

Paying Not to Know:
News Avoidance in Times of War
(Work in Progress, Do Not Disseminate)

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Abstract

Coverage of the ongoing Israel-Gaza war varies enormously across the two sides of the conflict and both sides hold sharply different beliefs about the facts of the conflict. We conduct a survey experiment in Israel and Jordan asking whether individuals try to avoid news about civilian victims from the opposing side, and how such news would affect them if they were to read them. We present several key findings. First, Israeli Jews and Jordanian Arabs are substantially less willing to read about outgroup victims compared to ingroup victims. Second, this tendency is driven less by instrumental considerations or universal affective factors, and more by social identification and group norms. Third, reading about outgroup victims increases knowledge, fosters empathy toward the outgroup, and affects policy positions. Fourth, these effects are as pronounced among individuals who typically would avoid such news. Together, these results suggest that avoidance of news about outgroup victims may lead to disagreements about facts and exacerbate hostile attitudes and conflict.

Keywords: xxx

JEL Classification: xxx

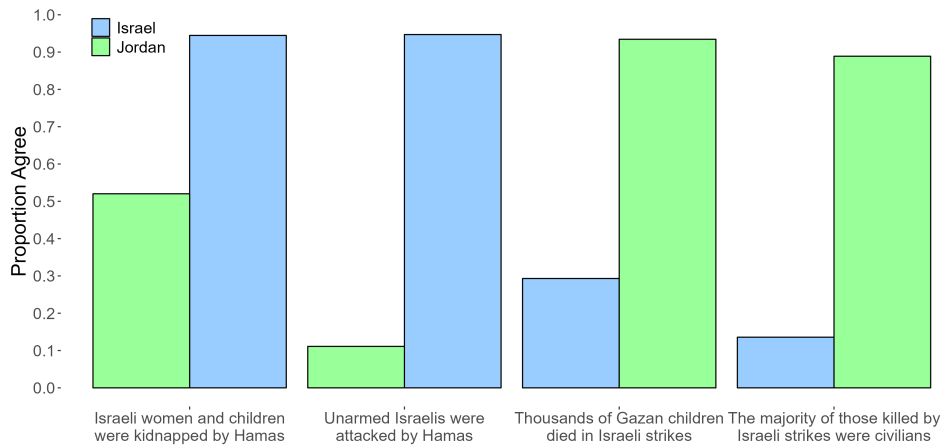
1 Introduction

In many conflicts, different sides maintain sharply divergent views about basic facts. These disagreements persist even long after the conflict started and even when media is not tightly controlled by the government and factual information is in principle available to all parties. Figure 1 shows survey data we collected among Israeli Jews and Jordanian Arabs in the spring of 2024, more than six months into the Israel-Gaza conflict. The numbers show dramatic differences in their beliefs about basic facts of the conflict.

One potential explanation for such persistent disagreements is that news coverage varies substantially across societies. Media outlets serving different populations often present drastically different narratives of the same events, emphasizing different aspects and using different framing . However, in today’s digital world, alternative sources of information are typically available. This raises two questions. First, do the gaps in coverage primarily reflect supply-side editorial decisions or whether they mirror underlying differences in demand for information across different populations? Second, do these gaps in coverage affect beliefs and attitudes?

This paper examines how people choose what news to consume during times of conflict, and how exposure to different types of news affects their knowledge, attitudes, and policy preferences. We focus particularly on news about civilian casualties, a critical aspect of conflict reporting that often receives divergent coverage across different societies. Our core finding is that both Israeli Jews and Jordanian Arabs systematically avoid news about civilian casualties from the outgroup, and are willing to forgo monetary incentives to do so. This avoidance appears primarily driven by social identity considerations rather than purely instrumental motives or universal emotional responses to negative news.

Figure 1: Facts about the ongoing conflict are sharply disputed



We establish these results through a series of incentivized experiments conducted in Israel and Jordan during spring 2024. The experimental design allows us to precisely

measure willingness to pay (WTP) for reading different types of news articles while controlling for their instrumental value. Participants are presented with headlines from CNN articles about civilian casualties from various conflicts and disasters. They must decide how much they are willing to pay to read each article, knowing they will need to answer questions about its content to receive a monetary reward. This design creates a clear instrumental value for reading any article, regardless of its content, allowing us to identify other factors driving news consumption choices.

Our first main finding is that both Israeli and Jordanian participants systematically avoid articles about civilian casualties from the other side of the conflict. The gap in WTP between articles about ingroup versus outgroup victims is substantial, equivalent to about 35-50% of the baseline WTP. This gap persists even for articles about events from previous years, suggesting it cannot be explained solely by the immediate instrumental value of the information.

We explore several potential mechanisms that could explain this systematic avoidance of outgroup victim news. Using variation in article characteristics and detailed self-reports, we find that the most prominent explanations relate to social identity considerations. The gap in WTP is strongly associated with the strength of participants' national identification and appears driven by both cognitive dissonance and social norms regarding what ingroup members ought to read. In contrast, we find limited support for purely instrumental considerations (such as information value or perceived article credibility) or universal affective motives (such as avoiding negative emotions).

These results immediately raise the question: Is news avoidance consequential? Perhaps the people who choose to avoid certain news, would not be affected by such news anyway. Beyond documenting selective news avoidance, we therefore examine its consequences by randomly assigning participants to read (and understand!) different types of articles. We find that reading about outgroup civilian casualties significantly affects empathy towards victims from the other side, policy positions regarding the conduct of military operations, and possibly knowledge. Importantly, these effects are not smaller among participants who would otherwise avoid such news, suggesting that selective exposure plays a meaningful role in maintaining gaps in knowledge and attitudes across societies.

