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LETTER

Disentangling the Relationship Between Prospective Expectations and Policy Preferences in Violent Conflicts

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Abstract
Popular willingness to compromise is an important step for conflict resolution. A key argument suggests that improving expectations about the prospects of peace can increase public support for concessions. Yet a competing view, anchored in broader debates about preferences and expectations, suggests that prior ideological dispositions motivate biased future expectations rather than vice versa. This tension, however, remains understudied in violent conflicts. In this study, we leverage rich survey data from Israel to disentangle the causal relationship between expectations and preferences for compromise in a long-standing conflict. Using two decades of aggregate monthly series and two exogenous shocks to peace expectations, we find that changes in prospective expectations do predict subsequent shifts in support for compromise. We find no contrary evidence for a null, opposite, or heterogeneous relationship. The findings contribute to ongoing debates about the interrelations between expectations and preferences and provide insights into their implications for conflict resolution.

Keywords: public opinion; conflict processes; prospective expectations; political attitudes; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Introduction

In violent conflicts, popular willingness to compromise is a critical yet elusive step for advancing peace. A large literature has examined the factors that shape public opinion for or against peaceful compromises in such contexts. A key argument suggests that improving future expectations about the likelihood of an agreement, via positive top-down or bottom-up signals, can shift public opinion in favour of diplomacy and concessions (for example, Halperin et al. 2011; Hasler et al. 2023; Leshem and Halperin 2020; Pruitt 1997; Shamir and Shikaki 2002; Zartman 2000). Policy preferences, in this view, can change when new information updates prior beliefs about probable developments.

This proposition, however, is complicated by a growing body of work, extending beyond the research of conflicts, which shows that prior ideological beliefs often bias people's future expectations rather than vice versa (Jerit and Barabas 2012; Taber and Lodge 2006). This counterargument suggests that new information is often screened and interpreted selectively to fit existing views, particularly on salient issues involving strong group identities (Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Porat et al. 2014; Gaines et al. 2007; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Zaller 1992). Hence, future expectations could reflect prior ideological preferences rather than shape them.

This fundamental disagreement carries important implications for our understanding of public opinion, violent conflicts, and peacemaking. Theoretically, the two arguments differ on the true

causal direction between future expectations and preferences for compromise. Policy-wise, they suggest opposing courses of action to promote peace. The former view encourages the cultivation of hopeful signals about the conflict's potential resolution by leaders and regular citizens. The latter, by contrast, is pessimistic about their value and implies slower and more laborious efforts to form peaceful preferences through early education, collective discourse, and alternative group identities (Coleman et al. 2007).

Nevertheless, the competing predictions and potential endogeneity have not been tested in conflictual contexts. Addressing this gap, the current study leverages uniquely rich survey data from Israel to empirically disentangle this relationship in a real-world protracted conflict. Our findings corroborate the first argument. Using vector autoregression (VAR) analysis of monthly time series spanning two decades, we find that aggregate changes in Jewish Israelis' expectations about future resolution precede shifts in support for compromise but not vice versa. Then, exploiting two exogenous shocks to peace expectations, we validate this influence at the individual level and its uniform impact across partisan lines.

Hence, in violent conflicts, changes in prospective expectations can and do lead to corresponding shifts in public willingness to compromise, with little contrary evidence. This finding is significant for domestic and international peacemaking initiatives, suggesting that hawkish views partly embed practical pessimism. Accordingly, efforts to improve future expectations about an agreement could help overcome one of the most persistent barriers to conflict resolution. This finding further shows that the relationship between preferences and expectations acts uniquely in violent conflicts compared to other policy domains.

The study proceeds with a brief outline of the two opposing arguments and their empirical implications. We then discuss the Israeli case study and present our data and findings in two steps. The first involves VAR analysis of monthly time series of aggregate Jewish-Israeli public opinion from 2001 to 2020. The second examines individual-level preferences before and after two historical shocks to peace expectations. We conclude with several takeaways.

