

Selective or collective? Palestinian perceptions of targeting in house demolition

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journals.sagepub.com/home/cmp**Sophia Hatz**

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Abstract

There is a growing consensus that repression and counter-insurgency can be effective when selective. Yet the empirical evidence is mixed and theories specify that (unmeasured) perceptions of target selection matter. This article addresses this gap by directly measuring individuals' interpretations of a coercive policy which varies in target selection. It employs original surveys with Palestinians on their exposure to house demolition, views on the policy and attitudes towards the Israel–Palestine conflict. The study finds that when interpreted as indiscriminate, house demolition increases opposition to compromise. The results are consistent when perceived target selection is manipulated in an embedded survey experiment.

Keywords

Coercion, perceptions, Israel–Palestine, repression

Introduction

Under what conditions is state repression and counter-insurgency effective, and under what conditions is it counter-productive? There is a growing consensus among academics and policymakers that a state's use of threats and violence against non-state actors is effective when selective. In targeting militants and their supporters precisely, selective tactics signal punishment for engaging in armed resistance and generate clear incentives for compliance with a state. Indiscriminate targeting, on the other hand, is considered ineffective at best, and counter-productive at worst (Kalyvas, 2006:151). In targeting both militants and civilians, indiscriminate tactics fail to signal that punishment can be avoided and generate moral outrage, motivating dissent (Kalyvas, 2006; Toft and Zhukov, 2015).

At the same time as this is a widely accepted theory, the empirical evidence is mixed. In particular, a number of studies find that selective counter-insurgency measures, such as drone strikes and targeted assassinations, can be counter-productive when they result in

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collateral civilian casualties or the death of militant leaders with symbolic or political roles (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009; Condra and Shapiro, 2012; Hudson et al., 2011; Jaeger et al., 2012; Pape, 2004; Zussman and Zussman, 2006). One possible explanation for these apparently contradictory empirics is that drone strikes and targeted assassinations are interpreted as indiscriminate. That is, the strategies are perceived as random violence or violence directed against civilians. More generally, what can be classified as selective according to a state's intentions may be perceived as indiscriminate by the individuals who are targeted and affected. This is important because, as theoretical models specify, it is perceived target selection that matters: as long as a policy is viewed as indiscriminate, it will have the effect of an indiscriminate policy (Kalyvas, 2006:145).

This article tests an important caveat in theories of coercive efficacy by accounting for local views on coercive policies and practices. The case of house demolitions in the Israel–Palestine conflict presents a unique opportunity for this endeavour. Israel has long employed a policy of demolishing Palestinian houses and structures in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem as a means of countering Palestinian armed resistance and enforcing control in the occupied Palestinian territories. The variation in the purposes and practices of different types of house demolitions—military, punitive, and administrative—provides an opportunity to distinguish between different modes of target selection based on Israel's intentions. As these three types of house demolition are otherwise quite similar, this also provides an opportunity to isolate differences in their coercive efficacy while holding many other factors constant.

A second important motivation for the selection of this case is that it provides a clear example of a gap between what can be considered indiscriminate or selective according to theoretical constructs and a state's intentions, and what is perceived on the ground. While punitive and administrative demolitions can be considered selective by design, they are widely characterized as “collective punishment” and “ethnic displacement” by Palestinians and human rights groups. In the case of administrative and punitive demolition, whether these policies are effective or counter-productive depends on whether Palestinians view these policies as selective or as collective targeting.

In order to measure individual-level perceptions directly, Palestinians were surveyed on their exposure to house demolition, their views on the policy and their support for resistance and compromise in the Israel–Palestine conflict. Employing two alternative questions to measure the types of demolitions experienced confirms that the individuals surveyed characterize military and punitive demolitions as “collective punishment” and administrative demolitions as “ethnic displacement”. Furthermore, exposure to demolitions characterized as indiscriminate is associated with higher levels of opposition to political compromise. These findings support the general proposition that when targeting is perceived as indiscriminate or collective, repression and counter-insurgency can be counter-productive.

In order to address the threat of confounding (common causes of exposure to different types of house demolition and different preferences for resistance), the survey also included an embedded experiment. In the experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to read and reflect on a vignette describing a hypothetical demolition incident. The incidents were similar in all respects except the type of demolition described. A measure of perceived target selection asked in reference to the vignettes revealed, again, that respondents consistently do not view any type of demolition to be selective in its targeting.

The results of the survey and experiment should not, however, be interpreted as evidence that individuals do not distinguish between different modes of target selection, or that all

modes of target selection are counter-productive. In a close comparison of two vignettes each describing a punitive demolition, survey respondents expected greater levels of resistance in response to a demolition which was relatively indiscriminate—targeted the home of the parents of a Palestinian attacker who had already been killed—compared with a relatively selective demolition—one which targeted the home of the Palestinian attacker and his immediate family. This result demonstrates that even small differences can lead individual cases to be interpreted as relatively more or less selective, and this interpretation can have important consequences for a policy's coercive efficacy, measured in terms of its impact on preferences for resistance.

Through a survey of Palestinian opinion on house demolition, this article presents empirics with important policy implications. House demolition is a topic of high relevance in the Israel–Palestine conflict: it has been in use throughout the conflict, with surges in recent years, and its consequences for deterrence and settlement are widely debated. Lessons about house demolition can be extended to similar practices by other states, such as the raiding of civilian communities, collateral damage during strikes, and the intimidation of potential militant collaborators. If viewed as collective punishments, these kinds of measures may instigate more than deter. While not commonly considered part of a state's repertoire of repressive tactics, structural violence can have an important impact on prospects for peace, as administrative demolitions do in the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict.