Our findings contribute to several strands of literature. First, we add to the literature on news consumption and media effects (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006; DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Enikolopov et al., 2011; Durante and Knight, 2012; DellaVigna et al., 2014; Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014; Adena et al., 2015; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017; Enikolopov et al., 2020; Chopra et al., 2022) by quantifying demand-side drivers of news selection and comparing instrumental versus intrinsic considerations. Second, we contribute to work on conflict and asymmetric information (Fearon, 1995; Jackson and Morelli, 2011) by identifying news avoidance as a potential source of persistent disagreement about

facts. Third, we extend research on social identity in economics (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000; Chen and Li, 2009; Shayo, 2009; Hjort, 2014; Atkin et al., 2021; Oh, 2023) by demonstrating its role in information acquisition decisions. Finally, we contribute to the literature on information avoidance (Golman et al., 2017) by showing how social identity considerations can drive systematic avoidance of available information.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses related literature in slightly more detail. Section 3 describes our experimental design. Section 4 presents results on willingness to pay for different types of news and explores mechanisms. Section 5 examines the effects of news exposure. Section 6 concludes.

2 Literature

This paper contributes to several strands of literature. First, we build on research examining news consumption and media effects. A substantial body of work has focused on the supply side of media bias (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006; Mullainathan and Shleifer, 2005) and its effects on political outcomes (DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017; DellaVigna et al., 2014). We complement this literature by examining demand-side factors, particularly how social identity considerations affect news consumption choices. While recent work has begun exploring demand for news (Suen, 2004; Chopra et al., 2023), we provide novel evidence on how group identities shape these choices in conflict settings.

Second, our work relates to research on conflict and asymmetric information. Classical theories highlight how information problems can lead to conflict (Fearon, 1995; Gartzke, 1999; Wagner, 2000). We identify selective news avoidance as a potential mechanism sustaining information asymmetries, even when factual information is technically available to all parties. This provides a novel perspective on why disagreements about basic facts often persist in conflict situations.

Third, we contribute to the growing literature on social identity in economics, building on foundational work by Akerlof and Kranton (2000). Recent studies have demonstrated how social identities affect various economic behaviors (Shayo, 2009; Chen and Li, 2009; Hjort, 2014; Cohn et al., 2015; Atkin et al., 2021). We extend this literature by showing how identity considerations shape information acquisition decisions.

Finally, we contribute to research on information avoidance (Golman et al., 2017). While prior work has documented various motives for avoiding information, including both instrumental reasons (Oster et al., 2013) and psychological factors (Ganguly and Tasoff, 2017), we highlight the role of social identity as a driver of systematic information avoidance. This connects to broader questions about motivated reasoning and belief formation (Bauer et al., 2024).

Our empirical approach builds on methods developed for measuring willingness to

pay for information (Becker et al., 1964) and recent advances in experimental studies of news consumption (Chopra et al., 2022). We also draw on studies of media effects in conflict settings (Yanagizawa-Drott, 2014; DellaVigna et al., 2014)). Our findings have implications for understanding polarization and conflict (Levy, 2021), particularly how media consumption patterns may reinforce existing divisions.

3 Research Design

Using local survey companies, we recruited 1,753 Israeli Jews and 199 Jordanian Arabs to answer an online survey. Participants were paid for their response as per survey company policy but were also able to win an additional bonus payment of up to 19 ILS or 5.4 JOD. Recruitment started during April 2023 and continued until July 2023. Figure 1 shows the main survey’s design.

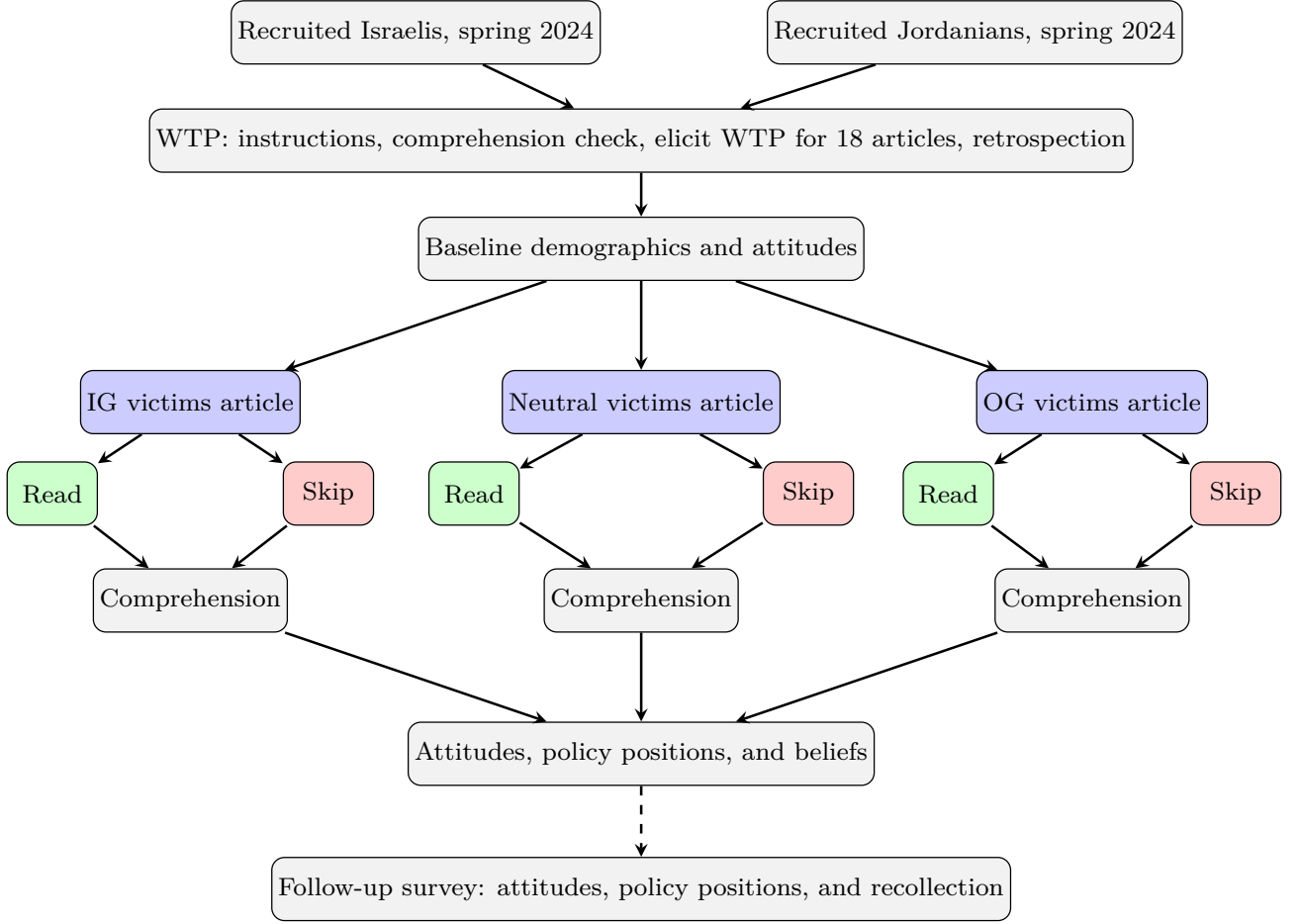
Our survey is comprised of 4 main parts: We first elicit participant’s willingness to pay to read various news articles. We then ask a series of baseline demographics and attitude questions. These are asked at this phase so as not to affect willingness to pay and not be affected by the following reading (or lack thereof). Participants are then either exposed or not exposed to one of the articles and answer 3 quiz questions relating to it. Exposure to the articles is determined through a combination of random allocation and the expressed willingness to pay preferences of the participant as detailed in the following pages. After answering the article’s quiz question, participants answer a second series of personal questions. Participants are invited to answer a followup survey the following day.