Two Opposing Logics

Previous research on conflicts has identified people's future expectations as a key factor for resolution. Several studies argue that improved expectations about the practical prospects of peace can increase policy preferences for compromise (for example, Halperin et al. 2011; Hasler et al. 2023; Leshem and Halperin 2020; Pruitt 1997; Shamir and Shikaki 2002; Zartman 2000). Belligerent attitudes are often linked to a sense of personal and national threat, stress, and collective humiliation (Canetti et al. 2019, 2017; Zipris et al. 2019). Greater optimism about the conflict's future, however, moderates such reactions and reduces threat perceptions, out-group dehumanization, and desire for retaliation (Bar-Tal 2007; Leshem and Halperin 2023; Moeschberger et al. 2005; Rosler, Cohen-Chen, and Halperin 2017; Shikaki 2006). Some conclude, therefore, that increasing optimism is a necessary precondition for peacemaking (Pruitt 1997).

Building on this framework, multiple studies examine the external factors shaping prospective expectations about peace as a first step for resolution. The findings show that future expectations react to the conflict's violence and costs (Gayer et al. 2009; Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2006; Godefroidt 2023; Zartman 2000) signals about the adversary's openness to compromise (Berenji 2020; Cohen-Chen, Halperin Crisp et al. 2014; Halperin et al. 2011; Leshem and Halperin 2020; Rosler et al. 2023; Yakter and Harsgor 2023), media coverage (Sheafer and Dvir-Gvirsman 2010), and the international community's positions (Shelef and Zeira 2017).

The argument's underlying premise, however, stands at the heart of a broader disciplinary disagreement about the causal relationship between prospective expectations and policy preferences. On the one hand, some arguments, as the one noted above, imply rational belief

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updating and Bayesian learning processes (Coppock 2022; Gerber and Green 1999). In this view, people adjust future expectations following new external information. They then update their prior policy preferences based on the modified evaluations. Economic voting has been a paradigmatic example: voters often observe real-world economic markers, modify their economic expectations accordingly, and subsequently update related policy and electoral preferences (Lewis-Beck 1988; Lockerbie 1991; MacKuen, Erikson and Stimson 1992; Nadeau, Lewis-Beck and Bélanger 2012; Rueda and Stegmueller 2019).

On the other hand, some works, mainly outside the conflict literature, challenge this premise and suggest that prior preferences shape expectations instead of vice versa. This counterargument argues that people are cognitively motivated to justify and rationalize their long-standing worldviews in the face of new information, particularly on salient issues with strong predispositions (Jerit and Barabas 2012; Taber and Lodge 2006). Such reaffirmation occurs through biased information screening and retrieval, whereby people selectively seek, interpret, and accept messages corroborating prior attitudes and reject opposing evidence (Ditto and Lopez 1992; Gaines et al. 2007; Kunda 1990; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Zaller 1992). Hence, existing preferences often form biased prospective expectations rather than the contrary (Bartels 2002; Duch, Palmer and Anderson 2000; Wlezien, Franklin and Twiggs 1997).

Although typically debated regarding economic and partisan attitudes, this opposing framework is particularly relevant for violent conflicts. Conflicts are politically salient, involve strong collective identities, and tend to solidify rigid and long-standing attitudes validating the in-group and denigrating the adversary (Bar-Tal 2007; Homola, Pereira and Tavits 2020; Lupu and Peisakhin 2017; Rozenas, Schutte and Zhukov 2017). Studies on long-standing conflicts show that such narratives increase selective information-seeking, dismissal of hopeful messages, and out-group intolerance (Bar-Tal, 2009; Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Porat et al. 2014; Manekin and Mitts 2022; Nyhan and Zeitzoff 2018; Peffley, Hutchison and Shamir 2015). Consequently, ongoing conflicts often anchor public opinion in pessimistic equilibria regardless of positive signals (Coleman et al. 2007).

