The challenges and opportunities for development in former warzones: A survey report of Colombian communities

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March 2022

Abstract

What are the challenges and opportunities for development in former warzones? This report presents the findings of a survey in Colombian territories that endured the presence of non-state armed actors at some point during the war as well as in communities that never experienced the ongoing presence of such actors. By comparing conflict and non-conflict communities, this study identifies some of the distinct challenges and opportunities that former warzones face as they navigate the difficult transition from war to peace. The findings point to new avenues for research on the legacies of civil war, war-to-peace transitions, and post-conflict reconstruction and provide insights for policy debates about interventions in war-torn countries in general, and in Colombia in particular.

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1 Introduction

What are the challenges and opportunities for development in communities that have experienced a civil war? Most of the discussion tends to focus on the territories that endure high levels of violence. Yet, civil war impacts local communities in many other ways. Some populations endure low levels of violence but coexist with combatants for months or years. Whether armed groups engage in governance in these territories, and how, may reshape informal institutions, political cleavages and alliances, and influence state-society relations as well as individual political behavior. The specific ways that civilians respond to the presence of armed actors in their territory can also leave deep marks in their individual behavior and the social fabric of their communities. To be sure, violence also leaves deep marks. The loss of lives and destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods, undermining of local governments, impacts on physical and mental health, and transformed social relations are all examples of the troubling consequences of war. But a focus only on communities impacted by violence leaves out many of the changes that civil war can bring to local communities across a conflict-afflicted warscape.

Understanding the legacies of these varied experiences during civil war is a mammoth task (Arjona and Castilla, 2020). A crucial step is *describing* the situation of communities that lived under the presence of armed actors, as opposed to focusing only on those that endured violence. This description is important for two reasons. First, it can inform research on the legacies of civil war by uncovering systematic differences and similarities between communities that interacted with armed actors and the rest of the country. And second, it provides essential information for identifying priorities and designing policies and interventions to foster reconstruction, peace, and reconciliation. To be sure, understanding the causes of a phenomenon is often essential for designing adequate policies; but identifying problems and opportunities, even if we have not figured out what explains their origins, is also crucial for identifying policy priorities.

Relying on survey data collected among a sample of Colombian communities six years after the signing of the peace agreement, this report seeks to contribute to the study of the legacies of civil war, war-to-peace transitions, and post-conflict reconstruction as well as to policy debates about interventions in war-torn countries. It also seeks to contribute to our understanding of the current situation in Colombia, the legacies of war in different territories, and discussions about policy needs amidst a difficult transition after the signing of the 2016 peace agreement. The survey was conducted in 107 communities located in 35 municipalities throughout the country. By comparing

warzones—understood as territories where non-state armed actors have an ongoing presence—with territories that never experienced the presence of armed actors, we seek to identify some of the challenges and opportunities of communities that experienced the war more directly.

We proceed as follows. In section 2 we describe our data sources and the larger project they are part of. In section 3 we present basic demographic data of conflict and non-conflict communities. In section 4 we turn to exposure to armed group presence and violence during the conflict. Section 5 delves into various current security conditions and basic rights after the signing of the peace agreements. Section 6 focuses on the current socioeconomic situation. Section 7 turns to political behavior and Section 8 to various aspects of state-society relations and local governance. Section 9 focuses on the social fabric. In section 10 we focus attitudes towards the peace agreement and reconciliation. Section 11 presents the conclusions.

2 Data on Colombian communities

The Colombian conflict has been a protracted, irregular civil war between the Colombian state, left-wing insurgent groups (most notably, the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, FARC), and right-wing paramilitaries. For over five decades, individuals and communities have been impacted not only by violence but also by profound transformations brought up by the presence of armed organizations, the responses of state actors, and the ways in which different sectors of the population reacted to the dynamics of war.

In 2016, the Colombian state and the primary insurgent group of the conflict, FARC, negotiated a peace agreement that resulted in the disarmament and demobilization of FARC's members. Though rejected in a popular plebiscite in October of the same year, wherein 50.2% of voters voted against a negotiated end to the conflict, the peace agreement has moved forward (Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil, 2016). The wide-reaching and comprehensive peace agreement is one of the most extensive peace agreements authored worldwide and includes provisions to achieve rural reform, robust democratic political participation, the end of the violent conflict between FARC and the Colombian state, curbing trafficking of illicit drugs and their influence on Colombian society, and appeals for justice and reparations for victims of the conflict (Bell et al., 2021). Now, almost 6 years out from the signing of the Havana Accords, progress toward the stated benchmarks of the agreement has been modest (Isacson, 2021). Violence is extremely high in certain regions of the country; attacks against civic leaders have risen to unprecedented levels, with more than seven hundred assassinations since

the signing of the agreement (Indepaz, 2019). Additionally, another guerrilla group, the National Liberation Army (ELN) as well as several criminal groups continue to operate in various regions of the country. Nonetheless, violence has decreased in most regions of the country and the number of new reported victims of conflict-related violence has diminished in recent years (Red Nacional de Información, 2022).

The two surveys we rely on for this report are part of a larger project that seeks to trace the effects of local wartime dynamics on the social and political life of individuals and communities in the post-conflict stage[1]. Recognizing that war is not only a shock of violence but, rather, a complex web of various shocks, this project investigates how distinct experiences of war at the local level impacts individual behavior and social and political dynamics in the post-conflict period. In particular, the project focuses on how patterns of governance in conflict zones can influence the social and political life of individuals and communities in the wake of war.

The surveys are part of what is, to our knowledge, the first longitudinal study of individuals and communities both during and after civil war. This study focuses on a random sample of around 80 communities that lived under the sustained presence of guerrillas, paramilitaries, or both at any point throughout the war. The first wave of data collection took place in 2012, when Arjona (2014, 2016) collected detailed evidence on the presence and activities of armed groups throughout the war, the responses of local communities, and the ensuing forms of order and governance that functioned in conflict zones. The second wave of fieldwork consisted of a survey that Arjona conducted in 2016, a few months before the demobilization of FARC. The two surveys we rely on for this report, conducted in the fall of 2021 as part of a collaborative project by Arjona and Moore, is the third stage of data collection and seeks to gather information on how individuals and communities have navigated the transition after the demobilization of FARC. In order to compare communities affected by the presence and activities of armed actors, the survey was conducted not only in the same communities Arjona had studied in the past but also in a random sample of communities that had not experienced the sustained presence of non-state armed groups at any point during the war[2]. Map 1 shows the municipalities with and without a history of sustained armed group presence included in the sample–in red are the municipalities where we have detailed information about the armed group presence, in blue are the municipalities for which there was no

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[1]For additional information on the project and survey, see Arjona and Moore (2022)

[2]We define sustained presence as six months or more of frequent presence of combatants in a territory.

recorded armed group presence. Details on the sampling strategy are given below.

Figure 1: Sampled municipalities

The two surveys are part of the Drugs and (Dis)Order project, which focuses on war-to-peace transitions in conflicts with illicit economies. One of our goals is to investigate the distinct experiences of communities with coca crops, drug trafficking, or both, and how these illicit economies can influence communities' trajectories after the signing of the peace agreement.

Finally, the surveys aim to provide detailed evidence that can help researchers and policy makers better understand the unique challenges and opportunities that distinct types of conflict zones face. Considering this variation is essential as Colombia continues to navigate the difficult path toward peace and reconciliation.

2.1 Surveying communities in warzones

The study aimed to collect data on conflict zones—that is, territories that have endured the ongoing presence of non-state armed groups. For this reason, the goal was to select a representative sample of communities where at least one non-state armed group had been present for at least six months at any given point from the 1970s to 2012.

Given that there are no records of armed group presence—only of armed group violence—the universe of cases included, initially, all the municipalities of the country. Municipalities were only excluded when, based on both the absence of primary records and conversations with contacts in the field, there was no indication of presence of armed groups at any point since the 1970s. The sampling proceeded in three stages. First, the Colombian territory was stratified in three regions, excluding 6 of 33 Colombian departments or provinces.[3] Each region had the same number of municipalities. In order to ensure variation along important dimensions, a random sample of 22 municipalities was then selected, stratified by state presence, ethnic composition (as measured by the population share of Afro-Colombians or Indigenous people in the municipality), and population distribution in urban and rural settlements. Data on these stratification variables come from official Colombian sources.

In the second stage, the presence of armed groups was corroborated in each selected municipality on the basis of primary and secondary sources as well as interviews with experts and field contacts. Only the municipalities where at least one armed group had been present in the past for at least 6 continuous months were included in the sample. If, based on primary and secondary sources as well as field contacts, a municipality had not have presence of armed groups for at least six months, that municipality was replaced with another randomly selected from the eligible municipality list.

In the third stage and once the list of municipalities was finalized, localities (i.e. villages, hamlets, or neighborhoods) were chosen on the basis of their wartime experiences. A short survey with individuals knowledgeable about the municipality gathered evidence on the forms of social order that operated in each community over time based on vignettes.[4] Participants were asked to give their responses related to as many communities that they had

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[3]The departments of the Amazonian region (Vichada, Guainía, Guaviare, Vaupés, and Amazonas) as well the island groups (San Andres, Providencia, and Catalina) were excluded on the basis that the populations in these territories are sparse and conflict had only recently arrived there, thus sustained armed group presence has historically been limited.

[4]See Arjona (2016), Appendix I and II for more information on this survey and subsequent coding processes.

reasonable expertise about. A sample of between 2 and 4 localities per municipality was thus selected, attempting to preserve the distribution of social order scores among all surveyed localities. The *cabecera* of each municipality (the equivalent of a county, municipal, or district seat in other contexts) was included in the selection of communities in each municipality for this wave of fieldwork. The final sample of 64 sub-municipal communities are located in 20 municipalities covering 13 different departments.[5]

As of 2021, we have detailed community-level data regarding the types of armed group governance that these localities experienced over time as well as of many other community dynamics during the war. We also have detailed data on the attributes of individuals and communities right before the FARC demobilized as well as five years after the signing of the peace agreement. Following these communities both during and after the presence of armed groups will allow us to trace the impact of various wartime experiences on individuals, families, communities, and local governments.

2.2 Surveying communities without armed group presence

The selection process for the control group was also an iterative process. First, we took a list of all Colombian municipalities, excluding those that were in the treatment group or those located in departments in the Amazon region, and aggregated data on municipal-level violence over the course of the conflict using data from various sources (Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico, 2014; Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2013; Osorio et al., 2019). We determined the total magnitude of violence in each Colombian municipality by simply adding up the number of violent events recorded in each municipality over 1976-2019 across each of the cited violence databases.[6] We considered lists of municipalities at different specifications of violence cutoffs. We specifically considered municipalities that experienced no violence or were in the 10th or 15th percentile of violent events. We ultimately limited the list from which to sample municipalities to those that experienced violence in the 15th percentile or less, as the list of municipalities was long and diverse enough that we could have a more representative sample and there would be municipalities to draw from should we have to

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[5]There are less communities than in original fieldwork waves as we excluded all municipalities from the first round of fieldwork as well as communities where current security conditions made it impossible or dangerous to complete the survey.

[6]We were not worried about double counting violent events between databases, as we wanted to limit our selection process as much as possible to conflict-free municipalities, thus uniformly over-counting would simply allow us to be necessarily restrictive.

discard any of the initial selection.

From the initial list of municipalities at the 15th percentile of violence and below, we selected a stratified random sample using the original stratification variables. Upon selecting these initial municipalities, we then searched Colombian newspapers, human rights reports, and other reports from Colombian institutions to determine if any of these municipalities were false negatives on the basis of a lack of violence. We also contacted regional or local authorities in some cases, such as the local ombudsman's office (*Personería*) or a mayor, to verify any information. We replaced municipalities as necessary with a random draw of another municipality from the eligible list.[7] Upon gathering a final list of 15 municipalities, we worked with a research assistant who informally interviewed mid-level guerrilla and paramilitary ex-combatants about whether the armed group they were affiliated with was ever present in the municipalities in question. We repeated the discard-replace procedure for all municipalities where our research assistant confirmed that there had been armed group presence. Once finalized, we randomly selected 2 localities in each municipality in addition to the municipal seat (cabecera) from which to survey individuals– thus sampling a total of 44 non-conflict afflicted localities.[8]

The survey was enumerated in the same way across both warzone and non-conflict settings. The survey was carried out in a sample of households in urban and rural areas of the selected municipalities. The sampling strategy was different in urban and rural zones based on available territorial information. In urban zones, survey enumerators received grid level map information in the selected municipal section. Each municipal section was divided into different blocks. Within each block, enumerators were required to complete a maximum of 8 surveys, 2 on each side of each block. Upon arrival to each selected housing development, the household that answered the door was selected as the interviewed household.

In rural zones, enumerators conducted a sweep of the residences in each cardinal direction from a point of reference. The point of reference might be

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[7]We first attempted to replace discarded municipalities with others that were similar on the stratification variables of the discarded municipalities. However, there were too few municipalities in some stratum to allow for this to be a random process. Therefore, we chose to merely replace each discarded municipality with a random choice from the total eligible list. Due to this, there is higher geographical clustering in the control group than in the treatment group. However, because we allowed for this to be based on the random process, we are confident that this clustering is representative of some of the patterns, determinants, and realities of local armed group presence in Colombia rather than sampling error.

[8]A total of 45 communities were sampled, but due to the realities of survey enumeration, the survey was only carried out in 44 communities.

a police station, a school, or an intersection of roadways. During this sweep, enumerators visited households to complete the requisite number of surveys for each population settlement.

In both urban and rural areas, the person selected to complete the survey in each household was the person 25 or older[9] with the closest birthday among those present in the home at the time. Enumerators were instructed to alternate between men and women respondents from household to household to achieve parity between the percentage of women and men respondents.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, survey enumeration was delayed multiple times from 2019 to 2021. However, due to limited levels of community transmission of the novel Coronavirus in Colombia, existing presence of local survey enumerators employed by the survey firm, and the development of safe survey fielding methods, the survey firm conducted the survey between November and December of 2021.

2.3 The survey instrument

We surveyed individuals on the following domains of their lives as well as on aspects of their community and municipality:

- Demographics

- Experiences of violence during the war

- Security conditions and basic rights after the peace agreement

- Current socioeconomic situation

- Service provision

- Political behavior and state-society relations

- Social relations

- Local power and authority

- Reconciliation and Peace

We conducted the survey in conflict communities with a total of 1,517 people. The survey in non-conflict communities was conducted with 1,128

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[9]Since we are interested in historical trends regarding the conflict as well as in people's views on the peace agreement, we required that all survey respondents were at least 16 years old in 2016, when the peace agreement was signed.

people and was slightly shorter as some questions on the presence of armed groups and community responses to such presence were not included.

This report focuses on the differences and similarities between communities that endured the presence of armed actors at any point in the past and communities that never interacted with armed actors, except for, if anything, sporadic encounters. We refer to the former as warzones or conflict communities, and to the latter as non-conflict communities.[10] Our goal is to explore the differences between communities directly impacted by the presence of armed actors and the rest of the country in order to guide new research on the legacies of war as well as to inform policy debates about priorities and opportunities for change.

3   Demographics

Of the 2,642 total respondents, 48.11% are men and 51.89% are women. The gender distributions across the two subsamples, i.e. those in warzones and those in non-conflict communities, are similar and differences are likely due to random noise in the sampling process. Figure 2 shows the distribution of respondents on the basis of their gender and the respective subsample.

Figure 2: Gender Distribution

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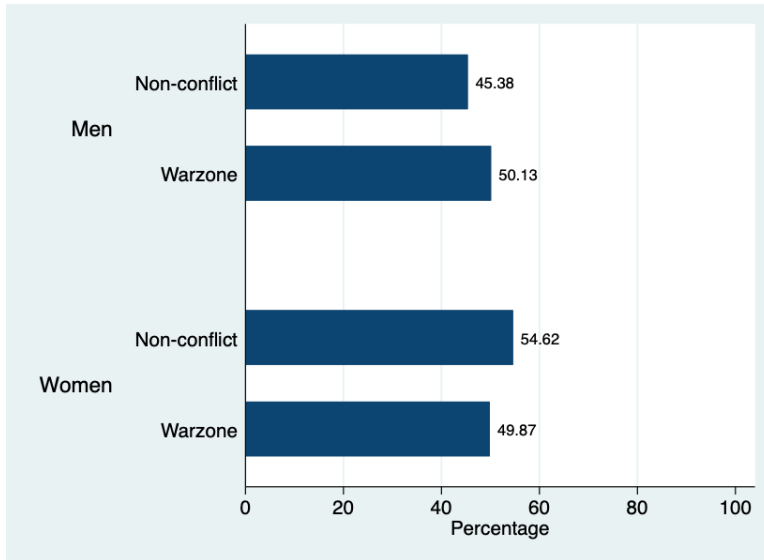
[10]These labels are used for simplicity. However, it is important to note that communities that have not endured the ongoing presence of non-state armed actors can also experience different types of violent conflict.

