

When Do Displaced Persons Return? Postwar Migration among Christians in Mount Lebanon



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Abstract: *Under what conditions will forcibly displaced persons return to their original homes after wars end? We draw on theories of labor migration to show that even displaced persons who have positive feelings toward their original location may nevertheless choose to return as regular visitors rather than permanent residents unless the location offers attractive economic opportunities. Furthermore, we argue that violence can create negative emotions not only toward geographic locations of bloodshed but also against its perpetrators. After ethnic wars, the displaced may be unwilling to return to intermixed locations, exacerbating ethnic separation. We study postwar migration among Lebanese Christians displaced during the 1980s and identify economic conditions using exogenous price shocks for olive oil, a major local export. Among policy implications for economic reconstruction and transitional justice, our most important insight is that sometimes we should help the displaced in their new location rather than induce permanent return to their old homes.*

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Under what conditions will forcibly displaced persons choose to return to their original homes after wars end? This is an important question in a world with 65 million displaced, and it has major policy implications for addressing ongoing migration crises in Syria and elsewhere.¹ Policy makers traditionally assumed that most displaced persons would return to their original homes if armed hostilities cease, but contemporary practitioners reject this unrealistic assumption (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter 2015). Recent work on whether displaced households return—based on attitudinal surveys and ethnographic case studies—highlights the importance of physical security, emotional legacies of violence, sufficient livelihood, material destruction, respect for prewar property rights, and legal status (Arias, Ibáñez, and Querubin 2014; Serrano 2011). In recent years, scholars have gained an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the social, economic, and political factors that cause

wartime displacement (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Engel and Ibáñez 2007; Steele 2009). However, the literature on postwar reconstruction focuses on the merits of partition, elections, and outside peacekeeping forces and has largely ignored the question of migrants (Fortna 2004; Paris 2004; Sambanis 2000).

We theorize how migrants weigh both their emotional orientation toward home and their future economic prospects in a simple additive decision-making model of return migration. Whereas the literature focuses on whether the displaced return as permanent residents or not at all, we also consider a third possibility: Some displaced persons may prefer to maintain a strong personal connection to their old homes by becoming regular visitors, for instance, by keeping a family home for weekend and holiday visits. We consider both permanent residents and regular visitors to be returnees, only in different capacities.

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¹Of this number, 22.5 million of the displaced are refugees because they crossed an international border. The remainder are internally displaced (data as of February 2018 from <http://www.unhcr.org/>).

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Displaced persons' emotional orientation toward home can vary. Many displaced persons long to return home, although the literature also shows that some develop an aversion to return where they experienced violence or their property was destroyed or stolen (Arias, Ibáñez, and Querubin 2014; Serrano 2011). We argue that an equally salient dynamic should be for displaced persons to avoid the perpetrators of such crimes. In the aftermath of ethnic wars, displaced persons may ascribe blame for their suffering to the former enemy non-coethnic community in its entirety, rather than to select individuals, and view all group members as perpetrators. Displaced persons may therefore be unwilling to return to locations with a large non-coethnic population.

To study the decision of whether and how to return, we also draw on a large literature on labor migration (e.g., Constant and Massey 2002; Stark and Bloom 1985). While some displaced may be attracted to return by compelling job opportunities, others believe that their future economic prospects are better in their new place of residence. We argue that the inertia of stable employment can affect conflict migrants in much the same way as it does labor migrants. Unless there are lifelong economic prospects in the original location, the modal displaced person with fond feelings for her old home may prefer to return as a regular visitor and stay comfortably settled with housing and employment in her new environs.

To evaluate our argument, we study postwar return among Lebanese Christians displaced from Mount Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war of 1975 to 1990. During one episode in 1983–85, Muslim and left-wing militias forcibly displaced the Christian population from over 200 villages in this intermixed region, who were unable to return until the war ended in 1990.² By 2007—almost 20 years after the war ended—only about 20% of displaced Christian households had returned to their original villages as permanent residents, but the rate varies across villages from 0 to 100%. The low rate of return is surprising because returnees faced comparatively favorable conditions. After the war ended, militias demobilized and the region witnessed no further ethnic violence. The government respected prewar property rights and even paid off wartime squatters such that by 1993, virtually all Christian real estate was returned to its owners.

The next section elaborates our theoretical framework, empirical implications, and hypotheses. The third section introduces the reader to the Christians of Mount Lebanon. The fourth section discusses how we obtain and use quantitative evidence on Mount Lebanon, and the

following one details our statistical models and key results. We use observational data to establish correlates of return migration and subsequently identify the impact of economic opportunities with a natural experiment based on exogenous shocks in the world price of olive oil, an important national export good. The price of olive oil in international markets soared in the early 2000s as Western consumers warmed to its health effects, and we find that displaced Lebanese returned in larger numbers as permanent residents to villages with the geological prerequisites to grow olives and partake in this commodity boom. Specifically, in villages with substantial cropland devoted to olive trees, a 1-point increase in the world price of olive oil drives four or five more households to return permanently. We conclude the article by discussing policy implications. To induce the displaced to return home, we need to focus on both economic reconstruction and transitional justice. However, the most important implication of our argument is that in some contexts, policy makers should help displaced persons in their new location rather than induce return to their old homes.

Violence, Migration, and Return

With the end of the Cold War, refugee return became a larger focus of the international refugee regime (Barnett 2001). Millions of displaced persons have returned to their place of origin since then. In the 1990s, an average of 10% of refugee stocks returned to their countries of origin annually (Hatton 2013). Since 2000, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has assisted an average of 1 to 2 million returnees annually. In the early 2000s, returnees were disproportionately refugees, but the share of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has been growing steadily since then.³ In 2017, unassisted returns represented more than half of all returns and were disproportionately returning IDPs.⁴ Despite the volume of returnees, the issue remains understudied.

We develop a theory about migrant decision making for displaced persons who are free to choose between staying in their current residence or returning to their original homes after wars end.⁵ These conditions are common among IDPs, who typically have postwar freedom

³These figures are based on data from the UNHCR Statistical Online Population Database (<http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/overview>).

⁴UNHCR estimates that 4.8 million displaced persons returned in 2017; among those, 2.7 million were unassisted IDPs. See UNHCR Global Trends 2017 (<https://www.unhcr.org/5b27be547.html>).

⁵Our model applies most clearly to persons facing displacement for several years, who become settled in their new environment.

²This wave of displacement affected about one-eighth of Lebanon's roughly 1,600 municipalities (Labaki and Abou Rjeily 1993).

of movement within their own country. Our theory also applies to some, less typical, refugees who enjoy freedom of movement across the border between their home and asylum countries and sufficient legal status to stay in their asylum country postconflict. Refugees from some African wars of independence enjoyed such freedoms (Neldner 1979).

Orientation toward Home

A migrant's orientation toward home arises out of feelings for the place and social connections to its community. The orientation toward home can be positive or negative. For instance, labor migrants often have fond feelings and want to return home one day (Constant and Massey 2002). They yearn for the culture, climate, and food of home as well as social ties to family and friends (Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011; von Reichert 2002). These sentiments may extend to displaced persons. Yet not all migrants *want* to return. The literature on return migration shows that many displaced persons from locations that experienced violence do not want to return. Their aversion is rooted in fear, anger, and traumatic memories (Arias, Ibáñez, and Querubin 2014).