The disagreement is not just theoretical but predicts different empirical patterns. The first view expects that positive (negative) changes in prospective expectations about resolution will subsequently increase (decrease) support for compromise. The second argument rejects this proposition and implies three possible alternatives. Firstly, there could be a *null* relationship, in which changes (positive or negative) in future expectations do not move preferences for compromise at all. Secondly, there could be an *opposite* relationship, wherein positive (negative) changes in prospective expectations react to preceding increases (decreases) in support for compromise. Finally, there could be a *heterogeneous* relationship, where shifts in expectations only affect the preferences of subgroups ideologically predisposed to favour them. Table 1 summarizes the different predictions.

Nevertheless, these competing hypotheses have not been tested in violent conflicts outside the laboratory. In what follows, we leverage uniquely rich survey data from Israel to empirically disentangle this relationship in real-world settings using both aggregate and individual-level analyses. We first discuss our case selection.

The Israeli Context

Our empirical analysis focuses on Jewish public opinion in Israel, a paradigmatic case study in the research of public opinion and conflict processes (Godefroidt 2023; Phillips and Greene 2022). This context affords several key advantages for our purposes. First, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is protracted and violent, but also exhibits dynamic trends of escalation and diplomacy. Thus, it displays temporal changes in expectations and preferences about peace while holding the conflict's nature constant. Second, Israel provides rich public opinion data spanning lengthy periods and critical historical junctures, allowing us to measure popular trends in close and regular intervals. Third, Jewish

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Table 1. Expected Empirical Patterns by Theoretical Argument

Preference Updating
Δ expectations for resolution → Δ support for resolution
Motivated Reasoning
Δ expectations for resolution ≠ Δ support for resolution
Δ expectations for resolution ← Δ support for resolution
Δ expectations for resolution → Δ support for resolution only in predisposed audiences

Israelis are deeply divided on the conflict's desired solution (Shamir and Arian 1999; Yakter and Tessler 2023), a useful setting to examine potential heterogeneity by ideological predispositions.

The choice of Israel also has limitations, particularly when generalizing to milder, shorter, or more symmetrical conflicts. Specifically, this salient and protracted context may overstate ideological rigidity over change compared to more moderate cases. The conflict's asymmetry, wherein Israelis experience lower regular violence than Palestinians, may further weaken their urgency for resolution. Hence, null or static findings should be generalized carefully. Nevertheless, this potential rigidity lends greater credibility to patterns of change, as we do find below, informing and possibly understating similar trends in milder or more dynamic cases.

Aggregate-Level Relationship

Data and Method

First, we examine the direction of influence between expectations and preferences at the aggregate level. Longitudinal analyses of aggregate attitudes are particularly useful for revealing consistent patterns of temporal ordering between public views over long periods. This helps identify structural, population-wide dynamics that may be obscured by individual-level fluctuations, measurement error, or short-term noise. Moreover, macro-level shifts in popular opinion are often substantial enough to influence public debates and policy making. Accordingly, their analysis is well-established in research on the temporal dynamics of public opinion vis-à-vis other attitudes and elite behaviour (for recent examples, see Barberá et al. 2019; Devine and Murphy 2020; Enns 2014; Key and Donovan 2017; Merkley and Stecula 2021; Soroka, Stecula and Wlezien 2015; Widmann 2022; Wlezien 2024). Nevertheless, while such data can detect cumulative processes across large segments of the population, as we often expect in active conflicts, they do not establish individual-level correlations and carry the risk of ecological fallacy. We address this limitation in the second step of our study.

Our analysis uses time-series data from the Peace Index project, which polled representative samples of Jewish Israelis every month for two decades. Although each survey includes different respondents, the identical representative sampling ensures a reliable panel of aggregate Jewish-Israeli public opinion. We examine two recurring questions asked monthly from July 2001 to March 2020. *Prospective expectations* are measured as follows: 'Do you believe or not believe that negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will lead in the coming years to peace between Israel and the Palestinians?'[1] *Support for compromise* is

[1]Recent conceptual work on hope for peace (for example, Leshem 2023; Leshem and Halperin 2020) differentiates between expectations (what one thinks would likely happen) and wishes (what one desires would happen). Our operationalization of prospective expectations aligns with the former, emphasizing prediction and beliefs about likely outcomes in coming years rather than personal desire.

