

**Behavioral Themes**  
Identity/Perception of self

**Sector**  
Conflict & governance

**Project Type**  
Lab experiment

**Sample Size**  
700 participants



# Assessing the behavioral effects of conflict exposure



Photo credit: Jeff Ackley





Photo credit: Random Institute

## How does exposure to conflict affect social preferences?

There is a growing body of evidence that exposure to violent conflict affects the deep determinants of behavior. These include individuals' level of risk-aversion, discount rate and pro-social behaviors. A meta-analysis of 23 papers that estimate the effect of violence on behavior, concludes that exposure to violence is related to increased social group participation, participation in community leadership, prosocial behavior in experimental games, voting and knowledge of and interest in politics. However, whether this relationship is causal remains an open question.

The purpose of this project is to assess the effect of recalling experiences of conflict on a series of preferences as well as pro- and anti-social behaviors.



## Design and Results

### Intervention

A sample of 700 participants were randomized into a treatment and a control group, after which a priming treatment was administered.

#### Story about recent event

Participants in the control group were primed by being asked to tell a story about a recent event.

#### Story about conflict

Participants in the treatment group were primed by being asked to tell a story about an experience they had which involved conflict.

All participants were asked to self-signify the narratives elicited by the priming question using the SenseMaker<sup>®</sup> tool, to verify the accuracy of the priming treatment.

Following the treatment, both groups were asked to complete a number of consecutive exercises in a mobile lab setting. They were tested on:

**Risk preferences** - using a choice over lottery with equal probabilities

**Time preferences** - using a choice over temporal budgets (CTB) design

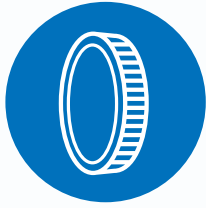
**Altruism levels** - using a Dictator Game

**Fairness levels** - using an Ultimatum game

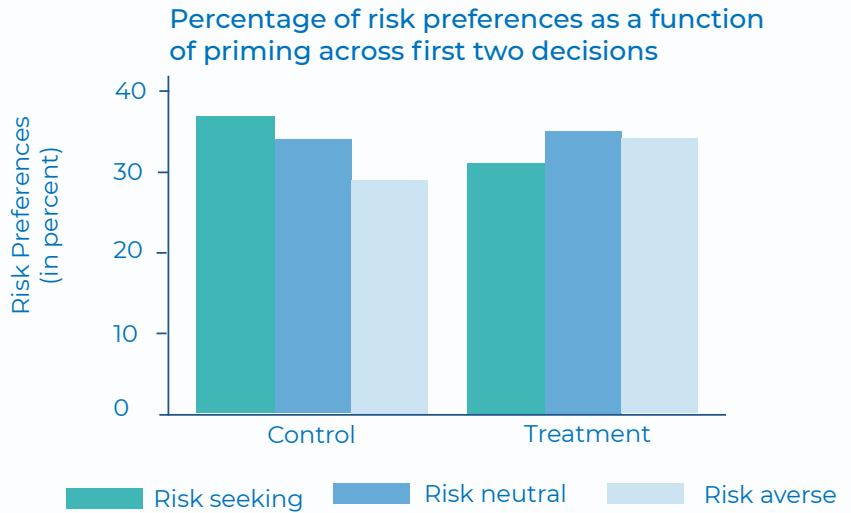
**Collaboration behaviors** - using a Fragile Public Goods Game

**Anti social behaviors** - using the Vendettas and Retaliation game

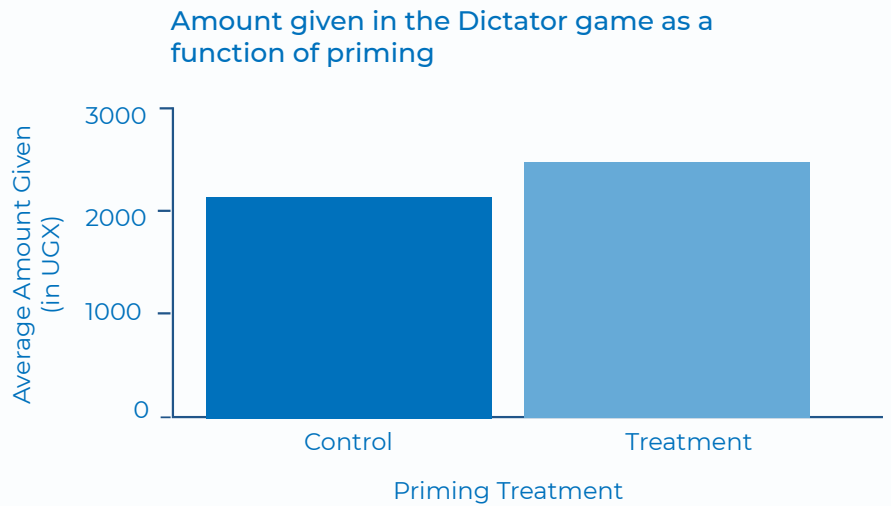
# Results



People in the treatment group were slightly more likely to choose risk-averse coin options.



In the Dictator game, the treatment group gave, on average, 17.5 percentage points more than the control group.



The treatment group gave more in the fairness game, indicating a higher level of fairness. People in the treatment group were more likely to punish unfair offers.

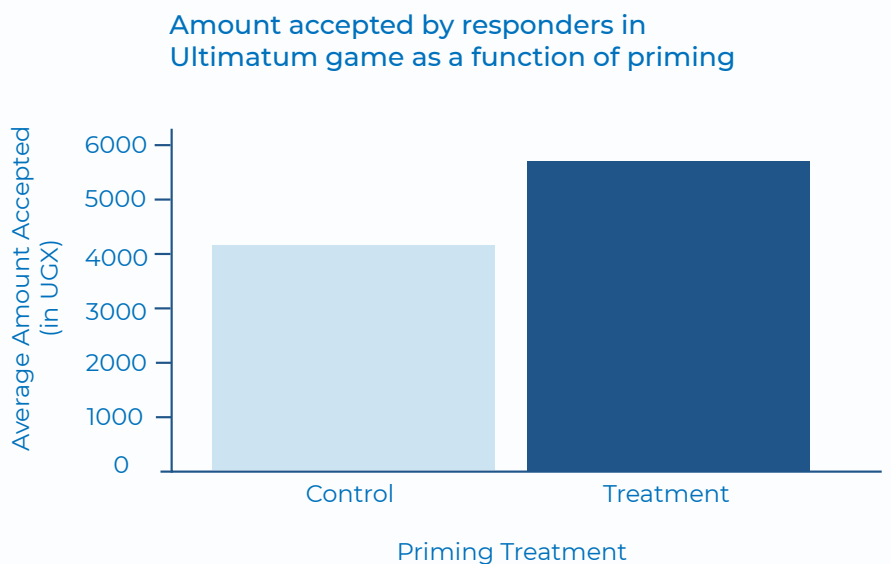




Photo credit: Olatunde Stephen

## Discussion

### Recalling conflicts makes people more pro-social

We find that people primed to recall the conflict displayed more prosocial behavior, which was consistent with existing literature. They were willing to share more with an anonymous partner (altruistic giving) and were more likely to reject uncooperative behaviors (high fairness standards). Recalling the conflict also made people more cautious, prompting them to take less risk.

### Collective experience of conflict

Our conflict prime had a strong effect on most of our behavioral outcomes, regardless of the participants' previous level of exposure to violence and across different experiences of violence. This suggests that the experience of conflict is a collective experience rather than an individual one.