3.1 Elicitation of Willingness to Pay

We elicit willingness to pay to read articles through a variation of the BDM method (Becker et al., 1964). Participants are told that they are about to see a collection of news article headlines, that one article will be chosen at random, and that they will then be presented with 3 quiz questions relating to it. They are told the those who answer 2 of the 3 quiz questions correctly will receive a bonus prize of 90 point with 100 points being worth 10 ILS or 1 JOD. Participants are also told the quiz questions are directly related to the relevant article, and not the general topic – “Around 95% of those who read the article answered correctly and got the prize. In contrast, only around 20% of those who did not read the article manage to answer the questions correctly”. These statistics are based on pilot studies.

Participants are then asked to state the maximum number of points they are willing to forgo in order to read each article. They answer this per article, knowing that both the article and the cost of reading it are determined by lottery. Payment is taken from

Figure 2: Experiment design



an initial participation bonus of either 100 points (Israel) or 450 points (Jordan)¹. Participants indicate their maximum willingness to pay on a slider that goes from 0 to 100 points. They are repeatedly reminded that the bonus prize is 90 points. This method of elicitation is incentive compatible as participants have no control on the actual price or article and are simply indicating the most they are willing to pay. We make sure participants understand the mechanism using several comprehension questions.

After completing their comprehension tests, participants are shown 19 different articles, 18 are taken from CNN and an additional attention check². Though the experimental setup is obviously far removed from the social media context, articles are displayed in a manner meant to emulate their appearance on social media. Headlines are presented as they appear in the original (with the addition of a Hebrew/Arabic translation) and are accompanied by the thumbnail picture they were originally matched with. Figure X shows an example of how articles are shown along with how they appear when shared on

¹Due to technical constraints, Jordanian participants could only be paid if they provided their email address and responded to a follow-up survey. Only 72 out of 199 Jordanian participants ultimately completed this second survey

²The attention check asked participants to indicate a specific value on the slider. participants who failed the attention check were removed from the experiment.

Figure 3: Examples of headline presented to participants



social media. The resemblance is meant to invoke the social media landscape and will hopefully increase the reader’s conviction in the external validity of our results.

3.1.1 Article Selection and Characteristics

We carefully selected CNN news articles about civilian victims of various conflicts and disasters. The articles cover Israeli, Palestinian, Ukrainian, and non-conflict related civilian casualties, including both recent events (2023) and older incidents (2010s). We focused on straight news reporting rather than opinion pieces or explainers, specifically selecting articles that explicitly mention civilian victims of a specific nationality and focus on “situation on the ground” coverage.

To ensure external validity while maintaining experimental control, we created a pool of 43 potential articles and randomly selected 18 for each participant, with randomization occurring within categories (see table X). This approach allows us to control for article characteristics while capturing responses to a broader set of news stories.

Importantly, we hold constant the news outlet (CNN), time frame, and overall format across articles. This design choice rules out variation in “source utility” or overall source credibility as alternative explanations for our findings. Additionally, some articles about specific incidents appear as reporting about ingroup victims in one country and outgroup victims in another, allowing us to include article fixed effects in our analysis.

To supplement information regarding our chosen articles, we ran a secondary, incentivized, survey, where the same participant pool rated article headlines on a set of criteria: Does the article portray Israelis/Palestinians positively or negatively? Is the article expected to evoke negative emotions? Are people familiar with the details of the incident covered in the article? Is the information considered credible? Is it important that members of the ingroup read this article? We use these answers to capture how our articles are perceived by participants.