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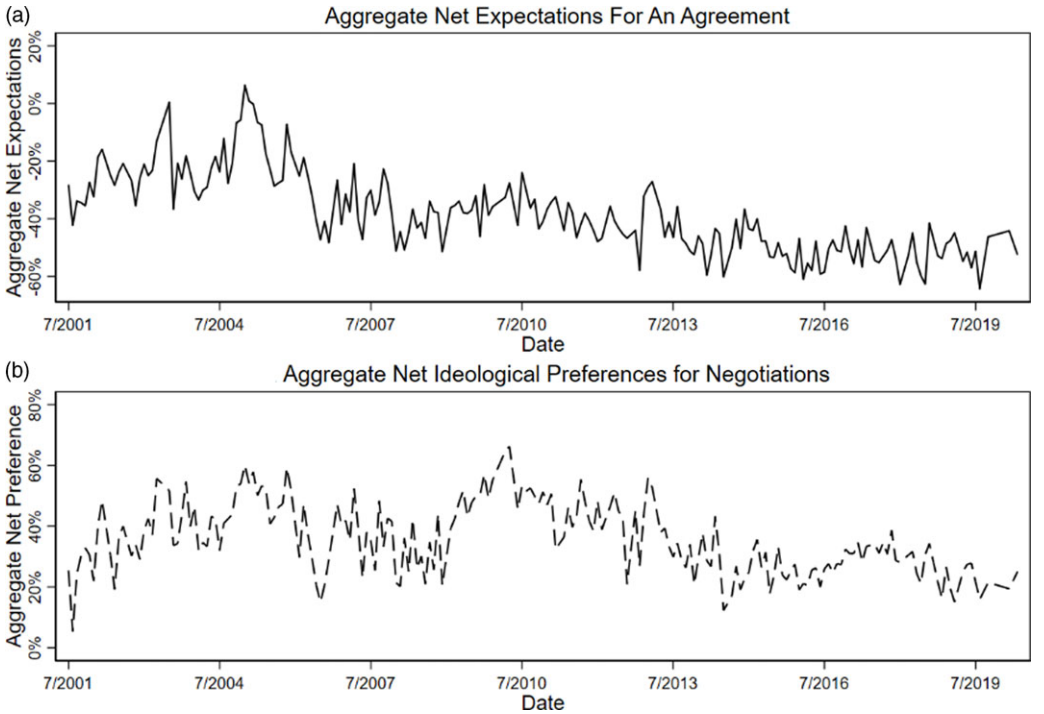

Figure 1. Net Expectations and Ideological Preferences, 7/2001–5/2020.

gauged thusly: 'What is your position on conducting peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority?' Both questions use a four-point answer scale from strong disbelief/opposition to strong belief/support. We aggregate individual-level responses into time series by summarizing each question's monthly net belief/support (the total share of positive answers minus the total share of negative answers per month). Figure 1 plots the two series. Supplementary Appendix (SA) A1 elaborates further on the data. Unit-root tests, summarized in SA A2, verify that both series are stationary.

To analyze whether changes in expectations predict subsequent shifts in preferences and/or vice versa, we estimate a VAR model (Freeman, Williams and Lin 1989; Sims 1980). VAR models disentangle endogenous relationships using a system of equations wherein each variable is regressed on its lagged values and the lagged values of the other variables. The results are interpreted using a post-estimation Granger Causality test, which determines whether prior levels of one variable significantly predict the current levels of the other, even when controlling for the latter's past trajectory (Freeman 1983). Our model includes four monthly lags based on several selection statistics discussed in SA A3.

To isolate the interrelations between expectations and preferences, we control for several exogenous factors that may affect both simultaneously and confound their direct relationship. First, we control for monthly violence levels using the current and one-month lag of *Israeli casualties by Palestinians*, *Palestinian casualties by Israelis*, and *rockets shot from Gaza*. Second, we control for elite-level signals about the conflict's future using the current and one-month lag of *negotiation summit occurrences* and *hawkish changes in the Palestinian and Israeli leadership* (the latter in first difference). SA A3 details these covariates and the full model specification.

