

# Microfoundations of civil conflict reconciliation: Ethnicity and context<sup>1</sup>

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KARIN DYRSTAD,<sup>a, b</sup> HALVAD BUHAUG,<sup>b</sup> KRISTEN RINGDAL,<sup>a, b</sup>  
ALBERT SIMKUS,<sup>a, b</sup> and OLA LISTHAUG<sup>a, b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Sociology and Political Science, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), <sup>b</sup> Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW), Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

Comparative work on reconstruction and peace building in war-torn countries is dominated by a macro-oriented approach, focusing on structural political reforms, legal issues, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of (rebel) soldiers, and repatriation of the displaced. This article offers a different perspective, examining micro-level determinants of reconciliation. Earlier research indicates that political attitudes in post-ethnic conflict societies are shaped by ethnic affinity. A large literature on the importance of contextual conditions for human behavior would suggest that ethnic composition of the local population and physical proximity to the conflict zone also should affect individual support for peace and reconciliation. To test these propositions, we draw on a geo-referenced survey of the Macedonian population that measures respondents' perception of the 2001 civil conflict. Contrary to expectations, the spatial and demographic setting exerts only feeble impacts on individuals' support for the Framework Agreement. Several years after the conflict was settled, the survey data reveal a strongly divided Macedonian society where ethnicity trumps all other individual and contextual factors in explaining the respondents' preferences.

**KEYWORDS:** ethnic conflict, Macedonia, nationalism, peace agreement, reconciliation.

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The post-World War II frequency of armed conflict reached its peak in the early 1990s, after which it has seen a considerable decline (Gleditsch et al. 2002; Harbom and Wallensteen 2010). A large portion of today's conflict outbreaks are recurrences of old conflicts, and as a consequence, the average conflict age is on the rise (Human Security Report 2009). It thus appears that the "conflict trap" (Collier et al. 2003) is more than fancy jargon; about 60% of all countries with civil wars fall back into violence within ten years (Elbadawi, Hegre, and Milante 2008). To break the conflict trap, we need to enhance our understanding of post-conflict reconciliation and sustainable peace building.

Traditionally, the dynamics of armed conflict are studied from a country-level perspective. Today, however, quantitative research is increasingly adopting disaggregated approaches to the study of civil war. Attention is no longer limited to features of the state, but frequently covers local geographic and demographic conditions (Weidmann 2009), inter-group inequalities (Murshed and Gates 2006), state – non-state actor interaction (Buhaug, Cederman, and Rød 2008), and characteristics of insurgents (Humphreys and Weinstein 2008) and rebel groups (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). In contrast, comparative research on post-conflict societies still suffers from a state-centeredness, where focus is placed on national political issues, such as transformation of political institutions and the establishment of systems of power sharing; legal issues, including treatment of former state and/or rebel leaders and prosecution of war criminals; as well as questions of disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation of the displaced (for example, Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom 2008; Hoddie and Hartzell 2003; Walter 2003). All these issues are important in order to tap the character and progress of peace processes, but such elite-oriented institutional approaches are insensitive to the true societal impact of a settlement and are insufficient as a means to gauge the extent of reconciliation among the masses.

The best measurable indication of prospects for lasting peace is the extent of normalization between the former antagonists. While contentious issues relating to ideology, government composition, and applied policies normally can be solved through compromise, questions of nationality and the right to self-determination are often deemed indivisible and non-negotiable (Toft 2003). Indeed, some claim that there is no lasting solution to ethnic war but partition (Kaufmann 1996). This might explain why secessionist and ethno-national conflicts are particularly intractable and prone to recurrence after a ceasefire or peace agreement has been reached.

In this article, we study determinants of support for peace agreement and inter-communal normalization in polarized, war-torn societies, with particular focus on the possible roles of ethnic identity, local settlement patterns, and physical exposure to violence. A key feature of this analysis is the explicit focus on individual-level preferences and support for reconciliation. Moving beyond standard, aggregate approaches to post-conflict risk, our empirical analysis makes use of a geo-referenced survey of the Macedonian population from 2005, as well as precise data on the location of each violent event during the 2001 conflict.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The limited number of attitudinal surveys in post-conflict societies prevents a comprehensive cross-national analysis of individual attitudes toward peace agreements. That said, Macedonia is an interesting case for several reasons. The brief conflict represents the most recent armed conflict in Europe outside the Caucasus. Moreover,

The data are analyzed through multilevel regression, which facilitates considering both individual-level and municipality-level characteristics and estimating their relative impact.

Our main finding is that ethnicity seems to trump all other determinants of support for the peace agreement. More than four years after the end of the conflict, the ethnic Macedonians are still predominantly opposed to the general Framework Agreement while the Albanian minority shows a very strong support.<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, and contrasting a large literature on the importance of social context for human behavior, the spatial and demographic context exerts feeble impact on individuals' perceptions. This is testimony to the crucial role of ethnic identity in shaping people's preferences and constitutes a powerful counterweight to scholars and practitioners who dismiss ethnicity as irrelevant for our understanding of social conflict. This result also highlights the need to invest more in developing bottom-up strategies and policies to improve relations between former antagonists.

The article is organized as follows: we begin by discussing possible determinants of individuals' support for reconciliation and develop a set of testable hypotheses. The second section provides a historical backdrop to the Macedonian conflict. We then proceed by describing our data material and the research design before presenting the findings from the empirical analysis. The article ends with a discussion on the significance of the results.

## **RECONCILIATION AND SUPPORT FOR PEACE AGREEMENT**

Reconciliation among citizens is increasingly viewed as an integral part of the process of making peace; yet, no scholarly agreement exists on the precise meaning of reconciliation, and definitions are typically hazy and broad (Hagenboom and Vieille 2010). For Gibson (2004), reconciliation means "the extension of dignity and esteem to those of other races and cultures, through understanding, trust, and respect". Weinstein and Halpern (2004) describe reconciliation as repairing "the social fabrics" of society whereas others focus on the role of civil society (Belloni 2001), intergroup forgiveness (Bakke, O'Loughlin, and Ward 2009), and transitional justice (Grotsky 2009). According to Katsikas and Siani-Davies (2009), reconciliation is "about an emotional and cognitive reordering which allows the establishment of new relationships between former enemies." This process, in turn, changes people's perception of both their own group and of the former antagonist. It is in this last meaning that we use the term reconciliation. In the following, we discuss a few contextual characteristics that might affect the prospect of societal reconciliation in post-war societies and propose a set of hypotheses which will guide the subsequent empirical analysis.

