How Cross-Cutting Discussion Shapes Support for Ethnic Politics: Evidence from an Experiment in Lebanon

Laura Paler[1], Leslie Marshall[2] and Sami Atallah[3*]

[1] *University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA; lpaler@pitt.edu*
[2] *University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA; lrm51@pitt.edu*
[3] *Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, Beirut, Lebanon;*
sami.atallah@lcps-lebanon.org

ABSTRACT

It is widely believed that ethnic politics and conflict are less pronounced in countries with cross-cutting rather than reinforcing social cleavages. We argue that one possible explanation is that cross-cutting cleavages facilitate cross-cutting social interaction among individuals from different ethnic and/or class groups. This article examines whether such cross-cutting interaction, relative to homogeneous interaction, can reduce support for ethnic politics and increase support for a cross-ethnic, programmatic alternative. We conduct an experiment in Lebanon in which 720 lower- and upper-class Christians, Sunnis, and Shia were randomly assigned to participate in discussions that varied in their sectarian and class compositions. Our evidence suggests that cross-sectarian discussion resulted in less support for sectarian politics but only when

individuals also belonged to the same economic class, driven by greater learning about shared preferences and reduced coethnic social pressure. We also demonstrate the limitations of other forms of cross-cutting discussion, showing that interaction among coethnics or non-coethnics from different classes did not weaken support for ethnic politics. These findings reveal when and how interaction that leverages a second dimension of interest or identity can help shift political preferences, shedding new light on the foundations of support for cross-ethnic politics in ethnically divided societies.

It is widely believed that ethnically diverse societies exhibit slower economic growth, lower levels of public goods provision, weaker accountability, and more civil conflict (Alesina *et al.*, 1999; Alesina and Ferrara, 2005; Chandra, 2004; Horowitz, 2000). Such outcomes are thought to be less prevalent, however, in countries where other social cleavages cut across the ethnic cleavage. Cross-cutting cleavages (unlike reinforcing cleavages) allow for membership in different social groups, weakening the dominance of ethnic identity and interests. As Dunning and Harrison (2010, p. 21) state: "When individuals who are members of the same group or social category on one dimension of interest or identity, such as ethnicity, are members of different groups on another dimension, such as social class, their competing interests on the second dimension may undercut their primary allegiance to interests arising on the first dimension." This claim is supported by evidence that cross-cutting cleavages can reduce prejudice (Deschamps and Doise, 1978), weaken ethnic voting (Dunning and Harrison, 2010; Huber, 2017), and mitigate ethnic conflict (Gubler and Selway, 2012).

While there are many possible cross-cutting cleavages, scholars have long been especially interested in societies in which ethnic and class cleavages intersect such that different ethnic groups have both lower and upper income members.[1] Class is particularly important because it is a central cleavage around which programmatic political competition is organized, making it a viable — if not preferable — alternative to ethnic politics (Huber, 2017). Yet, in many contexts with cross-cutting ethnic and class cleavages, the latter rarely serves as an alternate foundation for political competition, in no small part because of the challenges associated with fostering "interethnic class-based alliances or intraethnic class antagonisms" (Horowitz, 2000, p. 32). This raises

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[1]Horowitz (2000) seminally refers to these as "unranked" societies.

the question: When will a cross-cutting class cleavage facilitate cross-ethnic, programmatic politics in ethnically diverse societies?

The main goal of this article is to examine the role of social interaction in answering this question. We argue that cross-cutting cleavages at the societal level could shape political preferences at the individual level by enabling cross-cutting social interaction, or interaction with people from different ethnic and/or class groups. In other words, in societies with cross-cutting cleavages, individuals have opportunities to engage with non-coethnics from their own economic class or with coethnics from different classes that do not exist in contexts where cleavages are reinforcing. Such interactions could in turn have important implications for how individuals form preferences over ethnic versus cross-ethnic, programmatic politics.[2]

This argument builds on the notion that social interaction is the "primary mechanism linking social group membership and individual political behavior" (Horan, 1971 quoted in Mutz, 2002). Moreover, whether interaction occurs in homogeneous or heterogeneous environments can have important consequences for individual attitudes and behavior. Evidence suggests that interactions with in-group members reinforce group-based preferences and harden social identities (Klar, 2014; Paluck, 2010; Scacco and Warren, 2018). Such effects are especially pronounced when group membership is defined by ethnicity (McPherson *et al.*, 2001). Critically, however, most studies on social interaction characterize homogeneity and heterogeneity on the basis of a single dimension, such as ethnicity. We still know little about the effects of interaction when a second dimension of common or competing identity is present. Our study thus focuses on the specific question: How does cross-cutting ethnic and class (relative to homogeneous) interaction affect support for ethnic versus cross-ethnic, programmatic politics?