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Table 2. Granger Causality Tests Based on VAR Estimates

Direction of Influence	χ^2	*df*	*P-value*
Expectations → Preferences	10.355*	4	0.035
Preferences → Expectations	5.716	4	0.221

* $p < 0.05$.

Findings

Table 2 presents the VAR's Granger Causality estimates.[2] Corroborating the first argument, we find that prospective expectations Granger-cause preferences for negotiations. Conversely, we see no statistically significant indications of a null or opposite relationship. To interpret this influence, Figure 2 plots the orthogonalized impulse response function (OIRF) of a hypothetical one-standard-deviation shock to expectations.[3] *Ceteris paribus*, it estimates an immediate 4.36-point shift (0.36 of one standard deviation) in net support for negotiations, followed by additional, gradually diminishing effects over 16 months.

Individual-Level Reactions to Exogenous Expectation Change

Data and Method

As noted, aggregate-level analyses have several advantages, including their consistent, long-term outlook and external validity, but also two potential downsides. First, they could sometimes mask an ecological fallacy, whereby group-level averages do not correspond with individual-level correlations. Second, aggregate changes could be driven by ideological heterogeneity, that is, only voters ideologically predisposed to favour the new expectations would react to it.[4] In Israel, where partisanship is defined primarily by attitudes toward the conflict, positive (negative) expectation changes may only strengthen the prior preferences of already dovish left-wingers (hawkish right-wingers). If so, prior preferences would remain the root cause of change.

To address these issues, we examine individual-level data using two historical moments with unanticipated exogenous shocks, one positive and one negative, to Jewish-Israeli peace expectations. Our analysis compares individual support for compromise in the weeks before and after these shocks, regarding them as quasi-experimental informational treatments to expectations, assigned as-if randomly between pre-event and post-event respondents (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno and Hernández 2020). The bandwidth of several weeks before and after the shock helps to increase the findings' generalizability, capture effects that unfold over several days, and improve statistical power. Nevertheless, SA B7 verifies that the results hold with a narrower temporal bandwidth.

This design requires direct and immediate shocks to future expectations independent of preference change. To support this premise, we selected appropriate events based on several criteria. First, the events must be sudden, salient, and at an identified moment in time. Second, to modify expectations, the shocks must communicate new and clear information about the probability of making peace with the adversary. Third, they should not involve violence, which could influence support for compromise directly, regardless of expectations. Fourth, the events should not be adjacent to other conflict-related events of similar magnitude that could exert

[2]SA A4 presents the full VAR estimates. SA A5 confirms their stability and normalcy.

[3]The OIRF calculation uses Cholesky decomposition, assuming the causal order detected in Table 1.

[4]Aggregate time series could technically be subset by partisanship. Unfortunately, the Peace Index's monthly sample sizes do not allow such subsampling without adding significant amounts of noise.

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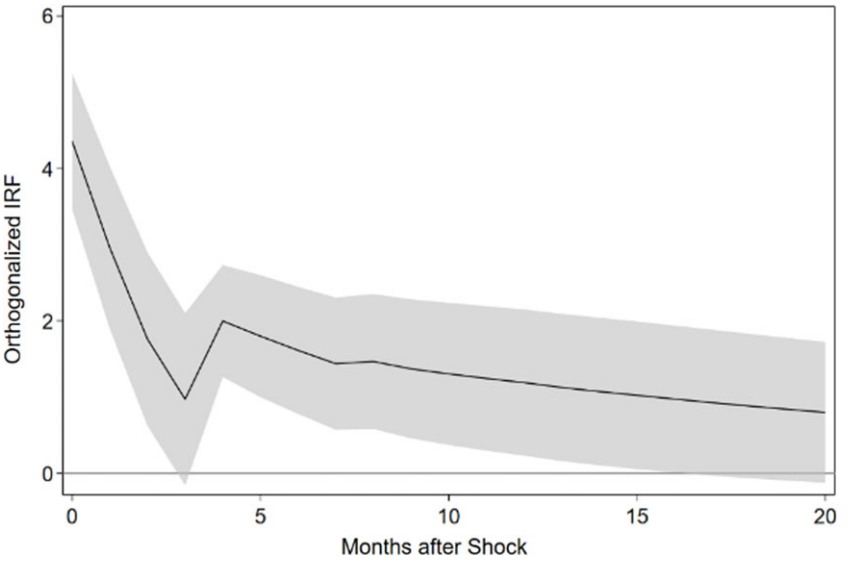