We add to this literature by arguing that displaced persons' negative emotions can be directed at other individuals or communities just as much as at physical space. Displaced persons may fear, resent, or be angry at other individuals or other ethnic groups in addition to having feelings about geographic locations. We theorize that displaced persons may develop an aversion to return to locations where they would have to live next to the perpetrators of violence who caused their displacement. In the most direct sense, this means that displaced persons may not want to return to live in close proximity to specific individuals who participated in wartime violence and who the displaced view as perpetrators.

After ethnic conflicts, the displaced may also abstract blame away from particular individuals and assign guilt to the former enemy non-coethnic community in its entirety. Violence between individuals can poison relations between entire ethnic groups such that displaced persons come to view all members of the other group as perpetrators.⁶ Furthermore, some displaced persons may believe that their feelings are reciprocated, and members of the non-coethnic communities view the displaced persons as perpetrators of wartime atrocities as well. Some displaced persons may therefore expect non-coethnics to be hostile

and unfriendly, and prefer to avoid interaction with non-coethnics altogether. These effects are likely to be stronger the more that displacement resulted from conflicts fought across hardened identity cleavages and the more extensive participation was in wartime activities within both communities.

A person who considers returning to an intermixed community may therefore have an aversion to return because of the presence of non-coethnics, and we argue that this effect may be as salient as the legacy of massacres or material destruction. After ethnic wars, this dynamic may drive many displaced persons to avoid returning to mixed locations with a high proportion of non-coethnics.

Regular Visitors

We view return as a complex concept that can take many shapes. Aside from those who return as permanent residents, we also consider a second mode of return: those who choose to return regularly as visitors.⁷ This category of returnees reveals that displaced persons who do not move back permanently still can retain meaningful personal connections to territory despite experiencing violent displacement from it. By regular visitors, we mean something more than tourists: households that maintain a family home, return for weekends or to celebrate major holidays, and hold family events like weddings and funerals.⁸

As is typical of labor migrants, who often work in more developed urban areas but retain a personal connection to their former homes, many displaced persons choose to visit because they have affection for their original location. Survey evidence from Norway shows that many refugees have since visited their country of origin (Vralstad and Wiggen 2017, 47–48). However, the share of migrants who have visited their old home varies considerably, ranging from relatively high rates for those from Iraq (71%) and Iran (55%) to fairly low for those from Somalia (24%) and Eritrea (12%). When asked the reasons for their visits, the two dominant responses were “[for] holiday” (75%) and “[to] visit relatives” (31%).⁹

⁷The literature on conflict-induced migration has largely neglected regular visitors, although one exception is the work of Bakewell (2015).

⁸The length and frequency of visits likely depend on the cost and distance of travel.

⁹Only 16% of respondents chose “other reasons,” which could include economic motivations; economic factors thus motivate at most a minority of conflict migrants in Norway who visit their original homes.

⁶Armed conflicts in plural societies often reinforce and polarize group identities (Bulutgil 2016).

Our quantity of interest is persons who choose to visit primarily for personal, social, emotional, and recreational reasons, typically as a family during weekends and holidays, rather than single men who come as business travelers on occasional weekdays or temporary workers at particular times such as harvest season. All visitors by definition forsake full-time employment in the location they visit, and many displaced persons choose to incur economic costs to visit because they experience pleasure and meaning from visiting. Others may also derive economic benefits from visiting that help offset its cost, such as fishing and hunting, local trade and barter, or ownership stakes in land or property (Bakewell 2015). However, it would be atypical for recreational visitors to see economic gains from visits dramatically exceed costs. Lucrative investment opportunities that require little investment in time are typically restricted to wealthy households. Bakewell (2015) finds that some refugees who visited Angola from Zambia made substantial profits in two ways: smuggling and extracting natural resources. However, smuggling is a risky entrepreneurial activity unlikely to attract the modal refugee, and cross-border arbitrage is by definition unavailable to IDPs. Hunting, fishing, and foraging may be profitable among subsistence farmers but relatively less lucrative in even marginally more developed economies, especially when displaced persons have fled from rural to urban areas, as is increasingly common (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter 2015).

Regular visitors are thus important for several reasons. First, regular visits are one mode of return and merit study if we want to understand how violence changes the connection between individuals and territory, and how armed conflicts cause permanent demographic change. Second, to the extent that displaced persons incur a net cost to visit, they provide a behavioral measure of their positive emotional orientation toward home. Third, there is evidently huge variation in whether displaced persons visit that existing theories cannot explain. Fourth, visitors pose different policy challenges than do permanent returnees. In the locations they visit, they need public infrastructure like roads and electricity, but not other services like schools.

Future Prospects for Livelihood

The return literature often characterizes violent displacement as an unexpected shock and implies that once the reasons for displacement are resolved—safety is assured, property rights are restored—the natural tendency for the displaced is to resume their regular predisplacement life (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter 2015; Zeager and

Bascom 1996).¹⁰ However, when displacement lasts years or decades, conflict resolution does not necessarily lead displaced persons to return as if by magnetic force. Rather, the decision to return represents a new migration decision with lifelong implications for livelihood and lifestyle. Thus, we draw on neoclassical economics (e.g., Borjas and Bratsberg 1996), which argues that migration decisions are based on a comparison of expected lifetime earnings in different locations.

Decision-Making Model

We introduce a model to synthesize these concepts—orientation toward home, future economic prospects, and regular visits. Displaced persons consider their social and emotional attachment to their place of origin and their future economic prospects in their current residence and original home. They choose among three options: (1) *stay* in their current place of residence, (2) stay in their place of residence but regularly *visit* their village of origin, or (3) *move permanently* back to their place of origin.

The displaced migrant's choice is based on three components. The first is her orientation toward home, v_o , which captures the emotional and social utility of returning home. The orientation toward home is intended to capture the typical emotional and social reactions of labor migrants like homesickness and missing the lifestyle or community. It also includes emotional reactions to violent displacement, such as anger, fear, and resentment. When $v_o > 0$, the displaced migrant *wants* to return, as she has an affinity for her original home. When $v_o < 0$, the displaced migrant *does not want* to return, as she has an aversion to the location.

The second component is her economic prospects in the place of residence and place of origin, w_r and w_o , respectively. As discussed earlier, economic prospects encompass expectations about a long-term stream of earnings because it is a lifetime decision.

Finally, there is a cost associated with return: either the cost of visiting, c_v , or the cost of returning permanently, c_m . We assume that making a permanent move is more costly than visiting regularly. Thus, $0 < c_v < c_m$. In terms of transportation costs, regular visits could be more expensive than a one-time move. However, the cost of moving permanently also includes sacrificing social and material capital. Individuals who move permanently give up their house and may have to sell durable goods

¹⁰This characterization implicitly adopts a New Economics framework: Once the initial shock is resolved, the migrant returns home (Constant and Massey 2002; Merkle and Zimmermann 1992).

at a loss. They also lose nontransferable social capital related to local community, administrative, bureaucratic, and professional life in their place of residence.¹¹

When the displaced person decides to stay, she receives wages in the place of residence, w_r , and loses (gains) whatever affinity (aversion) she has for returning home, v_o .

$$U(\text{Stay}) = w_r - v_o. \quad (1)$$

By similar reasoning, when the displaced person decides to visit, she receives wages in her place of residence, w_r , gains (loses) whatever affinity (aversion) she has for returning home, v_o , and pays a cost associated with visiting, c_v .

$$U(\text{Visit}) = w_r + v_o - c_v. \quad (2)$$

Last, when the displaced person decides to move permanently, she receives a stream of wages in her place of origin, w_o , gains (loses) whatever affinity (aversion) she has for returning home, v_o , and pays a cost associated with moving, c_m .

$$U(\text{Move}) = w_o + v_o - c_m. \quad (3)$$

To make comparisons among the options, we define $\Delta w = w_r - w_o$ to capture relative economic prospects. When Δw is negative, economic prospects are relatively better in the place of origin. Conversely, when Δw is positive, economic prospects are relatively better in the place of residence.