The challenge with studying the causal effects of cross-cutting interaction is that individuals typically select into their networks and engagements. We address this by conducting a "lab-in-the-field" discussion experiment in Beirut, Lebanon. While social interaction can take many forms, we focus on discussion because it is a fundamental form of political and civic engagement and one that is capable of directly shaping political preferences (Carpini *et al.*, 2004). Moreover, political discussion was particularly relevant in Lebanon at the time of the study. In August 2015, mass protests erupted over the government's failure to manage trash collection. The protests were in part a criticism of the paralysis caused by sectarianism, which is deeply entrenched in Lebanese politics and society.[3] These protests created a window of opportunity for public

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[2]The nature and extent of cross-cutting interaction will still depend on a number of factors, including the degree of residential and workplace integration. Yet, the notion that cross-cutting cleavages enable cross-cutting interaction is consistent with recent evidence that social networks mirror social structure (Eubank, 2019).

[3]We use the terms "ethnic" and "sectarian" interchangeably throughout this article.

discourse over the future of sectarianism and presented an important occasion to examine how discussion in different social environments can influence support for sectarian politics versus potential alternatives.

Against this backdrop, we recruited more than 720 lower and upper socio-economic class Christians, Sunnis, and Shia from the Beirut area to participate in one-time, six-person discussions that varied in their sectarian and class compositions.[4] Specifically, participants were randomly assigned to one of four discussion types: (1) same-sect, same-class, (2) mixed-sect, same-class, (3) same-sect, mixed-class, or (4) mixed-sect, mixed-class. The first arm represents homogeneous (or "reinforcing") discussion and serves as the control. This reflects the fact that, even in societies with cross-cutting cleavages, homophily is still the most common form of social interaction (Brewer, 2000; Habyarimana *et al.*, 2009; McPherson *et al.*, 2001) and thus serves as an important benchmark. While homogeneous interaction could bolster support for ethnic politics, the other arms allow us to investigate whether and how three distinct types of cross-cutting discussion affect political preferences. Specifically, we use the second arm to examine whether within-class discussion with non-coethnics strengthens preferences for cross-ethnic, class-based politics. We use the third arm to investigate whether cross-cutting discussion can achieve the same outcomes by exacerbating intraethnic, class-based divisions. Finally, the fourth arm enables us to investigate the benefits (or limits) of full diversity in social interactions.

We measure the effects of cross-cutting discussion on support for cross-ethnic, programmatic politics using a variety of survey and behavioral measures. Our main behavioral measure is willingness to sign a public petition condemning the role of sectarianism in Lebanese politics and demanding a programmatic alternative. Additionally, to ensure that participants consider the distributive trade-offs of switching support, we employ a novel map exercise to examine how cross-cutting discussion affects the importance of sectarian versus economic considerations in the preferred allocation of future oil revenue. We also use a public goods game to examine whether cross-cutting discussion contributes to preference formation through its effects on cooperation and collective action capacity.

Our findings suggest that mixed-sect, same-class discussion succeeded in shifting support away from ethnic politics and towards a cross-ethnic, programmatic alternative. Participants in mixed-sect, same-class discussions were 10 percentage points more likely to sign the petition relative to those in homogeneous discussions, although this result is not statistically significant at conventional levels and should be regarded as suggestive. We obtain stronger

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[4]This project was designed and implemented in collaboration with the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), an independent, non-sectarian think tank.

evidence that these participants allocated more to poor districts in the map exercise, and did so regardless of the district's predominant sect. This evidence of greater support for cross-ethnic, programmatic politics is further supported by evidence for key mechanisms. We theorize that cross-cutting discussion could shift preferences by facilitating *learning* about economic preferences, shaping social *identity*, exposing participants to social *pressure*, or evoking *emotions*. We find clear evidence that mixed-sect, same-class discussion both enabled learning about shared preferences and alleviated coethnic social pressure to support the sectarian status quo. We also show that, while mixed-sect, same-class discussion did not strengthen cooperation, participants at baseline were already about equally willing to cooperate with cosectarians and non-cosectarians from their class. All in all, our findings support the conclusion that cross-ethnic discussion among individuals of the same economic class can strengthen the foundation for political change.

Conversely, our findings highlight the limits of other forms of cross-cutting interaction. Neither same-sect, mixed-class nor fully mixed discussions shifted political preferences relative to homogeneous discussion. While there is suggestive evidence that same-sect, mixed-class discussion resulted in learning about divergent preferences, social pressure to support the sectarian status quo (and cooperation levels) were also high in these groups, underscoring the difficulties of fostering intraethnic, class-based divisions. And while interaction in fully mixed groups unexpectedly increased social identification with class out-groups, this did not lead to greater support for cross-sectarian, programmatic politics, highlighting the limits to full diversity.