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the conflict was limited both in time and space and never developed into full civil war. It is likely that societal polarization and traumatization increase with the intensity and longevity of the conflict; thus, the relatively limited fighting in our case reduces the possibility that our findings are product of extreme circumstances and therefore not transferable to other contexts.

<sup>3</sup> Where not otherwise specified, the term "Macedonian" refers to ethnic Macedonians, while "Albanian" refers to ethnic Albanians of Macedonian nationality.

## **Ethnic identity**

Ethnicity is defined in a variety of ways. Defining features may include shared religion, language, historical heritage, and territorial claims (Haug 2001). Importantly, traits are based on, or believed to be based on, descent (Chandra 2006). In line with Fearon and Laitin (2000) and Brubaker (2009), we view ethnicity as one of many identities, whose importance and salience depend partly on the context.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, some suggest that ethnic awareness and animosity may be more pronounced consequences than causes of conflict (Dyrstad forthcoming; Gurr 2000; Massey, Hodson, and Sekulić 2006; Oberschall 2000; Wood 2008). Moreover, Kalyvas (2003, 2008) describes how local disputes may be interpreted in terms of the national cleavages as ethnicity becomes the main organizing principle of politics.

In principle, reconciliation should lead to a deeper understanding of the other group's position. Therefore, if a process of reconciliation has been at work for some time, we should observe a convergence in support for the peace agreement between the communities as ethnic cleavages become less relevant. On the other hand, research on ethnic salience and the strength of ethnic identity indicates that once activated, ethnic polarization does not go away overnight, but must be targeted through systematic work (Simonsen 2005; Wood 2008). South Africa and Northern Ireland are good examples of the durability of ethnicity as a defining social cleavage (for example, Gibson 2004; Hewstone et al. 2008).

For simplicity, we assume that the post-conflict society consists of two groups, a politically dominant ethnic majority and a rebellious ethnic minority, although the argument could be expanded to more complex settings. The negotiation of a peace agreement almost always addresses the distribution of political power between former enemies. Often, this bargaining takes the form of a zero-sum game where one group gains what another loses. In this context, rebels generally gain more than the government, since the rebels are recognized as a group and given some degree of authority, whether regionally or nationally (Svensson 2007). Even if the government remains the strongest part, a negotiated peace agreement leads to a readjustment of the relative distribution of power, rights, and privileges between the government and the insurgent minority. We therefore propose the following general hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** The ethnic minority shows more support for a peace agreement than the ethnic majority.

## **Ethnic settlement patterns**

There is a considerable literature on the relationship between ethnicity and civil conflict, and the issue is indeed a contested one. A number of articles argue that particular macro-level configurations of ethnicity are hazardous, be it diversity (Sambanis 2001), dominance (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), polarization (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005), or exclusion (Cederman and Girardin 2007). Others claim that ethnically heterogeneous societies are neither more nor less exposed to armed conflict (Fearon 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003). Characteristically, all these works relate to ethnicity and ethnic composition of the population at the nation-state level,

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of different concepts of ethnicity and ethnic violence, see Oberschall (2000).

but there is in principle no reason why the underlying mechanisms cannot play out (and, perhaps, be more relevant) at a local level as well.

The role of local ethnic configurations in maintaining or breaking down prejudices and hatred is not well understood and has not been subject to much systematic scrutiny. Often, arguments in favor of ethnic segregation in post-conflict settings are based on (near) deterministic assumptions about the incompatibility of different identity groups (for example, Horowitz 2000; Kaufmann 1996; Sambanis 2000). This logic implicitly suggests that enmity against “the other” is more prevalent in areas where identity groups live together, especially where the demographic balance between groups changes over time. According to Lake and Rothchild (1996), collective fear of a group’s existence spreads more easily and thus provides fertile soil for conflict in ethnically heterogeneous communities.

Insights from social psychology would also suggest that ethnic composition of the population matters, although in a different manner than that proposed by the security dilemma logic. Originally developed by Allport (1954), the so-called contact hypothesis proposes that under conditions of rule of equality of status and cooperation toward common goals, increased interaction between different groups promotes a more positive image of the other. The extent of such contact inevitably depends on the ethnic composition of an area. If a locality consists mainly of members of one ethnic group, there are fewer opportunities to meet people that ascribe to different ethnic identities. Whether the effect of this contact is positive or negative is disputed, however, and could depend on the cultural differences between the two groups (Stein, Post, and Allison 2000; Tredoux and Finchilescu 2007).

We propose three competing hypotheses on the effect of local ethnic composition for individual’s support for inter-ethnic reconciliation. First, according to what we may label the dominance perspective, higher local presence of a national minority should result in a wider gap in preferences and perceptions between the ethnic communities. Local dominance of a minority group may strengthen the sense of justice for their cause and is likely to be associated with more frequent demands for political reforms, while the local minority (which is the national majority) will fear the consequences if the demands from the locally dominant group are met. This proposition is supported by previous research from the former Yugoslavia (Massey, Hodson, and Sekulić 1999).

Second, informed by the widely acknowledged contact hypothesis, we propose that inter-ethnic differences in preferences are smaller in areas with relative parity between the minority and majority groups. Where either the minority or majority group is locally dominant, individuals have few opportunities to interact with the other and acknowledge their needs and desires. Conversely, if we apply a polarization (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol 2005) or balance of power (Buhaug 2010) perspective to local politics, we should expect to find the highest degree of inter-communal disagreement in areas where the two communities are about equal in size. A longer development of this reasoning, although primarily at the meso (group) and macro (country) level, can be found in Horowitz (2000).

**Hypothesis 2.** The minority-majority discrepancy in support for a peace agreement increases with the minority group’s relative share of the local population (Dominance hypothesis).

**Hypothesis 3.** The minority-majority discrepancy in support for a peace agreement is smaller in areas where the two groups are relatively equal in size (Contact hypothesis).

**Hypothesis 4.** The minority-majority discrepancy in support for a peace agreement is larger in areas where the two groups are relatively equal in size (Polarization hypothesis).