The migrant compares the utility of the three options and chooses the best response. First, a displaced person prefers visiting to staying when $U(\text{Stay}) < U(\text{Visit})$ or when

$$v_o > \frac{1}{2}c_v. \quad (4)$$

This result provides the first implication of the model. A displaced person will only visit regularly when she *wants* to return home, for emotional or social reasons. She is willing to incur an otherwise unnecessary cost to do so.

Next, the displaced person prefers moving permanently to visiting when $U(\text{Visit}) < U(\text{Move})$ or when

$$\Delta w < c_v - c_m. \quad (5)$$

Since we have assumed that $c_v < c_m$, the displaced migrant will only choose to move permanently over visiting when Δw is negative. Thus, we have a second implication of the model: A displaced person will only return permanently, rather than visit regularly, if the economic

prospects in the place of origin are *better* than the economic prospects in his or her place of residence.¹²

Last, the displaced person prefers moving permanently to staying when $U(\text{Stay}) < U(\text{Move})$ or when

$$\Delta w < 2v_o - c_m. \quad (6)$$

This condition can be satisfied regardless of whether $v_o > 0$ or $v_o < 0$ and regardless of whether $\Delta w > 0$ or $\Delta w < 0$. Much of the return literature has viewed incidence of return as indicative of successful postconflict programming. However, our simple model reveals that we can infer neither that permanent returnees necessarily have an affinity for home nor that those who failed to return permanently have an aversion toward home. The decision to move back permanently, rather than staying in their new location, may intuitively seem to imply that the returnee has both economic and emotional reasons to return, but that is not necessarily true, as either set of factors can dominate the other.

If the migrant has an aversion toward home ($v_o < 0$) and nevertheless chooses to move back permanently, it must be the case that economic prospects in the place of origin were better than in the place of residence ($\Delta w < 0$). Conversely, if economic prospects are relatively better in the place of residence ($\Delta w > 0$) and the migrant nevertheless chooses to move home permanently, it must be the case that he or she has an affinity for home ($v_o > 0$). Furthermore, that affinity must be relatively large because it must dominate the cost of moving home and the decrease in economic prospects.

This analysis provides two final implications. Displaced migrants who have some aversion to returning home ($v_o < 0$) may nevertheless return home as permanent residents because the economic prospects in their place of origin are sufficiently good. Last, displaced migrants who have some desire to return home may not return permanently because of insufficient economic prospects in their place of origin.

Our theory generalizes to persons who face the options of staying, returning, and moving freely as a regular visitor following protracted displacement. Although most IDPs enjoy freedom of movement, our theory does not apply to IDPs who face recurring violence, political

¹¹The status of property rights also influences the cost of moving: Displaced persons who can reclaim property have substantially lower costs of moving back.

¹²Here, we assume that regular visitors and permanent residents reap the same emotional rewards, which may be unrealistic. In Appendix A (p. 3) in the supporting information (SI), we explore an alternative model that allows residents to reap greater psychological benefits than visitors. One substantive difference of the alternative model is that for some individuals, the added psychological benefits of permanent return may be so great (compared to visiting) that they are willing to forgo higher salaries in their new location. We discuss this possibility in the empirical implications below.

repression, or other forms of coercion that prevent return. Similarly, IDPs may be forced to return if they have been interned or lived in camps that are subsequently dismantled. Many refugees fall outside our scope conditions because they lack permanent legal status in their receiving country and can be forced to return to their country of origin.¹³ Finally, some migrants move on to third locations, including Western countries, for instance, through UNHCR resettlement or clandestine people smuggling. They typically face higher costs of return and higher benefits from remaining in their new homes; descriptive statistics imply that they are less likely to return, but future work should explore their decision making calculus (Vralstad and Wiggen 2017).

Empirical Implications

Although we theorize individual decisions, our argument has observable implications primarily at the village level because both variables that motivate individual decisions affect villages: the presence of non-coethnics, and local economic conditions. Within a particular village, some individuals may want to return home so intensely that they are willing to forgo better economic prospects in their place of residence. Others might have such a strong aversion to returning home that no level of economic opportunity is enough to draw them to return. Yet most displaced persons weigh both emotional and economic factors. Thus, we aggregate to the village level as in a simple market model. We assume that among displaced persons from each village there is a distribution over orientation toward home. Since bloodshed at the time of displacement is a village-level event, it shifts the whole village toward emotional aversion and fewer people return. The same logic applies to economic prospects.

Our first two hypotheses concern emotional orientation toward home. In line with our discussion on violence and emotions, we expect that armed conflict and forced displacement poison the relationship between victims and perpetrators and by extension between displaced persons and co-ethnics of the perpetrators. We predict that the displaced will return in smaller numbers to places where conflict produced a negative emotional orientation. Furthermore, the negative emotional orientation should be more evident among regular visitors than among permanent returnees, as the latter could be motivated by economic incentives.

¹³However, the principle of non-refoulement, enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, prohibits signatories from forcing refugees to return to countries where they would face persecution.

H1: Mixed villages attract fewer permanent residents and visitors than homogeneous villages, and the number of returnees will decrease with the proportion of non-coethnics in the village at the time of displacement.

Because violence enhances negative emotions, we also predict that the displaced will return in even fewer numbers to mixed locations where bloodshed accompanied forced displacement. However, in homogeneous villages, violence should be a less significant barrier to return because potential returnees would not face its perpetrators.

H2: Villages where massacres occurred attract fewer permanent residents and visitors than villages where massacres did not occur. Mixed villages where massacres occurred attract even fewer returnees than mixed villages with no massacres or homogeneous villages where massacres occurred.

As for economic prospects, we posit that most displaced persons would return to their villages as permanent residents if there were sufficiently attractive economic opportunities. Thus, greater proportions of the displaced will return as permanent residents to places poised to take advantage of economic growth. Since many economic opportunities are available only to those willing to relocate permanently for full-time employment, these opportunities will be less important for visitors.

H3: Locations with expanding economies or more economic opportunities will attract more displaced persons to return as permanent residents.

These empirical implications pertain when migrants return spontaneously as individuals or households, like most IDPs and some self-settled refugees. However, by assuming a simple market model, we exclude interdependent decision making. We make this decision even though some recent work on forced migration emphasizes how community plays an important role in migration decisions (Camarena 2018; Harpviken 2009). The strategic environment may also implicitly coordinate return as in models with gains to coordination, a tipping point, or endogenous costs (Carrington, Detragiache and Vishwanath 1996). However, we aggregate in a market framework because we seek to explain diverse levels of return, rather than a bimodal distribution, and complicating the model with interdependent decision making does not facilitate this task.¹⁴ Furthermore, even if return is initially

¹⁴Histograms of levels of return appear in SI Figure A1.

coordinated or organized, market forces may, over time, induce some resettled households to leave again, as documented in South Sudan (Pantuliano et al. 2008).