All in all, these findings contribute to research on ethnic and programmatic politics; on cross-cutting cleavages; and on social interaction, discussion, and intergroup contact. This article also has important implications for thinking about how to structure social engagement in ethnically divided societies with a cross-cutting cleavage. We emphasize that this study aimed to shed light on what happens when individuals discuss politics in different social environments and not necessarily to bring about enduring attitude change.[5] Nevertheless, the results can help to inform the work of civil society organizations, political parties, and other actors seeking to mobilize citizens across ethnic lines. We return to these contributions in the conclusion.

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[5]As such, it has much in common with other studies that have used discussion experiments to understand effects on individual attitudes and behavior in lab-like settings, e.g. Klar (2014) and Chang and Peisakhin (2019). This article differs from Chang and Peisakhin (2019) — who also study the effects of inter-sectarian discussion in Lebanon — in that we focus on the effects of discussion across sectarian *and* class divides and on political preferences rather than on cooperation.

Cross-Cutting Discussion and Support for Ethnic Politics

How can cross-cutting, relative to homogeneous, discussion result in less support for ethnic politics and more support for cross-ethnic, programmatic politics? A vast literature on discussion highlights a number of ways by which it is thought to shape preferences (for a review, see Myers and Mendelberg, 2013). Here we theorize four main mechanisms — learning, identity, pressure, and emotions — by which cross-cutting discussion could shift preferences. We first describe these mechanisms with reference to two types of cross-cutting discussion — discussion among non-coethnics of the same class and among coethnics from different classes — because they yield the clearest intuitions. We conclude the section by considering what might happen in fully cross-cutting discussion.

Before continuing, it is important to define what we mean by support for "ethnic politics" versus "cross-ethnic, programmatic politics." We conceptualize the former as a preference for politics that follows an ethnic logic, broadly speaking.[6] This includes a preference for parties and candidates that make commitments primarily to their ethnic groups (Huber, 2017), and to the formation of political coalitions of coethnics. It can also entail support for policies and practices of ethnic favoritism in the distribution of government resources. Conversely, support for programmatic politics is a desire for candidates and parties that make commitments on the basis of issues and policy priorities, without consideration for ethnicity. As such, insofar as issue priorities cut across ethnic groups, programmatic politics will be cross-ethnic in nature and foster cross-ethnic coalitions.[7] Voters could support programmatic politics because they care about policies related to taxation and redistribution or about the provision of goods prioritized by their economic group.

Theorizing the Mechanisms

The first mechanism by which cross-cutting discussion could shift support away from ethnic and towards cross-ethnic, programmatic politics is by facilitating *learning about economic preferences*. In societies with cross-cutting ethnic and class cleavages, different ethnic groups have both lower and upper income members. This raises the possibility that non-coethnics of the same class might have more similar economic preferences or priorities than coethnics of different classes. While it is commonly argued that preferences over policies or goods are often more congruent within ethnic groups than across them (e.g., Alesina *et al.*, 1999), evidence for this is mixed (Desmet *et al.*, 2018;

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[6]We prefer a broad definition because, given our empirical context of Lebanon, we are studying support for sectarianism or sectarian power-sharing writ large.

[7]In conceptualizing programmatic or class politics as inherently cross-ethnic, we follow on Huber (2017) and Esteban and Ray (2008), among others.

Habyarimana *et al.*, 2009). Most relevant for our purposes, Lieberman and McClendon (2012) find that there are ethnic differences in preferences but primarily in countries with more economic inequality between ethnic groups (equivalent to societies with reinforcing ethnic and class cleavages), implying fewer differences where average wealth levels among ethnic groups are similar.

Thus, discussion among non-coethnics of the same class could facilitate learning about shared economic preferences while discussion among coethnics from different classes could increase awareness of economic differences. Unlike homogeneous discussion, which affords little opportunity for such learning, cross-cutting discussion could lead individuals to believe that their economic interests and priorities would be better advanced by forging within-class alliances with non-coethnics rather than cross-class alliances with coethnics. All in all, as it is often argued that people support ethnic politics because it delivers material benefits (Chandra, 2004; Huber, 2017), learning about shared or divergent economic preferences could enhance the material reasons for supporting a cross-ethnic, class-based alternative.

Second, cross-cutting discussion could shift preferences away from ethnic politics by *strengthening class or weakening ethnic identity*. A vast body of research in psychology argues that individuals categorize themselves and others into groups and derive social identity from their group memberships (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identity confers psychological benefits like status and self-esteem, and the desire for positive self-image is at the root of in-group favoritism and out-group bias. Such identity-based payoffs can also shape political preferences (Shayo, 2009), including preferences for ethnic parties (Chandra, 2004; Suryanarayan, 2019).