Given that we are interested in historical trends regarding the conflict as well as in people's views on the peace agreement, we required that all survey respondents be 25 or older. The age distribution among our respondents is shown in Figure 3. Respondents across warzones are typically younger than those from non-conflict communities. Conversely, there are more respondents from non-conflict communities in their middle age or older than in the warzone communities.

Figure 3: Distribution of the Sample Across Age Cohorts
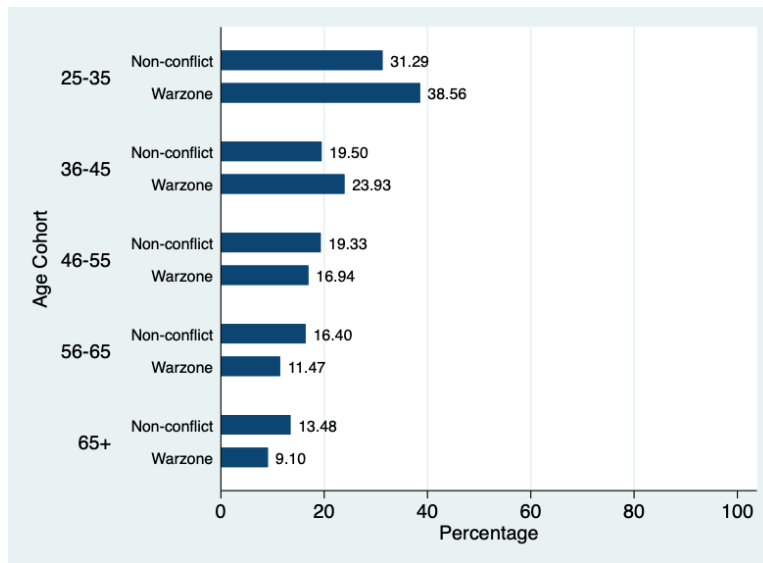
In both the warzone and non-conflict communities, a large majority of people responded that they did not have a specific racial ethnic heritage (Figure 4). There is a significantly higher proportion of respondents that are ethnic minorities in the warzone communities versus those in non-conflict communities (Figure 5).

An overwhelming majority of respondents in both non-conflict and warzone communities respondend that they profess Catholicism; however, it was much more common to report so in the non-conflict communities (86%) relative to warzone communities (70%). On the other hand, more individuals in warzone communities were likely to state that they are Protestants (17%) than in non-conflict communities (7%) or were more likely to not have a religious identity at all (13% in warzone communities, 8% in non-conflict communities). Responses related to other religions were similar across these different communities.

Over a majority of the respondents in both warzones and non-conflict communities stated that there are no children in the care of the household.

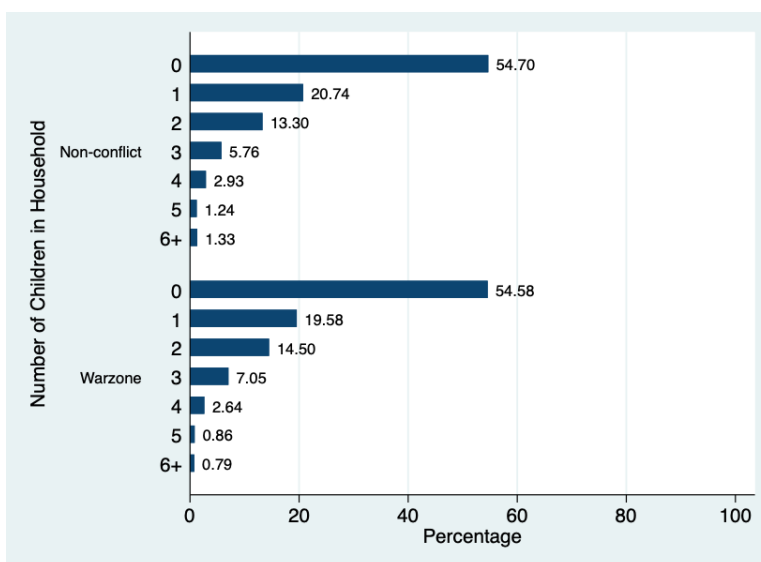Figure 4: Race or Ethnic Heritage of Respondents
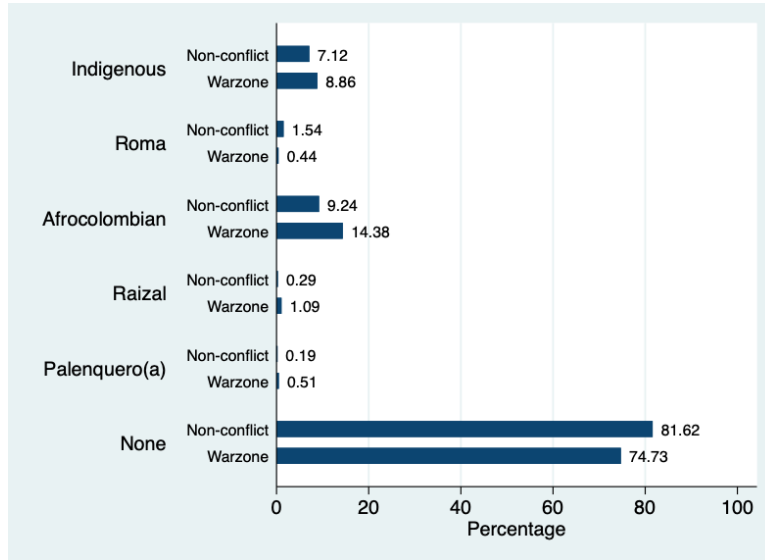
Figure 5: Ethnic Minority Status of Respondents
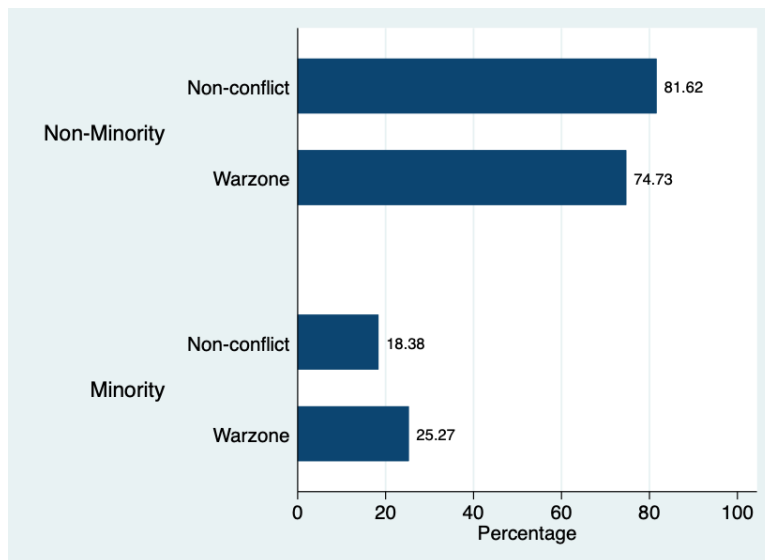
Among those that do have children, the number of children in households in both types of communities are similar, most have only 1 or 2 children and few have 3 or greater (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Number of Children in Household

Respondents in both non-conflict communities and warzone communities have a wide distribution of educational experiences, as shown in Figure 7. More respondents in warzone communities said that they had no formal schooling at all, and less respondents in these same communities stated that they had some primary education relative to those in non-conflict communities. While it appears that there might be some differences in education levels between the communities, they are not stark.

Regarding respondents' occupational status over the last 30 days (Figure 8), the responses are similar across non-conflict and warzone communities regarding employment. However, respondents in non-conflict communities reported that they were more likely to be looking for work or engaged in some other economic activity and those in warzone communities responded with greater frequency that they were studying.

4   Exposure to armed group presence and violence

By definition, warzones have been exposed to the ongoing presence of non-state armed groups for at least six months at some point throughout the war,

Figure 7: Respondent's Level of Education
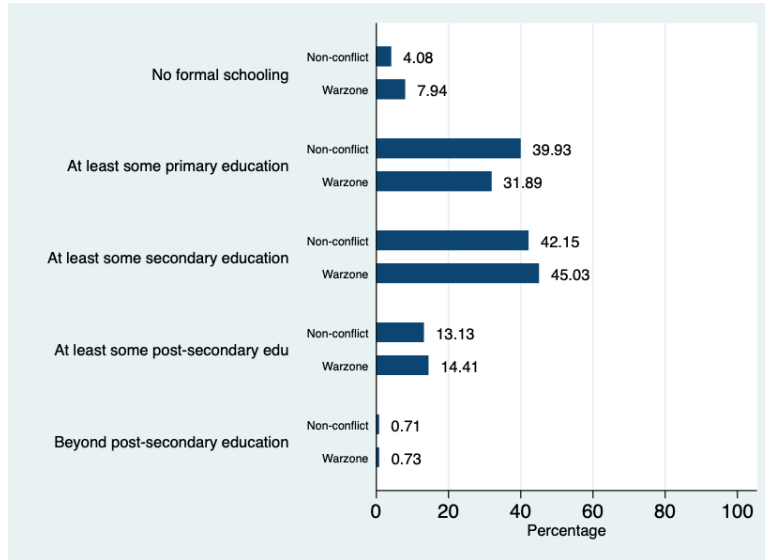
Figure 8: Stated Occupation Over the Last 30 Days
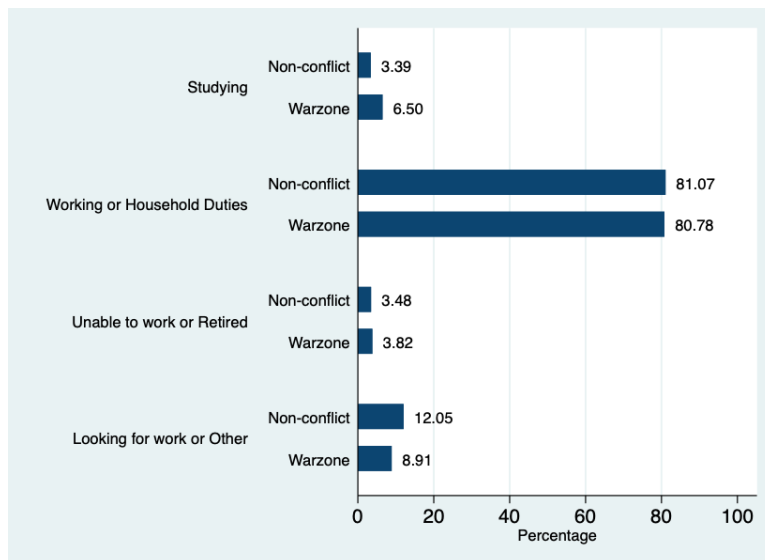
while non-conflict communities have never experienced such armed group presence in their territory. Warzones are therefore expected to endure the legacies of coexisting with non-state armed groups much more than non-conflict communities are, even if the latter endured sporadic encounters with combatants or isolated violent events.

Levels of violence are obviously expected to be higher in warzones than in the rest of the country. As Figure 9 shows, those living in a warzone were almost three times more likely to have experienced at least one war-related violent event in the past than those living in non-conflict communities. Almost every single type of violent event is far more common in conflict zones than in non-conflict zones. Figure 10 shows a comparison for the most common types of violence, and Figure 11 shows the data for less common violent events.

Figure 9: At least one war-related victimization (self or relative)
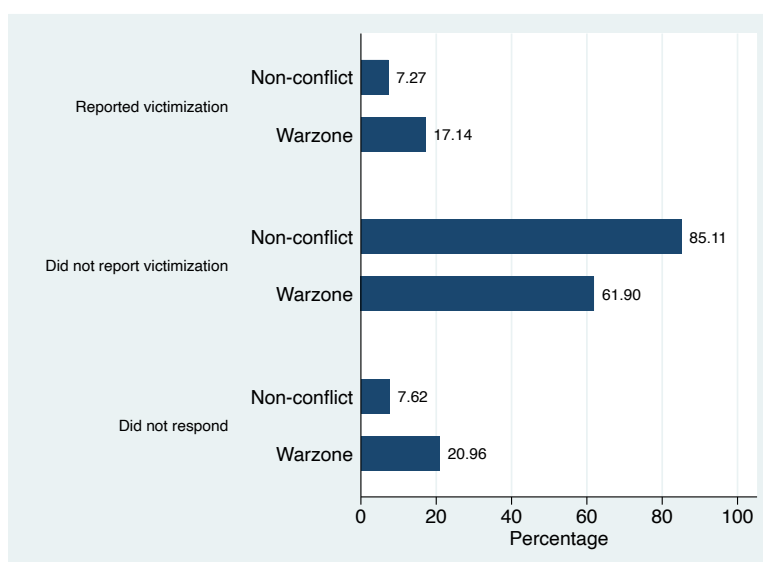
Another piece of evidence that shows how war violence has impacted warzone communities is the extent to which parents lose their children to the war. Although parents are not more likely to suffer the loss of a child in warzones than in non-conflict communities (Figure 12), the percentage of parents who lost a child due to the armed conflict is more than twice as large in warzones than in non-conflict communities (Figure 13).

These data show that warzones can be expected to grapple much more than the rest of the country with the various negative impacts that violence and armed group presence can have on critical outcomes, which include education, mental and physical health, the local economy, social relations, and

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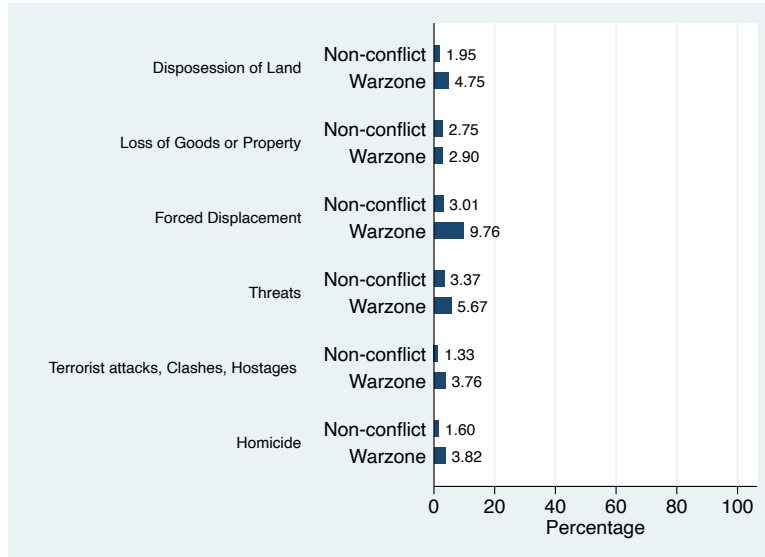Figure 10: Most common types of war-related victimization (self or relative)

	Non-conflict	Warzone
Disposession of Land	1.95	4.75
Loss of Goods or Property	2.75	2.90
Forced Displacement	3.01	9.76
Threats	3.37	5.67
Terrorist attacks, Clashes, Hostages	1.33	3.76
Homicide	1.60	3.82

Figure 11: Less common types of war-related victimization (self or relative)

	Non-conflict	Warzone
Forced Disappearance	0.62	0.66
Massacre	0.18	0.73
Mines, Munitions, IEDs	0.18	0.20
Forced recruitment of minors	0.27	0.26
Kidnapping	0.27	0.40
Torture	0.18	0.26
Sexual abuse or violence	0.09	0.46