CNN Headline	2010s	2023
Palestinian victims	2/5	3/8
Israeli victims	2/6	3/8
Ukrainian victims	2/4	3/5
Other disasters	1/3	2/4
Attention check	1	

Article Type	Israeli Victims	Gazan Victims	Chinese Victims
Minimum Price (0)	30%	30%	18%
Maximum Price (100)	10%	10%	0%
Uniformly random price	2% (dropped from analysis)		

3.2 Treatment Design

Following the willingness to pay elicitation, as per the BDM mechanism, survey participants are randomly assigned an article and a price to read it. We utilize this random assignment element to look at the effects of reading different kinds of news articles with a particular focus on articles that either depict the reader’s in-group as a victim or the reader’s out-group as a victim. We supplement these with a third article regarding a natural disaster in far-away environment, where casualties usually evoke less emotion.

Participants were ultimately assigned one of three articles: The first article tells the story Khaled Nabhan, a Palestinian man who lost two of his grandchildren in an Israeli airstrike in November 2023. The second article recounts the story of Alma Or and Noam Or, two teenagers who were held by Hamas militants and released as part of the 2023 truce agreement. The final article describes the aftermath of a deadly earthquake which resulted in over 130 deaths in China’s Gansu province. All three articles were meant to evoke strong emotions.

To improve statistical power and minimize selection bias in treatment assignment, neither the price of reading nor the articles themselves were drawn uniformly. Instead, they were drawn from the distribution displayed in table X. Since the minimal WTP participants were able to report was 0, those participants who were assigned the minimum price of 0 points were always exposed to their article. Those assigned the maximum price of 100 points were only exposed to the article if they expressed a willingness to pay this maximal price (which is 10 points higher than their quiz prize). Those assigned to a uniformly random price were excluded from the analysis since their exposure to the articles was more strongly dependent on their reading preferences. Among those assigned to a uniformly random price, article selection was uniformly random.

The articles themselves were presented to participants already translated into either Hebrew or Arabic. Participants could view them in the original English by clicking a button on the article screen. Articles were presented in a purely textual format, lacking

any pictures or graphs that were originally displayed alongside them. The full texts of the articles are in Appendix X. Screenshots from the survey appear in Appendix Y.

3.3 Effects of Reading

We collect several pre-registered outcome variables regarding the effects of article reading. Our primary focus is on article comprehension, empathy towards the out-group, policy positions towards the war, and factual perceptions of the conflict. Secondary outcomes include media attitudes, particularly towards CNN, changes in emotive attitudes compared to the pre-treatment baseline, and the understanding of international criticism.

We measure article comprehension through the share of correct answers to the quiz questions. As mentioned before, each participant is presented with three multiple choice questions relating to their assigned article. These are drawn (iid) from a bank of five questions per article. To prevent them from looking up answers online, participants have 60 seconds to answer these questions.

Factual perceptions of the conflict are captured through a list of 4 statements regarding the war. Participants are asked to respond to these statements and indicate on a 5-point scale the likelihood with which they are correct or incorrect. The statements are as follows: “Dozens of Israeli women and children were kidnapped by Hamas”; “Thousands of Gazan children were killed by Israeli strikes in Gaza”; “Israeli towns were attacked by Hamas, but no unarmed civilians were attacked”; “The absolute majority of those killed by Israeli air strikes in Gaza are Hamas militants and not civilians”. As per the UN, The Institute for National Security Studies (affiliated with Tel Aviv University), the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, and the ACLED initiative, the first two of these statements are true, the last two are false.

Empathy towards the outgroup is captured through the level of agreement regarding a declarative statement (“I feel sorry for the suffering of some [outgroup] civilians hurt in the war”) as well as through two donation questions with actual stakes. The first of the two donation questions presents participants with two international aid organizations, Project HOPE and Direct Relief. As per their websites, both organizations have activities in the Palestinian Territories as well as in Israel.

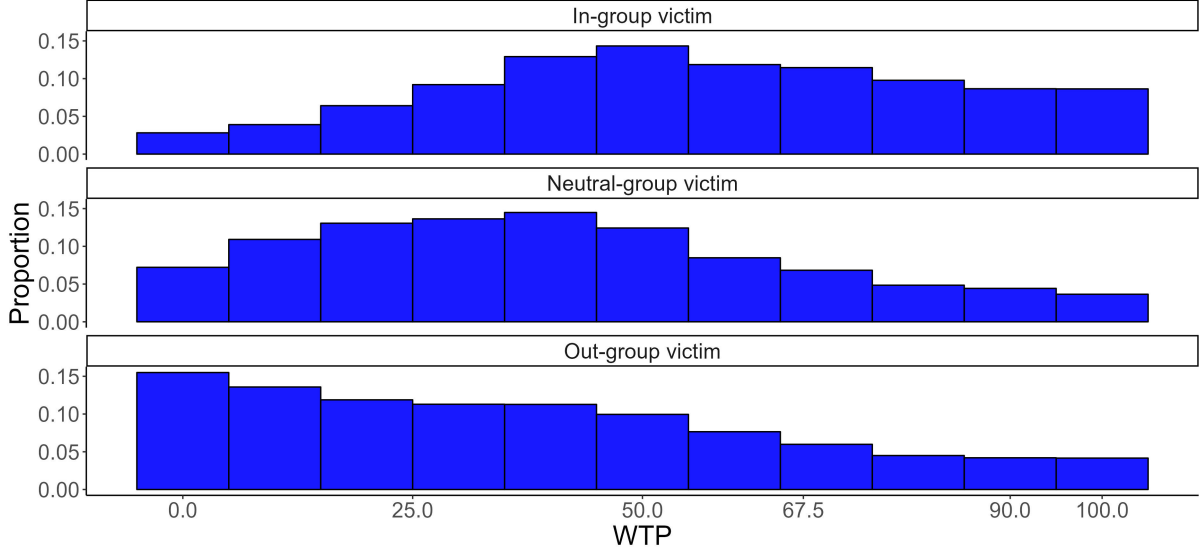
4 Results: WTP for Articles

4.1 Main Results on Willingness to Pay

Our first key finding is that both Israeli Jews and Jordanian Arabs systematically avoid news about civilian casualties from the other side of the conflict, even when this entails foregoing monetary rewards. Figure 4 shows the distribution of WTP for articles about ingroup victims, outgroup victims, and neutral victims (Ukrainians and non-conflict casualties). The results reveal a substantial gap between WTP for ingroup versus outgroup