## **Proximity of violence**

Several studies indicate that exposure to violence increases intolerance, hatred, and feelings of revenge (for example, Cardozo et al. 2003; Halperin 2008; Massey, Hodson, and Sekulić 2006). Disregarding other sorts of war-related traumas, residing close to violent events is likely to correlate with loss of close relatives and friends, which may significantly lower individuals' motivation for giving concessions to the "other".<sup>5</sup>

There is in principle no reason why spatial proximity to a conflict should have a uniform effect on the preferences of antagonist populations. In fact, building on the logic alluded to above we might expect conflict exposure to have opposite effects on the majority and minority populations, leading to higher societal polarization in violence-affected areas. For the majority, living in proximity to the violence should make them more alienated from the insurgents' claims, and, consequently, make them less reconciliatory. For the minority, living in proximity to the conflict could inspire a stronger sympathy with the rebels' cause, producing a stronger polarization of attitudes near the events of violence. This leads to another set of hypotheses, relating to the effect of proximity to violence.

**Hypothesis 5.** Support for a peace agreement is positively associated with the distance from the conflict zone.

**Hypothesis 6.** The minority-majority discrepancy in support for a peace agreement is negatively associated with the distance from the conflict zone.

## **THE CASE OF MACEDONIA**

The limited number of surveys in post-conflict societies prevents a comprehensive cross-national analysis of attitudes toward peace agreements. Instead, this analysis concentrates on one relevant case, Macedonia, for which such data have been collected. To understand post-conflict Macedonia, a brief treatment of the armed conflict as well as its actors is needed. The following section provides an overview of the ethnic groups in the country and describes the process from independence to armed conflict in Macedonia.

According to the 2002 census in Macedonia, ethnic Macedonians make up about two-thirds of the population, while Albanians make up one-fourth (Statistical Office of Macedonia 2002). In addition, there are small minorities of Roma, Serbs, and Turks. Traditionally, there have been few cross-cutting interests between the two groups (Lund 2005). The large majority of Macedonians are Orthodox Christians while nearly all Albanians in Macedonia are of Muslim faith. The differences between the two groups are not only linguistic and religious, but also social. Brunnbauer (2004) describes how the socialist modernization politics of Yugoslavia had very different impacts on Macedonians and Albanians, and in effect created an ethnic division of labor, even though the two groups formally enjoyed equal rights. While the

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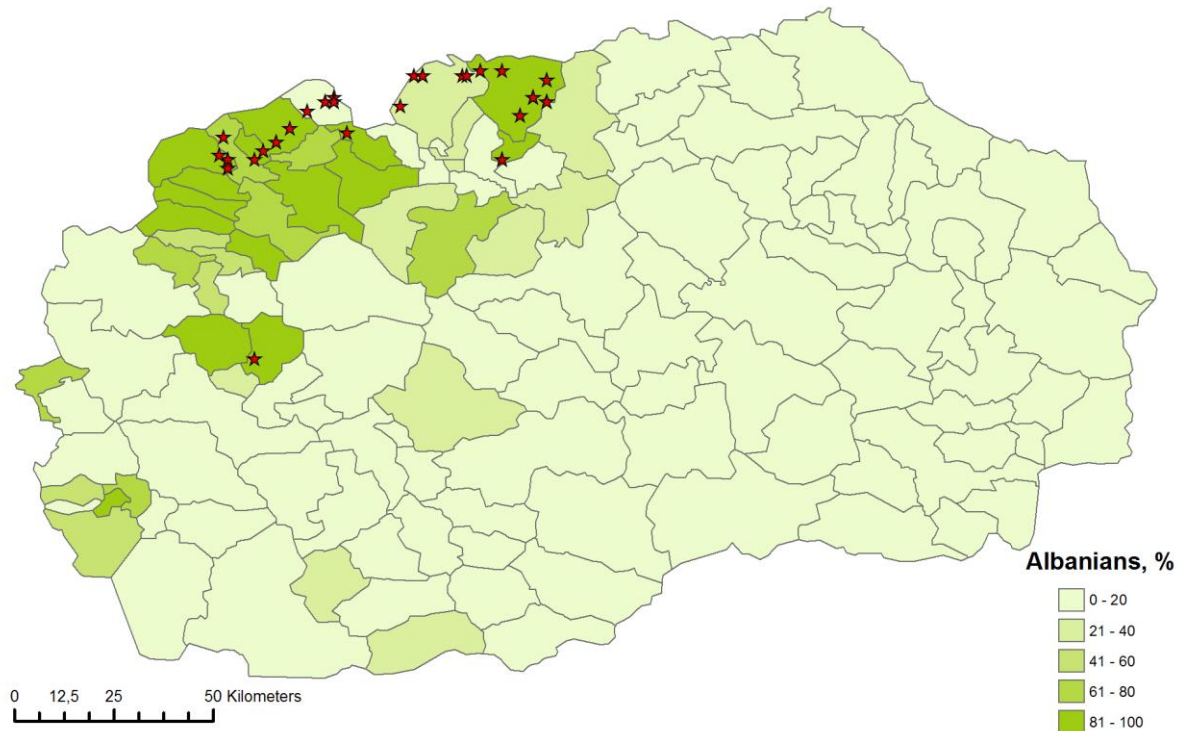
<sup>5</sup> Though see Bakke, O'Loughlin, and Ward (2009), who report that people who live close to areas of violence in the Caucasus are more disposed to forgiving than those who live farther away from the war zone.

Albanians maintained a more traditional, rural lifestyle, the Macedonians went through a process of modernization and, consequently, became overrepresented in public offices, both because of higher levels of education and because Macedonian was recognized as the official language.

Macedonia was first recognized as a republic within the federation of Yugoslavia in 1945. The country achieved independence in January 1992 after a referendum in 1991. The apparently successful transition conceals the fact that the Albanians boycotted the referendum, and that independence only increased the tensions between the Macedonian majority and the large Albanian minority. Albanians and other ethnic groups were granted minority rights (Marko 2005), but were not declared a “constituent nation” in the new constitution, and the new independent state of Macedonia was perceived as an ethnic Macedonian nation. In the years following independence, Albanians demanded full equality for all nationalities, as well as recognition of Albanian as an official language, and an Albanian University in Tetovo. Albanian politicians also launched the idea of a federal state. The state adopted a series of measures throughout the 1990s to improve the rights of the Albanians (Poulton 2000), but ethnic relations continued to deteriorate, and the Macedonians saw Albanian claims as a threat to the integrity of the Macedonian state. When war broke out in Kosovo in 1998, many feared that it would spread to Macedonia as well, but the country remained at peace for another two years. In spring 2001, however, fighting erupted between the Macedonian armed forces and the National Liberation Army of Macedonia (NLA), and soon the country was on the verge of civil war.