Lebanon in the Aftermath of Civil War

To evaluate this argument, we use a case from the Lebanese civil war of 1975–90: displaced Christians in Mount Lebanon.¹⁵ The Lebanese civil war had deep roots both in domestic politics, where Muslim and secular parties challenged a consociational power-sharing model that privileged Christians, and in the regional Arab–Israeli conflict (Picard 2002; Salibi 1976). Armed Palestinian groups relocated to Lebanon after the 1970–71 civil war in Jordan and triggered an arms race with Christian political parties that escalated into armed conflict in April 1975. Both Christian and Palestinian groups engaged in massacres and ethnic cleansing during 1975–76, although in a narrowly targeted manner, and all regions of the country remained somewhat ethnically intermixed (Hägerdal 2019). Syria invaded Lebanon in late 1976 to stop open warfare.¹⁶

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon and engaged Palestinian and Syrian forces as its army pushed north to reach Beirut and link up with its Christian allies (Schiff and Yaari 1984, chaps. 7, 12). Under Israeli military cover, Christian militias ventured south from Beirut to establish a military presence in Mount Lebanon, a region mixed mostly between Maronite Catholics and Druze and controlled until 1982 by a Druze militia.¹⁷ However, the Israeli public soured on the war after Christian forces perpetrated massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Following massive public protests in Israel, Israeli forces pulled back to a buffer zone in south Lebanon.

When Israeli forces withdrew from Mount Lebanon in 1983, they left two rival militias—the Lebanese Forces and the Progressive Socialist Party (at that point almost exclusively Christian and Druze, respectively)—contesting the region. The result was a swift and

brutal war in August–September 1983 that ended with a decisive Druze victory. Participation in this episode of the war was extensive among local Christians and Druze, and the fighting quickly devolved into a communal civil war fought along a hardened identity cleavage. With its military advance, Druze forces staged numerous massacres of Christian civilians, and many Christians therefore fled before enemy fighters reached their village. In 1984–85, the violence spread south from Mount Lebanon into the two neighboring districts of Saida and Jezzine and drew in Sunni and Palestinian forces fighting along Druze. The episode, unlike the war of 1975–76, caused a “quasi-complete” expulsion of the Christian community from over 200 villages: Roughly 163,000 individuals were displaced, about 2,700 disappeared, and 1,155 were confirmed dead (International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) 2013, 40–45; Labaki and Abou Rjeily 1993, 55, 59). Some displaced Christians left the country and emigrated abroad, but the decisive majority moved into the Christian suburbs of East Beirut.¹⁸ Figure 1 shows all locations where Christians were ethnically cleansed between 1983 and 1985.¹⁹

The civil war ended in 1990 with the Taif Agreement brokered by regional and Western powers. Three important aspects of postwar reconstruction facilitate our study. First, after the war, militias demobilized and Mount Lebanon did not witness further sectarian violence (ICTJ 2013, 72). Second, unlike in many other postwar environments, Lebanese Christians in Mount Lebanon retained formal property rights to the land and homes they left behind, and these rights have generally been respected. Third, after the war, the Lebanese government created a Ministry for the Displaced to work on political reconciliation and compensation for victims. Many Christian homes in Mount Lebanon were occupied by squatters, and the ministry spent a considerable amount of money during 1993–94 to induce squatters to leave those homes. This project was successful, and the issue of squatting was essentially resolved by the end of 1994.²⁰

Data and Descriptive Statistics

We use data from reports on postwar migration in Mount Lebanon produced by *Institut Libanais de Developpement*

¹⁵The villages we study occupy most of five electoral districts: Baabda, Aley, Shouf, Saida/Zahrani, and Jezzine. The first three constitute part of the Mount Lebanon administrative region, whereas the latter two form part of the south. For clarity of exposition, we use “Mount Lebanon” as shorthand for the region we study, although we acknowledge that this moniker is somewhat inaccurate.

¹⁶See International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ); (2013, 20–22).

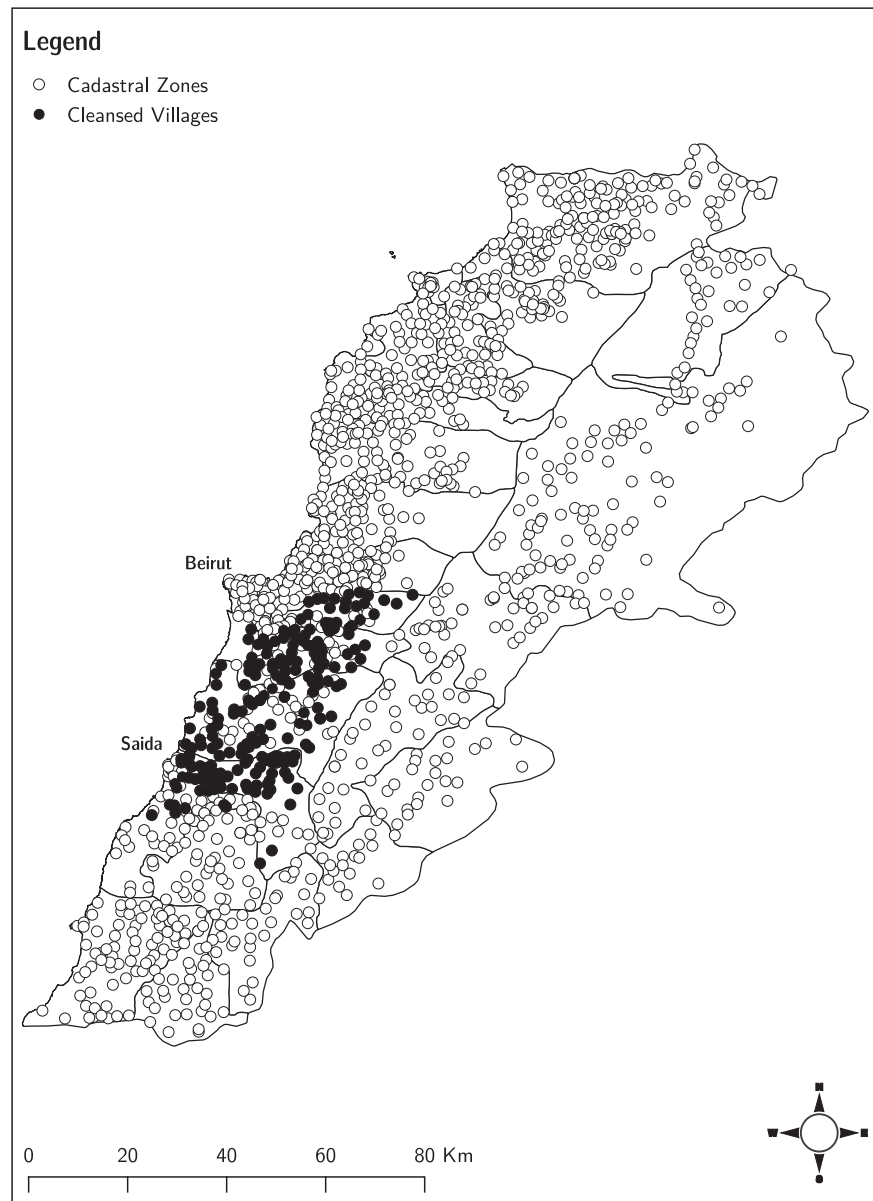
¹⁷The Druze faith is an offshoot of Shia Islam.

¹⁸Author interviews with think tank staff members, Jel el-Dib, 2017.

¹⁹A handful of locations in the southeastern corner of the map were never conquered by hostile forces, but a large share of Christians left as the region became a combat zone.

²⁰Author interviews with think tank staff members, Jel el-Dib, 2017.