casualties.

Figure 4: Distribution of WTP



In Israel, participants are willing to pay an average of 15.1 points more for articles about Israeli civilian victims compared to neutral articles ($p < 0.01$). Conversely, they are willing to pay 4.8 points less for articles about Palestinian civilian victims ($p < 0.01$). The total gap of approximately 20 points represents a 35-50% difference in WTP relative to the baseline. To put this magnitude in perspective, 20 points is equivalent to approximately seven minutes worth of survey time in our setting.

The pattern in Jordan mirrors these findings, though with somewhat different magnitudes. Jordanian participants are willing to pay 13.2 points more for articles about Palestinian victims compared to neutral articles ($p < 0.01$), while showing no significant difference in WTP between Israeli victim and neutral articles. These results are robust to including article fixed effects, which control for any article-specific characteristics.

We also find that participants are more likely to completely avoid ($WTP = 0$) articles about outgroup victims. In Israel, the probability of zero WTP is 4.3 percentage points higher for articles about Palestinian victims compared to neutral articles, while it is 1.7 percentage points lower for articles about Israeli victims. This systematic avoidance of outgroup victim news suggests that differences in media coverage across societies may reflect underlying differences in demand.

4.2 Mechanisms

We explore three potential mechanisms that could explain the systematic avoidance of outgroup victim news: instrumental considerations, universal affective motives, and social identity factors. The evidence most strongly supports social identity as the primary

driver.

First, we find limited support for purely instrumental considerations. If participants viewed some articles as providing more valuable information, we would expect higher WTP for more recent events or previously unfamiliar incidents. However, the gap in WTP persists even for articles about older events from the 2010s, where immediate instrumental value is minimal (Label 1). Moreover, participants actually display higher WTP for articles covering familiar events, contrary to what an information-value explanation would predict. Article credibility is positively correlated with higher WTP, but not significantly (Table 2).

We directly assess perceived instrumental value through personalized retrospection questions asked after the WTP elicitation but before article assignment. Participants are reminded of either their lowest or highest article WTP and asked to report their perceived probability of winning the monetary prize with and without reading the article. Surprisingly, the difference in these probabilities (Δ) is actually smaller for articles that receive higher WTP, with $\Delta = 33.8\%$ for maximum-WTP articles versus $\Delta = 41.1\%$ for minimum-WTP articles. This pattern is inconsistent with instrumental considerations driving WTP differences.

Second, we find limited evidence for universal affective motives such as avoiding negative emotions. If anything, participants display higher WTP for articles expected to induce negative emotions (Table 2). They also report feeling more sad during the survey after reading about ingroup victims, suggesting that emotional avoidance cannot explain the preferential consumption of ingroup victim news (Table 3).

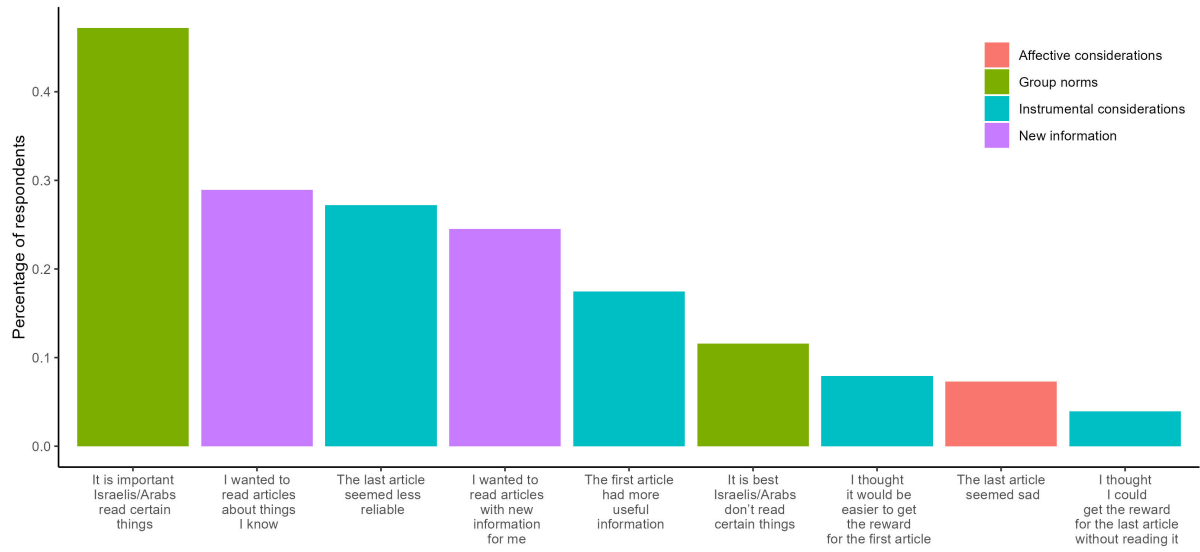
Ultimately, the strongest evidence points to social identity considerations as the key mechanism. The gap in WTP is significantly larger among participants who report high levels of pride in their ingroup (Table 1). We also find that group norms—beliefs about what ingroup members ought to read—explain a substantial portion of both the positive effect for ingroup victims and negative effect for outgroup victims (Table 2). When asked directly about their rationales for giving high vs low WTP values, over 40% of participants cited injunctive group considerations.