One important way by which social interaction could affect preferences is by restructuring how a person defines in-group and out-group and, consequently, which categories serve as the foundation for their social identity (Dovidio *et al.*, 2006). Critically, cross-cutting interaction could facilitate such re-categorization, increasing the salience of class identity and weakening ethnic identity. Specifically, we expect that interaction among non-coethnics of the same class could strengthen class identity and mitigate ethnic differences, consistent with research on common ingroup identity (Gaetner *et al.*, 1993). Conversely, discussion among coethnics of different classes could also bring class identity to the fore, weakening ethnic identification. This follows from the notion that individuals can resist a common in-group identity (like ethnicity) when another dimension of identity (like class) is both salient and in conflict with a primary identity (Crisp *et al.*, 2006; Gaetner *et al.*, 1993).[8] Thus, while homogeneous interaction could reinforce the dominant (ethnic) identity

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[8]In a rare political science test of this, Klar (2018) shows that having a common gender identity increased gender bias among women with competing partisan identities in the United States.

(Paluck, 2010; Scacco and Warren, 2018), resulting in greater support for ethnic politics, cross-cutting discussion could elevate the identity payoffs associated with class.

A third mechanism by which cross-cutting discussion could influence political preferences is through *social pressure* and its impact on the perceived social costs of supporting ethnic versus cross-ethnic, programmatic politics. Importantly, discussion requires the public expression of one's preferences, which can make individuals feel pressured to conform their opinions to those of others with whom they are interacting (Farrar *et al.*, 2009; Mutz, 2002). There is good reason to believe that homogeneous ethnic discussion creates social pressure to support ethnic politics. This builds upon evidence that coethnics are good at enforcing social norms (Habyarimana *et al.*, 2009; Miguel and Gugerty, 2005), and that fear of coethnic social sanctioning increases public support for policies and positions favored by one's ethnic group (Corstange, 2013; Paler *et al.*, 2018). Thus, interactions among coethnics — perhaps regardless of class — could strengthen support for ethnic politics by reinforcing awareness of the social costs of rejecting it. In contrast, cross-cutting discussion with non-coethnics could increase support for programmatic politics by making fears of coethnic sanctioning for "defection" less salient. It is even possible that mixed ethnic interactions could foster social pressure to reject ethnic politics (Carlson, 2016).

Finally, we consider the possibility that cross-cutting discussion induces *emotional responses*. Research on intergroup contact suggests that positive interactions across social divides can help to foster out-group empathy and reduce intergroup threat and anxiety (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011; Scacco and Warren, 2018). It is possible that emotional responses could also facilitate preference change if they augment the mechanisms described earlier. For instance, increased empathy or reduced anxiety arising from positive interaction with non-coethnics could facilitate learning or the weakening of sectarian identity attachments. While we view emotional responses as potentially contributing more indirectly to preference change, we examine them empirically for completeness with our pre-analysis plan and for consistency with the intergroup contact literature.

In summary, cross-cutting (relative to homogeneous) discussion could shift support away from ethnic and towards cross-ethnic, programmatic politics if it: facilitates learning about shared (divergent) economic preferences among non-coethnics (coethnics); strengthens class identity or weakens class identity; or reduces (increases) social pressure to support ethnic (class) politics, where any of these mechanisms could be augmented by emotions. We emphasize that cross-cutting discussion could shift preferences via one or more, but not necessarily all, of these mechanisms. These mechanisms are important to investigate to help uncover not only whether cross-cutting discussion shifts preferences but also why.

Fully Cross-Cutting Discussion

So far we have discussed mechanisms with respect to two types of cross-cutting discussion: discussion among non-coethnics of the same class and coethnics from different classes. We also consider the effects of discussion that is cross-cutting on both class and ethnic dimensions, meaning that individuals interact with those from both their ethnic and class in-groups and out-groups. This is an important form of interaction to study because diversity in social interactions is often viewed as a normative good. Yet, research cited at the outset highlights that there can be challenges associated with diversity, although we still know little about how different kinds of diversity interact. For instance, it is possible that cross-ethnic, within-class interaction is optimal for increasing support for programmatic politics but that these beneficial effects do not arise from cross-ethnic interaction that also involves class diversity.