This article proceeds as follows. It begins with a review of prior research on coercive efficacy and target selection. Next, it presents the context of house demolition, describes target selection in military, punitive and administrative demolitions, and specifies hypotheses regarding how house demolitions are perceived and how exposure to demolitions affects preferences for resistance. The sections that follow present the research design and results of the survey with Palestinians. The conclusion reflects on the study's contribution to conflict theory. Replication data, details on ethical protocol and data collection procedures, sample surveys, and additional analyses are included in the Online Appendix.¹

Target selection and coercive efficacy

State-led repression and counter-insurgency follow the logic of coercion: threats and harm are used to impose costs and signal punishment, leading targeted groups and individuals to prefer compliance with the state's demands over political dissent and armed resistance (Davenport, 2007). Contrary to this straightforward logic, however, empirical studies of the effect of repression and counter-insurgency on non-state groups' conflict preferences and behavior yield diverse results (Davenport, 2007; Hultquist, 2015; Lichbach, 1987). Although states employ policies in an effort to undermine insurgencies and gain political concessions, these measures vary substantially in their effectiveness relative to these objectives.

Addressing this puzzle, several scholars have proposed the hypothesis that the coercive efficacy of repressive practices and military strategies depends on the extent to which targeting is selective or indiscriminate. Targeting is considered selective when the target of a repressive policy is chosen based on individual-level actions or attributes of guilt, such as direct involvement in conflict violence or the provision of support to a non-state armed group. Target selection is considered indiscriminate, in contrast, when targets are chosen based on aggregate, group-level characteristics and no distinction is made between the guilty and the innocent, or between militants and civilians (Kalyvas, 2006; Lyall, 2009: 359; Toft and

Zhukov, 2015: 230). Indiscriminate targeting is a broad category that can include random violence (Kalyvas, 2006; Lyall, 2009), collective violence against ethnic identity groups (Kalyvas, 2006), civilian victimization (Downes, 2007), and mass killings (Valentino et al., 2004).²

Generally, academics and policymakers agree that selective tactics are effective while indiscriminate tactics are ineffective or counterproductive. By now, this is considered a consensus or conventional wisdom.³ In targeting militants and their supporters precisely, selective tactics signal that resistance will be punished and generate clear incentives for compliance with the state's demands (Mason and Krane, 1989). Indiscriminate tactics, which make no distinction between militants and civilians, fail to signal that punishment can be avoided and generate anger or moral outrage, stimulating dissent (DeNardo, 1985; Gurr, 1970; Kalyvas, 2006).

Many empirical studies find evidence in support of this general theory. Studies find that indiscriminate violence can incite counterattacks (Kalyvas, 2006; Pape, 1990), radicalize local populations (Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007; Jaeger et al., 2012; Wood, 2003), increase rebel recruitment and help insurgent groups gain territorial control (Kocher and Kalyvas, 2011). In parallel, studies show that selective tactics such as targeted killings, the destruction of military infrastructure, and drone strikes can be effective in suppressing an insurgency (Jaeger and Siddique, 2011; Johnston and Sarbahi, 2016; Pape, 1996). In the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict, Dugan and Chenoweth find that the “backlash effect” from repressive actions by the Israeli government is especially prominent when directed at Palestinians in general, compared with when directed at known Palestinian combatants (Dugan and Chenoweth, 2012). Prior research on house demolitions leads to a similar conclusion: Benmelech et al. find that “precautionary” demolitions of houses in general locations during the Second Intifada were met with a sharp increase in Palestinian suicide attacks, while punitive house demolitions selectively targeting Palestinian militants and their families led to a short-term reduction in suicide violence (Benmelech et al., 2015).

However, there also appears to be evidence to the contrary. A number of studies show that collateral civilian fatalities resulting from drone strikes increase popular support for insurgent violence and the incidence of insurgent violence (Condra and Shapiro, 2012; Hudson et al., 2011; Jaeger et al., 2012; Pape, 2004). Studies considering the efficacy of targeted assassinations find the strategy effective when the strikes eliminate military leaders, but ineffective or counterproductive when the strikes result in the death of noncombatants, legitimate politicians, and ideological leaders (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009; Zussman and Zussman, 2006). For example, in a study of High Value Targeting (HVT) operations in counter-insurgency campaigns worldwide, a CIA report concluded that HVT strikes may increase popular support for insurgencies if noncombatants are killed during the strikes, if legitimate political actors aligned with insurgents are targeted, or if the government conducting the strikes is considered overly repressive or violent (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009: 2). A case in point is Israel's controversial HVT operations early in the second Intifada (2000–2002), which strengthened solidarity among insurgent groups and increased Palestinian support for hardline militant leaders. Examining the efficacy of this policy using stock market reactions, Zussman and Zussman infer that assassinations targeting senior political leaders can be counter-productive in the net, as this type of assassination generates motivational effects above and beyond its incapacitation effects (Zussman and Zussman, 2006). One interpretation of these apparently contradictory empirics is that selective

counter-insurgency policies can fail when they are perceived as arbitrary, illegal or immoral—as “indiscriminate” or “collective punishment”.

In summary, the mixed results in prior research could be evidence of a caveat in theories regarding target selection and coercive efficacy: as long as a policy is viewed as indiscriminate, it will have the effect of an indiscriminate policy. While the caveat has been acknowledged in theoretical models (Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007; Kalyvas, 2006: 145), it has not been empirically tested. This article sets out to test two precise implications. The first is that what can be classified as selective according to a state’s intentions or theoretical constructs may be perceived as indiscriminate by the individuals targeted and affected. The second implication is that the efficacy of repression and counter-insurgency depends on local perceptions of target selection. To the extent that a coercive policy has the effect of generating sufficient costs for resistance and clear incentives for compliance with the state’s demands, the policy should be effective in reducing insurgency. If, however, a policy fails to signal that the costs of conflict can be avoided and generates moral outrage (for example, if it is interpreted as indiscriminate), it may result in increased political dissent and armed resistance.

Target selection in house demolition

The practice of house demolition has been documented by scholars and historians alongside other Israeli measures such as targeted assassinations, deportations, detentions, curfews, checkpoints and permit systems (Byman, 2011; Khawaja, 1993). In house demolition, houses, apartments and other structures are destroyed for various security-related purposes: to prevent attacks, to clear areas for military operations, to degrade militants’ infrastructure, to punish acts of violence and to enforce permit systems in areas under Israeli control. By some estimates, over 40,000 Palestinian structures have been demolished since 1967.⁴

Reports on house demolition generally distinguish between three types of demolition: military, punitive, and administrative (Shnayderman, 2004; The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 2012). The following sections describe how, with prior research and conventional definitions as a point of departure (Benmelech et al., 2015; Kalyvas, 2006), military demolitions can be classified as indiscriminate, while punitive and administrative demolitions could each be considered examples of selective targeting. In addition, qualitative arguments are presented about how Palestinians are likely to interpret target selection in each type of demolition. The proposition that perceived target selection matters for coercive efficacy can be tested here: as long as house demolition is perceived as indiscriminate, it will be indiscriminate in effect.