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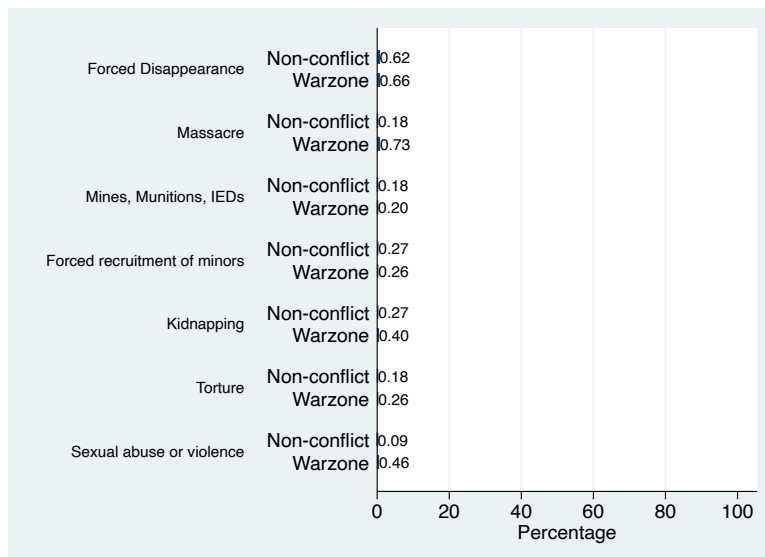
Figure 12: Parents whose children have died
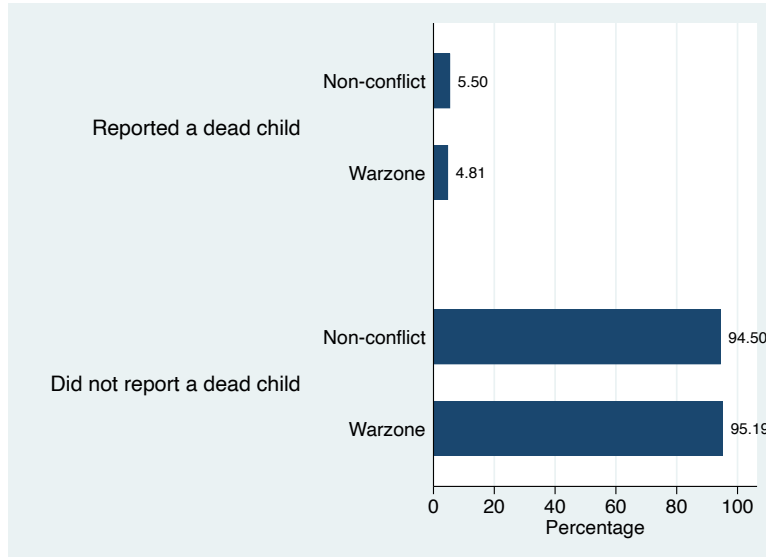
Figure 13: Parents whose children died due to war-related violence
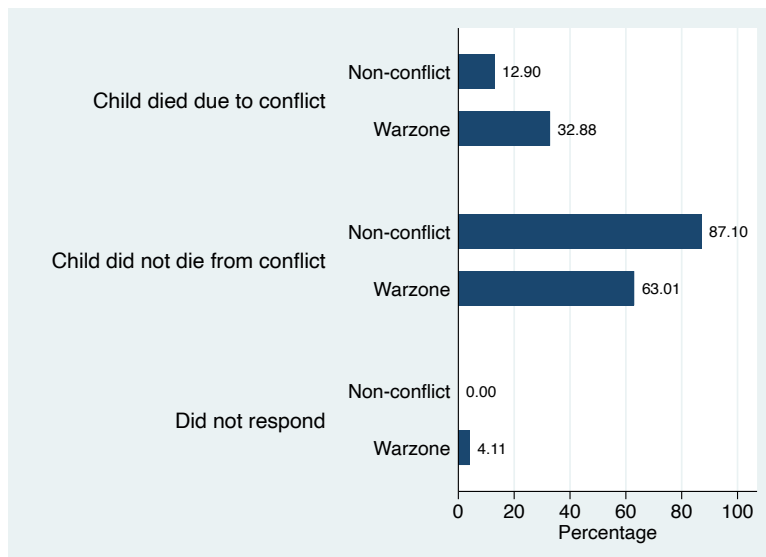
Figure 14: Frequency of Number of Total Armed Groups Present in a Given Community
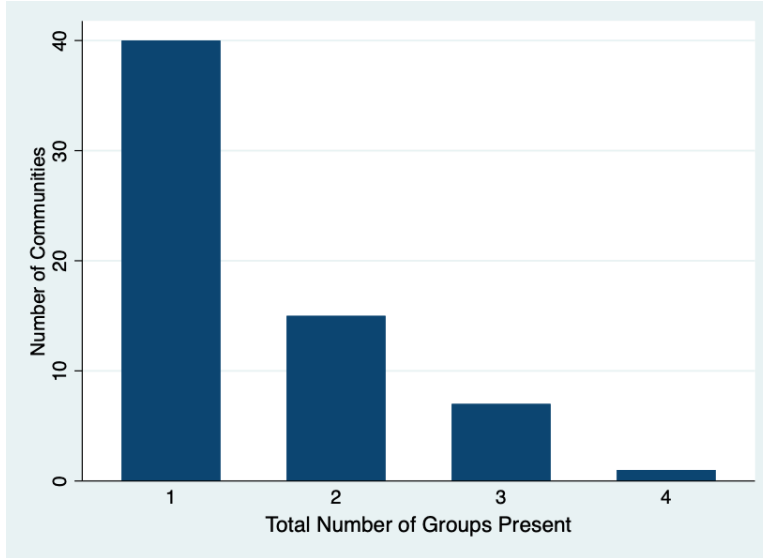
the quality of governance and democracy, among others.[11] It is important to note, however, that there is great variation in exposure to the presence and violence of armed actors within warzones. Figure 14 shows the number of sampled communities that lived under the presence of one, two, three, and four armed groups between 1970 and 2012, and Figure 15 shows the total number of years that communities sustained armed group presence. Moreover, armed groups can interact with local populations in many different ways, not only in terms of their use of violence but also in whether and how they govern civilians, how they recruit new members, how they put their ideology into practice, and how they relate with the state. Warzones are therefore likely to show tremendous variation in the kinds of legacies of civil war that they endure.

Having established that the experiences of warzones are far from homogeneous, and that they are therefore likely to face distinct kinds of legacies, this report focuses on the differences between warzones and non-conflict zones. In the next sections we focus on issues related to security, basic rights and freedoms, socioeconomic situation, political behavior, state-society relations, and local governance after the signing of the Peace Accords in 2016. We also report findings about social trust and attitudes towards reconciliation.

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[11]See Arjona (2021) for a review of some of this literature

Figure 15: Total Years with Armed Group Presence
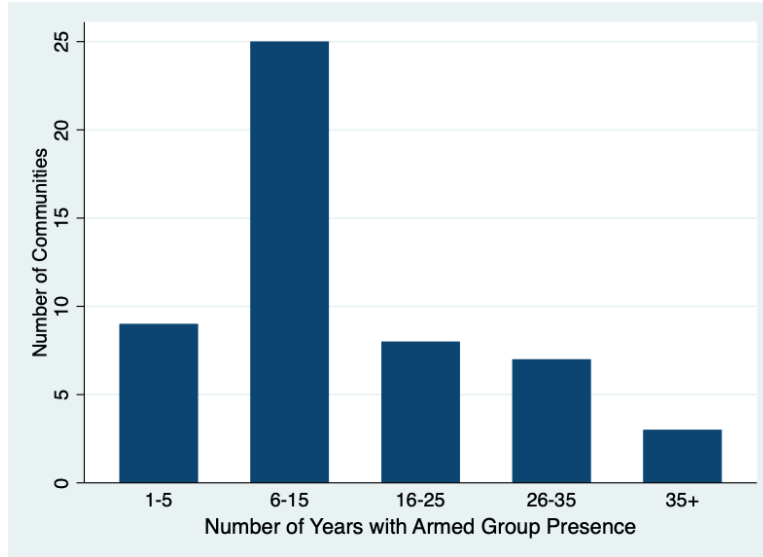
5 Security conditions and basic rights after the peace agreement

How have security conditions changed since the signing of the peace agreement in 2016? We asked respondents if they felt very safe, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe or very unsafe in their community at the time of the survey. As Figure 16 shows, those living in warzones report, on average, significantly higher levels of insecurity. We also asked respondents if there had been threats, attacks or killings of civic leaders in their communities. As Figure 17 shows, this type of violence was fifteen times more likely in warzones than in non-conflict communities. This finding is particularly troublesome considering that 37% of respondents in warzones did not respond to this question, as compared to 13% in non-conflict communities. This rate of non-response may indicate that the percentage of those living in a place where civic leaders have been victimized may be even greater in warzones than we can estimate with these data alone. Respondents were also asked if they or their immediate family members had been the victim of a crime in the prior six months in their community. Once again, those living in a former warzone are more likely to respond positively to this question than those in the rest of the country, although the rates are very low in both cases (Figure 18). It is important to note that, again, those in a warzone are three times more likely to avoid responding this question (24%) than those in non-conflict communities (7%). All the differences are statistically significant, pointing to some improvement

in security conditions in many warzones.

Figure 16: Insecurity in respondent's community at present
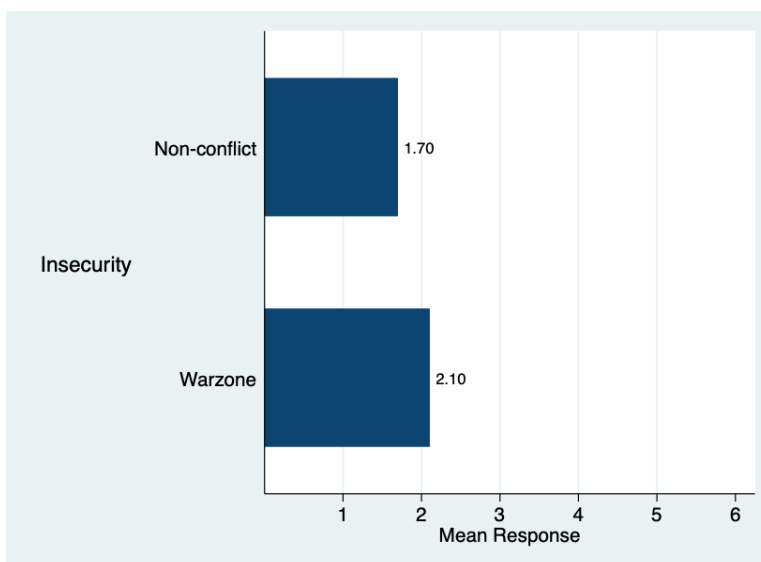
Respondents also reflected on whether security has improved or gotten worse since the signing of the peace agreement, using a scale from 1 (got much worse) to 6 (got much better). Respondents in both warzones and non-conflict communities seem to feel that security has neither improved nor gotten worse, as Figure 19 shows. However, the average rate given by those in warzones is slightly higher and the difference is statistically significant.

Turning to basic rights and liberties, we asked respondents how free they feel to move from one place to another, within and outside their community; express their ideas freely; practice their religion; choose their romantic partner; vote for their preferred political candidate in elections; run for office if they want to; join a political party of their choosing; create a civic organization; and protest peacefully. As Figure 20 shows, those living in warzones report, on average, lower levels of freedom for each category, with all differences being statistically significant. It is also important to note that the non-response rate for these questions is always higher among respondents in warzones than elsewhere.

6 Current Socioeconomic Situation

The survey included several questions about respondents' current socioeconomic situation. To measure relative economic status, we asked respondents

Figure 17: Threats, attacks or killings of social leaders in the respondent's community
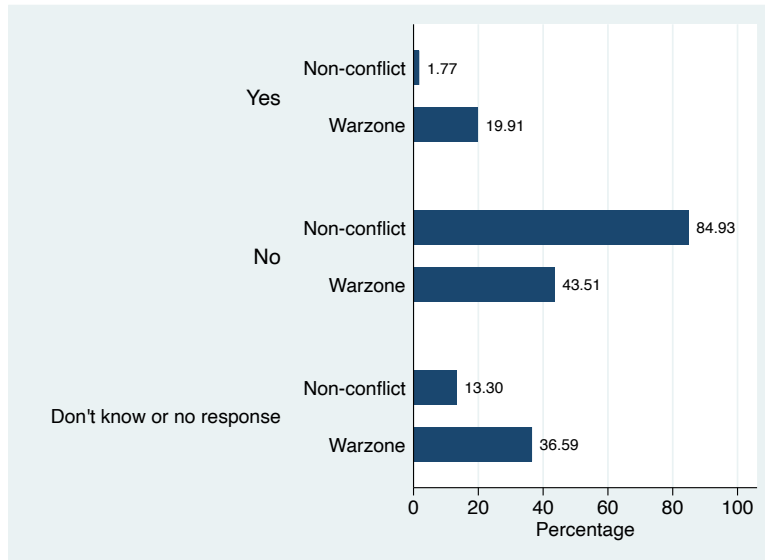
Figure 18: Have you or your immediate family members been the victim of a crime in their community in the last six months?
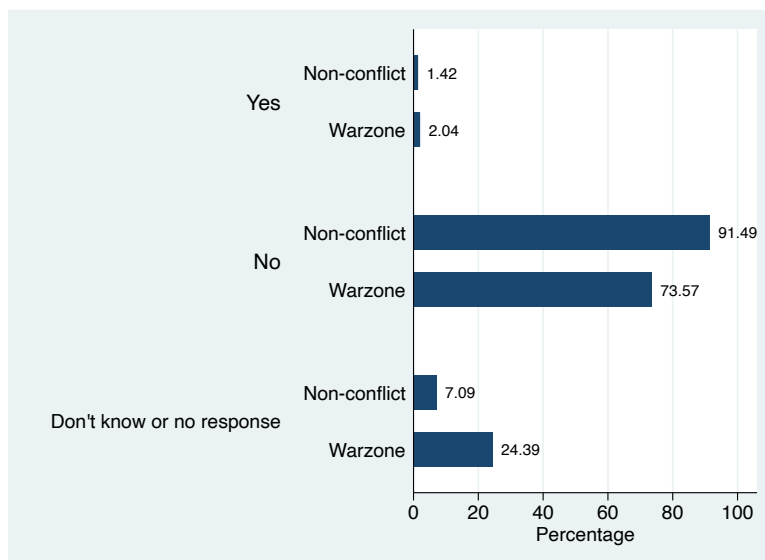
Figure 19: How much has security improved or worsen in your community since the signing of the peace agreement?
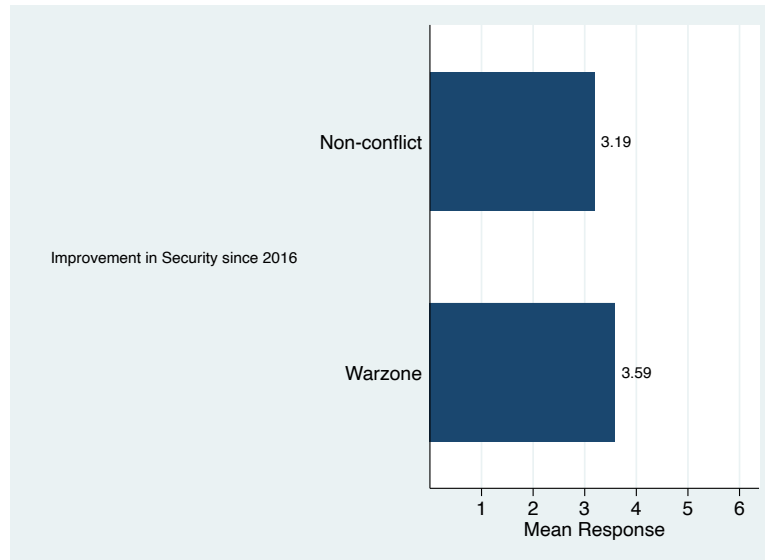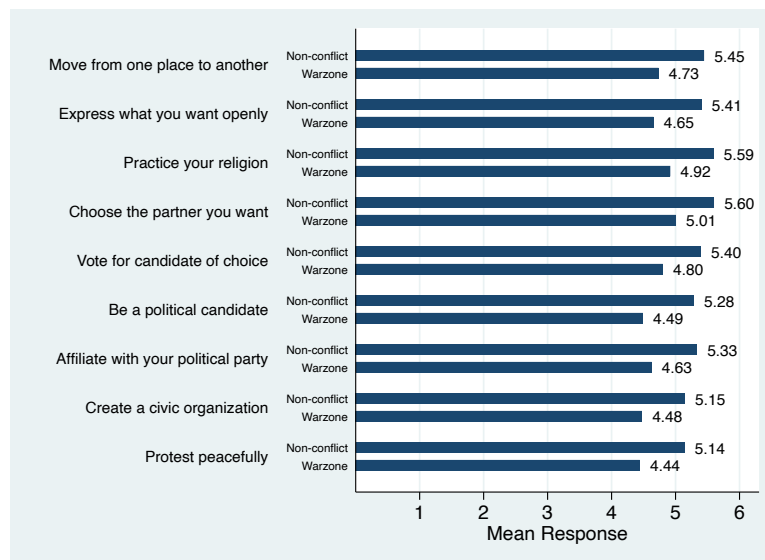

Figure 20: How free do you feel today to...?

about their self-perceived economic class compared to the rest of their community (Figure 21). In both non-conflict and warzone communities, very few people identified themselves as rich or upper middle class. There are some slight differences in that more people in non-conflict zones identified themselves in the lower middle class, subsequently less identified as poor. More people from warzone communities thus identified their self-perceived economic class as poor.