We therefore also empirically investigate the effects of fully cross-cutting discussion. At one extreme, it could be that fully cross-cutting interaction is highly divisive, undermining the formation of both ethnic and class alliances. At the other extreme, it could be unifying if it prompts people to converge on another common identity, like national identity. Elevating the salience of national identity could help to mitigate both ethnic and class-based differences, although with uncertain implications for preferences over ethnic versus cross-ethnic, programmatic politics. While exploratory, our overall goal with this empirical analysis is to shed light on whether, on average, fully cross-cutting discussion can also result in relatively more support for cross-ethnic, programmatic politics than homogeneous discussion via the theorized mechanisms.

The Context: Political Crisis in Lebanon

We investigate the effects of reinforcing and cross-cutting discussion in Lebanon in a particularly timely historical moment. In August 2015, mass protests erupted over the government's failure to manage trash collection. As garbage piled high in the streets — a potent visual reminder of the corruption and inefficiency of the sectarian-based political system — Lebanese mobilized across sectarian lines in a political movement (dubbed the "You Stink" movement), demanding a solution to the country's economic and social ills. These protests presented an important window of opportunity for public discourse on the future of sectarianism and the possibilities for political reform.

This is significant because sectarianism is deeply rooted in Lebanese politics and society. Since the French mandate period, Lebanon has been a consociational democracy in which top executive, legislative, judicial, and administrative positions are apportioned on the basis of sect (Salloukh *et al.*,

2015).[9] While Maronite Christians were advantaged by the power-sharing institutions put in place at the time of Lebanon's independence in 1943, a growing Muslim population and regional instability resulted in a civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990.

The 1989 Ta'if Agreement ending the war called in principle for the elimination of sectarianism while at the same time updating it for the post-war context. It solidified, for instance, the practice of reserving the position of president for a Maronite Christian, of prime minister for a Sunni Muslim, and of speaker of parliament for a Shia Muslim. It also shifted power from the executive to the legislature, where seats are divided equally among Christians and Muslims. The institutionalization of politics along sectarian lines also came to be reflected in the organization of Lebanon's political parties. Today, most parties in Lebanon are dominated by one confessional group whose members differ substantially along other social dimensions (Corstange, 2013). Political parties rely on clientelism and the direct distribution of social or welfare goods to maintain political support (Cammett, 2014), resulting in a sub-optimal allocation of resources from the perspective of balanced national development (Salti and Chaaban, 2010).

Importantly, while the sectarian cleavage dominates in Lebanon, there is also a cross-cutting class cleavage. Since the civil war, both Sunni and Shia populations have experienced improvements in economic well-being such that now all three of Lebanon's major sects have comparable within-group wealth distributions (Corstange, 2013). Yet, in a study of how class and sect influence preferences over illiterate voting rights, Corstange (2013) shows that private preferences are consistent with class but that public preferences follow sectarian lines. As Corstange (2013, p. 899) concludes: "Lebanon's sectarian communities are internally heterogeneous in both socio-economic status and policy preferences." This is consistent with our own evidence that policy priorities vary by class in Lebanon (see Appendix H). Moreover, among participants in our study, 50% viewed sect and 38% viewed class as one of their three foremost identities, indicating that both are relatively salient in the Lebanese context. This highlights the importance of investigating the factors that might strengthen not only the private but also the public expression of class-based interests in Lebanon.

While Lebanon's power-sharing institutions are often credited with preserving the peace, the 2015 "You Stink" protests were emblematic of a growing popular frustration with the deficiencies of the status quo. Lebanon routinely ranks in the bottom of indices of service provision and infrastructure

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[9]Lebanon has 18 officially recognized sects. While no official government census has been conducted since 1932, estimates suggest that 27% of the population is Sunni, 27% is Shia, and 21% is Maronite Christian, with the rest of the population belonging to smaller groups (http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/lebanon/religious-sects.htm).

quality.[10] Dissatisfaction over government's poor performance contributed to mass street protests demanding an end to sectarianism during the Arab Spring.[11] There are also notable examples of cross-sectarian, class-based mobilization, as was the case with a 2013 teacher's coalition strike. Critically, in spring 2016 — shortly after the field work for this project completed — a secular and issue-oriented group known as *Beirut Madinati* (Beirut My City) organized to compete in the municipal elections. To the surprise of many, this new party won 35% of the vote against established sectarian parties. These recent developments highlight that there is growing demand among Lebanese for a new brand of non-sectarian, issue-based politics and underscore the importance of examining how reinforcing and cross-cutting interaction shape preferences for political change.