FIGURE 1 Villages Ethnically Cleansed of their Christian Population, 1983–85

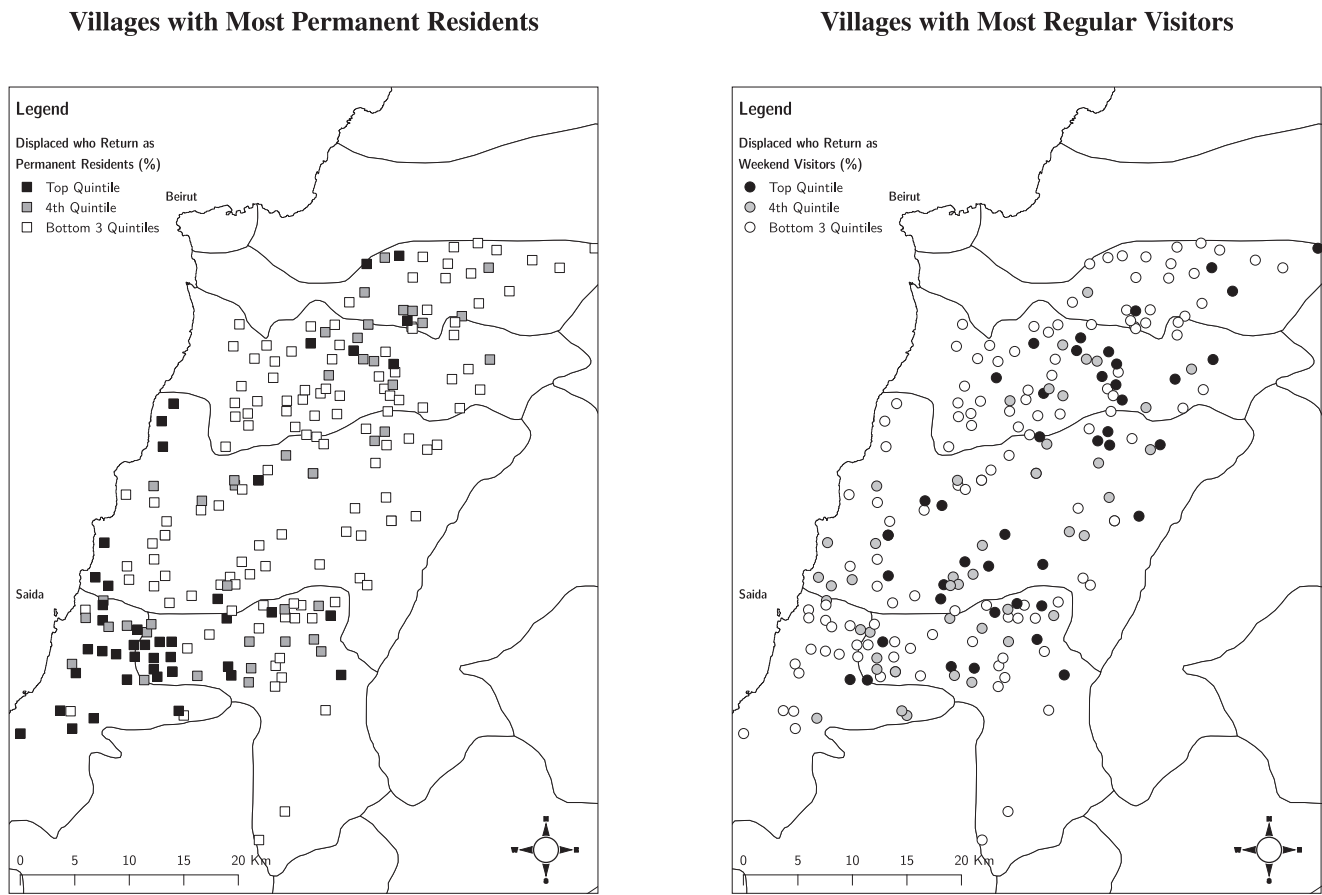


Economique et Social (ILDES), a research institute run by social scientists at Lebanese University and partly funded by the European Union. Research assistants from the institute visited every village in Mount Lebanon where Christians were ethnically cleansed during the 1983–85 period. The ILDES reports record the number of displaced families in each village and the number that subsequently returned. The original report was updated, yielding eight waves of data from 1991 to 2007 (Abou Rjeily 2006, 2008). For the years 2003 and 2007, ILDES also compiled data on the number of families that visited the region

on weekends or over the summer but have not returned permanently.²¹

We build two panels from the ILDES data. The first panel includes data on return of permanent residents and regular visitors across 142 villages in Mount Lebanon

²¹Families that visit on weekends and summers are most likely recreational visitors, rather than workers. These measures do not include business travelers who visit on weekdays or seasonal laborers. The olive harvest season is October–December, not the summer, and seasonal agricultural labor has tended to be Syrian guest workers willing to accept lower pay.

FIGURE 2 Return of Permanent Residents and Regular Visitors by Location

Note: Permanent resident return is based on cumulative return as of 2007. Regular visitor rate is based on weekend return for the period between 1999 and 2003.

in 2003 and 2007. The second panel includes data on permanent residents from 209 villages in the Mount Lebanon region and spans the period from 1991 to 2007 in 4 year increments. Across the villages in 2007, the share of displaced persons who took up permanent residence ranged from 0 to 100%, with an average value of 20%.

The two maps in Figure 2 summarize a key point: Villages that attract greater proportions of the displaced as permanent residents are generally in different places than the villages that attract greater proportions of regular visitors. The map on the left shows villages that are in the top two quintiles in terms of the proportion of permanent residents. The map on the right shows villages in the same quintiles with respect to regular visitors. Permanent residents cluster heavily in the northwest and southwest corners of the map, close to the two major cities of Beirut and Saida and in some cases within commuting distance. Visitors are more frequent in the mountainous areas further east.

Massacres. To capture violence, we construct an indicator for each village for whether a massacre of Christian civilians occurred during the process of displacement using data from the ICTJ (2013). Massacres occurred in 57 villages.

Muslim Share. About one-third of the villages, 69 out of 209, were mixed (Muslim and Christian) before the war, whereas the other two-thirds had only Christian residents.²² We use data on the number of Sunni, Shia, and Druze in each village from the 2010 Lebanese voter registration rolls (Cammett and Issar 2010; Hägerdal 2019).

²²In the empirical sections, we include Druze in the category Muslim to create one consistent measure of non-Christian population. In Lebanon, Druze count as Muslims in some administrative circumstances, such as establishing the share of Christian to Muslim seats in Parliament. However, the faith is distinct from Sunni and Shia traditions.

FIGURE 3 World Olive Oil Prices and Permanent Return

Note: World price of olive oil in current U.S. dollars per metric ton comes from the IMF (2017). Percent of displaced Christian households that returned comes from ILDES (2008).

Economic Prospects. For the natural experiment, we construct two measures of olive cultivation that capture economic prospects of individual villages. The first, from ILDES, is an indicator for the presence of olive trees; 133 villages grow olive trees. The second is a weighted measure where the presence of olive trees is scaled by the proportion of agricultural land surrounding the village. Agricultural land is based on time-series satellite imagery for land cover (European Space Agency Climate Change Initiative [ESA] 2017). Cells of 50% or greater cultivated land within a 3 kilometer radius of the village center are considered agricultural.²³ The weighted measure is useful because it varies over time and captures the capacity of the village to take advantage of the olive oil price shocks. With the olive tree measures, we pair world prices of olive oil from the International Monetary Fund (IMF 2017). Figure 3 shows variation over time in the world price of olive oil and cumulative permanent return.

