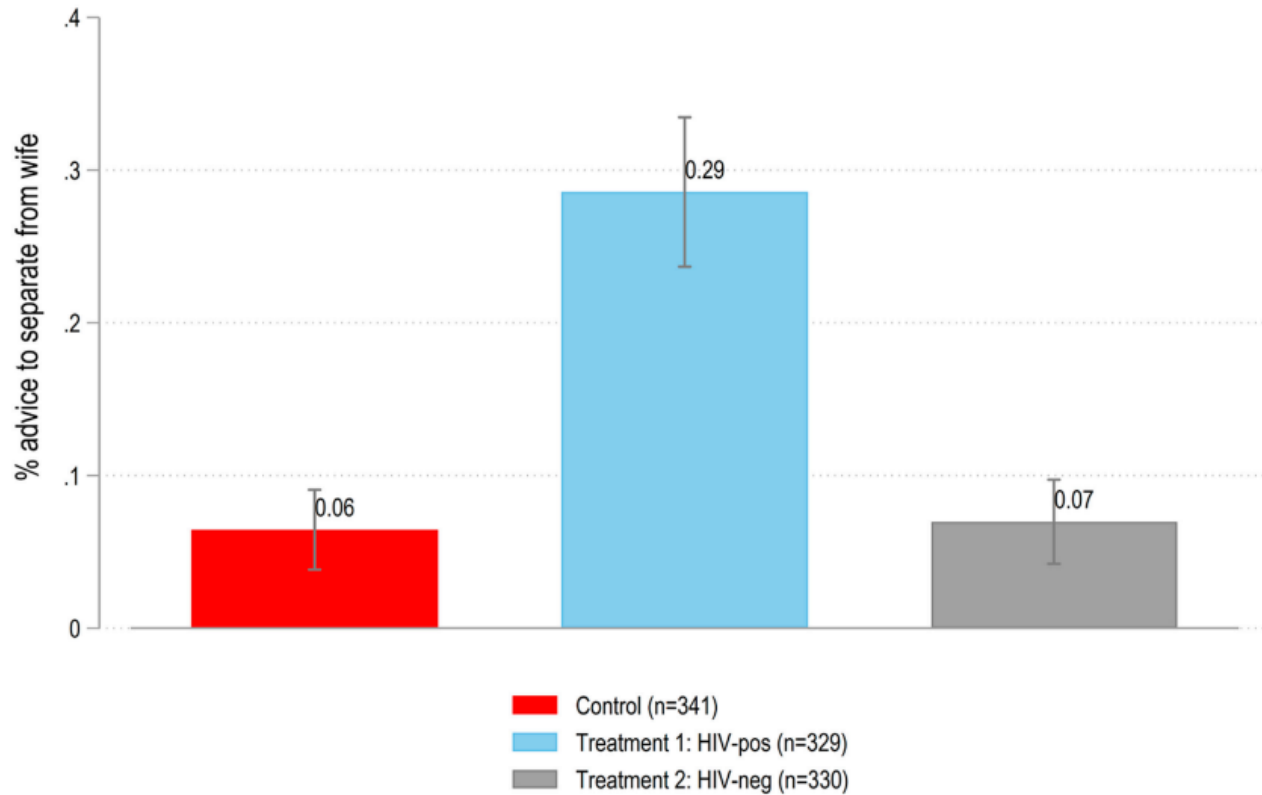




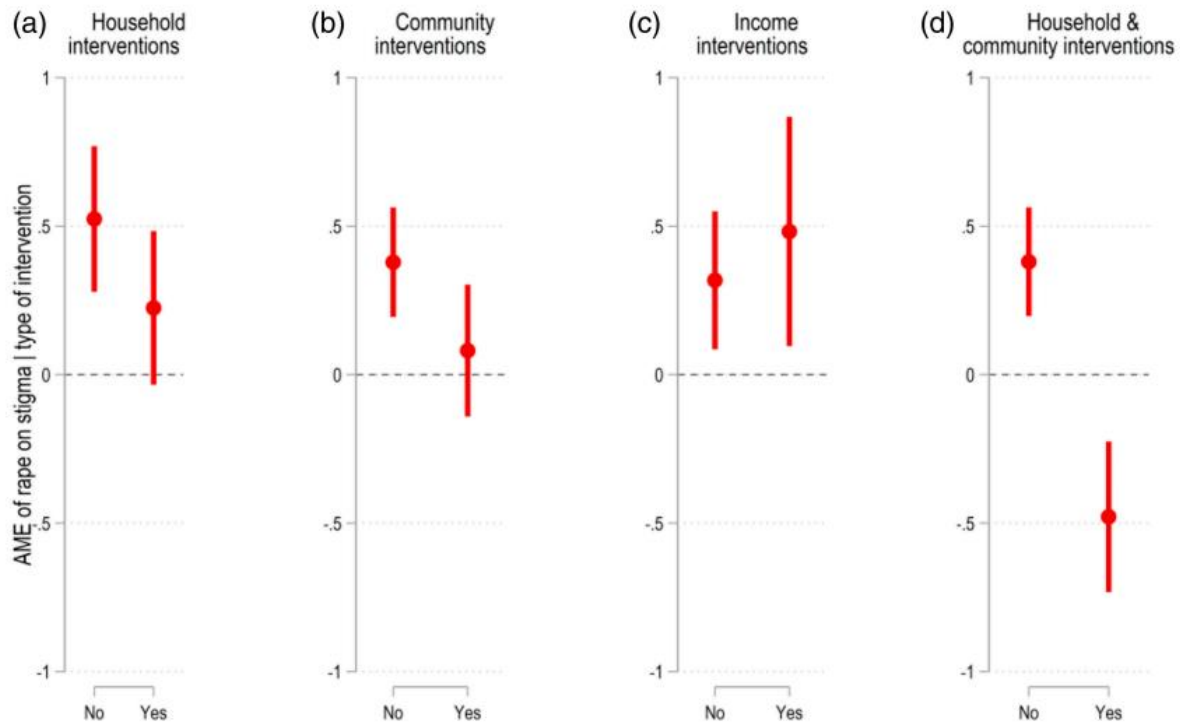
# More outcomes on social and political behavior from DRC (with Summer Lindsey)



# Fear of HIV reason for rejection? (with Summer Lindsey)



# Effective support interventions to reduce stigma (with Summer Lindsey)



# Sensitivity analyses to unobserved confounders

Figure A1: Sensitivity to unobserved confounding