During the spring and summer of 2001, government forces and the NLA were fighting around Tetovo, Skopje, and Kumanovo. As illustrated in Figure 1, the conflict concentrated in the Northwestern part of Macedonia, where the majority of the Albanian population resides. Many Albanians fled to Kosovo as a result of the fighting, and anti-Albanian riots broke out in the cities of Bitola and Prilep. By August 2001, the number of people displaced by the conflict reached 170 000 (IDMC 2004) and more than 100 people were killed. After several failed attempts, EU and US mediators assembled the leaders of the main political parties in the city of Ohrid for peace talks, which resulted in the Framework Agreement (FA), signed on 13 August, 2001.

**Figure 1. Albanian population and location of violent events in Macedonia**



The figure shows the relative share of Albanians per municipality (darker shades denote larger Albanian presence) with stars representing locations of reported battles during the 2001 civil conflict.

The FA in Macedonia redesigned the distribution of political power between the ethnic groups, and although both sides had to make concessions, the main changes were in favor of the Albanians. For example, the Ohrid agreement provided constitutional amendments for improving the status of Albanians, and a series of changes were proposed to accommodate the Albanian demands, including the development of decentralized government bodies and changes to the municipality borders, equitable representation in the civil service, an Albanian university in Tetovo, a double majority vote system in parliament, and teaching in primary and secondary schools in languages spoken by more than 20% of the population. However, the demand for a bilingual, federal state was not met (Marko 2005). The Macedonians saw the concessions made to the Albanians as threatening their rights. Moreover, since the threshold for being given special minority language rights was set at 20%, smaller minorities suffered.

Using survey data from the immediate aftermath of the conflict in Macedonia, Ringdal, Simkus, and Listhaug (2007) investigated the Macedonian public opinion on the cause of the conflict, desirability of ethnic integration, and the implementation of the Ohrid agreement. Their findings showed a clearly divided understanding of the nature of the conflict. While Macedonians tended to see the conflict as due to Albanian criminal gangs, the influence of Kosovo-Albanian guerrillas, and external actors like the United States and Albanians from outside Macedonia, the majority of ethnic Albanians stated that the conflict was about fighting for equality, fair treatment for Albanians, and local autonomy and representation. A similar pattern of ethnic polarization was evident in the evaluation of the FA. The negative perception of outside actors like the US among Macedonians could also reflect lower trust in the mediator's



objectivity and credibility, which in turn could lead to a more negative evaluation of the Framework Agreement (for a discussion on mediator bias and credibility, see Favretto 2009; Rothchild and Groth 1995).<sup>6</sup> Despite tensions over the implementation of the FA, however, hurdles have gradually been surmounted in a peaceful way. According to the most recent report from the Balkan Monitor, ethnic relations seem to be improving, and support for the Ohrid Agreement is increasing (Balkan Monitor 2009).

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The empirical analysis draws on a survey of the Macedonian population from late 2005, conducted by Brima Gallup in Macedonia. The survey was designed as a follow-up to the 2003 South-East European Social Survey Project, SEESSP (Simkus 2007), and included only Albanians and Macedonians. Albanians were oversampled in order to secure precise estimates of attitudes in both ethnic groups. The net sample consists of 1,881 respondents, 35.6% Albanians and 64.4% Macedonians. In nearly all cases, the ethnicity of the respondents could be anticipated prior to the interview, which allowed using an interviewer of the same nationality as well as the most appropriate language version of the questionnaire. In the following subsections, we describe the estimation method and materials.

### The multilevel regression model

We assume a two-level hierarchical model where the respondents constitute level one and the 85 municipalities represented in our sample make up level two. We decided to incorporate this data structure into the statistical model as it allows us to introduce and analyze right-hand side variables at different levels while maintaining unbiased standard errors for both levels. Moreover, the multilevel approach facilitates assessing the relative explanatory power of the individual and municipality levels. Our basic multilevel model has three equations, one for the individual level and two for the municipality level:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}X_{ij} + e_{ij}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \beta_1 + u_{1j}$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \beta_0 + u_{0j}$$

Subscript  $i$  represents respondents and  $j$  represents municipalities. The regression constant has subscripts both for the sample clusters and the municipalities, showing that it may vary among both types of contexts. The last term is the individual-level residual, analogous to the residual in an OLS regression except for the extra subscripts. We allow for within-level correlation among the residuals but assume no correlation across levels. The covariance matrix involving these terms will also be estimated in a multilevel analysis. This enables us to estimate the intraclass correlations and assess how much of the variation in the dependent variables is found between the municipalities and between the individual respondents.

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<sup>6</sup> We thank one anonymous reviewer for bringing our attention to this point.

In the basic model, the intercept and one regression coefficient are allowed to vary randomly among the municipalities. The basic model may be elaborated by adding more individual-level explanatory variables, by adding municipality characteristics, or by allowing more regression coefficients to vary randomly among the municipalities (for details on the multilevel regression model, see Goldstein 2003; Hox 2002). The analysis was conducted using SPSS 18.

## Variable operationalization

We use two complementary dependent variables to measure support for inter-ethnic reconciliation, separating between aspects of the FA that address *decentralization* (model suffix a) and *minority rights* (model suffix b). The questionnaire included seven questions regarding the FA:

“Regarding the following specific aspects of the Framework Agreement, please tell me if you: 1) Like it very much; 2) Like it; 3) Are neutral; 4) Dislike it; 5) Dislike it very much.”

- Decentralization of political power to the municipalities
- Changes in municipality borders
- Ethnic quotas for hiring persons for public jobs
- Ethnic quotas for political representation
- Establishment of a state-supported Albanian university
- The Albanian language being made another official language
- Amnesty for those who fought in 2001

A factor analysis indicated that a one-dimensional scale may be formed from the seven aspects of the FA on the basis of the Kaiser’s criterion, but the scree plot indicated a two-dimensional solution. The two dimensions correspond to the two most important elements of the FA, the issues of minority rights and decentralization. Accordingly, we combine the first two aspects to form a decentralization scale, and the other five into a scale of minority rights.<sup>7</sup> The two scales have correlation of 0.65.