Figure 21: Self-Reported Economic Status
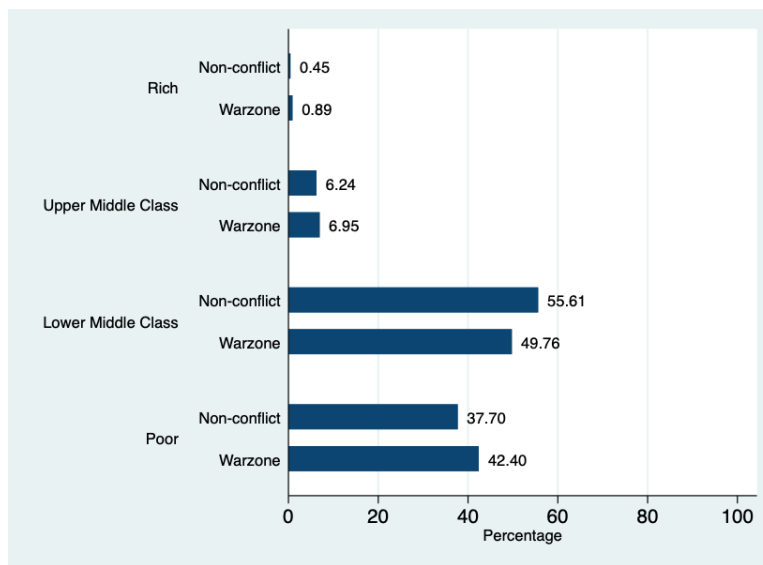
To measure household scarcity and poverty levels, respondents were asked to indicate whether the household income was enough to cover minimum expenses (Figure 22). Respondents in warzone communities were significantly more likely to report that the household income was not enough relative to respondents in non-conflict communities – possibly indicating that the level of household economic stability in warzone communities is wanting. This is reaffirmed by the reported levels of food scarcity in warzone communities versus non-conflict communites (Figure 23). Nearly 22% of respondents in warzone communities stated that their household had gone without food due to the lack of resources or money to obtain it in the past year, compared to 14% of respondents in non-conflict communities. This difference is statistically significant.

The survey also collected data on state subsidies. A significantly greater proportion of respondents in warzone communities receive state subsidies (40%) relative to those in non-conflict communites (32%).

To measure wealth in a further nuanced way, rather than merely asking

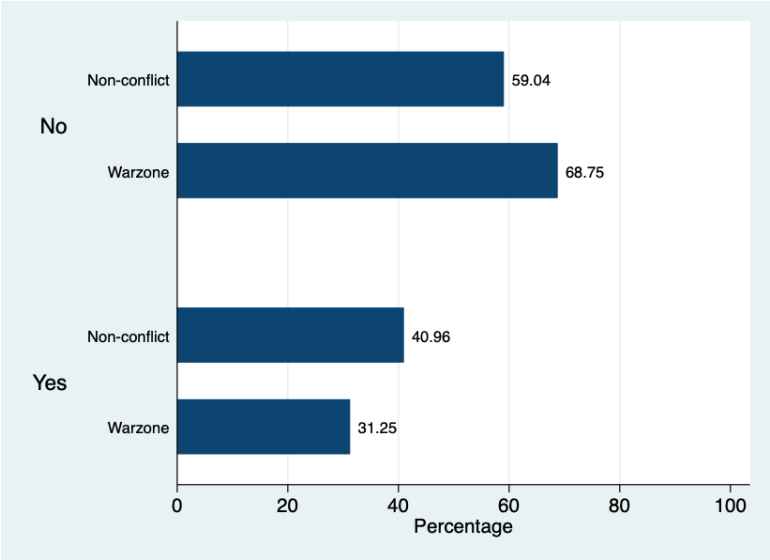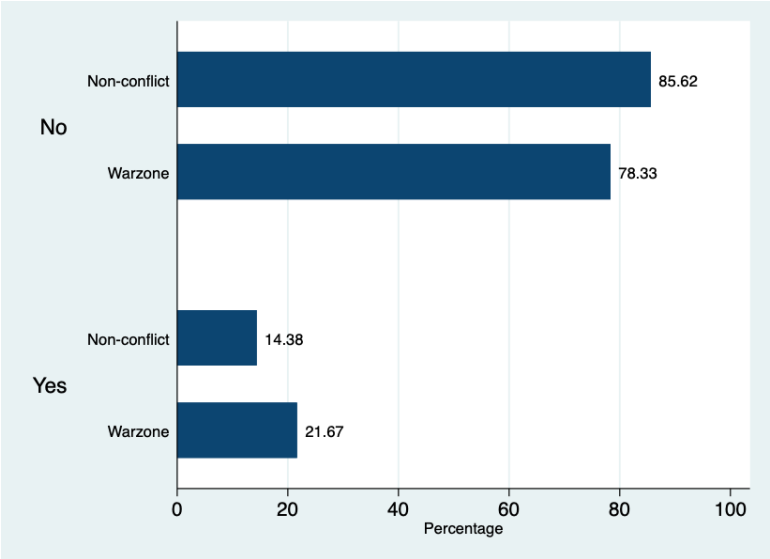Figure 22: Does the household income cover basic costs?

Figure 23: In the past year, has the household gone without basic groceries?

for income or estimated monetary holdings, we asked respondents to indicate whether or not the household has the following belongings or services: radio, television, bicycle, motorcycle, car, refrigerator or freezer, washer, tractor, or internet service (or cellular data). Table 1 below shows the percentages of respondents that stated that their household owned, or at least had access to, some of these items across the community sub-sample. In most cases it appears that warzone communities are performing more poorly as relates to economic indicators. However, these markers of household wealth indicate that respondents in warzone communities may at least have the basic household major appliances– even more so than those in non-conflict communities. For example, respondents located in warzone communities are more likely to have a refrigerator or washing machine. All this to say, these rates of household access to these major appliances that can make day to day life more efficient are still not necessarily the common in either warzones or non-conflict communities. Thus these markers of wealth may speak to the wider experiences of poverty, unmet basic needs, and the difficulties that arise out of poverty conditions that exist across the country, regardless of one's residence in a warzone *or* non-conflict community.

Table 1: Percentage of Respondents with Access to Various Household Items

Item	Warzone	Non-Conflict
Television	85.4%	87.5%
Refrigerator	62.0%	53.3%
Radio	57.4%	82.5%
Washing Machine	45.2%	30%
Motorcycle or Car	40.0%	41%
Internet Service (including cellular data)	25.8%	20.2%
None of these	4.2%	2%

When asked about land or property ownership, a significantly greater proportion of respondents in non-conflict communities stated that they had land. However, the substantive difference is not large – only 4.3% greater. What is more substantively important is the difference in the proportion of land title-holders among warzone and non-conflict communities. Among warzone community landholders, 77% hold the title to their land, versus 89% of landholders in non-conflict communities. This is a statistically significant difference. This preliminary finding may indicate the disparities in the formalization of property rights between these subsets of communities. On the one hand, this marker of limited state capacity may be a factor contributing

to why armed groups were able to infiltrate these territories to begin with. On the other, limited ability to obtain formal documentation of land rights may be a legacy of armed group presence on the rule of law.

We also asked how many smartphones and computers people in the household own to further measure connectivity and internet access. In terms of smartphones, respondents in non-conflict communities were more likely to have at least one. However, respondents in warzone communities were more likely to state they had a computer or tablet. Therefore, it is not apparent that either subset of communities is clearly more technologically connected than the other.

Figure 24: Quantity of Smartphones among Members of the Household
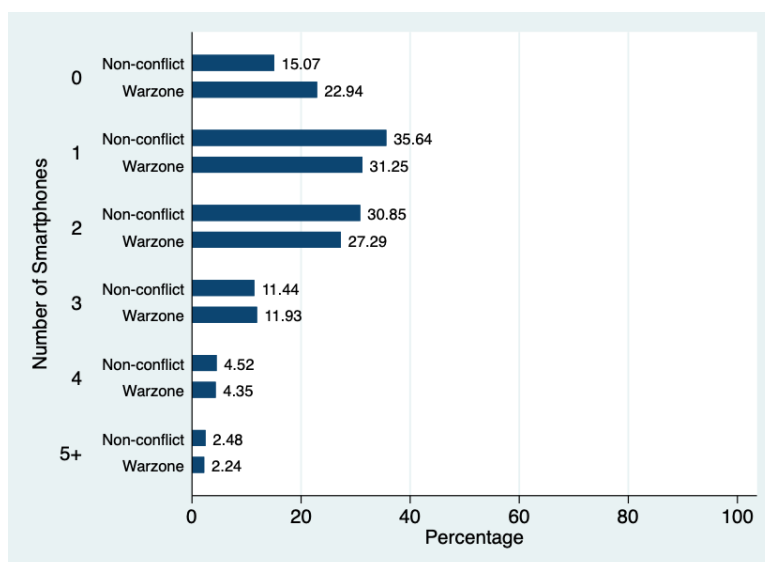
7 Political behavior

We asked respondents several questions about their preferences, attitudes, and behavior in the political realm. In this section we explore whether people living in a community that endured the presence of armed actors in the past exhibit different patterns of thinking about, and engaging with, politics.

We start with formal political participation. Whereas 85% of respondents report being registered to vote in non-conflict communities, the rate is 78% in warzones. In addition, almost 11% of respondents in warzones failed to respond this question, compared to 2% in non-conflict communities. Additional detailed data on both presidential and local elections—where people

Figure 25: Quantity of Computers or Tablets among Members of the Household
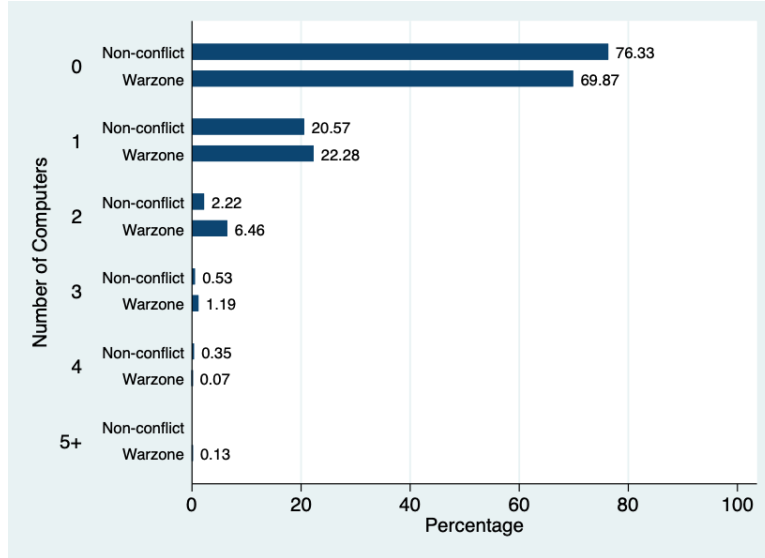
elect their mayor and council members—show that the quality of the democratic process is much lower in warzones than elsewhere.

Starting with the last presidential election, which took place in 2018, we asked respondents if they voted; whether they voted freely; whether they voted under pressure or coerced; whether they voted for their preferred candidate or political party; and whether they voted in exchange of a gift or money. We asked the same questions about the last local elections, which took place in 2019.

Before discussing the results for these questions, it is important to stress that, again, those living in warzones are much less likely to respond to these questions than those living in non-conflict communities. This pattern of non-response is important as it may signal fear to share their views on issues that can be sensitive in their communities.

Starting with presidential elections, 68% of respondents in warzones reported voting while 73% did so in non-conflict communities (Figure 26). People in warzones are also less likely to report that they voted freely (Figure 27) and that they voted for their preferred candidate or political party (Figure 28), and more likely to say that they voted out of pressure or coercion (Figure 29) and that they voted in exchange of a gift or money (Figure 30. We find very similar results on municipal elections (Figures 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35).

Turning to other forms of political participation, we asked participants

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Figure 26: Did you vote in the past presidential elections?
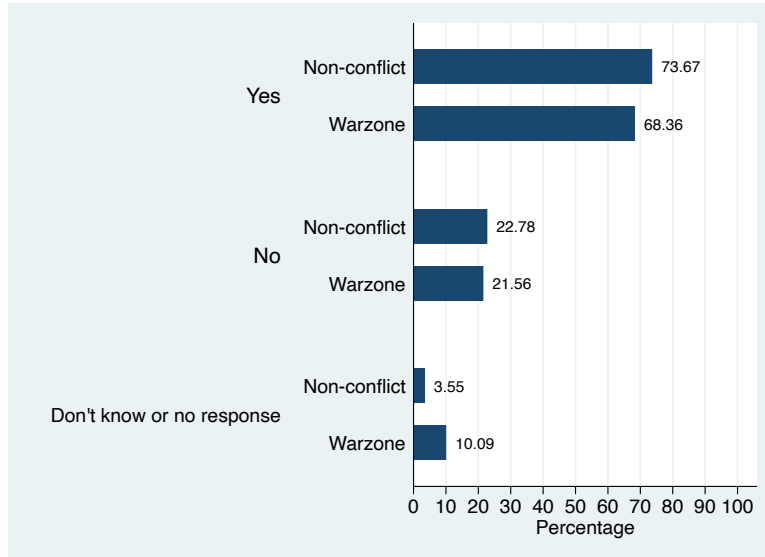
Figure 27: I voted freely (presidential elections)
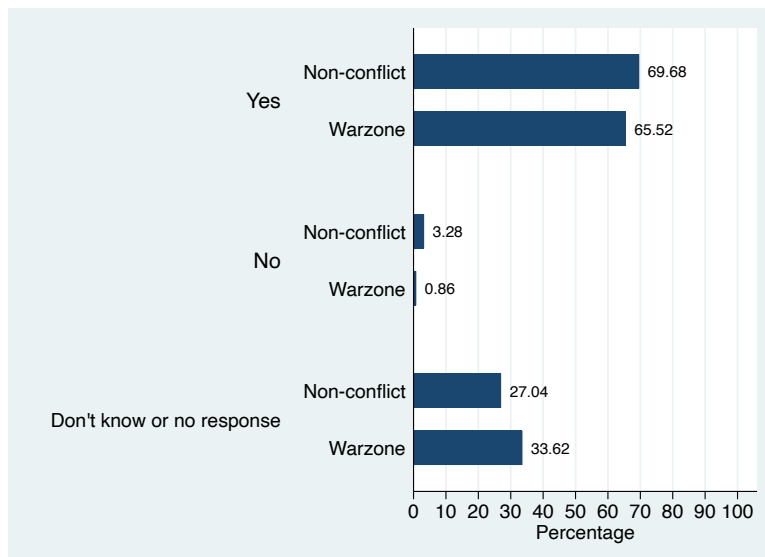
Figure 28: I voted because I liked the party or candidate (presidential elections)
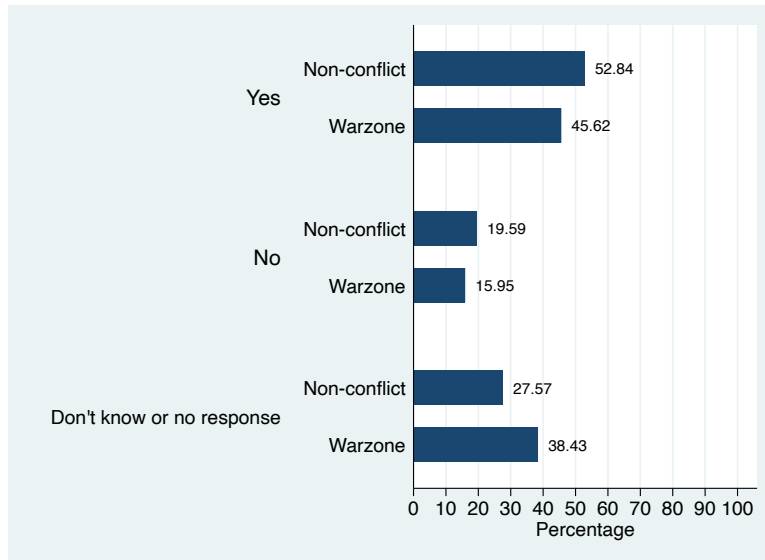

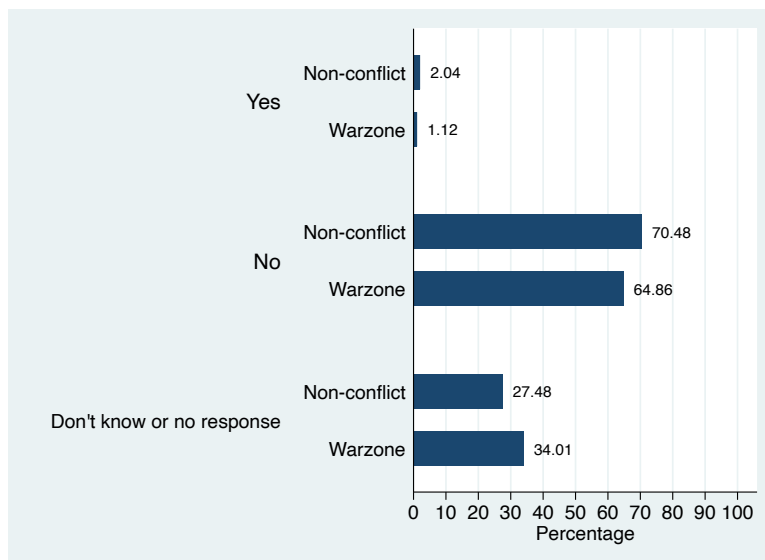Figure 29: I voted under pressure or coercion (presidential elections)