Figure 4 shows visually how village permanent returnee rates and the incidence of violence (left) and the proportion of Muslims and presence of olive trees (right) cluster in space.

Control Variables. To capture general economic conditions in the villages, we include road distance from each village to Beirut.²⁴ For each village, we add a time-varying

measure of urban land use.²⁵ Finally, the ILDES reports include information on property destruction, including the state of Christian homes in affected villages when the war ended.²⁶ From their measures we construct two indicators: one for where homes were razed (27 villages) and one for where homes were damaged (83 villages). See Table 1 and SI Table A1 for summary statistics.

Methods and Results

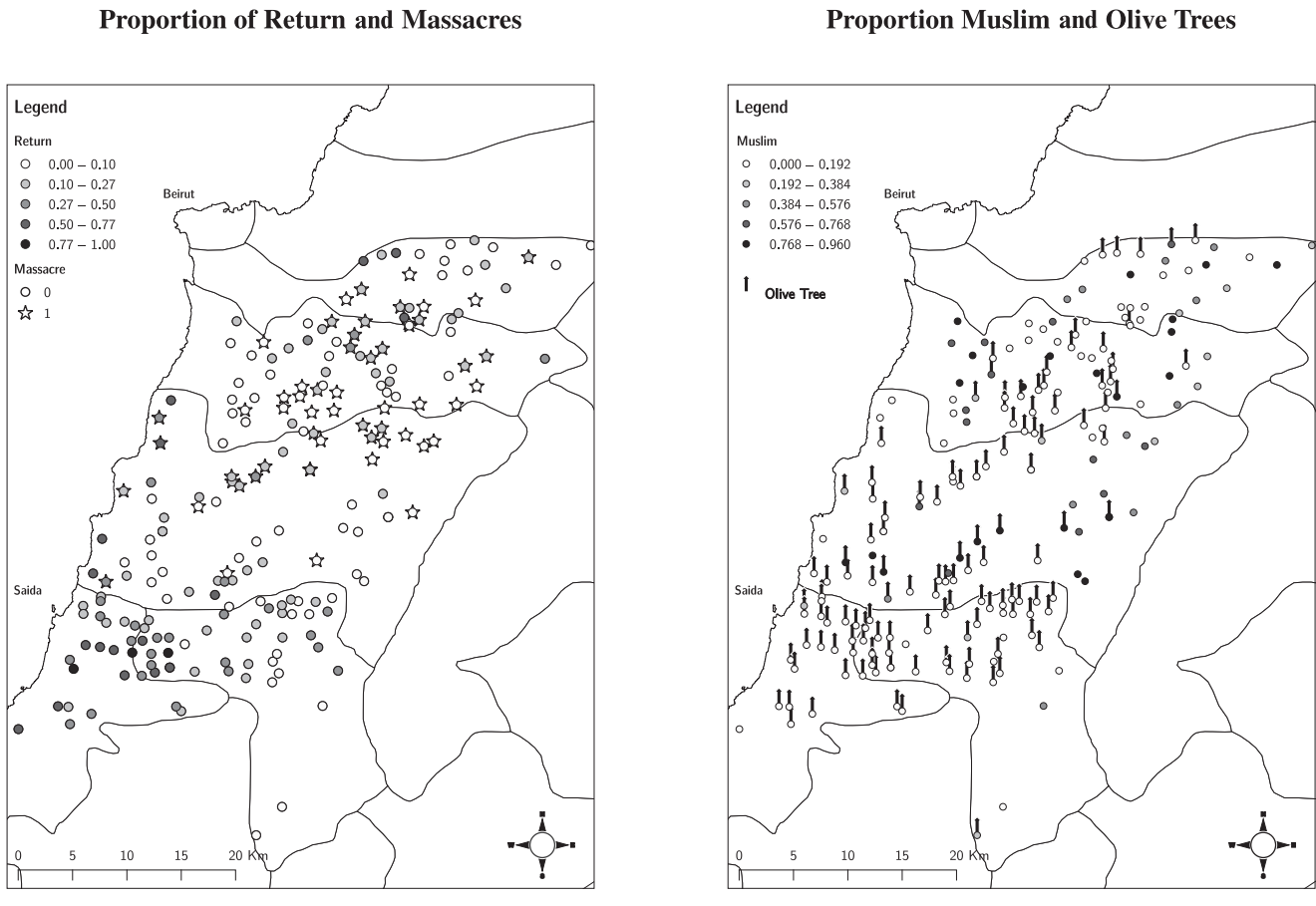
We find substantial evidence for our theory across two sets of empirical models. First, our inquiry into emotional and social dimensions of return suggests that mixed communities and mixed communities in which massacres took place are associated with less return. Displaced Christians choose not to return to places where they would have to live alongside non-coethnics. Second, our analysis of the impact of economic prospects demonstrates strong evidence that the economic outlook in rural villages figures prominently into the decision to return permanently. Displaced Christians respond to the combination of olive trees, substantial cropland, and the world price of olive

²³We calculated percentages using an equal area projection in QGIS v1.14.

²⁴We geocode each village and, using a reference point in central Beirut, calculate road distance from OpenStreetMap in ArcGIS.

²⁵The urban land use measure is the percentage of cells in a 3 kilometer radius of the village location that is categorized as urban in ESA (2017). We calculate this in the same manner as the agricultural land.

²⁶The reports provide data on destruction for villages in three of the five electoral districts; we complete the estimates of destruction using primary interviews with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and academics for the remaining 68 villages.

FIGURE 4 Variation in Return, Massacres, Religious Composition, and Olive Trees by Location

Note: Return is based on cumulative permanent resident return as of 2007. Proportion Muslim is at the time of displacement.

oil (our measure of economic prospects) by returning to their place of origin as permanent residents.

Legacies of Violence

To evaluate the first two hypotheses (about violence and orientation toward home), we compare return among villages given the incidence of massacres and the presence of Muslims in the village. We use the proportion of the displaced who returned as our dependent variable, with four measures of return: weekend visitors, summer visitors, permanent returnees, and total return (permanent residents and regular visitors).

We leverage the panel data structure to estimate the correlates of return in a fixed effects ordinary least squares (OLS) framework:

$$\begin{aligned}
 y_{it} = & \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Massacre}_i + \alpha_2 \text{Muslim}_i \\
 & + \alpha_3 \text{Massacre}_i \times \text{Muslim}_i \\
 & + X\beta + \eta_j + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it}.
 \end{aligned} \tag{7}$$

The subscript i indexes the village, j the region, and t the year.