Figure 2. Orthogonalized Impulse Response Function (OIRF) for Preferences After a Shock to Expectations. The 95% Confidence Region Marked in Grey.

competing influences. Fifth, their timing should be independent of preceding short-term changes in Israeli-Jewish support for compromise. Finally, we sought events with available and comparable survey data in the weeks before and after.[5]

Two events fit these conditions well. The first negative shock to peace expectations is the surprising victory of the militant Islamist movement Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections of January 25, 2006. The pre-election polls and media coverage predicted a narrow win for Fatah, the more moderate incumbent party (An-Najah National University 2006; Erlanger and Myre 2006). Moreover, Hamas's 44.5 per cent vote share, in itself a surprising 3-point edge over Fatah, unexpectedly granted 56 per cent of seats due to new electoral rules. Right after its victory, Hamas publicly refused to recognize Israel, respect previous agreements, or restrain its paramilitary activity, sending a salient informational signal about the lower likelihood of resolution. This message was amplified by the international community's quick opposition to a Hamas-led government that would endorse these positions. At the same time, these events did not include violence against Israeli citizens, which could have affected preferences through other channels.

The data before and after Hamas's January 25 victory are taken from Peace Index polls. The control group ($n = 1{,}016$) was surveyed on November 28-29 and on December 26-27, 2005, while the post-event treatment group ($n = 1{,}005$) was polled on February 27-March 1 and on April 3-4, 2006. Preferences for compromise are measured as the level of support for peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority on a four-point scale.

The second event represents a positive shock to expectations. For a fittingly exogenous treatment, we travel back to the 1970s, when the conflict involved neighbouring Arab countries more prominently. On November 9, 1977, four years after a traumatizing regional war, Egypt's president, Anwar Sadat, unexpectedly declared his readiness to visit Israel. Sadat's trip on November 19-21, the first ever by an Arab leader, included multiple symbolic gestures and a

[5]These criteria rule out such events as Yitzhak Rabin's assassination by a right-wing Israeli in November 1995 (no new information about Palestinian intentions, violent, and endogenous to Israeli public opinion), the peace process collapse during the second half of 2000 (a gradual process without an identifiable point in time), or the outbreak of the Second Intifada in September 2000 (violent). Indeed, survey data show that the former two did not cause a clear shock to Israeli peace expectations, while the latter's violence could have influenced support for compromise directly.

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public speech in the Israeli parliament calling for peace in return for Israeli territorial withdrawal. The visit was coordinated secretly in small elite circles and caught the Israeli public, parts of its leadership, and other Arab countries by complete surprise (Bar-Siman-Tov 1994; Berenji 2020).

The data surrounding Sadat's November 19-21 visit is from the biweekly Continuing Survey series by the Israel Institute for Applied Social Research.[6] The pre-visit surveys (n = 1,075) are from October 6-9 and October 20-22. The post-visit surveys (n = 1,048) were fielded on November 21-23 and November 30-December 4. Preferences for compromise are gauged as follows: 'Regarding the territories held by Israel since the Six-Day War, what is the greatest concession that you think should be made for peace with the Arab countries?' The answers range on a five-point scale from 'do not relinquish any territory, without exceptions' to 'relinquish all territories for a peace agreement'.