4.3 Heterogeneity and Robustness

The basic pattern of favoring ingroup victim news and avoiding outgroup victim news is remarkably robust across various subgroups and specifications (Figure 4). The effects persist when controlling for demographic characteristics, political ideology, and general news consumption habits. We find similar patterns among both more and less educated participants, across age groups, and across the political spectrum, though with some variation in magnitude.

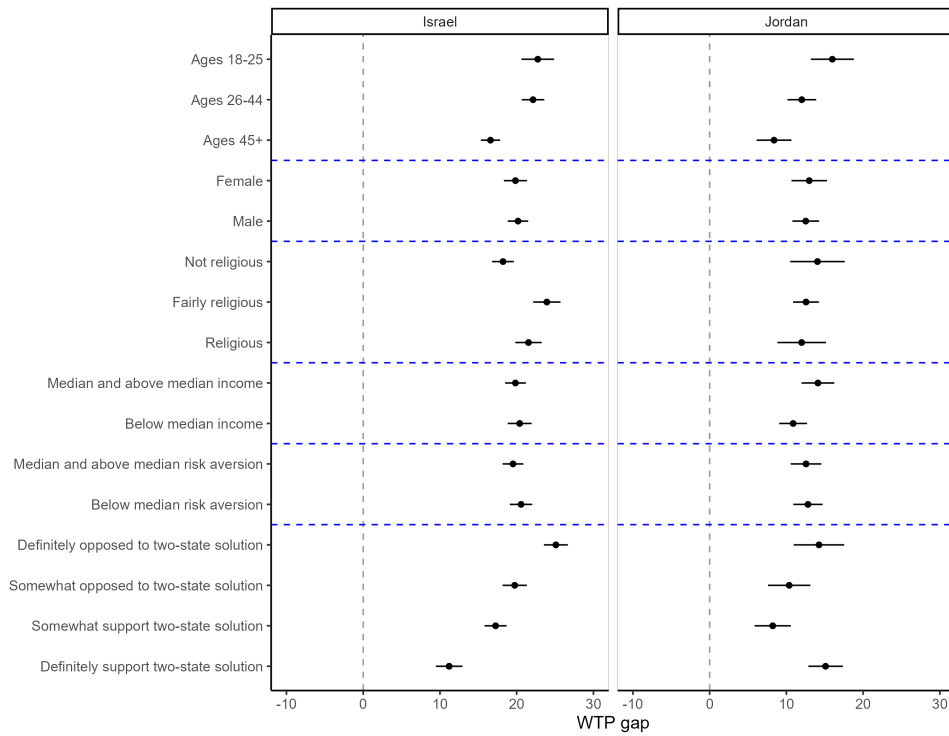
These results suggest that selective exposure to victim narratives during conflict is not driven by a small subset of extreme individuals, but rather reflects broader patterns of

Figure 5: WTP Rationales



identity-motivated information consumption. The systematic nature of these choices may help explain why different sides of a conflict often maintain very different understandings of events, even when factual information is technically available to all parties.

Figure 6: Ingroup-Outgroup gaps in WTP across subgroups



5 Results: The Effect of Reading the Articles

5.1 Identification Strategy

To identify the causal effect of exposure to news about civilian casualties, we leverage random assignment of articles and prices following the WTP elicitation. Each participant is randomly assigned to one of three article types (ingroup victims, outgroup victims, or neutral victims) and one of two price levels. At the minimum price (0 points), participants always gain access to the article. At the maximum price (100 points), they almost never gain access given typical WTP levels. This design creates experimental variation in article exposure that is independent of participants' preferences.

The implementation results in the following distribution: 30% of participants are assigned minimum price (0) for ingroup victim articles, 30% minimum price for outgroup victim articles, 18% minimum price for neutral articles, and 10% each maximum price (100) for ingroup and outgroup articles. A small fraction (2%) received randomly drawn intermediate prices and are excluded from the main analysis.

5.2 First Stage: Article Comprehension

We first examine whether our experimental manipulation successfully affected article comprehension, as measured by performance on the quiz questions. This analysis serves both as a manipulation check and as a first stage for our instrumental variables estimates of reading effects.

Participants assigned the minimum price (ensuring article access) answered 53.8 percentage points more questions correctly in Israel ($p < 0.01$) and 35.3 percentage points more in Jordan ($p < 0.01$) compared to those assigned the maximum price. The effects are even larger for articles about ingroup victims, with an additional 10 percentage point increase in correct answers in Israel ($p < 0.01$) and a 7 percentage point increase in Jordan (not statistically significant). These results confirm that our price manipulation effectively influenced article reading and comprehension.

5.3 Effects on Knowledge and Attitudes

We examine four pre-registered outcome variables: comprehension and recollection of article content, empathy toward outgroup civilians, willingness to consider civilian casualties in military operations, and agreement on basic facts about the conflict. For each outcome, we estimate both intent-to-treat (ITT) effects of price assignment and local average treatment effects (LATE) of reading the articles using price assignment as an instrument.