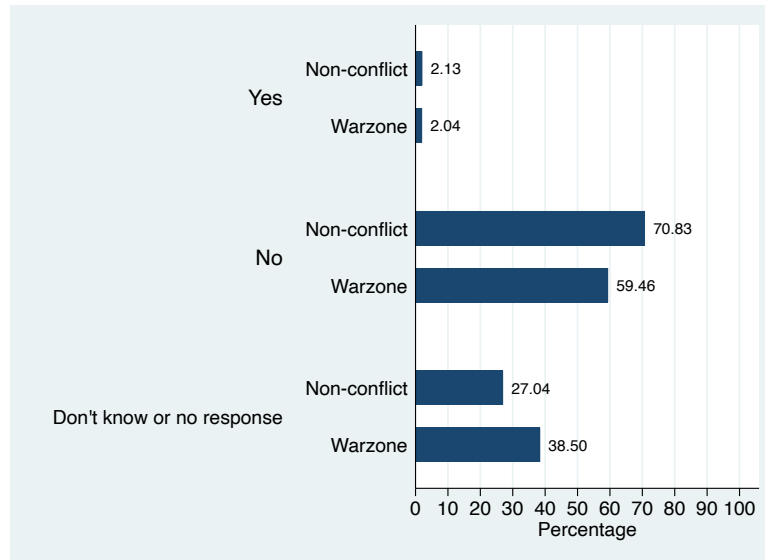Figure 30: I voted for someone who gave me gifts or money (presidential elections)

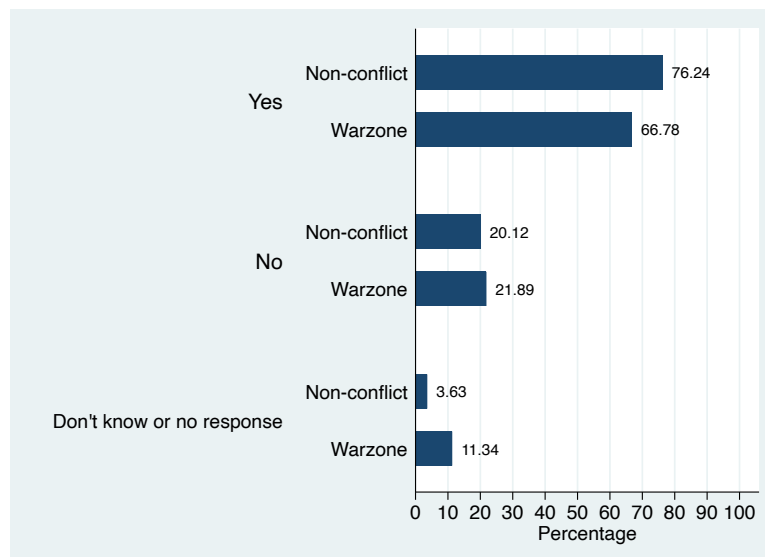Figure 31: Did you vote in the past local elections?
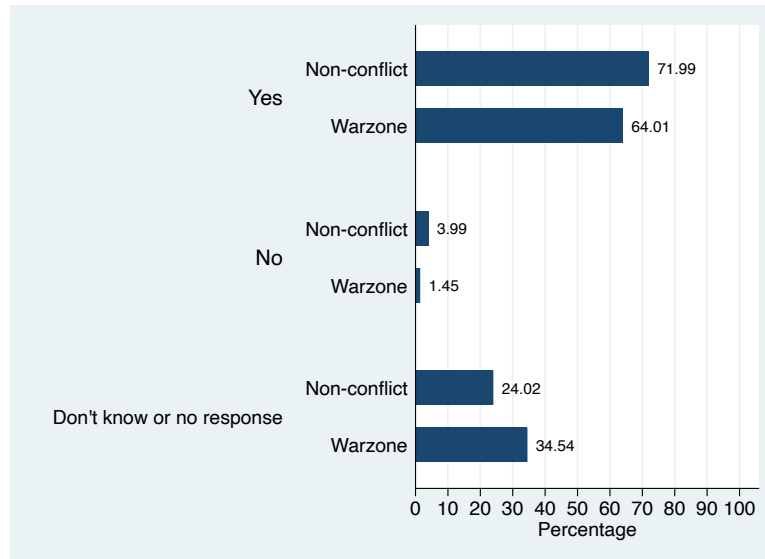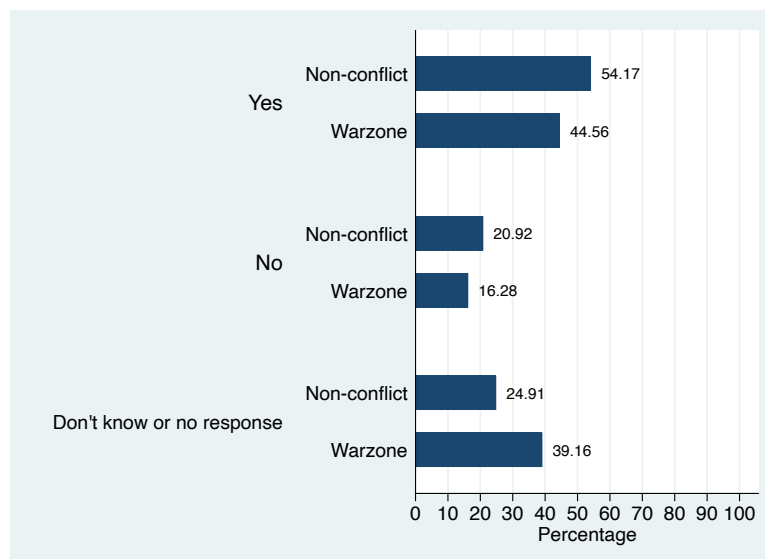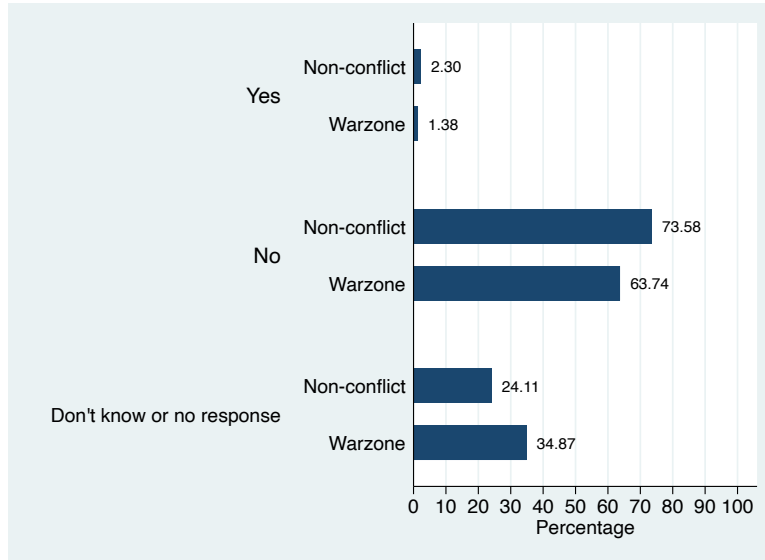
Figure 32: I voted freely (local elections)

Figure 33: I voted because I liked the party or candidate (local elections)

Figure 34: I voted under pressure or coercion (local elections)

Figure 35: I voted for someone who gave me gifts or money (local elections)
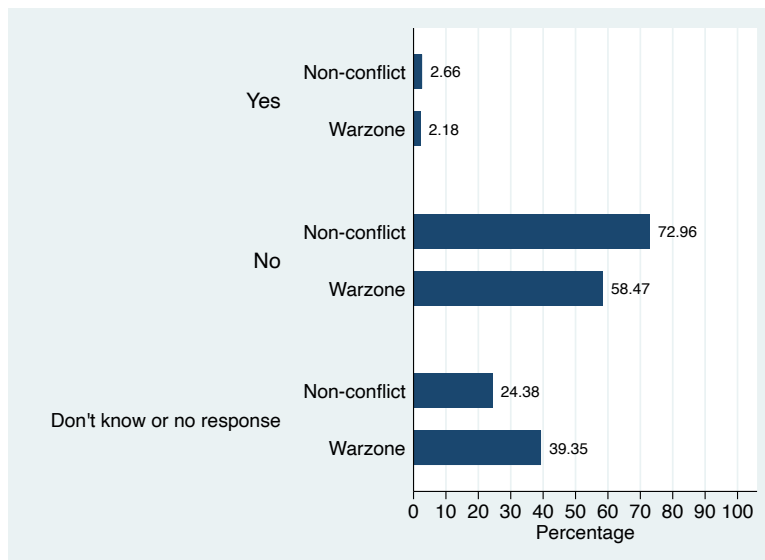
whether they had signed petitions, participated in demonstrations or strikes, wrote to or contacted a politician, reported a problem to a local authority, or were volunteers on a political campaign. As Figures 36, 37, 38 , 39 and 40 show, all forms of non-voting political participation are lower in conflict zones and, again, non-response rates are higher in these territories.

Figure 36: Political Participation: Signing a Petition
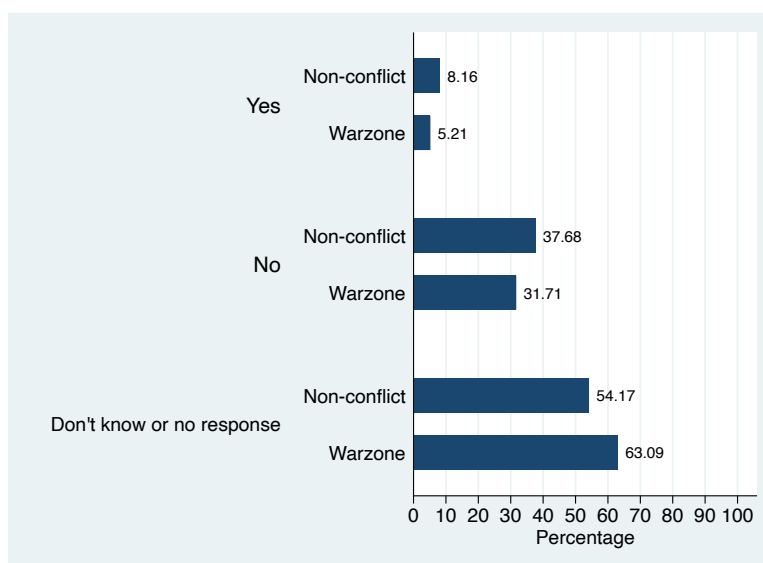
We also asked respondents about their willingness and ability to participate politically. People in warzones are equally likely as those in non-conflict zones to believe that they can contribute to local politics if they wish to do so: in both types of territories the mean response is 3.4, with 1 meaning that they do not believe they can contribute and 6 meaning that they believe they can. When asked how much they consider participating to be important as a way to help change things in their community, the responses were again very similar across territories with a mean response of about 3.8 (with 1 being they do not consider participating to be important and 6 being that they do).

Respondents were also asked about their support for democracy. Residents of both types of territories show similar levels of support for the idea that people should be able to peacefully express their opposition to the government's policies; respondents also show similar levels of support for the idea that it is important that those who rule are elected by popular vote. However, those living in warzones are significantly less likely to agree with the idea that under certain circumstances an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one. This result suggests that warzones may

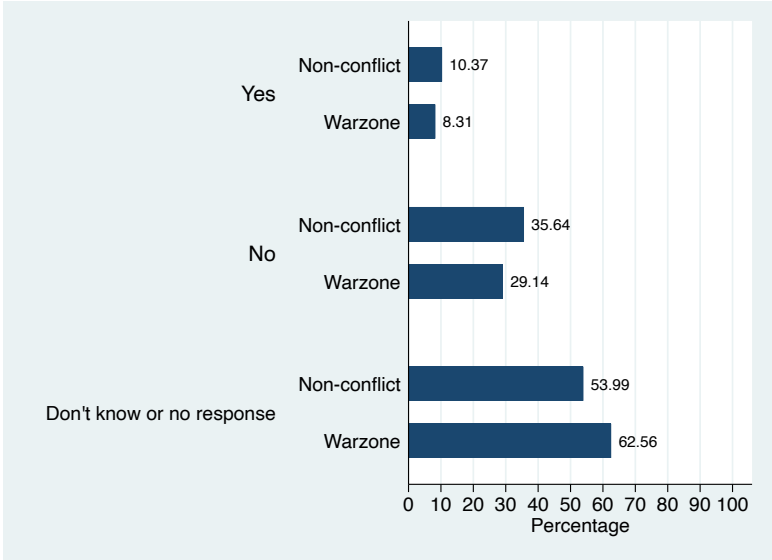Figure 37: Political Participation: Participating in a Demonstration or
Strike

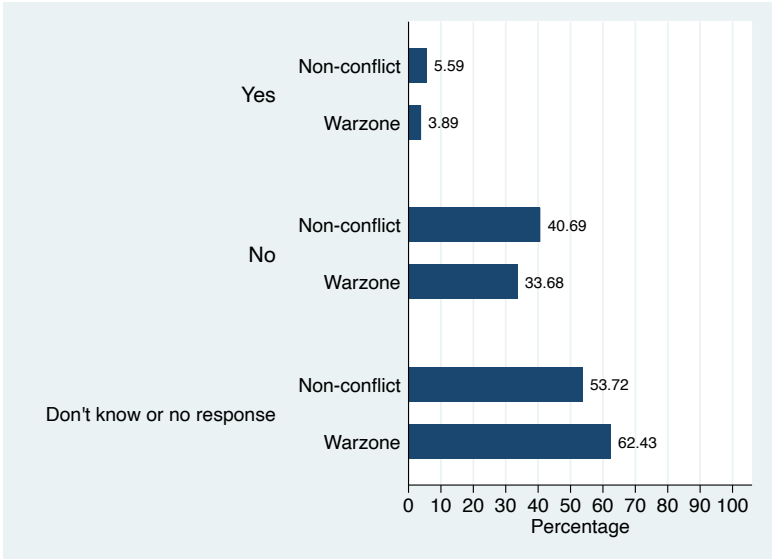Figure 38: Political Participation: Contacting a Politician

Figure 39: Political Participation: Reporting a Problem to Authorities
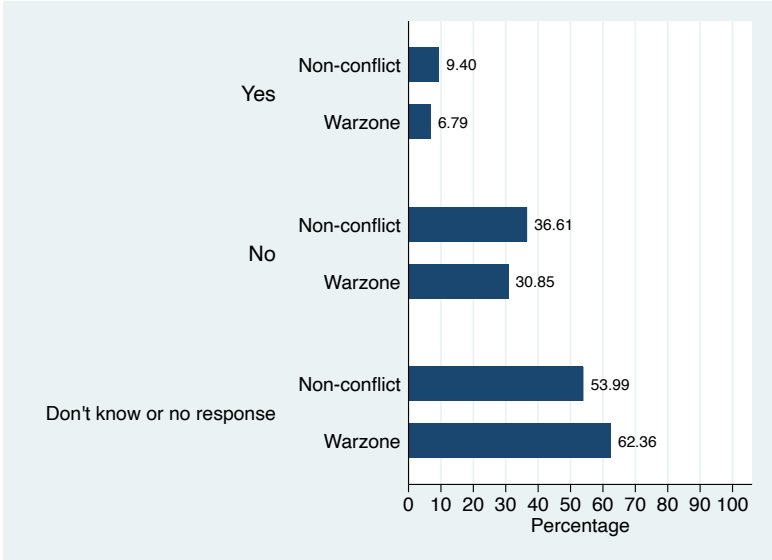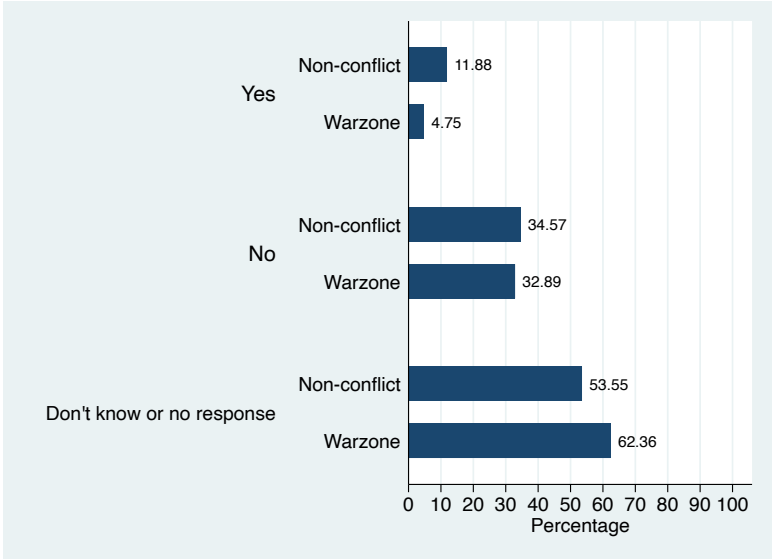

Figure 40: Political Participation: Volunteering in a Political Campaign

not suffer from a democratic deficit as it is often assumed, and that those living in warzones may learn more complex lessons about democracy and the rule of law(Arjona et al., 2022) (Figure 41).