Research Design

To examine the effects of reinforcing versus cross-cutting discussion, we recruited lower and upper socio-economic class Christians, Sunnis, and Shia from the Beirut area and randomly assigned them to six-person, 60-minute discussions that varied in their sectarian and class compositions. Specifically, participants were assigned orthogonally following a 2×2 factorial design to same or mixed-sectarian discussions (where the latter comprised two participants from each sect) and to same or mixed-class discussions (where the latter consisted of three members of each class). This yielded four discussion types: (1) same-sect, same-class, (2) mixed-sect, same-class, (3) same-sect, mixed-class, and (4) mixed-sect, mixed-class, as shown in Table 1. Overall, 30 discussions of each type were organized, resulting in a total of 120 discussions involving 720 participants (of which 713 completed the study). The first arm captures homogeneous discussion (and serves as the control) while the other three arms are variations on cross-cutting discussion. This design enables us to examine whether and how, when discussion occurs, its effects are shaped by social conditions.[12]

We note that our discussion experiment is one of the largest conducted to date, which should help to increase confidence in the results. For instance, in research on the effects of discussion across partisan divides, the experiment in Klar (2014) involved 349 university subjects and lasted 5 minutes on average.

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[10] For instance, according to the World Economic Forum (2017), Lebanon recently ranked 130 of 137 countries in its overall infrastructure quality.

[11] http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/1008/what-is-political-sectarianism.

[12] Precisely because we are interested in the effect of discussion in different social contexts rather than the effect of discussion versus no discussion, we do not have a pure control in which no discussion takes place. Also, given the already complex study design, obtaining the appropriate number and composition of pure control groups would have been prohibitively expensive and complex.

Table 1: Summary of randomization.

		Sectarian discussion	
		Same sect	Mixed sect
		Group 1	**Group 2**
	Same class	Groups = 30	Groups = 30
		$n = 180$	$n = 180$
		Sect comp: 6 Sunni or 6 Christian or 6 Shia	Sect comp: 2 Sunni, 2 Christian, and 2 Shia
Class discussion		Class comp: All poor or all rich	Class comp: All poor or all rich
		Group 3	**Group 4**
	Mixed class	Groups = 30	Groups = 30
		$n = 180$	$n = 180$
		Sect comp: 6 Sunni or 6 Christian or 6 Shia	Sect comp: 2 Sunni, 2 Christian, and 2 Shia
		Class comp: 3 poor and 3 rich	Class comp: 1 poor and 1 rich of each sect

In Chang and Peisakhin (2019), 120 Sunni and Shia participants in 20 groups engaged in cross-sectarian discussions lasting 30 minutes. Our cross-sectarian discussions alone involved 360 individuals in 60 groups.

Recruitment and Randomization

The 120 discussions were organized in five sets of 24 discussions with six discussions of each type per set. A set of discussions was completed about every three weeks between January and April 2016. For each set of discussions, a professional focus group firm recruited 40 individuals of each of the six different "profile types" (i.e. poor or rich Christian, Sunni, or Shia), of which 24 would ultimately participate and 16 would serve as backups.[13] Thus, for the entire study, 1200 individuals were recruited to obtain 720 participants. Recruiters employed screening surveys to identify eligible participants. Once eligibility was confirmed, each recruit was randomly assigned to a discussion group type, blocking on set, sect, and class.[14] Once assigned, all individuals — including backups — were scheduled for one session in accordance with the target numbers needed for every session. Individuals received no advance information about their discussion type. Upon arrival at the session, if more recruits of each profile type arrived than were

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[13]See Appendix A for details on how we determined whether participants belonged to lower or upper economic classes.

[14]Where possible we also blocked on recruiter and neighborhood. Additionally, to minimize the possible interference of other identity cleavages, all discussion groups were same-sex; three sets of discussions were conducted with only men and two with only women.

needed, participants were randomly selected to ensure that those who actually took part in the discussion were a random draw of those assigned.[15] All individuals received a show-up fee, regardless of whether they participated. Table 2 provides an example of the randomization for one set of 24 discussions.

We note that recruited individuals were not a random sample of the population. The firm primarily used its networks of community members in the greater Beirut area to identify potential participants.[16] While this recruiting approach does not affect the internal validity of our experimental results, it might raise questions about how our participants differ from the population. To shed light on this, we implemented a nationally representative survey with 2,495 respondents just prior to the experiment that allows us to compare our participants to the population of the Beirut area and to Lebanon as a whole (see Appendix D). By construction, our participants were more likely to be male and were wealthier than the average resident of Beirut. The sample is also slightly younger and better connected to sectarian elites but otherwise the characteristics of the sample are not very different from that of the population.