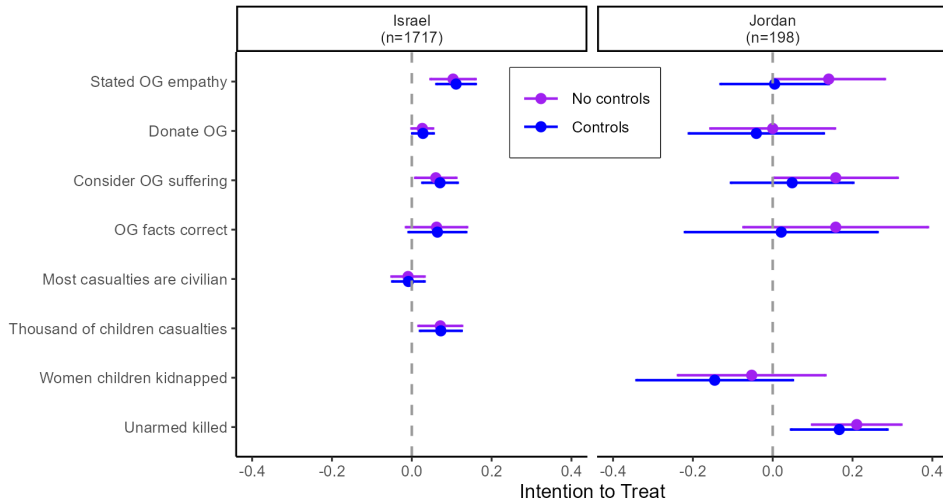
The results reveal substantial effects of reading about outgroup civilian casualties. Compared to reading about ingroup casualties, exposure to outgroup victim articles increases stated empathy toward outgroup civilians by 11.1 percentage points in Israel (p

< 0.01), from a baseline of approximately 30%. The effects on behavioral measures are smaller but still significant: the probability of donating some money to an outgroup-focused charity increases from 4% to 6.4% ($p < 0.05$).

We also find meaningful effects on policy preferences. Reading about outgroup victims increases support for consideration of outgroup civilian casualties in military operations by 7.1 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), from a baseline of approximately 24%. These effects represent the ITT of article assignment; the instrumental variables estimates suggest that actually reading and comprehending the articles produces effects roughly 50% larger (See Tables 5 and 5).

The effects extend to factual beliefs about the conflict. Participants assigned to read about outgroup victims show significantly different patterns of agreement with various statements about civilian casualties compared to those assigned ingroup victim articles. This suggests that exposure to news about outgroup suffering can affect not just attitudes but also beliefs about objective facts.

Figure 7: Effect of Articles



5.4 Persistence of Effects

A follow-up survey conducted 1-7 days after the main experiment shows that many of these effects persist. The impact on empathy toward outgroup civilians remains nearly as large as in the immediate aftermath, with a 5.9 percentage point difference between outgroup and ingroup article conditions ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, the effect on considering outgroup civilian casualties persists, with a 9.7 percentage point difference ($p < 0.05$).

This persistence is notable given that participants were exposed to just a single article in a controlled setting. It suggests that systematic differences in news consumption patterns could have lasting effects on attitudes and beliefs in conflict settings.

5.5 Heterogeneous Effects by Initial WTP

A key question is whether the effects of news exposure vary with participants' ex-ante willingness to read such news. This speaks to whether selective exposure matters: if those who choose to avoid outgroup victim news would not be affected by it anyway, then consumption patterns might be less consequential.

We find no evidence that effects are smaller among participants who would typically avoid such news. If anything, the point estimates suggest slightly larger effects among those with lower initial WTP for outgroup victim articles, though the differences are not statistically significant. The effects on both empathy and policy preferences are robust across the WTP distribution.

These findings suggest that selective exposure to different victim narratives likely plays a meaningful role in sustaining gaps in knowledge, attitudes, and policy preferences across conflict parties. The fact that exposure affects even those who would choose to avoid such information implies that systematic differences in news consumption may contribute to persistent disagreements about basic facts and appropriate policies.

6 Conclusions

This paper provides experimental evidence on how social identity shapes news consumption during conflict and how exposure to different victim narratives affects knowledge and attitudes. Using incentivized experiments in Israel and Jordan, we document systematic avoidance of news about outgroup civilian casualties, even when such avoidance carries direct monetary costs. The gap in willingness to pay between articles about ingroup versus outgroup civilian victims is substantial, equivalent to 35-50% of baseline WTP.

Several pieces of evidence point to social identity as the key mechanism driving these patterns. The avoidance of outgroup victim news cannot be explained by purely instrumental considerations—participants actually perceive higher chances of earning monetary rewards from articles they are less willing to read. Nor can it be explained by universal emotional motives, as participants show higher WTP for articles expected to evoke negative emotions. Instead, the patterns are strongly associated with strength of group identification and beliefs about what news ingroup members ought to consume.

The consequences of selective exposure appear meaningful. When randomly assigned to read about outgroup civilian casualties, participants display increased empathy toward the outgroup, greater willingness to consider civilian casualties in military operations, and different beliefs about basic facts of the conflict. These effects persist for at least several days and are not smaller among participants who would typically avoid such news. This suggests that systematic differences in news consumption may help sustain gaps in knowledge and attitudes across conflict parties.

Our findings have several implications. First, they suggest that divergent media coverage during conflict may reflect demand-side factors as much as supply-side editorial decisions. Second, they highlight social identity as an important driver of information acquisition choices, extending previous work on identity in economics to the domain of news consumption. Third, they suggest that exposure to news about outgroup suffering can affect attitudes and beliefs even among those predisposed to avoid such information.

These results point to both challenges and opportunities for reducing conflict-related polarization. While social identity considerations create systematic biases in information consumption, our finding that exposure effects persist even among those who would avoid such news suggests potential benefits from mechanisms that increase exposure to diverse conflict narratives. Future work might explore how such exposure could be increased while respecting individual autonomy and accounting for identity-related preferences.