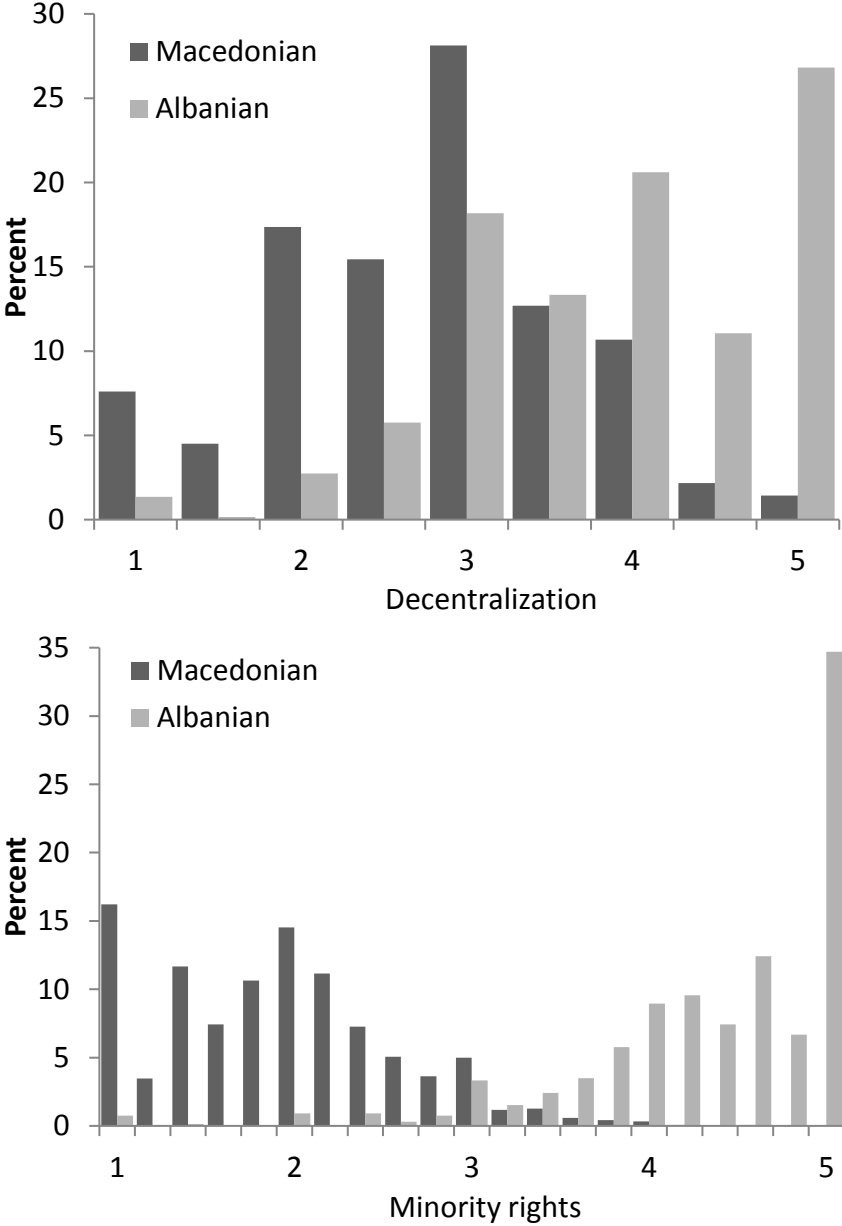
For the decentralization scale, the mean correlation among the components is 0.57 and the Cronbach’s alpha for the scale is 0.73. For the minority rights scale, the values are 0.76 and 0.94, respectively. Both scales were computed as the mean of the reversed scores on the seven questions for each respondent. Accordingly, the lowest possible score of 1 means that the respondent has answered “Dislike it very much” to all questions, and a maximum score of 5 means that the respondent has answered “Like it very much” to all questions. The scales show a correlation of 0.46 (decentralization) and 0.58 (minority rights) to a general binary question on whether the Framework Agreement was a good thing. This lends validity to both composite measures, but also indicates that people associate the FA more with minority rights than with

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<sup>7</sup> The last item about amnesty does not strictly ask about minority rights, but correlates very well with the other variables, and is therefore included in the minority rights scale. Scales with and without this items have a correlation of  $r=.99$ .

decentralization.<sup>8</sup> The distributions of both scales are included in Figure 2. Overall, people are more favorable to decentralization than to minority rights.

**FIGURE 2. Support for main components of Framework Agreement by ethnicity**



The graphs illustrate the share of respondents that are supportive of the two main components of the Macedonian Framework Agreement by ethnic identity. Higher values denote larger support.

The variables to be used in the multilevel analysis are described in Table 1. The first panel shows the dependent variables and four individual-level covariates. The main individual-

<sup>8</sup> As an additional validity test, all analyses were run on the individual indicators separately. This does not alter our main results, nor do these models indicate that the scales are not one-dimensional.

level explanatory variable is a dummy variable that distinguishes between people of Albanian and Macedonian ethnicity. In addition there is a set of conventional background factors – gender, age, and education – that act as controls. Note that age and years of education have been centered around their mean values. The municipality-level regressors capture the ethnic composition and geographical context of the units. We include both a linear term indicating the share of Albanians in the municipality (%) and a dummy variable to mark off municipalities in which the two ethnic populations are comparable in size (smallest group comprises at least 35% of the population). Both variables are generated from the 2002 census of the Macedonian population. To capture proximity to violence we measured the distance from the geographic center point (latitude and longitude coordinates) of each municipality to the nearest reported battle event during the Macedonian insurrection (see Figure 1), given in kilometer (km).<sup>9</sup> To account for a possible spillover effect of the civil war in Kosovo, we also include a measure of the distance to the Kosovo border (km). The distances were calculated using ArcView 9.2 desktop GIS (geographic information systems). The final panel describes cross-level interactions between ethnic affiliation and the contextual factors.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for individual- and municipality-level variables**