Military demolition

Military demolition is the broadest category of house demolition. It is the destruction of houses, structures and properties in association with military operations and for military purposes (The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 2011). This includes the demolition of structures in order to prevent attacks from specific locations, to destroy structures used for militant purposes, and to clear areas for buffer zones, security strips, fences, military installations or roads (Amnesty International, 2004; Benmelech et al., 2015; B’Tselem, 2002; Darcy, 2003). Demolitions in this category are ordered and carried out by the IDF via

bulldozer, explosives or missiles. Military demolitions have typically been carried out in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem.⁵

Following definitions of indiscriminate violence and prior research on house demolitions, military demolitions can be considered an example of indiscriminate target selection (Benmelech et al., 2015: 29). Two defining characteristics of indiscriminate targeting are evident in the policy of military demolitions: a general location is targeted in order to prevent or deter attacks from the population in this location, and the practice is often used in contexts of poor information or control, where it is difficult to target Palestinian militants precisely. The IDF has stated that military demolitions are used to prevent attacks on Israeli settlers and soldiers, and that because Palestinian militants conceal themselves in civilian areas and use civilian structures for cover, it is necessary to target general locations for demolition during “clearing operations” and military escalations. This justification was given for the “clearing” demolitions in Gaza during the second Intifada (B’Tselem, 2002), for the demolitions during Operation Cast Lead in 2008 (Human RightsWatch, 2010a: 5) and for the demolitions during Operation Protective Edge in 2014 (B’Tselem, 2015: 58–59).

Anecdotal evidence of how targeting in military demolitions is perceived by Palestinians and other actors outside the state of Israel can be found in human rights groups’ reports on military demolitions. For example, in an investigation of demolitions in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead in 2008, Human Rights Watch documents the demolition of 189 buildings, referring to these specific cases as “excessive”, “unnecessary”, and “wanton destruction” (Human Rights Watch, 2010a). Reflecting on land-sweeping operations in Gaza during 2003–2004, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights concludes: “Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilian property can be interpreted only in terms of collective punishment against the Palestinian civilian population” (The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 2004: 2). This sentiment is also voiced by B’Tselem, a prominent Israeli human rights group. Describing demolitions for “alleged military purposes”, B’Tselem writes: “This is a policy of collective punishment directed at people whom Israel does not even claim were involved in attacks on Israeli civilians or security forces” (B’Tselem, 2011).

In summary, the policy of military demolition can be classified as an example of indiscriminate targeting based both on Israel’s stated intent to prevent and deter attacks from general locations and on local interpretations of the policy as “collective punishment”. Evidence in line with both hypotheses below would confirm the general theory that indiscriminate violence is counter-productive, while also supporting the proposition that it is the perception of targeting as indiscriminate which matters.

Hypothesis 1a: Military demolitions are perceived as indiscriminate (“collective punishment”).

Hypothesis 1b: Exposure to military demolitions increases Palestinian support for resistance.

Punitive demolitions

A second category of house demolition is punitive demolition, in which houses are demolished as punishment for the actions, attempted actions or suspected actions committed by owners or occupants (Shnayderman, 2004). Offences include political organizing, stone throwing and attacks on Israeli soldiers and civilians (Silber, 2011). Aiding indirectly in an offence, for example by planning, supporting or concealing an offence, is also punishable by

demolition (Shnayderman, 2004). Punitive demolitions have occurred primarily in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; in Gaza punitive demolitions ceased with Israel's disengagement in 2005.

Following conventional definitions, prior research on house demolitions and Israel's stated intent, punitive demolitions can be considered an example of selective targeting (Benmelech et al., 2015: 29). In punitive demolition, houses are selected for demolition based on individual-level attributes—the actions, attempted actions, or suspected actions of the owners or occupiers—as opposed to general, population-level characteristics as in indiscriminate military demolitions. The IDF's stated purpose of punitive demolitions reflects a logic of specific deterrence: "House demolition sends a clear message to terrorists and those who assist in perpetrating acts of terror that they will be forced to pay the price of their notions."⁶

Although punitive house demolition primarily targets offenders and their potential accomplices, however, in practice punitive demolitions also target individuals who are not suspected of involvement in any offence. For example, in the wake of an attack on Israeli soldiers or civilians, houses belonging to the extended family, relatives and neighbors of the attacker are often demolished. In many, perhaps even most cases, the offender was not living in the house at the time of the demolition because the person was in hiding, had already been arrested, was killed during the course of the attack, or because the attack was a suicide attack (B'Tselem, 2014; Shnayderman, 2004; Silber, 2011). In these cases especially, the punishment befalls the offender's family (including minors), other occupants of the house, or residents of neighbouring buildings which may be damaged collaterally. It is not necessary to establish that each of these individuals aided in the offence in order for the policy to be carried out as a punitive measure.⁷

Based on these characteristics, legal scholars and human rights groups argue that punitive demolitions are a form of collective punishment—the punishment of innocent individuals for the crimes of others (Carroll, 1990; Darcy, 2002–2003, 2003; Farrell, 2002; Shalev, 1990; Yashuvi, 1990). The term is also widely used in media coverage of demolitions and in reports by humanitarian groups, and it features prominently in debates on the legality and morality of the policy within Israel and abroad. Proponents of the policy argue that punitive demolitions are an effective deterrent, while critics argue that it is a counter-productive collective punishment.⁸ The policy of punitive house demolitions thus exemplifies a clear gap between what can be defined as selective, based on a state's intent, and what is perceived by victims and monitoring groups. While the policy of punitive demolitions is employed by Israel as a means of deterrence, specifically in response to terror attacks, it is viewed by Palestinians as part of a general policy towards Palestinians, along with other measures of the occupation (Hass, 2017).