The survey also collected evidence on respondents' opinions about the quality of democracy in Colombia in general, and in their communities in particular. Respondents in warzones and non-conflict communities report similar levels of satisfaction with democracy in the country. They also report that their communities are equally democratic. Those living in warzones rate their municipalities as being slightly less democratic than those in non-conflict zones; although the difference is statistically significant, it is not of a large magnitude (Figure 41).

Figure 41: Democratic values
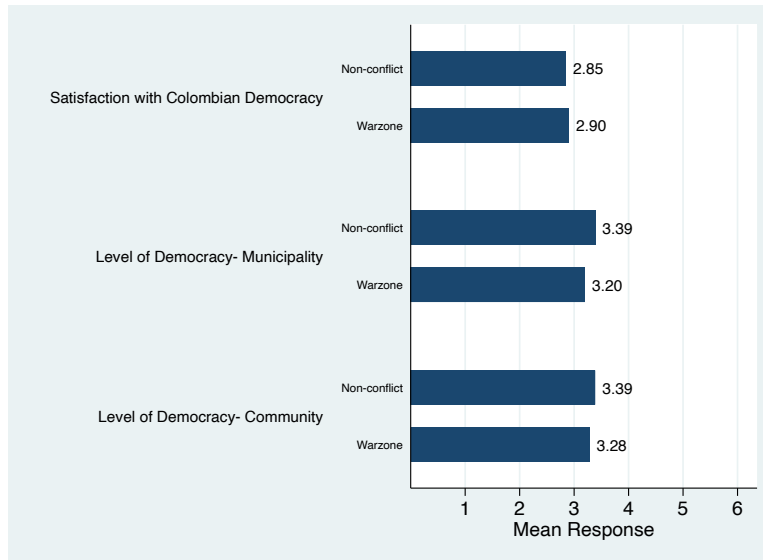
We also asked respondents whether they feel that their interests are represented by the municipal council, their mayor, a political party, the country's president, and congress. Those living in warzones are less likely to say that these actors represent them; they are also less likely to say that they *do not* represent them. Instead, non-response is common among those living in warzone to each of these questions regarding degree of representation. In each case, those living in warzones were less likely to respond at all relative to those in non-conflict communities (Figures 42 to 46). All these differences are statistically significant.

Figure 42: Do you feel like the municipal council represents your values and interests?
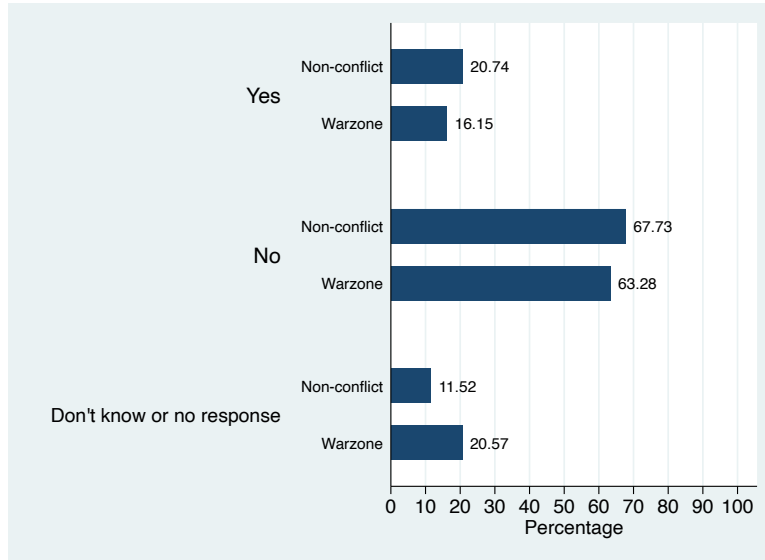

Figure 43: Do you feel like the mayor represents your values and interests?
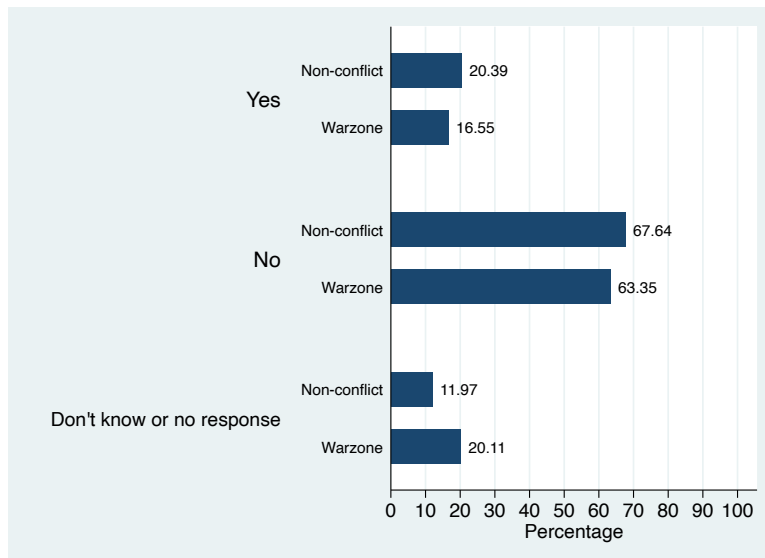
Figure 44: Do you feel like a political party represents your values and interests?
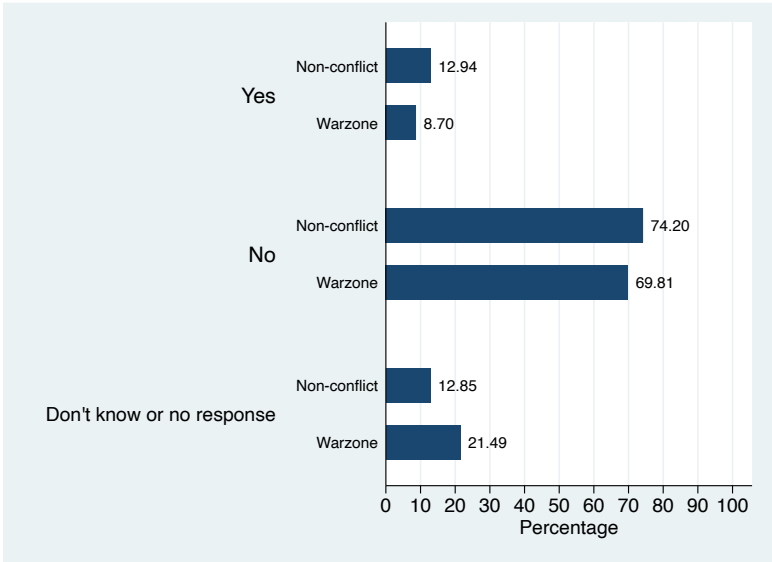

Figure 45: Do you feel like the president represents your values and interests?
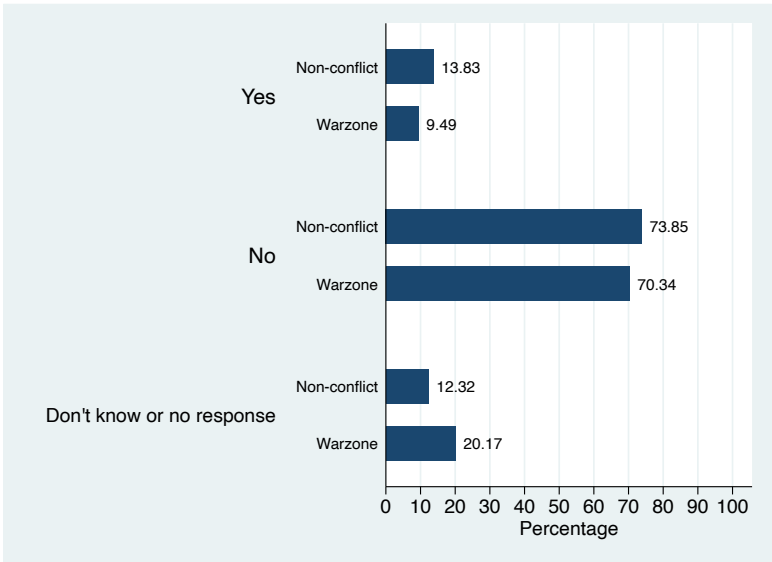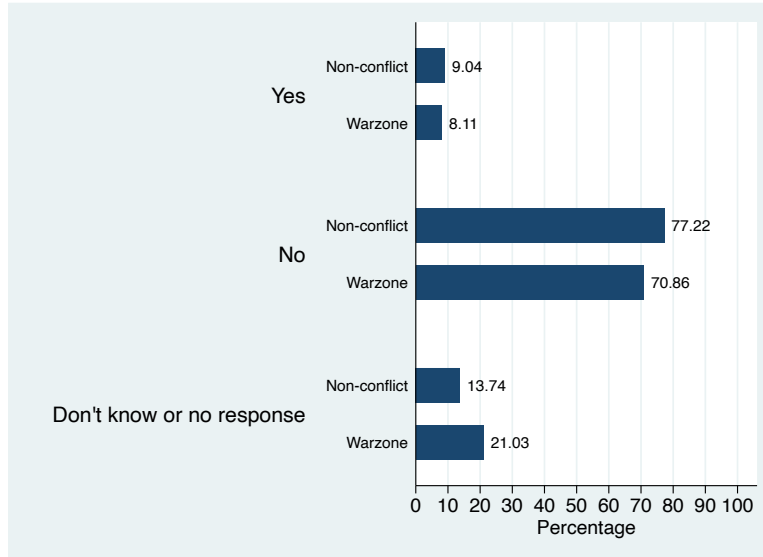
Figure 46: Do you feel like congress represents your values and interests?

8 State-society relations and local governance

The survey asked multiple questions about municipal governments, public goods provision, and state-society relations. Most of our findings point to a strained relationship between most local populations and the state. They also show that in most cases the situation is significantly worse in warzones.

We start with citizens' assessment of the availability and quality of public goods. As Figure 47 shows, although the provision of public goods tends to be better in non-conflict communities, the differences are not as large as might be expected. In fact, only drinking water and garbage collection are significantly worse in warzones, while sewer and wastewater treatment services, aqueduct, electricity, and gas are equally available on average in both types of territories. Respondents in warzones do report, however, lower levels of satisfaction with the education and health services in their communities, as Figure 48 shows.

How much do citizens trust different state agencies? As Figure 49 shows, levels of trust are very similar across warzones and non-conflict zones, except when it comes to the police and the army. In both cases, respondents in warzones trust less the state armed forces than respondents elsewhere. These differences are statistically significant.

We also asked participants to assess how the army and the police treat people in their community using a scale that goes from good (1) to terrible (4). People in warzones report, on average, lower rates than those living

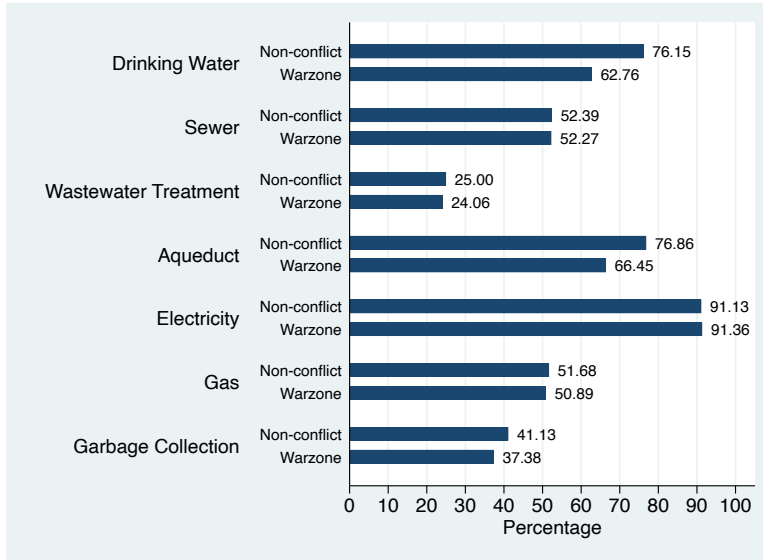Figure 47: Utilities available in your home

Figure 48: Satisfaction with education and health services provided by the state
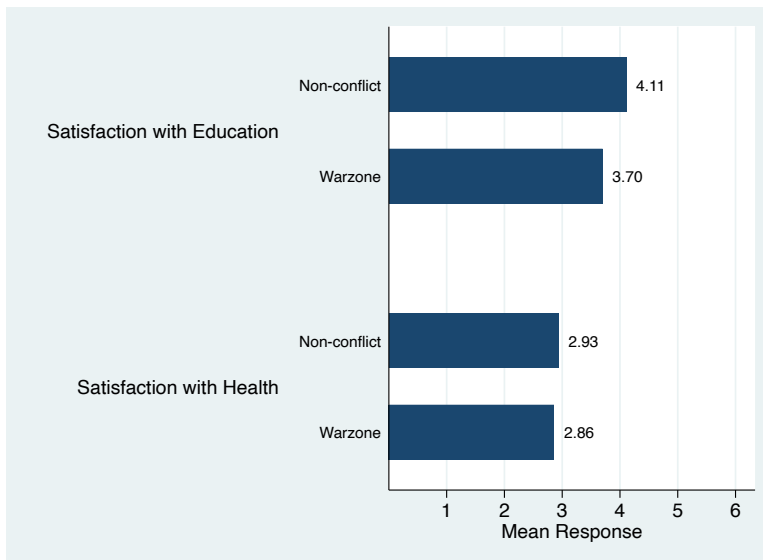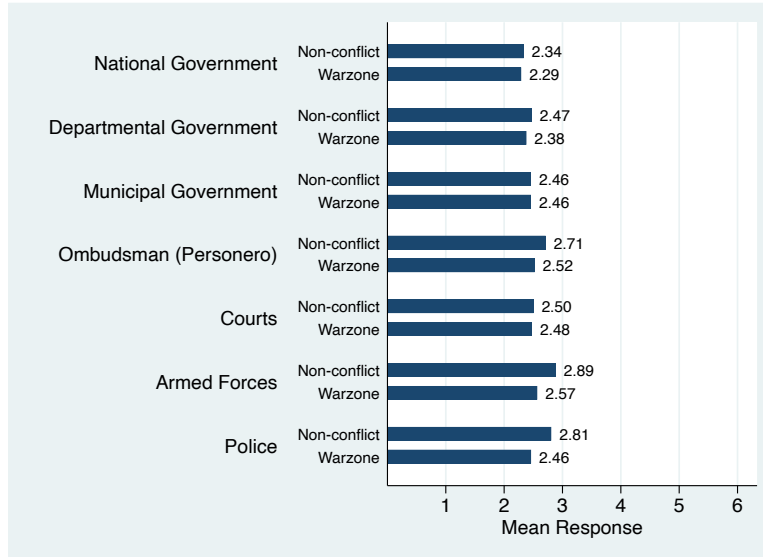
Figure 49: Trust in state and government entities

in non-conflict zones (Figure 50). These last two questions suggest that the relationship between the state armed forces and conflict communities are still strained and demand attention.

When asked whether they or their neighbors would be able to access the relevant authorities if they needed help from the state, respondents in warzones and non-conflict zones gave very different answers. While 47% of those living in non-conflict zones think they would, only 29% said so in warzones. Moreover, when asked if they have ever felt mistreated or abandoned by the state, those living in a former warzone were more likely to answer yes and to not respond (Figure 51 and 52). The difference is particularly large, and is statistically significant, for the question about mistreatment by the state.

Perceptions of corruption in various state agencies are also worse among residents of warzones (Figure 53). Using a scale that goes from not corrupt (1) to highly corrupt (4), respondents systematically reported higher levels of perceived corruption for the police, the mayor, courts, social services (the Colombian Institute for Family Wellbeing), and the ombudsman's office, with all differences being statistically significant. Politicians are considered to be very corrupt (3.46) in both warzones and non-conflict zones.