<b>Individual level variables (n=1838)</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. dev.</b>
Support for Framework Agreement, decentralization	1	5	3.16	1.06
Support for Framework Agreement, minority rights	1	5	2.79	1.36
Albanian ethnicity (0=Macedonian; 1=Albanian)	0	1	0.36	
Female (0=male; 1=female)	0	1	0.53	
Age in years, centered (Age – 40)	–22	40	2.79	15.80
Years of education, centered (Years – 10)	–10	14	0.35	3.67
<b>Municipality level variables (n=85)</b>				
Albanians in municipality (%)	0	99.51	30.65	34.30
Ethnically mixed municipalities (1=35–65% Alb.)	0	1	0.17	
Distance to nearest conflict event (km)	3	159.65	42.03	42.13
Distance to Kosovo (km)	2.64	171	53.08	46.50
<b>Cross-level interactions</b>				
Albanian × Albanians in municipality	0	99.51	23.24	35.69
Albanian × mixed municipalities	0	1	0.10	
Albanian × distance to conflict	0	59.88	5.11	10.84
Albanian × distance to Kosovo	0	67.87	6.67	12.09

## ANALYSIS

The purpose of the statistical analysis is to assess empirically how ethnic identity, local settlement patterns, and proximity to violence influence individual-level support for inter-ethnic reconciliation. To this end, we study a survey of the Macedonian population conducted four

<sup>9</sup> The conflict event data were coded as part of a joint project led by Ola Listhaug, NTNU, and are available through the ACLED database (Raleigh et al. 2010).

years after the conflict – one of only a handful of post-conflict surveys available. As shown in Figure 2, ethnic polarization is a defining feature of contemporary Macedonia. In the general evaluation of the Framework Agreement, most Albanians answered that the FA is a good thing, whereas there is much more variation in the Macedonian responses. Also on the two composite scales, the ethnic divide is striking, particularly for minority rights (Figure 2). Most Macedonians score below 3 (“Neutral”) whereas almost all Albanians score higher than 3. This results in a low mean score of 2.16 for the Macedonians and a much higher mean of 4.23 for the Albanians.

A total of seven multilevel regression models were estimated for each of the two dependent variables (DV) to evaluate the hypotheses. The results are reported in Tables 2–4, where Table 2 presents individual-level characteristics (H1), Table 3 concerns local ethnic settlement configurations (H2–4), and Table 4 evaluates the role of violence exposure (H5–6). We begin by estimating a null model, which features the intercept only. The purpose of the null model is to split the variance in the dependent variable in two components: between-municipality variation ( $S_u$ ) and within-municipality (that is, individual-level) variation ( $S_e$ ). These components may be used to estimate the intraclass correlation (ICC); the proportion of variance that is due to variation among the municipalities. The between-municipality variation in the baseline model may also be compared with similar statistics in more elaborate models for calculation of explained variance.

The results presented in Model 1a–b (Table 2) show that a substantial proportion of the variance is due to variation between municipalities (although the relative importance of the higher-order variance differs somewhat between the DVs). There are two potential explanations for this. The variation may stem from an uneven distribution of individual-level characteristics among the municipalities. For example, we know that Albanians reside predominantly in the Northwestern municipalities so the between-municipality variance is likely to capture underlying differences due to different settlement patterns for the two ethnic populations. However, the inter-municipality variability may also stem from proper municipality-level characteristics and features, such as ethnic composition, the geographic location vis-à-vis violent conflict events, and proximity to the Kosovo border. The considerable drop in between-municipality variance in subsequent models that include respondent characteristics suggests that the first is probably more important.<sup>10</sup>

The remaining models in Table 2 are specified to test Hypothesis 1, that the minority population (in this case, Albanians) is more supportive of a peace agreement following ethnic conflict. Models 2a–b and 3a–b include all four individual-level regressors but they differ with respect to how the ethnicity variable is treated. In the fixed ethnicity specification (Model 2a–b), only the intercept is allowed to assume random variation across municipalities, whereas in Model 3a–b, the ethnic dummy variable may also vary randomly across the municipalities. In both specifications and for both aspects of the FA, the respondents’ ethnic affiliation turns out

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<sup>10</sup> A number of other municipality characteristics were also tested, including the population share with secondary education, percentage of the population employed in the service sector, the number of internally displaced persons, a dummy variable for the capital Skopje, and population size. With the exception of population size, none of them turned out to be statistically significant, nor did they otherwise alter the results reported here.

to be a powerful determinant of reconciliation, supporting our expectations. The Albanians on average score 1.3 points higher on the five-point decentralization scale than the average Macedonian when other background factors are controlled for. For the minority rights scale, the difference is approximately 2.5. Hypothesis 1 is thus strongly supported.

**Table 2. Multilevel regression model of support for FA, individual-level variables**

Fixed effects	Decentralization			Minority rights		
	(1a)	(2a)	(3a)	(1b)	(2b)	(3b)
Intercept	3.079** (0.074)	2.732** (0.062)	2.729** (0.063)	2.629** (0.119)	1.896** (0.043)	1.898** (0.043)
Albanian ethnicity		1.263** (0.064)	1.277** (0.095)		2.532** (0.047)	2.517** (0.085)
Female		-0.062 (0.041)	-0.057 (0.041)		-0.068* (0.031)	-0.060 (0.031)
Age		-0.001 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)		0.002* (0.001)	0.002* (0.001)
Education		0.018** (0.006)	0.017** (0.006)		0.018** (0.005)	0.017** (0.005)
Random effects						
S <sub>e</sub>	0.836** (0.028)	0.700** (0.024)	0.691** (0.023)	0.914** (0.031)	0.409** (0.014)	0.388** (0.013)
S <sub>u0</sub>	0.388** (0.074)	0.182** (0.039)	0.168** (0.039)	1.097** (0.182)	0.074** (0.017)	0.064** (0.017)
S <sub>u1</sub>			0.098 (0.060)			0.125** (0.044)
Intraclass correlation (ICC)	0.316	0.207		0.546	0.153	
-2 log likelihood	5102.47	4729.69	4720.76	5293.07	3684.88	3614.31
N	1,852	1,852	1,852	1,838	1,838	1,838

S<sub>e</sub>: Individual level variance, S<sub>u0</sub>: Municipality-level variance in intercept, S<sub>u1</sub>: Municipality-level variance in coefficient. Estimates are expressed as metric regression coefficients for fixed effects and variance components for random effects. Standard errors of the estimates are given in parenthesis.

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

More surprisingly, perhaps, is that other individual level determinants have little substantive effect. Although gender, age, and education obtain marginal statistical significance in some specifications, these effects are small compared to that of ethnicity. For example, according to model 3b, 10 years of additional education is estimated to raise the support for minority rights by less than 0.2 points – not even one tenth of the effect of being Albanian.<sup>11</sup>

The four covariates explored so far jointly explain about half of the individual-level variation and nearly 80% of the variation between the municipalities. In all, Model 3a–b provides a better fit to the data than the fixed effects models. Accordingly, the more elaborate models in Tables 3–4 will be extensions of the random effects Model 3.