In both cases, we estimate the expectation shock's effect on support for compromise by regressing the latter on a dummy variable indicating post-event respondents. For comparability across both datasets, support for compromise is rescaled to 0-1. We estimate both a bivariate model and a model with controls for gender, age group, education, and religiosity. Then, to examine partisan heterogeneity, we re-estimated the latter using subsamples comprising only right-wing and left-wing respondents, in turn. To avoid post-treatment bias in ideological identification, we measure partisanship based on respondents' self-reported party vote in the prior election, which we recode into ideological blocs (Left, Centre, and Right). SA B1 elaborates further on covariate operationalizations.

This quasi-experimental method relies on several inferential assumptions (Muñoz, Falcó-Gimeno and Hernández 2020). First, we assume that the two shocks represent immediate changes in expectations. This assumption is verified by survey data showing that peace expectations changed after both events in the appropriate directions (see SA B3). It is further supported by our aggregate finding that expectations consistently precede preference changes. Second, we assume excludability; that is, no other factors near the events caused a preference change independently of expectations. We support this assumption using our case selection criteria, which rule out parallel events or endogenous event timing, and several placebo tests (see SA B8).[7] Third, we assume ignorability, that is, respondents were equally likely to be surveyed before and after the events regardless of their views about the conflict. This premise is corroborated by the surveys' characteristics (see SA B1), balance tests (see SA B3), and a narrower bandwidth test (see SA B7). Finally, we assume compliance, that is, all post-event respondents experienced the events. This premise is supported by the salient nature of both shocks and the high media and national attention they received. SA B2 discusses these assumptions and corroborations in greater detail.

Findings

Figure 3 plots the shocks' estimated influences on the full sample, with and without controls, and on the partisan subsamples of left-wing and right-wing voters.[8] We find that both expectation shocks change policy preferences in their respective negative/positive direction, regardless of partisanship. Resembling our aggregate analysis, the effects equal 0.17–0.35 (2006) and 0.24–0.35 (1977) of the outcome's one standard deviation. Alternative specifications, including entropy balancing and nearest-neighbour matching (see SA B6), and placebo tests (see SA B8), validate the findings' robustness.

[6]The data are available courtesy of the Israel Democracy Institute.

[7]Given the informational and non-violent nature of the shocks, we consider immediate media and elite responses an inherent component rather than independent collateral influences. Most Israelis experienced both events through media coverage and elite involvement. Our examination of two different event types and periods further assuages concerns about variation in these factors. Nevertheless, further research could seek ways to disentangle the influence of actual events from elite behaviour.

[8]SA B5 details the full model estimates.

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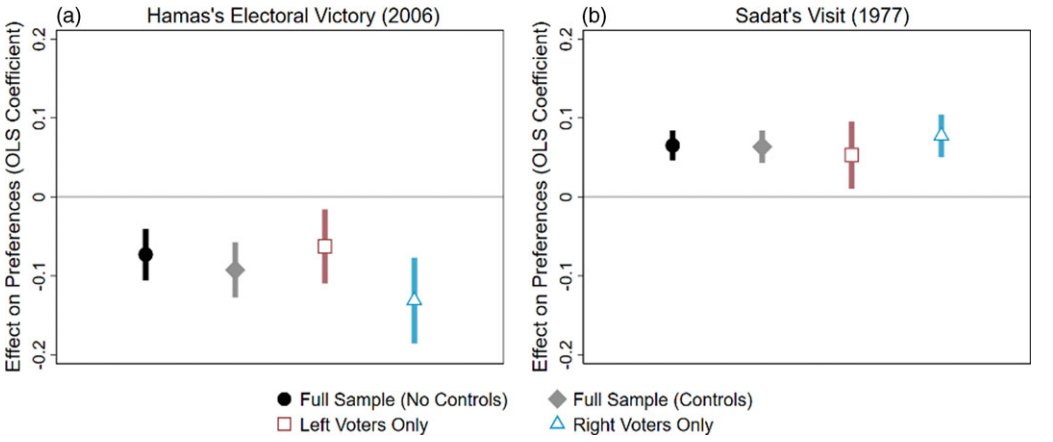

Figure 3. The Effect of Expectation Shock on Support for Compromise, by Model. The Vertical Lines Mark 95 per cent Confidence Intervals.