As the debate on punitive demolitions suggests, the coercive efficacy of punitive demolition depends on how the policy is viewed. To the extent that punitive demolition is considered selective, the policy should be consistent with norms of fairness, generate clear incentives for compliance, and be effective in deterring Palestinian armed resistance. However, if punitive demolition is viewed as collective punishment, as some evidence suggests, the policy is likely to be counter-productive:

Hypothesis 2a: Punitive demolitions are perceived as indiscriminate ("collective punishment").

Hypothesis 2b: Exposure to punitive demolitions increases Palestinian support for resistance.

Administrative demolitions

A final category of house demolition is administrative demolition: the demolition of Palestinian structures which were built without a permit or in violation of building and zoning regulations. Since the division of the West Bank and Gaza into Areas A, B and C, administrative demolition has been limited to Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where Israel retains control over planning, zoning and building. In contrast to military and punitive demolitions, which are ordered by the minister of defence, administrative demolitions are ordered by civil authorities (the Civil Administration in West Bank and the Ministry of Interior or Jerusalem municipality in East Jerusalem). Like punitive and military demolitions, administrative demolitions are generally carried out by IDF soldiers and bulldozers.

According to Israeli authorities, administrative demolition could be defined as a selective policy: administrative demolitions target structures built or owned by individuals who have violated Israeli building and planning laws. For Israel, the policy is a means of enforcing law grounded in Jordanian legislation in force at the time of Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Only Palestinians who violate Israeli law are penalized, and the penalty can be avoided, in principle, by obtaining the necessary permissions or by moving to areas where Palestinians are permitted to build.

Two characteristics of administrative demolitions, however, suggest that administrative demolitions are likely to be interpreted as a form of indiscriminate targeting. First, it is common knowledge that it is extremely difficult for Palestinians to obtain a building permit in Area C and East Jerusalem (B'Tselem, 2013; Margalit, 2007; OCHA, 2015; The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 2012). While settler communities are allowed to designate land for construction, Palestinians generally must build illegally (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2014; Shnayderman, 2004). The restriction on Palestinian building in Area C is made explicit by Israeli officials (Amnesty International, 2004: 37). Second, it is widely recognized that administrative demolitions consistently punish Palestinian violations of building laws, but hardly ever punish Israeli Jews for the same violations (Amnesty International, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2010b). Taken together, these conditions suggest that, although individual administrative demolitions target individual offenders, the policy as a whole affects Palestinians as a population; laws and law enforcement concerning building in Area C and East Jerusalem are used to prevent and deter Palestinians—as a population—from building and settling in these areas.

Based on the policy's apparent targeting of Palestinians in the West Bank and Palestinian Jerusalemites, many humanitarian organizations argue that administrative demolitions constitute "institutionalized discrimination", "a policy of displacement" or "ethnic displacement" aimed at Palestinians as a group, linked to Israel's broader strategy of appropriating land and forcibly transferring Palestinians to small enclaves or neighboring countries (Amnesty International, 2004; Halper, 2009; Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2014; The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 2011). Interview-based studies have found that Palestinians interpret administrative demolitions as a "strategic ethnonational war conducted by Israel through a facade of planning" (Khaimasi and Narallah 2003 in

Braverman, 2007: 335) and “part of a comprehensive political agenda designed to transfer [Palestinians] out of Jerusalem” (Braverman, 2007: 363).

How the policy of administrative demolition is perceived in terms of target selection is likely to condition its consequences. If the policy is perceived as selective, it should be effective as a means of influence and control. However, if administrative demolition is instead interpreted as indiscriminate, as background characteristics suggest, the policy is likely to be counter-productive. This leads to a final set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a: Administrative are perceived as indiscriminate (“ethnic displacement”).

Hypothesis 3b: Exposure to administrative demolitions increases Palestinian support for resistance.

Survey design, sampling and measurement

In order to measure Palestinian perspectives on house demolition directly, a survey was fielded with Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem during 20 November to 11 December 2016. Surveys in the Arabic language were conducted by Palestinian enumerators visiting a range of sites in different districts, including non-governmental organizations, villages, refugee camps, clinics, urban centers, unions, and universities. Careful measures were taken to address the particular ethical considerations given the topic of the survey and the conflict context. Local and female enumerators were used in order to earn respondent trust and truthfulness. Enumerators were trained and supervised by research staff at Uppsala University in procedures to ensure respondents’ security, anonymity and confidentiality and to minimize the risk of emotional stress, as stipulated in the study’s ethical protocol (approved by the Uppsala Regional Ethical Review Board; Dnr. 2015/472). After excluding surveys which did not meet the inclusion criteria, the final sample size was 1166: 378 in Gaza Strip, 398 in the West Bank and 390 in East Jerusalem.

Owing to the complexity and expense of conducting systematic surveys in the occupied Palestinian territories, the sample is demographically diverse but not representative. This limits the generalizability of the results to the broader Palestinian population. Given this limitation, the survey leverages an embedded experiment in order to increase the extent to which the results hold for the individuals whose opinions were solicited.⁹

Main measured variables

Exposure to demolitions: after receiving information about the surveys’ purpose and protocol and agreeing to participate in the study, the first questions on the survey asked about respondents’ exposure to house demolition. Respondents were first asked if they have experienced the demolition of structures belonging to themselves and their nuclear family; belonging to relatives, friends and neighbours; shared by their community; or have experienced no demolitions. Some 75% of Palestinians surveyed had experienced the demolition of structures belonging to themselves or others.

Demolition-type: to measure demolition types experienced, respondents were asked to select the reasons given by Israel for the demolitions they had experienced. The answer options included three reasons commonly given by Israel, corresponding to military, punitive and administrative demolition: “for military purposes/during the course of military operations”; “punishment for an offence”; and “violation of building regulations”. This

question was coded to construct non-exclusive binary items corresponding to military, punitive and administrative demolition.