The key variable of interest is the interaction term, $\text{Massacre}_i \times \text{Muslim}_i$, and its component parts, Massacre_i and Muslim_i . We follow the advice of Hainmueller, Mumolo, and Xu (2018) and present marginal effects plots. Since we expect mixed communities and mixed communities with histories of violence to have fewer returnees, plots with downward trends are consistent with Hypotheses 1 and 2. Figure 5 shows that, conditional on a massacre taking place, fewer displaced persons return as the proportion of Muslims in the village increases. Plots (A), (B), and (C) display marginal effects plots for return in 2007, the last year of available data. Plot (A) displays summer visitors; plot (B) is weekend visitors, and plot (C) is all returnees, both permanent residents and regular visitors. The last graph, plot (D), displays results for permanent returnees from 1991 to 2007. Although precision varies, the downward trend is consistent across the graphs. As we might intuitively expect,

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	St. Dev.	N
Cross-Sectional			
Village Population (Persons)	1,364	1,705	211
Households Displaced	301	395	211
Permanent Return (Households in 2007)	64	147	211
Road Distance to Beirut (km)	46.48	13.54	211
Time Varying			
Olive Oil Price (Current USD per mT)	3,864	1,035	18
Cross-Sectional and Time Varying			
Urban Land Cover (%)	0.0227	0.0524	844
Agricultural Land Cover (%)	0.2506	0.2058	844
Weighted Olive Tree Measure	0.1769	0.2255	840

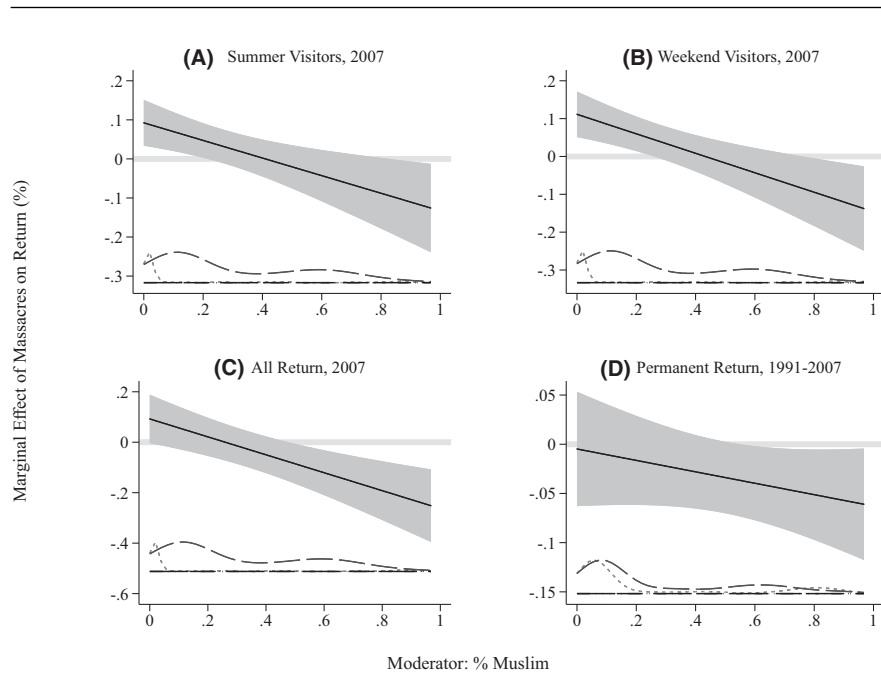
the extremes have the most precise estimates. Villages that are relatively homogeneous with mostly Christian or mostly Muslim residents have strong and generally statistically significant positive and negative correlations with return, respectively.

In Table 2, we present the point estimates for our preferred specification from Equation (7). In the first two columns, the dependent variable is visitors. In the third column, the dependent variable is all returnees. These three analyses use the data from 2003 and 2007, for which we have the visitor measures. In the final column, the dependent variable is permanent resident return, for which we have the panel from 1991 to 2007. While point estimates and statistical significance differ across the measures of return, we find that a combination of the presence of Muslims and the interaction between Muslims and massacres is associated with less return migration. Contrary to the literature, however, we find that massacres alone are not associated with less return. These relationships are robust to the inclusion of village-specific controls and region and year fixed effects.²⁷

Across the measures of return, the substantive implications are large. For example, a village that is one-third Muslim has an average of 14% fewer total returnees than a village that is homogeneously Christian. If the village also witnessed a massacre, that difference increases to 33%.

²⁷Complete regression tables and diagnostics of the linearity assumption appear in SI Appendix C.

FIGURE 5 Marginal Effect of Massacres on Return as Muslim Share Increases



Note: Summer and weekend visitors reflect households that visited in the previous 4 years (2003–7). Permanent return is based on cumulative permanent resident return. The Muslim share represents its value at the time of displacement in 1983. At the bottom of each figure is a density of percentage Muslim, long dash for massacres and short dash for no massacres.

TABLE 2 Massacres and Community Composition by Type of Return

	Weekend Visitors	Summer Visitors	All Return	Permanent Residents
Massacre, Indicator	0.0755 (0.0320)	0.0807 (0.0325)	0.0644 (0.0530)	0.0004 (0.0312)
% Muslim	-0.0320 (0.0492)	-0.0750 (0.0361)	-0.2671 (0.0786)	-0.1543 (0.0362)
Massacre × % Muslim	-0.2169 (0.0835)	-0.2074 (0.0843)	-0.2526 (0.1133)	-0.0707 (0.0506)
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y
Region Fixed Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year Fixed Effects	Y	Y	Y	Y
Observations	284	284	284	769
R ²	0.1398	0.1321	0.1887	0.3712

Note: Results were estimated with OLS. Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the village level. Models include 142 clusters except the last, which has 210.

Among weekend visitors, the difference between a homogenous village and one that is a third Muslim, given that both had massacres, is about half that of total returnees: a 16% decrease. In sum, we find evidence for our first and second hypotheses. Fewer Christians return the greater the proportion of Muslims in the village, and a legacy of violence in mixed communities is associated with even less return.

Natural Experiment: The Olive Oil Industry

For the third hypothesis, on economic opportunity, we use a natural experiment to identify the impact of economic prospects on return of permanent residents. The natural experiment disentangles economic decline and political violence, which are otherwise endogenously related, using exogenous price shocks in a difference-in-differences framework. We draw inspiration from studies such as Card (1990), which leverages an unexpected political shock and comparison across space to evaluate the impact of migration on wages, and Dube and Vargas (2013), which exploits commodity price shocks to solve the reverse causality problem in empirical models of conflict.

Our research design takes advantage of the fact that roughly coincident with the end of the Lebanese civil war is the beginning of a world consumer boom for olive oil. Thus, places with olive trees, like many villages in Mount Lebanon, experienced a sudden unexpected economic boom because their produce became more valuable. We use the volatility of world olive oil prices over time, as well as the fact that some villages had olive trees whereas others did not, to measure economic opportunity.

When the war ended, the average olive tree in Lebanon was more than 100 years old, echoing the country's long tradition of growing olives and making olive oil.²⁸ Furthermore, throughout the period, Lebanon's exports make up less than 1% of world production; thus, we can be confident that Lebanon is a price-taker in olive oil and that price fluctuations are unrelated to other correlates of economic growth in Lebanon.

We use difference-in-differences estimation with year and village fixed effects to address omitted variable bias. The design solves the problem of reverse causality: Returning Christian residents did not cause either the geological prerequisites for growing olives—such as soil, elevation, incline, or sunlight hours—or world market olive oil price fluctuations.

Specifically, we explain the proportion of displaced households that returned as permanent residents using the exogenous treatment as follows:

$$y_{it} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 Olive\ Tree_i \times Log\ OOPrice_{t-1} + X\beta + \eta_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it}. \quad (8)$$

The key variable is the interaction of the presence of olive trees in the village and the log of the world price of olive oil, lagged ($Olive\ Tree_i \times Log\ OOPrice_{t-1}$). This measure is our treatment. A positive γ_1 , the estimate on the coefficient of the treatment, constitutes evidence for our third hypothesis: Villages with better economic prospects—the expanding olive oil industry—should attract more permanent residents.

²⁸Records of Lebanese olive oil exports date back to Pharaonic Egyptian trade statistics from around 3500 BC.