Figure 50: Respondents' perception of how state armed forces treat people in the community
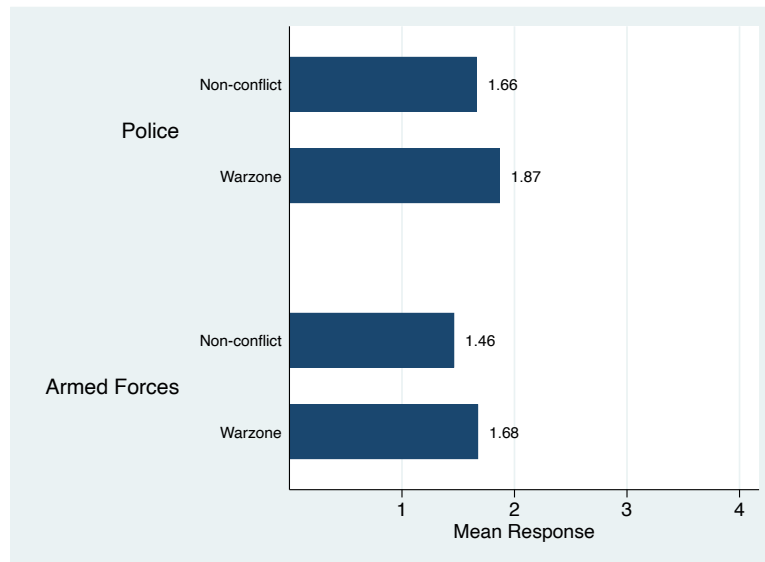

Figure 51: At some point in time, have you ever felt abandoned by the state?
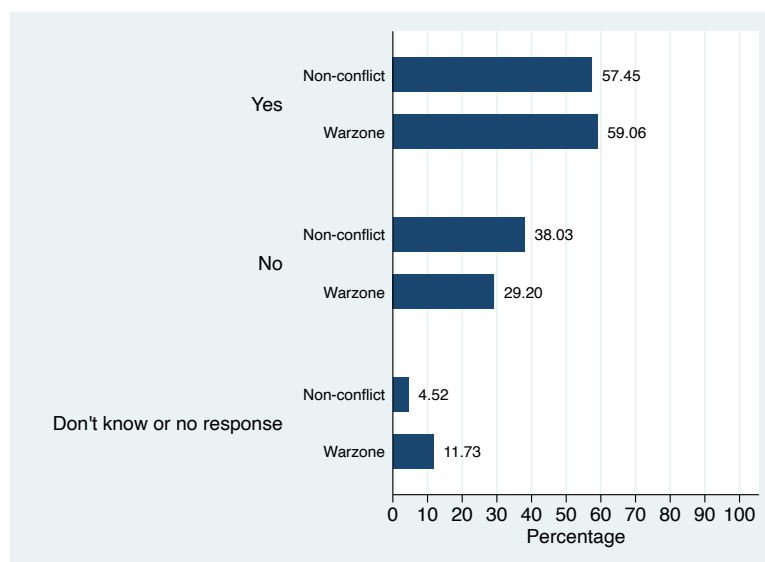

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Figure 52: At some point in time, have you ever felt mistreated by the state?
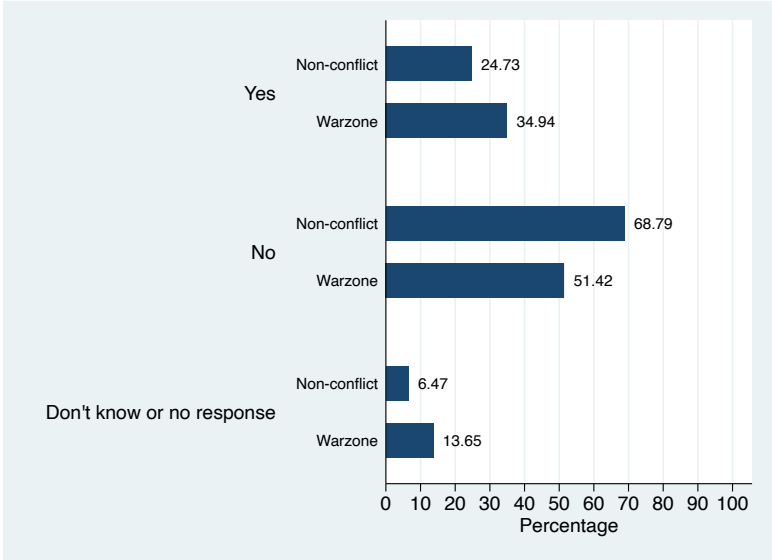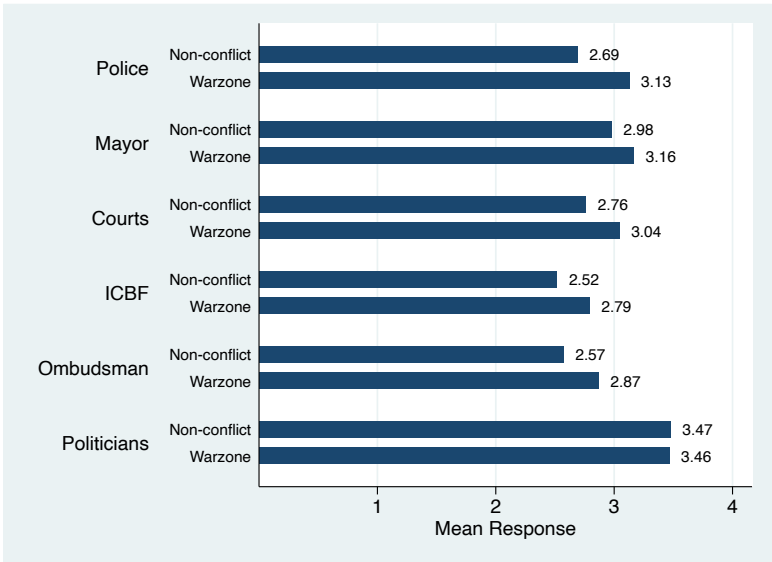

Figure 53: Respondents' perception of level of corruption in public agencies in the municipality

9 Social fabric

How do social relationships differ across territories? Several questions about daily interactions, social conflict, and trust suggest that the social fabric of warzones is not weaker than in non-conflict zones. We also fail to find that those exposed to the civil war more directly display higher levels of prosociality towards in-group members, as recent research on the effects of civil war violence has found.[12]. Indeed, levels of social trust in relatives, friends, community members, people in one's municipality, and even strangers in general are not significantly different across community types (Figure 54).

Figure 54: Interpersonal trust
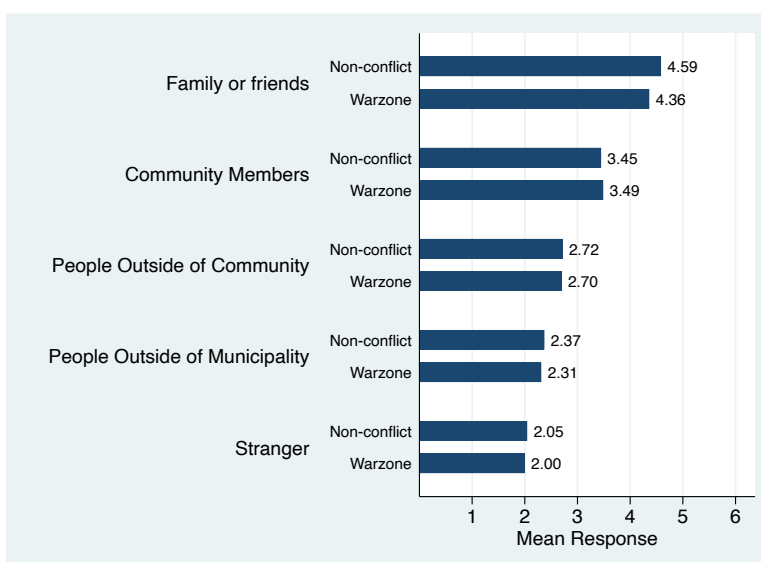
Cohesion is quite similar across territories as well. Respondents were asked to report how much they agreed with the following statements using a scale from 1 (full disagreement) to 6 (total agreement): "This is a united community" and "In this community people are willing to help their neighbors." Participants gave similar responses in conflict and non-conflict communities (Figure 55). When asked whether they think they would easily find someone in their community to help them if they needed economic support, respondents in warzones also gave similar responses to those living elsewhere (Figure 56). However, disputes among neighbors about property, contracts, and robbery, theft or personal injury are much more common in warzones (Figure 57) with all the differences being statistically significant.

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[12]See Bauer et al. (2016) for a review of this literature.

Levels of satisfaction with dispute resolution are nonetheless similar across conflict and non-conflict communities (Figure 58).

Figure 55: Cohesion in respondents' community
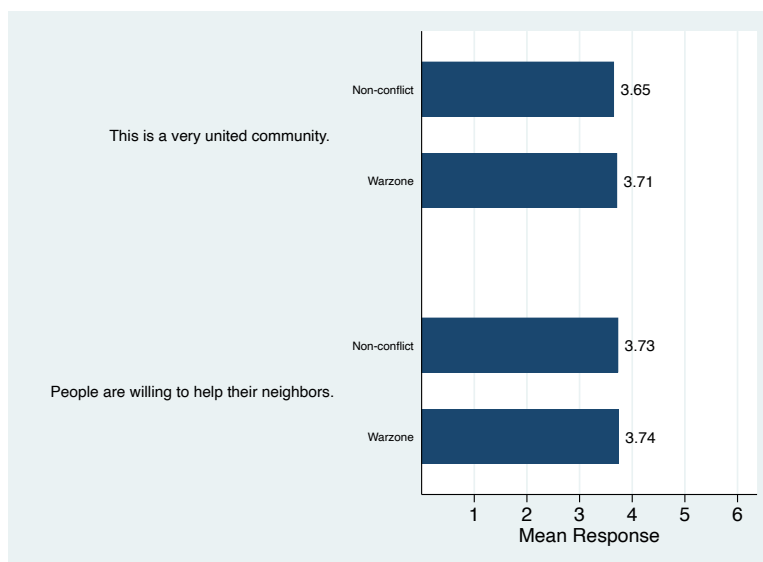
Turning to participation in civil society organizations, warzones do exhibit a less active civic life. Non-conflict communities are more likely to have all types of civil society organizations than warzones, except for victims associations and organizations representing ethnic authorities (*Cabildos* for Indigenous communities and *Consejos Comunitarios* for Afro-Colombian communities) (Figure 59). These results suggest that even though several social dynamics of former conflict zones may not be worse than elsewhere in the country, these communities do have fewer structured spaces to interact and come together for cultural, political, social, and economic activities.

10   Attitudes towards the 2016 peace agreement and reconciliation

Residents of warzones have lived through experiences of violence, armed governance, and mobilization, among others, that can influence their attitudes towards peace and reconciliation as well as their choices in this realm. The attitudes and behaviors of those living in places that never had a direct, ongoing interaction with non-state armed actors can also be influenced in distinct ways. The survey asked participants several questions about their views and behaviors.

Figure 56: If you needed economic support, would you easily find someone in your community to help you?
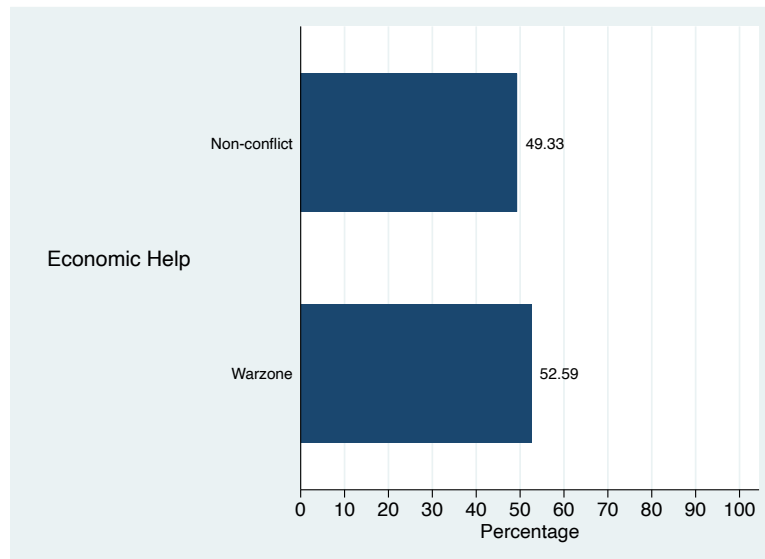

Figure 57: Respondents' perception of frequency of different kinds of disputes in their community
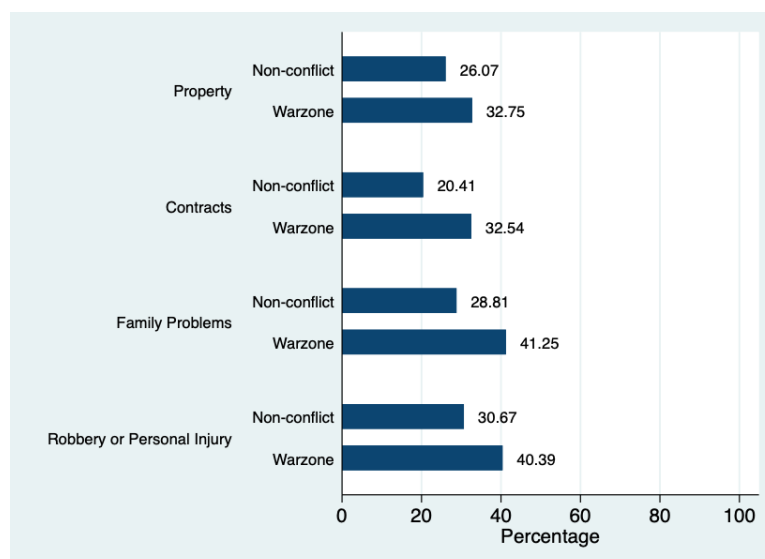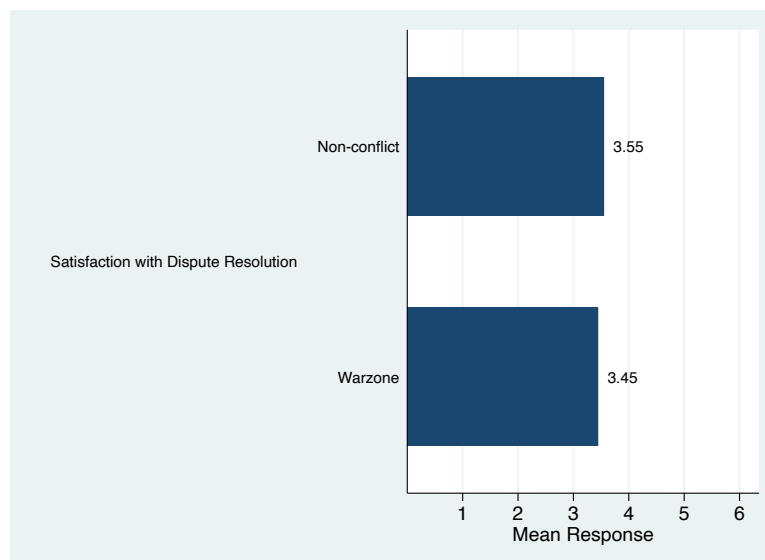
Figure 58: Respondents' overall satisfaction with dispute resolution in their community

Regarding attitudes towards the peace agreement, we asked respondents whether they voted in the 2016 plebiscite and, if so, whether they voted Yes or No. People in warzones were more likely to decline to respond to these questions, especially the one about how they voted. Considering only the responses of those who did answer the questions, we find that those living in conflict zones were more likely to vote, although the difference is not large and only significant at the 10% level. Among those who voted, respondents in warzones were slightly more likely to vote Yes, but the difference is very small and not statistically significant (Figure 60). Overall, there is no clear pattern in voting in the plebiscite based on people's exposure to the ongoing presence of armed actors.

Turning to people's views about the agreement, we find that those living in warzones are more likely to believe that reconciliation and forgiveness of FARC members is possible, as well as that the agreement seeks to guarantee the right to truth, justice, reparations and non-repetition for victims. The differences across community types are small but statistically significant. However, those in warzones are equally likely as those in non-conflict communities to believe in a negotiated, non-military solution to the conflict (Figure 61).