Perceived demolition-type: in a separate question, respondents were asked to select the reasons they thought best described the demolitions they had experienced from a list including the three reasons commonly given by Israel, as well as two reasons corresponding to indiscriminate targeting: “collective punishment” and “ethnic displacement”. This question was presented before demolition type in order to first give respondents the option to characterize demolitions as indiscriminate, while at the same time encouraging respondents to report demolition type according to Israel’s stated intent. This question was coded to construct non-exclusive binary items which can be categorized as either consistent with Israel’s stated intent: (military, punitive and administrative demolition) or indiscriminate (“collective punishment” or “ethnic displacement”).

Support for resistance: consistent with other studies of Palestinian conflict preferences (e.g. Canetti et al., 2015; Ginges et al., 2007), support for resistance is conceptualized in terms of support for armed resistance and opposition to political compromise. To measure *support for armed resistance*, respondents were asked to what extent they support or oppose the use of armed resistance as a means of pursuing Palestinian political goals and to what extent they support or oppose the targeting of Israeli civilians. To measure *opposition to compromise* respondents were asked whether they support or oppose the solution of two states for two peoples and whether they would support or oppose forgoing the right of return (of Palestinian refugees to their pre-1948 homelands) in order to reach this solution.¹⁰ Each of these four variables was coded on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly oppose armed resistance/strongly support compromise (1) to strongly support armed resistance/strongly oppose compromise (5). Across the survey regions, support for armed resistance and opposition to compromise were positively skewed (50% support or strongly support armed resistance; 55% oppose or strongly oppose compromise).

Covariates: at the end of the survey, respondents were asked to answer a set of questions measuring demographic characteristics and personal values, including *gender, age, religiosity, level of education, employment status and governorate of residence.*

Survey experiment: demolition vignettes

In addition to the measured variables described above, the survey included an experiment. The experiment consisted of randomly assigning respondents to read one of several demolition vignettes describing a hypothetical demolition in the West Bank. While many characteristics of the demolition were held constant across the vignettes, the vignettes differed in the structures which were targeted for demolition and why.

In the military demolition vignette, the demolition targeted “*structures in a location suitable for Palestinians to use in attacks against Israelis*”. In the punitive vignette, the demolition targeted “*the home of a Palestinian who had recently perpetrated an attack on Israelis*”. In the administrative vignette, the demolition targeted “*structures which were built without a permit*”. Specific instructions were given after the vignette emphasizing that respondents’ views on the hypothetical demolition vignette were of interest in the study, although the demolition described may differ from respondents’ own experiences.

To measure how respondents perceived target selection in the vignette, they were asked to select the statement which best described the persons harmed by the demolition. The answer options included a statement corresponding to “selective” targeting, “people who committed

or supported an offence against Israel”, as well as statements corresponding to different conceptualizations of indiscriminate, collective and ethnic targeting: “people belonging to a particular ethnic, religious or political group”; “people who had committed an offence against Israel and also people who were innocent”; “the relatives of someone who had committed an offence”; and “people who were unambiguously innocent”.

To measure levels of resistance in reference to different demolition types described in vignettes, respondents were asked what proportion of ordinary Palestinians they thought would respond to a demolition such as the one described with non-violent resistance and with armed resistance. Expectations of non-violent resistance were asked first, to avoid conveying a stereotype of Palestinian resistance as armed. Five intervals with ordinal categories (e.g. “a minority”) and numerical percentages (e.g. 0–20%) were given as answer options. Expected level of resistance was coded on a five-point Likert-type scale for each question.¹¹

Analysis and results

Perceptions of target selection

The first set of hypotheses in this study suggest that Palestinians interpret military, punitive and administrative house demolition as indiscriminate, rather than selective targeting. Specifically, military and punitive demolitions are viewed as collective punishment (H1a and H2a), and administrative demolitions are viewed as ethnic displacement (H3a). To test these hypotheses, Table 1 shows measures of bi-variate association across items in the two measures of demolition type included in the survey. These measures of bi-variate association simply show the strength of association between items corresponding to Israel’s stated reason for house demolition and items describing house demolition as indiscriminate targeting.

Consistent with H1a, respondents who cited Israel’s reason for the demolitions they experienced as “for military purposes/military operations” were more likely to describe this as “collective punishment”, compared with those who did not report having experienced a military demolition. Hypotheses 2a and 3a are supported in the same vein: respondents who cited

Table 1. Logistic regression on perceived target selection

	Perceived reason for demolitions experienced					
	Collective punishment			Ethnic displacement		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Intercept	0.189* (0.029)	0.180* (0.033)	0.234* (0.043)	0.116* (0.007)	0.112* (0.017)	0.090* (0.010)
Israel’s reason						
Military	0.037* (0.008)			−0.023 (0.016)		
Punitive		0.094* (0.028)			−0.025 (0.021)	
Administrative			−0.090 (0.062)			0.048* (0.018)
Observations	1166	1166	1166	1166	1166	1166

Robust standard errors clustered on region in parentheses. * Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Israel's reason as "punishment for an offence" tended to describe the demolitions they experienced as "collective punishment" and those who cited Israel's reason as "violation of building regulations" tended to describe demolitions as "ethnic displacement". Each of these three associations is significant at $p < 0.05$.

Two other patterns of association are of note. First, the associations among the three items repeated across both questions are all positive and significant at $p < 0.05$. Second, correlations among items within the question including indiscriminate reasons are all negative and significant at $p < 0.05$. Taken together, this suggests that some Palestinians do not reject a classification of target selection based on Israel's stated intent; respondents either selected reasons corresponding to Israel's intent or chose terms describing house demolition as indiscriminate. Among those who described demolitions as indiscriminate, some also tended to acknowledge a different reason given by Israel, revealing that military and punitive demolitions are associated with collective punishment and administrative demolitions are associated with ethnic displacement. This evidence regarding perceptions of targeting will have implications when assessing the impact of house demolition on support for resistance.

Demolition exposure and support for resistance

The second set of hypotheses in this study concern the efficacy of house demolition, measured in terms of the policy's impact on measures of Palestinian support for resistance. Drawing on the proposition that Palestinians interpret military, punitive and administrative demolition as indiscriminate, hypotheses 1b, 2b and 3b specify that exposure to each of these demolition types will increase support for resistance.