TABLE 3 Impact of Economic Prospects on Return of Permanent Residents

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Olive Tree–Price Interaction	0.0197 (0.0198)	0.0334 (0.0184)	0.1063 (0.0462)	0.1221 (0.0437)	0.1035 (0.0413)	0.0987 (0.0467)
Olive Tree Indicator	Y	Y	N	N	N	N
Weighted Olive Tree Measure	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Controls	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Region Fixed Effects	Y	N	Y	N	N	N
Year Fixed Effects	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Village Fixed Effects	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Region–Specific Time Trend	N	N	N	N	Y	N
Olive Tree–Specific Time Trend	N	N	N	N	N	Y
R ²	0.3500	0.8966	0.3641	0.8979	0.8997	0.8982

Note: Results were estimated with OLS. Standard errors are in parentheses and clustered at the village level. All models include 765 observations and 209 clusters.

Table 3 presents strong evidence for our third hypothesis.²⁹ Specifically, more displaced Christians return to villages that have more olive trees when olive oil export prices increase. The results use the panel of villages every 4 years from 1991 to 2007. The first two columns use the indicator for olive trees, and the last four columns use the weighted measure. The estimates with village fixed effects are all positive and statistically significant at conventional levels. The final two columns display two robustness checks. Column 5 shows that the positive estimate is robust to the inclusion of a region-specific time trend, and column 6 shows that it is robust to a treatment-specific time trend.

The weighted measure of olive trees, accounting for variation in land used for crops, improves precision (columns 3 and 4). This is because the weighted measure takes into account the amount of land that the village devotes to agricultural production. Substantively, a 1 point increase in the world price of olive oil in places where there are olive trees and 50% of the land devoted to crops results in a 6% increase in households returning permanently—an average of four or five families.³⁰

One remaining concern is that some regional minority communities, such as Greek Catholics and Shia Muslims, appear to cluster in villages with many olive trees. The dynamics of these minority communities may have systematically affected violence or return. As these are minority communities, we are confident that these problems are limited to a small number of villages. How-

ever, we cannot rule out this concern without more data on the sectarian makeup of villages.

Survey and Interview Evidence

Whereas our theory emphasizes decision making by displaced individuals, our quantitative results show outcomes at the village level. To bridge this gap, we turn to qualitative evidence that shows mechanisms connecting individual microlevel decisions to macrolevel outcomes. We draw on 16 months of fieldwork in Lebanon and about two dozen semi-structured interviews about the War of the Mountain and its aftermath, as well as a region-wide survey.³¹ Through snowball sampling, we managed to interview several Druze officials, including some of the most senior wartime political and military community leaders. Christian interviewees include politicians, public and religious officials, former militia commanders, academics, NGO workers, and commercial olive oil growers.

Economics and emotions are the two most pervasive themes when interviewees explain why so many Christians never returned to Mount Lebanon. However, different interviewees put different weight on these two variables, and most interviewees emphasize one over the other. We include two brief interview excerpts to give our readers a sense of the two most prevalent narratives that we encounter in the field. For instance, when we interviewed a Druze senior public servant in a small village in Mount Lebanon in 2017, he primarily blamed economic decline:

²⁹For full results tables, see SI Appendix D.

³⁰World olive oil prices have that kind of variability, and 30 villages at some point during the panel had 50% or more of their land devoted to agriculture.

³¹See SI Appendix E, for an anonymized list of sources.

TABLE 4 Reasons Cited for Displaced Persons Not Returning

Reasons for Nonreturn	Frequency (%)
Lack of job opportunities	51.8
Working/residing outside of region/country	48.7
Original homes not habitable	21.3
Psychological scars: insufficient reconciliation in mixed villages	21.3
Bad state of physical infrastructure	19.8
Youth not interested in region	19.3
Insufficient government financial compensation	7.1

Note: Respondents could list multiple answers.

Source: Abou Rjeily (2004, 28).

[In the 1950s] there were jobs here. In agriculture. [...] Apples, peaches, nuts, tomatoes, onions. The onions of [our village] are famous! [...] The production was enough for the population. But life became difficult in the villages. People left for the cities, looking for work. [...] And education. Universities. The educational level in the villages was very low. [...] Christians come back here to visit. Some build summer homes. But they don't move back [permanently]. It's the economy. There are no jobs here. Even [Druze youth], they are leaving.

Conversely, a Christian priest with ties to the region emphasized the role of resentment:

The perpetrators are still living there. Second, there is the sectarianization of state institutions. So [local state institutions] are all run by the [former Druze warlord family] Jumblattis. [...] [Third,] in intermixed areas, Christians may also have perpetrated violence there. So they know they could not return and be a part of the community.

Interestingly, we find that virtually no Christian interviewees mention fear as a factor inhibiting return. This omission might surprise some readers who would expect Christians to worry about resumed ethnic violence. In addition to our own interviews, we find further evidence for our claims in a survey that ILDES conducted asking Christian public officials in Mount Lebanon their opinion about why many Christians have not returned. Table 4 shows the results.

The survey emphasizes both economics and emotions, as the two most frequent answers relate to economic

factors and more than one-fifth of respondents also mention psychological scars. Of course, these answers are only the public version of personal beliefs on behalf of a major stakeholder group, and not necessarily the unvarnished truth. On the other hand, it is difficult to see how social desirability bias or strategic reporting would induce Christian leaders to blame the economy rather than something like insufficient government compensation, which only 7% mention. The qualitative evidence thus strengthens our belief that our argument captures salient dynamics of return migration among forcibly displaced Christians in Mount Lebanon.

Conclusion

Forces such as political instability, disrupted livelihoods, perceived threats, and actual violence cause households to leave conflict zones for other destinations with the allure of a better life. For some families, these arduous journeys are successful in the sense that they eventually rebuild a new life in their new location. Our study shows that it takes enormous efforts to induce most of those who have settled elsewhere to return to their original homes after wars end. Even though Mount Lebanon combined an absence of postwar violence, respect for prewar property rights, and a political ambition to end squatting, a majority of displaced persons never returned. Like labor migrants, displaced persons' decisions of whether to return are highly sensitive to economic opportunities; in addition, they appear rather reluctant to return to locations with a high concentration of non-coethnics.

Even if a postconflict society successfully addresses all of the classic "barriers to return," many displaced persons may still not return due to mundane concerns such as the inertia of stable employment. Consequently, the most prominent policy implication of our argument is that the goal of postwar policy should not be that all displaced persons return as permanent residents. If migrants left rural areas of economic decline for vibrant urban locations, perhaps economic reconstruction should focus on providing them with a comfortable life in their new surroundings. All societies continuously face demographic flux due to economic change, and urbanization ranks among the most powerful demographic trends in the contemporary world. The protracted displacement from rural homes to urban areas that characterizes Lebanon is becoming increasingly common among the internally displaced in countries like Colombia, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Nigeria, and Yemen (Harild et al. 2015).

A similar logic pertains to transitional justice efforts. Displaced persons were at one point dispossessed by wartime violence, but those who subsequently return as regular visitors are no longer deprived of enjoying their original home. The decision of whether and how to return is deeply personal, and there is no obvious reason why policy makers should turn regular visitors—or persons who prefer the lifestyle in their new environs and have no desire to return—into permanent residents. Evaluation of transitional justice programs should not limit their analysis to permanent resident return. The programming itself should focus on mending intergroup relations, which may indirectly encourage more displaced persons to return. However, Lebanon offers few clues about how government policy might overcome deep resentment.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: Extension to Theory

Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics

Appendix C: Legacies of Violence

Appendix D: Economic Prospects: Detailed Tables

Appendix E: Qualitative Evidence