<sup>11</sup> We tried a number of other predictors on the individual level, but none of these revealed any additional significant effects. Moreover, some individual-level indicators could not be included because they were highly collinear with ethnicity or were related to our dependent variables in ways where causal direction could not be assumed.

Next, we turn to the contextual effect of local ethnic composition, which is reported in Table 3. Models 4a–b and 5a–b correspond to the competing Hypotheses 2–4. All models are estimated with the same set of individual-level controls but the results for these are suppressed to save space. Overall, the first set of contextual models does not appear to constitute a significant improvement on the simpler individual-level models presented above, with the exception of model 4a. For the other models, the individual parameter estimates for the contextual variables are rather weak and the  $-2$  log likelihood statistics are only marginally lower than the corresponding figures for Model 3a–b.

Model 4a–b evaluates the dominance hypothesis (H2) that a higher share of the minority group (that is, Albanians) in a municipality is associated with an increase in support for reconciliation among its members and a declining support among the majority. For both dependent variables, the signs correspond to our prediction, but the coefficients reach statistical significance only for the first, decentralization. The coefficients are small and the estimated impact moderate. A change from a homogenous Macedonian municipality to one containing 80% ethnic Albanians increases the estimated discrepancy in perceptions between the random respondent for the two communities by about 0.8 points. The effect is strongest for Macedonians. Apparently, Macedonians who find themselves amid Albanians are less likely to support a transfer of power from the central state to the local, presumably Albanian-dominated authorities. For the question of minority rights, the influence of local ethnic balance is weaker and not distinguishable from zero. Thus, while we cannot conclude decisively in favor of H2, we have found indicative empirical evidence that local dominance of a national minority is associated with increased polarization between the ethnic populations over political issues that are zero-sum in nature.

Model 5a–b tests the alternative Hypotheses 3–4, that local parity between the national majority and minority populations moderates (H3) or amplifies (H4) tensions and divergence in preferences. Here, we use a simple dichotomous indicator which defines a “mixed” community as one in which Albanians constitute between 35% and 65% of the population in the municipality (the others being Macedonians). This is then interacted with the Albanian dummy variable. As is clear from Table 3, neither proposition is supported by the empirical data. While the negative sign of the coefficient for the interaction term is in line with the contact hypothesis (hinting at a slight convergence in attitudes in mixed municipalities), the statistical significance and marginal impact are too small to inspire confidence in this result.

**Table 3. Multilevel regression model of support for FA, by ethnic composition**

Fixed effects	Decentralization		Minority rights	
	(4a)	(5a)	(4b)	(5b)
Intercept	2.832** (0.071)	2.767** (0.065)	1.922** (0.050)	1.895** (0.045)
Albanian ethnicity	1.023** (0.223)	1.295** (0.112)	2.403** (0.207)	2.591** (0.096)
Albanians in municipality (%)	-0.007** (0.002)		-0.002 (0.002)	

Albanian × Albanians in municipality	0.008*		0.003	
	(0.004)		(0.003)	
Mixed municipalities		-0.333		-0.021
		(0.170)		(0.116)
Albanian × mixed municipality		-0.045		-0.268
		(0.198)		(0.182)
Random effects				
S <sub>e</sub>	0.691**	0.692**	0.387**	0.388**
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.013)	(0.013)
S <sub>u0</sub>	0.146**	0.155**	0.063**	0.063**
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.036)	(0.016)
S <sub>u1</sub>	0.098	0.092	0.016**	0.111
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.044)	(0.040)
-2 log likelihood	4712.0	4791.6	3613.0	3611.9
N	1,852	1,852	1,838	1,838

S<sub>e</sub>: Individual level variance, S<sub>u0</sub>: Municipality-level variance in intercept, S<sub>u1</sub>: Municipality-level variance in coefficient. Estimates are expressed as metric regression coefficients for fixed effects and variance components for random effects. Standard errors of the estimates are given in parenthesis. Effects of socio-demographic control variables from Model 3 are also estimated in the models, but not reported.

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

In Table 4, we introduce measures of the municipalities' geographic setting; the distance to the nearest battle location during the 2001 conflict and the distance to Kosovo. The two distance measures are highly correlated ( $r = .88$ ), reflecting the proximity of the Macedonian conflict to the Kosovo border – hence the two factors are estimated in separate models.<sup>12</sup> Models 6a–b and 7a–b report the results that evaluate Hypotheses 5 and 6.

Again, we find only weak evidence that contextual characteristics of the municipalities influence individuals' attitudes toward the peace process. For the decentralization component of the FA, proximity to the conflict and to Kosovo is associated with somewhat lower support, as suggested by H5. This result is consistent with the notion that people unexposed to potentially traumatic, violent events (almost all of whom are ethnic Macedonians) are more supportive of the Albanian cause, *ceteris paribus*. The substantive effect is only moderate, however; respondents in the most peripheral municipality, at about 160 km from the nearest battle event, are estimated to score about 0.5 points higher on the 5-point scale, which is not nearly sufficient to counterweight the negative effect of being Macedonian. The distance effect does not discriminate between Albanians and Macedonians, so the proposed increased polarization in conflict-affected areas (H6) is not verified. For the minority rights aspect (Models 6b and 7b) no contextual effect is found.

**Table 4. Multilevel regression model of support for FA, by proximity to violence**

Fixed effects	Decentralization		Minority rights	
	(6a)	(7a)	(6b)	(7b)

<sup>12</sup> Due to highly skewed distributions of the distance measures and because one might expect a decaying effect of distance we also tested log-transformed variants. However, measures of fit indicated that the reported, non-transformed variables contribute to more efficient models, if only by a fraction.