The Discussion Session

The discussions took place in sessions that lasted about 60 minutes and used the recent protests as a springboard for discussing participants' hopes and concerns regarding both economic conditions and sectarianism. At the start of each discussion, the moderator used the following script to introduce the sessions:

> *We are meeting today to discuss the recent developments in the country, mainly the protests that recently began in Lebanon. Many persons consider that these protests may present an important moment to reflect about the future of this country regardless of their outcome. We have invited you here today to engage in a discussion with members from [SAME/DIFFERENT] sectarian groups and [SAME/DIFFERENT] economic classes so that you can share with each other your thoughts and feelings about your*

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[15]This procedure was not implemented exactly as planned, which raises concerns about potential selection into participation. We discuss this at length in Appendix A and provide supporting information and balance tests in Appendix B that suggest this deviation from the protocol is not a major cause for concern.

[16]It would have been prohibitively difficult to obtain our required targets through random sampling; our piloting suggested that a relatively small proportion of those approached through random sampling would meet our sectarian and economic criteria and would be willing or able to participate. For examples of related studies that also do not employ random samples, see Klar (2014) and Dunning and Harrison (2010).

Table 2: Individual profiles by group type.

Group type 1: Same sect, same class						Group type 2: Mixed sect, same class					
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
P. Sun.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*	R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Sun.
P. Sun.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*	R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Sun.
P. Sun.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.
P. Sun.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.
P. Sun.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.
P. Sun.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.

Group type 3: Same sect, mixed class						Group type 4: Mixed sect, mixed class					
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
P. Sun.	*P. Sun.*	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*	*P. Sun.*
P. Sun.	*P. Sun.*	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Sun.
P. Sun.	*P. Sun.*	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.	P. Shi.
R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.
R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.	P. Chr.
R. Sun.	R. Sun.	R. Shi.	R. Shi.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.	R. Chr.

Note: The table illustrates randomization in one set of 24 discussions involving 144 participants. For each set of discussions, 24 participants (and 16 backups, not shown) were block randomly assigned by profile type (i.e. poor or rich Christian, Sunni, or Shia) to one of four discussion types. The italicized text illustrates the randomization with respect to poor Sunni participants.

economic and political hopes and concerns. Some of what we discuss today could be sensitive and at times people might disagree — that is ok. We just ask that you engage with one another with honesty and respect...

Participants were then asked to introduce themselves and offer basic personal information (e.g., on their jobs or neighborhoods) that would have helped to reveal their profiles.

After introductions, participants engaged in a moderated, structured discussion that followed the same format for all groups (see Appendix E for details). The discussions started by eliciting reactions to the protests and then transitioned into an exchange on economic concerns and political issues. The session concluded with a discussion of what changes, if any, participants wanted to make to the sectarian political system. We piloted the format extensively and followed existing best practices on how to encourage constructive exchange (Herzig and Chasin, 2006). Nevertheless, we intentionally did not include a collaborative exercise — as is common in intergroup dialogue and positive contact interventions — so that the experience would better resemble the realities of everyday political discussion and allow for differences to emerge (which was especially important for same-sect, mixed-class discussions).

We decided to reveal discussion type at the outset for three main reasons. First, sect and class are not necessarily visibly apparent in the Lebanese context. Thus, participants might have only inferred their group type with substantial noise, requiring a significantly larger study for statistical power. Second, our piloting suggested that discussing the protests already made both identities salient; the introductory script ensures that identities are salient for all discussion group types. This is important given that our interest is in understanding the effects of interaction rather than just identity primes. Third, research in psychology suggests that there are benefits to making social categories salient in inter-group contact situations insofar as cross-cutting identities can only shape bias when both are important and relevant in a given context (Brewer, 2000; Deschamps and Doise, 1978; Urban and Miller, 1998). We underscore that, by revealing group type at the outset, we are examining not whether social interaction makes these cleavages salient but rather whether, conditional on both sect and class being salient, social interaction shapes preferences and behavior.[17]

We took steps to ensure that study results are not an artefact of experimenter or moderator demand effects. All 120 sessions were led by one of two moderators whose role was to implement the discussion guide, help participants

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[17]We also note that the findings from a separate survey experiment conducted by the authors (pre-registered at http://egap.org/registration/1984) show that simply priming sectarian and class identities (in the absence of interaction) had no effect on political preferences (results available upon request).

clarify their statements if necessary, and ensure that all participants had an opportunity to talk. The moderators were highly experienced employees of a professional focus group firm. They took care not to reveal their sectarian affiliations and displayed no outward signs of religiosity in their names, language, or dress. Neither moderators (nor subjects) were informed about the hypotheses of the study in advance. Additionally, for each set of discussions, both moderators implemented all four discussion group types, allowing us to use moderator fixed effects to control for differences in abilities. Finally, to minimize the possibility that results could be driven by moderator learning or fatigue over time, the order of discussion types was generally varied within each block of 24 discussions so that the sequence with which discussion types were implemented varied throughout the sets.