More broadly, our results suggest that understanding how social identity shapes information acquisition may be crucial for explaining persistent disagreements about facts in conflict settings. Even when information is technically available to all parties, identity-driven selective exposure can lead different groups to maintain very different understandings of events. This highlights the need to consider both the supply and demand for information when studying conflict and polarization.

Table 1: Willingness To Pay

	<i>Dependent variable: WTP</i>							
	Israel	Jordan	Both	Israel	Jordan	Both	Both 2010s	Both 2023
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
IG Victim	15.122*** (1.199)	13.179*** (0.788)		12.634*** (1.208)	8.153*** (2.735)			
OG Victim	-4.835*** (0.828)	0.664 (1.03)		-2.596*** (0.898)	3.073* (1.713)			
IG-OG			16.238*** (1.065)			12.143*** (1.071)	9.697*** (1.019)	13.774*** (1.007)
Very Proud								
IG Victim * VeryProud				4.18*** (0.838)	6.239* (3.113)			
OG Victim * Very Proud				-3.763*** (0.715)	-2.991 (2.111)			
IG-OG * Very Proud						5.849*** (0.871)	5.771*** (1.028)	5.905*** (1.028)
Individual FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Article FE	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reference Group Mean	42.53	37.77		42.53	37.77			
Observations	31554	3582	35136	31554	3582	35136	13664	21472
R^2	0.708	0.705	0.716	0.711	0.708	0.718	0.75	0.718

Note: All S.E. clustered at individual, article levels.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 2: Mechanisms

	<i>Dependent variable: WTP</i>							
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
IG Victim	15.122*** (1.199)	10.199*** (1.394)	13.29*** (2.052)	11.206*** (2.127)	14.582*** (3.986)	8.584** (3.348)	2.115 (2.609)	4.041 (2.829)
OG Victim	-4.835*** (0.828)	-4.889*** (0.978)	-1.324 (3.275)	1.819 (3.321)	-4.053 (5.366)	0.548 (2.84)	0.536 (1.537)	-7.375* (3.795)
Familiarity		2.932*** (0.635)						1.785*** (0.626)
Credibility			2.237 (1.976)					0.087 (1.219)
Negative Emotions				4.438** (1.99)				-1.81 (1.807)
IG Positive Image					0.542 (3.675)			-5.195* (2.935)
OG Positive Image						-4.897** (2.378)		-2.677 (1.783)
Group Norms							7.8*** (1.579)	6.726*** (1.732)
R^2	0.708	0.711	0.709	0.71	0.708	0.71	0.712	0.714

Note: All S.E. are clustered at individual, article levels.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

IG Victim and *OG Victim* are dummy indicators. All other coefficients refer to a S.D change in the article characterization score.

All specifications use only the Israeli dataset, with 31,536 observations.

Table 3: End of Survey emotions

	<i>Did you feel...</i>					Overall enjoyment
	Happy (1)	Sad (2)	Ashamed (3)	Concerned (4)	Angry (5)	(1-5 scale) (6)
IG Victim	-0.014 (0.012)	0.126*** (0.028)	0.013 (0.013)	-0.028 (0.022)	0.057** (0.028)	0.035 (0.048)
OG Victim	-0.028*** (0.011)	0.062** (0.028)	0.023* (0.014)	-0.039* (0.022)	0.101*** (0.028)	-0.123** (0.05)
OG - IG (P-value)	-0.013 (0.214)	-0.064** (0.027)	0.01 (0.495)	-0.011 (0.62)	0.044 (0.147)	-0.158*** (0.002)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reference Group Mean	0.051	0.562	0.044	0.184	0.342	3.325
Observations	1717	1717	1717	1717	1717	1717
R^2	0.048	0.073	0.052	0.027	0.086	0.094

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: ITT Effects

	OG empathy		Donation includes OG		Consider OG suffering	
	Israel (1)	Jordan (2)	Israel (3)	Jordan (4)	Israel (5)	Jordan (6)
IG Victim	-0.037 (0.023)	0.117* (0.062)	-0.017 (0.012)	-0.027 (0.078)	-0.025 (0.021)	0.013 (0.069)
OG Victim	0.074*** (0.025)	0.122** (0.062)	0.011 (0.014)	-0.068 (0.071)	0.045** (0.022)	0.062 (0.075)
OG - IG (P-value)	0.111*** (0.00)	0.005 (0.943)	0.028** (0.042)	-0.041 (0.635)	0.071*** (0.002)	0.049 (0.534)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reference Group Mean	0.331	0.107	0.057	0.262	0.24	0.19
Observations	1717	198	1717	198	1717	198
R^2	0.285	0.393	0.056	0.195	0.3	0.348

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5: LATE Effects

	OG empathy		Donation includes OG		Consider OG suffering	
	Israel (1)	Jordan (2)	Israel (3)	Jordan (4)	Israel (5)	Jordan (6)
IG Victim	-0.055 (0.035)	0.261 (0.166)	-0.025 (0.019)	-0.019 (0.199)	-0.035 (0.032)	0.029 (0.175)
OG Victim	0.115*** (0.04)	0.441 (0.298)	0.017 (0.022)	-0.148 (0.32)	0.072** (0.036)	0.246 (0.336)
OG - IG (P-value)	0.17*** (0.00)	0.18 (0.504)	0.042** (0.043)	-0.129 (0.687)	0.107*** (0.002)	0.217 (0.462)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reference Group Mean	0.331	0.107	0.057	0.262	0.24	0.19
Observations	1717	198	1717	198	1717	198
R^2	0.284	0.323	0.053	0.184	0.297	0.319

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

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Online Appendix