Table 2 shows the results of multiple regression models estimating the effect of military, punitive and administrative house demolitions on four measures of support for resistance: support for armed resistance, support for targeting Israeli civilians, opposition to a two-state solution and opposition to forgoing the right to return. All models include controls for exposure to demolitions, and for religiosity, gender, age, level of education, and employment status. In order to account for unobserved differences across the Gaza strip, East Jerusalem and the West Bank, region dummies are included.

Using indicators of resistance related to opposition to compromise, hypotheses 1b, 2b and 3b are supported at $p < 0.05$. Individuals who reported having experienced military, punitive and administrative demolitions—according to the reason given by Israel—are on average more opposed to a two-state solution and the idea of forgoing the right to return, compared with individuals who have not experienced demolition or who selected other reasons to describe the demolitions they experienced. The impact of exposure to demolitions on support for armed resistance and support for targeting civilians is positive and of a similar magnitude, but is generally not statistically significant. The latter insignificant effects could be due to psychological or emotional consequences of survey questions relating to violence, or to strong differences in views on violence across Gaza, East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

To better illustrate the differences in support for resistance associated with exposure to house demolition and the perception of house demolition as indiscriminate, Figure 1 shows first differences in each of the four measures of support for resistance included in the survey. Setting the reference category to "no demolition exposure", the figure shows the effect of having experienced a military, punitive or administrative demolition, and the effect of also describing these demolitions as "collective punishment" or "ethnic displacement".

Table 2. Ordinary least squares regression on support for resistance

	Support	Support	Oppose	Oppose
	Armed resistance	Targeting civilians	A two-state solution	Forgoing return
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Intercept	2.719* (0.180)	3.384* (0.238)	1.792* (0.200)	2.512* (0.176)
<i>Israel's reason for demolitions</i>				
Military	0.279 (0.339)	0.131 (0.127)	0.273* (0.062)	0.191* (0.075)
Punitive	0.330 (0.264)	0.065 (0.066)	0.219* (0.083)	0.184* (0.080)
Administrative	0.538 (0.294)	0.308* (0.120)	0.361* (0.008)	0.293* (0.023)
<i>Controls</i>				
Demolition exposure	0.072 (0.100)	0.017 (0.059)	0.164* (0.062)	0.089 (0.050)
Religiosity	0.195* (0.053)	0.075* (0.036)	0.263* (0.050)	0.253* (0.046)
Male	0.103 (0.124)	-0.022 (0.113)	-0.177* (0.027)	-0.074 (0.136)
Age	-0.014 (0.009)	-0.013 (0.008)	0.005* (0.002)	0.005* (0.001)
<i>Education</i>				
Primary education (vs no formal)	-0.005 (0.120)	0.214 (0.259)	-0.233* (0.115)	-0.057 (0.236)
High school (vs no formal)	0.145 (0.210)	-0.288* (0.125)	-0.020 (0.249)	0.269* (0.016)
Vocational (vs no formal)	0.253* (0.073)	-0.110 (0.097)	-0.020 (0.172)	0.312* (0.046)
Bachelor (vs no formal)	0.185 (0.247)	-0.245* (0.107)	-0.116 (0.182)	0.336* (0.124)
MA or higher (vs no formal)	0.046 (0.322)	-0.535* (0.230)	-0.305 (0.583)	0.691* (0.206)
<i>Employment</i>				
Part-time (vs full)	0.121* (0.036)	0.229 (0.169)	0.280* (0.045)	-0.001 (0.048)
Unemployed (vs full)	-0.013 (0.149)	0.107 (0.113)	0.299 (0.208)	0.053 (0.170)
Self-employed (vs full)	0.118 (0.108)	-0.023 (0.055)	0.072 (0.088)	-0.225* (0.047)
Student (vs full)	0.005 (0.090)	0.105 (0.253)	0.454* (0.136)	0.163 (0.111)
<i>Region dummies</i>				
West Bank (vs Gaza)	-0.304* (0.029)	-0.469* (0.024)	0.076* (0.016)	-0.114* (0.007)
East Jerusalem (vs Gaza)	-0.674* (0.020)	-0.435* (0.072)	0.055 (0.046)	-0.061* (0.015)
Observations	1166	1166	1166	1166
R ²	0.093	0.056	0.068	0.078
Adjusted R ²	0.079	0.041	0.054	0.064
Residual standard error (d.f. = 1147)	1.187	1.232	1.370	1.062
F-Statistic (d.f. = 18; 1147)	6.557*	3.767*	4.663*	5.411*

Robust standard errors clustered on region in parentheses. * Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Here, it seems that respondents who reported experiencing military, punitive or administrative demolitions—and characterized these as indiscriminate—are on average more supportive of targeting civilians, more opposed to a two-state solution and more opposed to forgoing the right to return, by about 0.2 on a five-point scale, compared with respondents