Respondents also answered questions about their perceptions of former FARC members and their attitudes towards them. Those living in warzones are less likely to say that former guerrilla members should never hold public

49

Figure 59: Civil society organizations present in the respondent's community
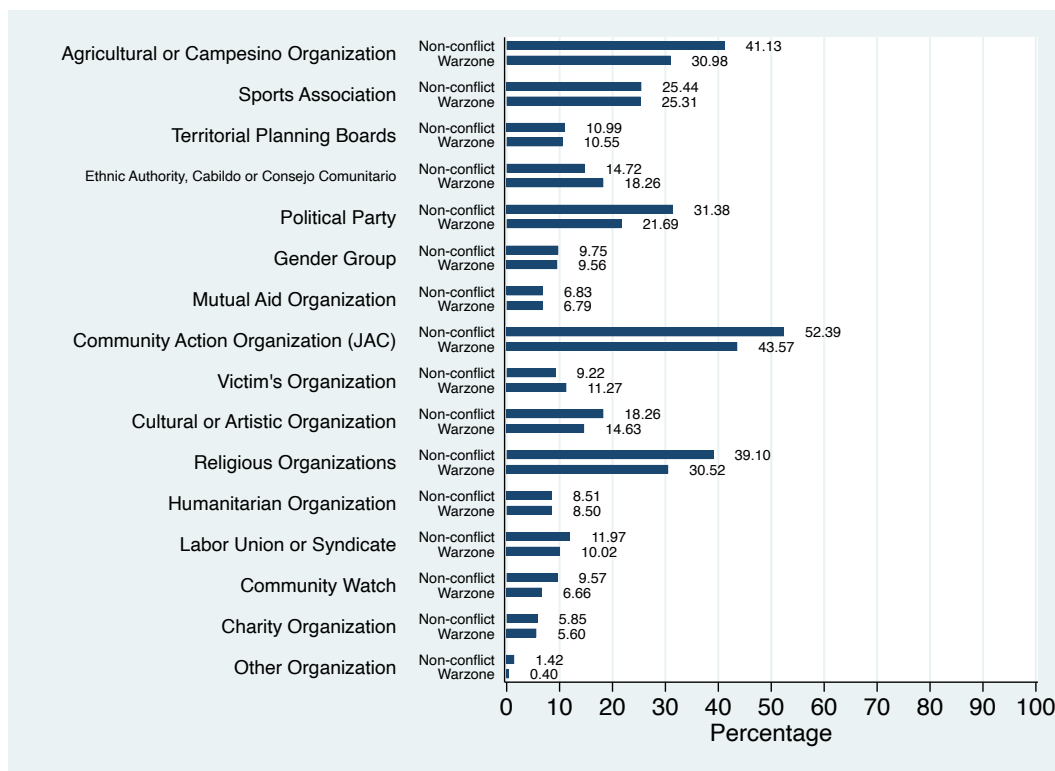

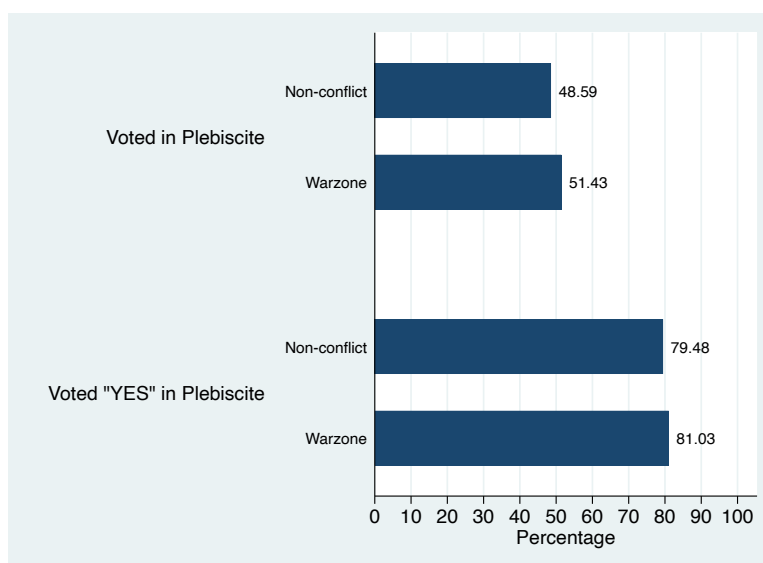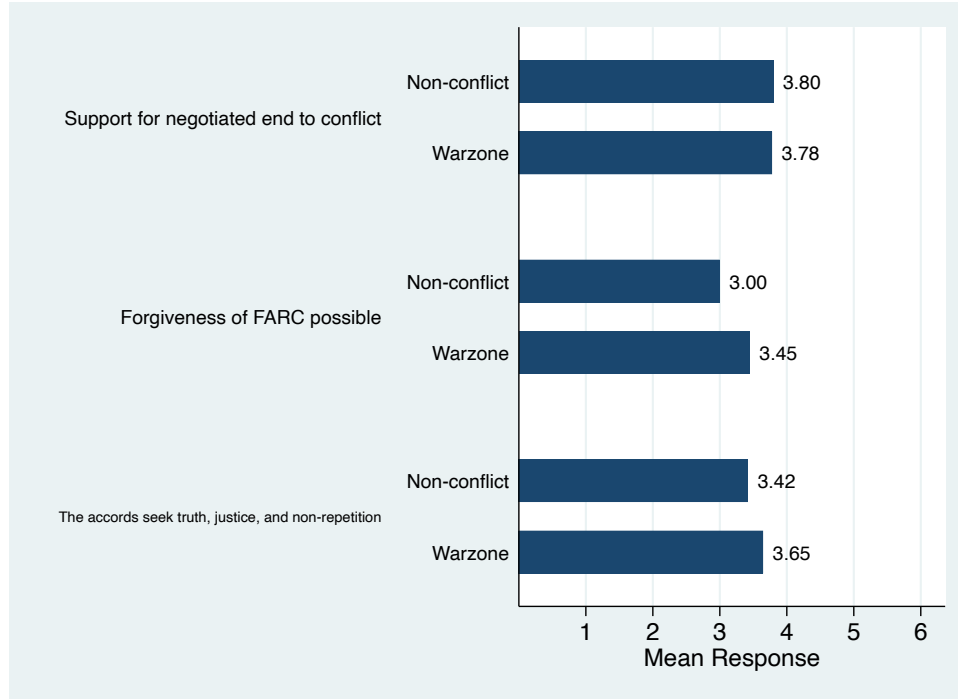Figure 60: Voting in the 2016 plebiscite

Figure 61: Views on the peace agreement

office. We also asked respondents if they would accept that ex-combatants can access help from the state in their municipality; if they would offer them a job; and if they would accept that their children or the children of a close relative dated a former combatant. Responses are not substantially different across conflict and non-conflict communities: for some responses they are very similar and for others those in warzones display slightly more open positions vis-a-vis ex-FARC members (Figure 62). Those in warzones are also more likely to say that they believe the state should let former FARC members free, more likely to say that they should be given reduced sentences conditional on their telling the truth and repairing their victims, and less likely to say that they should be sent to prison to serve their sentences. These participants are also more likely not to respond to these questions (Figure 63).

Finally, we asked questions to assess respondents' expectations about the fulfillment of the peace agreement. Almost one in three respondents in warzones declined to answer these questions as compared to 18% in non-conflict communities. A large majority of respondents in both community types are pessimistic about both the state and the FARC honoring the agreement; however, those in warzones are more skeptical than those in non-conflict

Figure 62: With regard to FARC ex-combatants, would you mind if...?
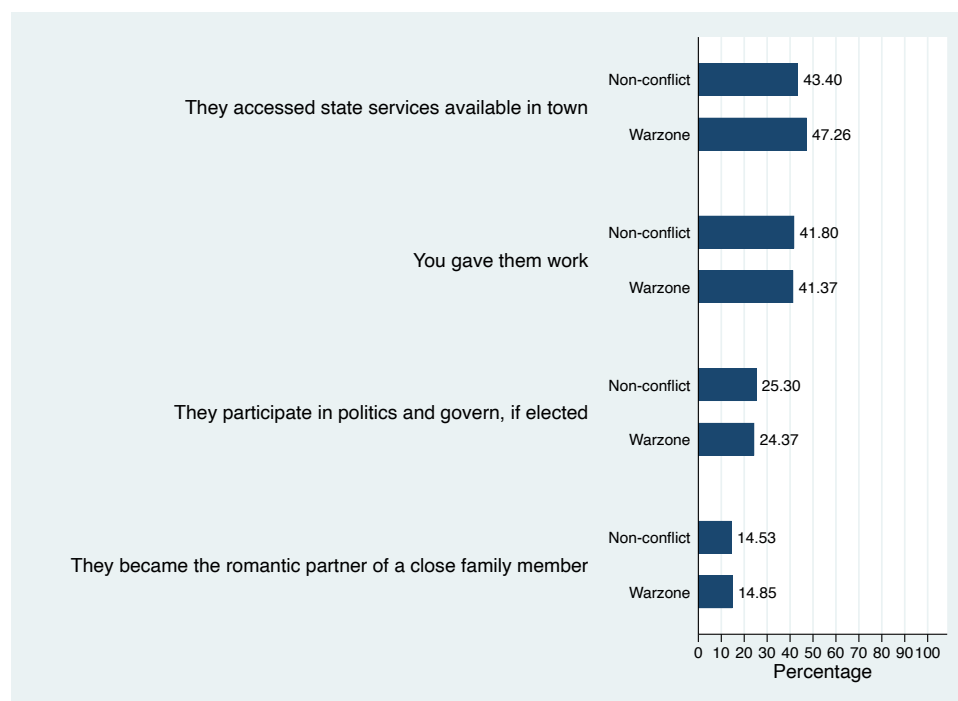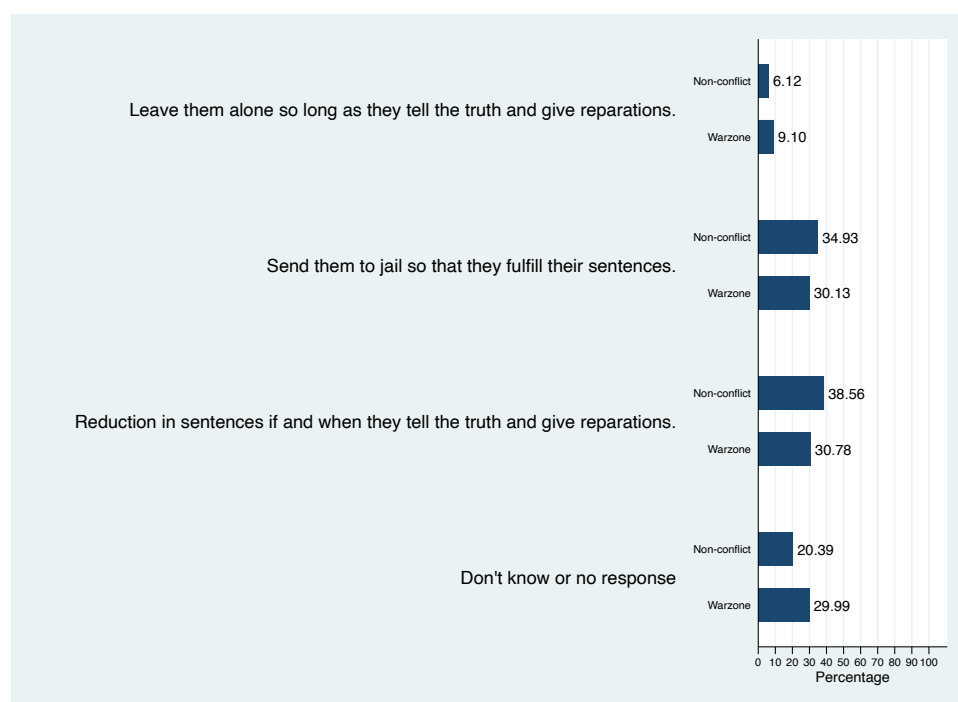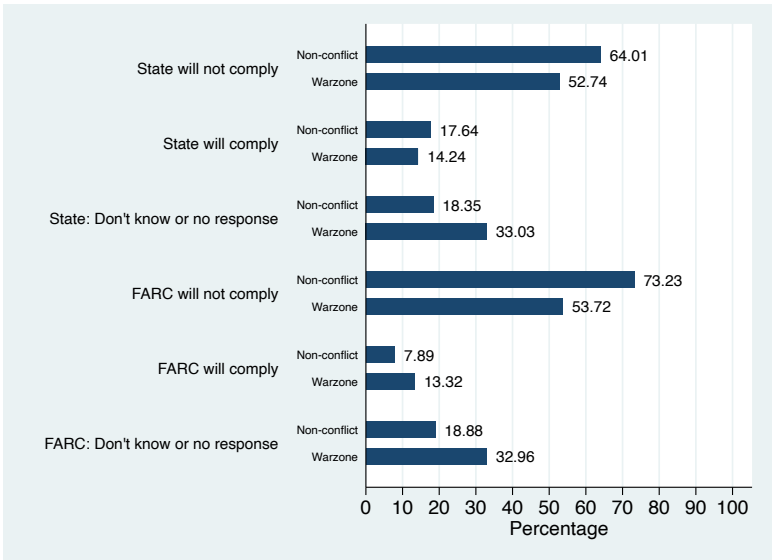

Figure 63: Attitudes towards penalties for former FARC members

communities about the state complying, and less skeptical about the FARC complying (Figure 64). All these differences are statistically significant.

Figure 64: Expectations about fulfillment of the peace agreement

11   Conclusion

This report presented detailed evidence on different aspects of the political and social life of communities that endured the ongoing presence of non-state armed groups in the past, as well as in communities that did not interact with armed actors in an ongoing basis. By considering the situation of communities that interacted with armed actors—as opposed to limiting our focus to communities impacted by violence—we seek to broaden the research agenda on the legacies of civil war, war-to-peace transitions, and post-conflict interventions. We also aim to contribute to the understanding of the impacts of the armed conflict in Colombia and the difficult challenges the country currently faces.

We find that warzones and non-conflict communities often differ in ways that would expected. For example, as the media and multiple reports have shown, security continues to be critical in many warzones, with the attacks on civic leaders being particularly concerning. Residents of warzones also face greater economic problems: they are more likely to consider themselves poor, report that the household income was not enough to cover their needs, and live in a household that had gone without food due to the lack of resources

or money to obtain it in the past year. We also find that formalization of property rights is lower in warzones than in non-conflict communities. Political representation is, as can be expected, lower in warzones than in non-conflict communities, and state-society relations are far more strained in these territories. Residents of warzones also report, on average, higher levels of corruption in local public agencies.

At the same time, the data suggest that the realities of conflict zones are not always worse than those elsewhere in the country. In particular, we do not find lower support for democracy in places that were more directly affected by the armed conflict, and we do not find several aspects of the social fabric of warzones to be worse than in non-conflict communities. Despite residents of warzones reporting higher levels of insecurity, they do not report higher levels of crime than respondents in non-conflict communities. Finally, although the provision of some public goods is worse in warzones, some, like gas, electricity, and wastewater treatment or sewer, are equally available in both types of communities. Contrary to recent findings in the literature on the legacies of violence on prosocial behavior, residents of warzones fail to display different levels of trust towards in-group members; they also report similar levels of social cohesion. Finally, although, as noted above, the relation between local populations and the state are more complicated in warzones, respondents report similar levels of trust in most public agencies. An important exception is the army and the police, which are much more distrusted by residents of conflict zones.

Our findings also point to critical areas that require attention. Individuals living in warzones report more restrictions to their basic rights and liberties than those in non-conflict communities. These communities also have fewer civil society organizations. These data point to essential limits to citizens' rights and liberties, and calls for more research on the subject as well as policies to protect the rights and security of those who engage with politics.

Respondents in warzones also report lower levels of political participation, including both voting and other forms of engagement. They are also more likely to vote under pressure and coercion. Despite this, these respondents were as likely as those in non-conflict communities to state that they consider participating to be an important way to help things in their community. Moreover, participants in both community types are equally likely to believe that they can contribute to local politics if they wish to do so. Residents of warzones express more dissatisfaction with democracy in their municipalities than those in non-conflict communities. However, respondents in both types of communities were equally likely to express support for democracy. What is more, those in warzones are less likely to believe that authoritarian governments can be, under certain conditions, preferable to democratic ones. These

findings raise questions about widespread assumptions about the democratic deficit of conflict zones and call for more research on the impact of civil war dynamics on political preferences and beliefs (Arjona et al., 2022).

It is important to stress that non-conflict communities also show important challenges as the country strives to transition to peace. People in these territories are less open to forgiveness and contributing to the reintegration of former combatants. These attitudes matter as the residents of non-conflict communities also influence how the country at large navigates the transition from war to peace.

Finally, this project raises important questions about the methodological challenges faced in the study of conflict and post-conflict settings. As previously mentioned, an important contribution of this project is to think beyond violence in the study of widespread armed conflict and its legacies. However, violence is still the only relevant proxy that many scholars may rely on to estimate the degree of exposure that people and communities have to civil conflict. Obtaining information and reliable data as to the presence of armed actors, their interactions with civilian populations, and armed group regulations over different activity through time is difficult, time-consuming, and fraught with potential sources of measurement error. For example, obtaining a carefully selected group of communities that had not experienced armed group presence was a months-long process, facilitated by a number of researchers and vetted via different sources. However, this project has allowed us to assemble this database surveyed communities wherein we can account for their wartime experiences and different community and municipal level markers that may be trace evidence of armed group presence, or predictors of presence itself. Having this information on these communities may help us learn what additional proxies and measurement opportunities there are for approximating, and identifying potentially early warning signs of, armed group presence.

It is important to note that we do not claim that the differences we observe between warzones and non-conflict communities are necessarily caused by war. It is entirely possible that some of these differences help explain why armed actors expanded to certain territories and not others in the first place, or why they were able to consolidate their presence there. However, regardless the cause, descriptive evidence of these differences is of tremendous importance as it can guide future research on the legacies of civil war as well as policy debates about priorities, needs, and opportunities in different types of communities throughout the country.

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