Intercept	2.568** (0.096)	2.539** (0.105)	1.834** (0.073)	1.834** (0.073)
Albanian ethnicity	1.364** (0.141)	1.326** (0.166)	2.645** (0.145)	2.645** (0.145)
Distance to conflict	0.003* (0.001)		0.001 (0.001)	
Albanian × distance to conflict	-0.001 (0.006)		-0.007 (0.005)	
Distance to Kosovo		0.003* (0.001)		0.001 (0.001)
Albanian × distance to Kosovo		0.001 (0.006)		-0.004 (0.005)
Random effects				
S <sub>e</sub>	0.691** (0.023)	0.691** (0.023)	0.387** (0.013)	0.387** (0.013)
S <sub>u0</sub>	0.165** (0.039)	0.163** (0.038)	0.063** (0.016)	0.063** (0.16)
S <sub>u1</sub>	0.098 (0.059)	0.100 (0.060)	0.126** (0.044)	0.124 (0.044)
-2 log likelihood	4793.52	4793.5	3611.8	3612.6
N	1,852	1,852	1,838	1,838

S<sub>e</sub>: Individual level variance, S<sub>u0</sub>: Municipality-level variance in intercept, S<sub>u1</sub>: Municipality-level variance in coefficient. Estimates are expressed as metric regression coefficients for fixed effects and variance components for random effects. Standard errors of the estimates are given in parenthesis. Effects of socio-demographic control variables from Model 3 are also estimated in the models, but not reported. \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ .

Overall, the contextual indicators fare better in models 4a–7a than in models 4b–7b, even if the substantial effects are small in both cases. Recall that minority rights were more strongly associated with the FA, and that the polarization between Macedonians and Albanians was much more pronounced for minority rights than for decentralization. This may help explaining why the context has no statistically significant effect for the minority rights aspect of the FA. A simple OLS regression model illustrates our point: Ethnic identity explains a startling 75% of the variance in support for increased minority rights, but only 26% of the support for decentralization (adjusted R<sup>2</sup>). Thus, the lack of significant effects for the contextual determinants only underscores the degree of polarization in contemporary Macedonia.

## DISCUSSION

We started this article by arguing that support for reconciliation in a post-ethnic conflict society should depend not only on the individual's ethnic identity (notably, majority versus minority affiliation), but also on contextual features. More specifically, we proposed three competing hypothesis on how local dominance of a minority group, local ethnic homogeneity, and local minority-majority parity, respectively, should increase the salience of ethnicity in determining support for reconciliation. In addition, we presented two propositions on how proximity to the conflict should decrease support for reconciliation and increase inter-ethnic divergence in preferences. A new survey of the Macedonian population served to test these propositions. Much to our surprise, and contrasting earlier work on the importance of inter-ethnic interaction

for societal consolidation, we found little conclusive evidence of a contextual pattern in the responses that could be traced to ethnic composition in the municipality or proximity to violent events. Instead, ethnic affiliation holds a tight grip on attitudes toward the Macedonian civil conflict and the resulting peace process, more than four years after the conflict ended, with little sign of normalization between the majority and the main minority communities.

So, what are the implications for our understanding of reconciliation in post-ethnic conflict societies? Perhaps most importantly, the analysis demonstrates that ethnicity can be a significant, even decisive cleavage in heterogeneous societies that have recently escaped from armed conflict, shaping and maintaining opinions and preferences and obstructing inter-communal reconciliation. We have no reason to suspect that Macedonia is unique in this regard. This conclusion by no means implies that age-old ethnic differences necessarily is a dominant cause of violent conflict, but our finding does point to the importance of investing in trust-building and minority-majority normalization among the general population as well as political elites in the aftermath of ethnically shaped conflicts and wars. This finding also fits well with reports that ethnic conflicts, and particularly separatist ones, are both harder to end (Walter 2003) and more likely to recur once a peaceful settlement has been negotiated (Collier, Hoeffler, and Söderbom 2008; Elbadawi, Hegre, and Milante 2008; Quinn, Mason, and Gurses 2007). Contested issues related to national recognition, equity in rights and privileges, and (local) self-determination are often portrayed as indivisible by the protagonists. The findings of this study illustrate a prevalent, intrinsic challenge of post-ethnic conflict societies: a distinct polarization of attitudes and preferences between ethnic communities.

A second implication is that inter-ethnic interaction and “contact” may be less effective in rebuilding inter-ethnic trust than sometimes portrayed (at least within the investigated time span). In fact, there is more evidence to support the dominance perspective; members of the national majority population who live as local minorities show stronger opposition to decentralization of power than majority representatives elsewhere. It thus appears that physical integration in some contexts is associated with higher levels of ethnic polarization, especially if there is a risk of a transfer of local authority from the majority to the minority group.

When it comes to the impact of geographic context, our study is less conclusive. At the country level, there is considerable empirical evidence of negative externalities of armed conflict, and several diffusion processes have been identified (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008; Forsberg 2008; Murdoch and Sandler 2002). The location of the Macedonian conflict – along the border with Kosovo and in the Albanian-dominated part of the country – was no coincidence. It revolved around core questions of Albanian nationality, and the UCK benefited from access to arms and knowhow from across the border. It is unlikely that organized violence would have broken out in Macedonia had it not been for recent wars in other parts of former Yugoslavia. This neighborhood effect is less pronounced when observing individual preferences at the local level. Proximity to violence lowers the motivation for peaceful conflict resolution among both contending groups, although the substantive effect of conflict exposure is quite small.

Whether these findings apply to other post-conflict societies remains to be uncovered. The fact that Macedonia is a small country with a small population and a short conflict history suggests that it might not be the best representative for the random post-ethnic conflict case.

Rather, the limited nature of the 2001 conflict – in casualty figures as well as temporal and spatial scope – makes it closer to a “least likely” case, where inter-ethnic animosity should be the least prominent and lasting. The fact that we still find a very powerful effect of the respondents’ national identity is testimony to the defining role of ethnic affinity in societies emerging from ethnic conflict.

Finally, a few caveats are in order. Certain aspects of our data are less than ideal. The fact that no Albanian respondent in the survey data lived further away than 60 km from the nearest battle location (and <67 km from Kosovo) implies that there might be too little variation in our data to really be able to capture a contextual effect. In addition, the sampling strategy of interviewing respondents in ethnically homogenous clusters implies that most municipalities are represented by respondents of either Albanian or Macedonian origin, even if the municipality in reality might be quite heterogeneous. This could help explaining why we uncovered only weak and mostly insignificant effects for our contextual determinants.

Future research should study other post-conflict settings and see if the reported results hold. Only when similar surveys have been conducted in a larger set of cases will we be able to derive more general and robust conclusions on post-conflict inter-group reconciliation and the relative importance of ethnicity and context.

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