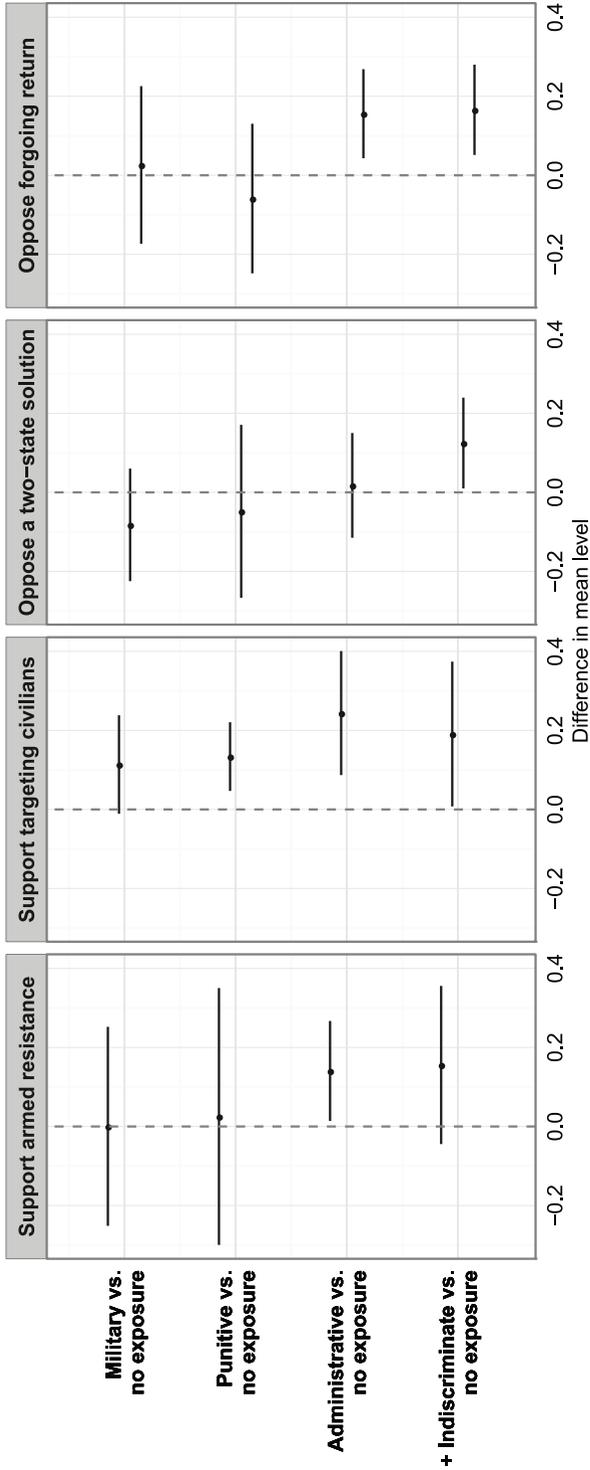


Figure 1. Difference in Palestinian support for resistance, by demolition reasons selected; 95% confidence intervals from clustered robust standard errors are shown.

who had experienced no demolitions. Only reporting demolition types experienced according to Israel's intent has less consistent effects. There is generally no significant difference in support for resistance comparing respondents who had experienced no demolitions with respondents who only reported demolition type as military or punitive. The effect of administrative demolition is significant here, as it is in Model 2, possibly owing to the large proportion of East Jerusalem Palestinians in the sample. Complementing the observed relationship between exposure to house demolition and opposition to compromise, the first differences illustrate the caveat in theories of target selection—that the *perception of* a coercive policy as indiscriminate can reduce its deterrent efficacy and generate opposition.

Demolition vignettes, perceived target selection and expected resistance

While the strategy for testing the proposed hypotheses concerning the impact of administrative, military and punitive demolitions relies on a comparison of the preferences of individuals exposed to different demolition types, scholars have noted that such a comparison is likely to be confounded (Abrahms, 2013: 9; Toft and Zhukov, 2015: 230). Exposure to different types of house demolition is not selected at random, but rather depends on factors likely to be correlated with levels of resistance. For example, most military demolitions have occurred in Gaza, where levels of support for armed resistance may be higher, and punitive demolitions in East Jerusalem and the West Bank generally target individuals believed to support armed resistance and oppose compromise. Individuals who describe demolitions as indiscriminate may also be more supportive of resistance because of underlying characteristics which also make them more vulnerable to certain types of demolition and other state violence.

Including an embedded experiment addresses these concerns in several ways. First, given random assignment to demolition types as described in a vignette, the embedded experiment allows for an unbiased estimate of differences in the measures which were asked in reference to the vignette. Second, by asking respondents to abstract from their own experiences, the experiment measures preferences under counterfactual situations. Third, the construction of artificial vignettes allows for especially close comparison of targeting strategies, by adding or subtracting elements of the treatment (Gerber and Green, 2012: Ch. 10.6).

Respondents' interpretations of the demolition vignettes in the survey experiment further support the proposition that demolitions are generally not viewed as selective targeting. In a manipulation check following the vignette, asking respondents to describe who was affected by the demolition, 8% of respondents chose the statement "people who committed or supported offence against Israel", while the remainder of respondents selected statements corresponding to different conceptualizations of indiscriminate targeting: "people belonging to a particular ethnic, religious or political group" (6%); "people who committed an offence against Israel and also people who were innocent" (13%); "the relatives of someone who committed an offence" (13%); and "people who were unambiguously innocent" (53%). This distribution is relatively consistent across the four vignettes.

In the design of experiments, this is referred to as a problem of two-sided non-compliance (Gerber and Green, 2012: Ch. 5 and 6): respondents who were assigned to the control condition (punitive) were in effect treated (perceived the demolition vignette as indiscriminate) and a few of the respondents assigned to treatment conditions (military, collective-punitive and administrative) were in effect in the control group (interpreted these as selective). In this survey experiment, the type of demolition described in the vignette should be thought of as

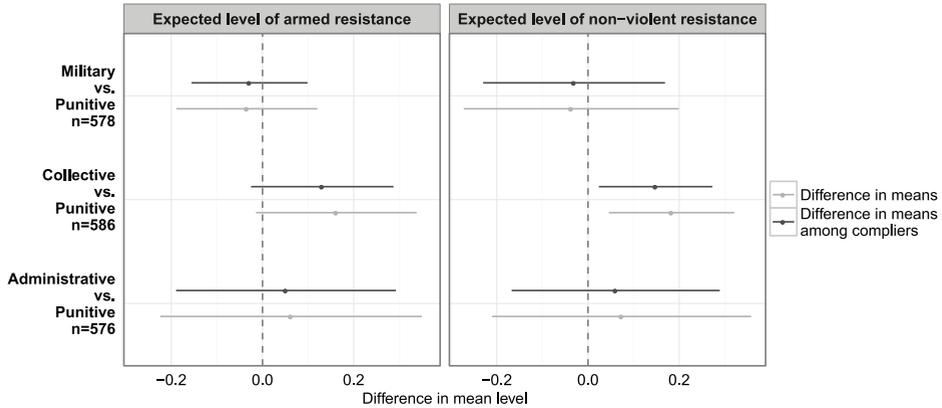


Figure 2. Expected level of Palestinian resistance in response to demolition vignettes; 95% confidence intervals from clustered robust standard errors are shown.

a measure of “intent-to-treat”, while the question measuring perceived target selection may be a better indicator of the treatment received. The non-compliance problem in the survey experiment again reflects the gap between target selection as defined by a state’s intentions and target selection as perceived by affected individuals.