Importantly, the relative effect is similar across partisan subgroups. While we see a larger point estimate for right-wingers ($\beta_R = -0.131$) compared to left-wingers ($\beta_L = -0.063$) in 2006, a Chi-square test for between-model coefficient differences finds this gap insignificant at the 95 per cent level ($p = 0.061$). Moreover, there is no similar difference in 1977. Nonetheless, the noisy gap implies that right-wing voters may react more strongly than left-wingers to negative signals reaffirming their hawkish priors. This potential pattern calls for further research on the complex relationships between information updates and partisanship in conflictual settings, including possible substantive differences between left-wing and right-wing predispositions.

Conclusion

The causal relationship between prospective expectations and policy preferences stands at the heart of a broad disciplinary debate. However, it remains understudied in violent conflicts despite its importance for peacemaking. On the one hand, public support for compromise with adversaries relies on assessments of future scenarios and risks. On the other hand, these preferences often reflect rigid group identities and defensive narratives that can bias future expectations.

This study aimed to empirically disentangle this causal relationship in such contexts. Leveraging uniquely rich data on Jewish-Israeli attitudes from multiple decades and historical junctures, we find robust evidence that changes in expectations about the likelihood of resolution predict subsequent shifts in support for compromise. We find little evidence of null, opposite, or heterogeneous effects. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict's protracted, deep-rooted nature lends additional credence to these dynamic findings and adds rigour and missing external validity to prior qualitative and micro-behavioural indications in this vein.

Our analysis makes two primary contributions to current debates on public attitudes, preference change, and violent conflicts. First, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first direct test of potential endogeneity between expectations and preferences in violent conflicts. In doing so, we link together research on conflict-related attitudes and broader debates, with mixed results, about belief updating and motivated reasoning. The former tend to concentrate on qualitative case analysis, observational correlations, or one-sided laboratory manipulations of either expectations or preferences without testing their complex interrelations (for example, Cohen-Chen, Halperin, Crisp et al. 2014; Halperin et al. 2011; Hasler et al. 2023; Leshem and Halperin 2020; Pruitt 1997; Rosler et al. 2023; Shamir and Shikaki 2002; Zartman 2000). The latter, meanwhile, focuses on

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other issue domains, such as economic and domestic policy, where risk assessment and group identities may operate differently (for example, Jerit and Barabas 2012; Nadeau, Lewis-Beck and Bélanger 2012; Taber and Lodge 2006; Wlezien, Franklin and Twiggs 1997). Our findings, therefore, underscore the need for broader comparative research on this tension and its underlying mechanisms across issues and geopolitical contexts.

Second, our results carry significant implications for conflict resolution. Specifically, they suggest that hawkish attitudes against compromise are not just ideological but can also price in pessimism about its practical prospects. Accordingly, initiatives aimed at improving future expectations can form a key pathway for changing hearts and minds, even in protracted conflicts. Such initiatives could be from the top down, through 'bold moves' and conciliatory messages by elites (for example, Berenji 2020; Yakter and Harsgor 2023), or from the bottom up, through signals about the openness of out-group members to compromise (for example, Leshem and Halperin 2020; Rosler et al. 2023). Conversely, waiting for public preferences to change before taking such difficult steps may enforce a negative equilibrium and prolong the status quo.

At the same time, our findings do not rule out broader theories about ideological bias in conflicts. While we show that shifts in prospective expectations can move support for compromise across ideological camps, advancing such expectation change in the first place remains a challenge. In-group and partisan predispositions may impede expectation change and require sufficiently large shocks to trigger meaningful shifts. Moreover, partisanship often establishes separate information environments, shaping different expectations and subsequent belief updating. Hence, future research should study the real-world conditions under which exogenous information can pass partisan thresholds, permeate prospective expectations, and build up positive momentum for peacemaking.

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Data Availability Statement. Replication data for this paper can be found in Harvard Dataverse at: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/R2LLBV.

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