To estimate the causal effect of the treatment received—interpreting target selection as indiscriminate, as opposed to selective—complier average causal effects were calculated (Gerber and Green, 2012: Ch.6). Figure 2 shows the result of ordinary least squares regressions where the demolition vignette is considered the intent-to-treat variable, as well as two-stage least squares regressions, where the demolition vignette is used as an instrumental variable for perceived target selection.

Comparing military and administrative demolitions with punitive demolitions, we should only expect to see a difference in measures of armed resistance if these demolition types are perceived as relatively more or less indiscriminate. The insignificant differences in these two comparisons are consistent with the hypotheses that all three types of demolitions are interpreted as indiscriminate.

There is a significant difference, however, in respondents’ expectations in the key comparison of vignettes, in which the collective characteristic of a punitive demolition was experimentally manipulated. A particular objective in designing the vignettes was to make the demolitions described as similar as possible, while only varying characteristics that might lead respondents to perceive the type of target selection in the vignette as *relatively* selective or indiscriminate in comparison with other demolition vignettes. To address the issue that even punitive and administrative demolitions may be interpreted as indiscriminate targeting, leaving no baseline for comparison, two different punitive demolition vignettes were included. The baseline punitive vignette described a demolition of the home of a Palestinian who had recently perpetrated an attack on Israelis. In the “collective-punitive” vignette it was added that the Palestinian who committed the attack had been killed by Israeli police at the scene of the attack, and that his parents’ home was demolished. The objective of this latter vignette was to exaggerate the “collective” characteristic of punitive demolitions, so that in comparison, the baseline “punitive” vignette would be interpreted as relatively selective.

Respondents who were assigned to read the collective-punitive vignette expected greater levels of non-violent resistance in response to this kind of incident, compared with respondents who were assigned to the baseline punitive vignette ($p < 0.05$; $n = 586$). The same tendency is apparent considering expectations of armed resistance, but is not statistically significant. The conclusion we can draw from this experimental setting is that when respondents interpreted hypothetical cases of house demolition as indiscriminate, the difference in perceived target selection led to increased expectations of resistance.¹²

Conclusion

The results of the survey and embedded experiment support the proposition that indiscriminate targeting—measured from the perspective of the target—can be counter-productive. Self-reported exposure to military, punitive, and administrative demolitions is associated with increased opposition to compromise among Palestinians surveyed, and these types of demolitions are associated with collective punishment and ethnic displacement. In a close comparison of two randomly assigned punitive demolition vignettes, survey respondents expected higher levels of non-violent resistance in response to a punitive demolition which was relatively more indiscriminate compared with a relatively selective punitive demolition.

The main finding of this study is the gap between the strategic logic of house demolition and how it is interpreted by Palestinians. House demolition is an example of a state policy intended to pursue security objectives. Yet, in different ways, a survey of Palestinian opinion demonstrates that this intent is misread. This finding contributes to our understanding of how coercion works. The mechanism of perceptions has been emphasized in many foundational theories of war (Blainey, 1988), social conflict (Pruitt et al., 2004), deterrence (Jervis, 1976), and coercion (Schelling, 1966), but is not often measured in empirical studies. Accounting for the role of perceptions both relates to a general theoretical topic and explains mixed empirical findings in prior research.

How populations react to coercive policies is also an important avenue for future research. The topic is especially relevant for the study of policies aiming to address uncoordinated (“lone wolf”) attacks, which are difficult to anticipate and disrupt, and suicide tactics, where individual offenders cannot be punished. Policies which address these kinds of threats often rely on broader deterrence in order to dissuade potential attackers and prevent further attacks. The question of how deterrence can be achieved, and under what conditions it fails, is essentially a question about individuals’ perceptions and preferences.

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Notes

1. Available from the *CMPS* website.
2. There is some disagreement about whether collective targeting should be considered distinct from indiscriminate targeting (e.g. Hultquist, 2015; Kocher et al., 2011; Steele, 2009) or an example of indiscriminate targeting (e.g. Kalyvas, 2006; Toft and Zhukov, 2015). This paper uses the terms interchangeably as theoretical arguments and predictions regarding their efficacy are equivalent in this particular context.

3. For example, Toft and Zhukov (2015: 22), Kocher et al. (2011: 201), Kalyvas (2006: 144), Lyall (2009: 335) and Souleimanov and Siroky (2016: 667).
4. Author's calculation based on public data from B'Tselem, the Israeli Committee on House Demolition and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
5. This category of demolitions is also referred to as "precautionary" (Benmelech et al., 2015) "preventative" (Amnesty International, 2004), "operational" (Shnayderman, 2004) and "clearing" (B'Tselem, 2002).
6. IDF Spokesperson in Shnayderman (2004: 64).
7. The policy is considered a legal means of deterrence under Israeli law (Regulation 119 of the Defence (Emergency) Regulations of the 1945 British Mandate) and international law (via the exemption to Article 53 of the fourth Geneva Convention) (Reicin, 1986; Silber, 2011).
8. For some references to this debate in media, see: Carlstrom (2014), Hass (2017), Omer-Man (2014) and Rasgon (2017).
9. See the Online Appendix for details on ethical protocol, sampling procedure, and sample characteristics in comparison with representative surveys.
10. These measures are based on similar questions in longitudinal surveys by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research and by the Peace Index, and on questions in related academic studies (Canetti et al., 2015; Ginges et al., 2007).
11. For the full text of the survey questions and the vignettes, and the distributions of all variables in the survey data set, see the Online Appendix.
12. It should be emphasized that, as in all experimental settings, the internal validity of these findings is high, but the external validity is low. The differences observed comparing the survey vignettes do not necessarily imply that individuals make these distinctions in a real-life settings.

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