We also sought to minimize demand effects through our approach to data collection, namely, by using self-administered surveys and costly behavioral measures for all outcomes, as elaborated below. Importantly, we did *not* seek to eliminate social desirability bias in the discussion itself, however. As discussed in our theory section, social forces likely had a substantial influence on what people said, reflecting the fact that individuals often "perform" differently in different social settings. Indeed, this was a possibility we sought to study rather than eliminate.

Data and Measures

Data for this study comes from multiple surveys and behavioral measures.[18] Our analysis draws upon data from four separate surveys. The first was the screening survey conducted by recruiters approximately two weeks before a block of discussions. Second, participants completed a self-administered survey before the discussion that provides data for balance checks and controls. Third, we conducted a self-administered survey immediately following the discussion to obtain mechanism results. Finally, after every discussion the moderator also completed a survey to provide their impressions of the session. Question wordings for all survey measures can be found in Appendix F while Appendix G presents descriptive statistics. We emphasize that all surveys completed by participants (including the map exercise described below) were self-administered and sealed in envelopes before submission to reinforce response confidentiality.[19] This builds upon evidence that self-administered

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[18]We also transcribed eight discussions from different treatment arms in order to obtain more qualitative insights. We prefer to use these for qualitative purposes rather than to code them for quantitative analysis because of the challenges of using discourse to code outcomes like learning and social identification. For examples of these transcripts, see Appendix N.

[19]Adult illiteracy rates in Lebanon are relatively low (Corstange, 2013) and inability to read or write was not an obstacle for any of our participants.

surveys alleviate social desirability bias and other demand effects (Tourangeau and Yan, 2007).

We capture our main outcome of interest — support for sectarian versus cross-sectarian, programmatic politics — using two measures rooted in news headlines at the time of the study. Our main behavioral measure is willingness to sign a petition condemning the role of sectarianism in Lebanese politics and demanding a programmatic alternative. The petition, sponsored by LCPS, embodied many of the issues that emerged from the protests by denouncing the sectarian status quo; calling for electoral reforms to reduce the influence of sectarian parties; and demanding more policy-making on the basis of economic and programmatic priorities. All participants were invited to sign at the end of the discussion session but were informed that signing was purely voluntary. While participants made the decision about whether to sign in private in the sessions (to reinforce its voluntary nature and mitigate against moderator effects), they were also informed that the petitions would be collected by LCPS and shared with their sectarian leaders (and communities).[20] Signing the petition thus constituted a public political action and one that was potentially socially costly. Indeed, Paler *et al.* (2018) provide evidence for these social costs in a related experiment in which Lebanese citizens were randomly assigned to a public condition where those who wanted to sign had to provide their names or to a private condition where they did not. The public version of the petition resulted in 20 percentage points less signing on average due in large part to fear of social sanctioning by cosectarians. Importantly, the present study employs the public version of the petition and as such we consider it a behaviorally costly measure.

One potential concern with the petition is that it does not explicitly capture the distributive considerations at the heart of support for sectarian politics. We address this by employing a novel map exercise embedded in the post-treatment survey. In 2010, oil and gas reserves were discovered off the coast of Lebanon, raising concerns that any revenues would be divided by confession rather than budgeted on the basis of economic need or policy priorities. To measure the effect of cross-cutting discussion on preferences over whether oil revenue be allocated on the basis of sectarian or economic considerations, all participants were given a map of Lebanon with each district labeled by its predominant sect and level of development. Participants were then asked to allocate shares of future revenue to each district.[21] We use this exercise to construct measures that allow us to examine whether cross-cutting discussion affects preferences for sectarian versus economic need-based distributions (see below).

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[20]See Appendix F.1 for the full text of the petition and invitation to sign. In the sessions, participants decided in private and sealed the petition — whether completed or not — in an envelope before submitting it.

[21]For more information on the map exercise, see Appendix F.2.

Finally, we also implemented a public goods game to obtain a behavioral measure of cooperation and collective action capacity. While our focus in this article is on preferences rather than cooperation *per se*, it is possible that our theorized mechanisms contribute to preference change by strengthening cross-ethnic, class-based cooperation or weakening intraethnic, cross-class alliances. To examine this, we implemented the public goods game in two rounds where the first round was played just after the group-type was revealed and provides baseline cooperation levels; the second round was played after the discussion concluded and allows us to examine the effects of the discussion itself (for details on the game, see below and Appendix J.3).

Our hypothesis tests, measures, and estimation strategy were pre-registered with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP). While most of the analysis follows the pre-analysis plan, there are some minor differences, which we report in Appendix M. Our data preparation also closely follows the pre-analysis plan. To account for a small amount of item-level missingness, we conducted 10 rounds of predictive mean-matching imputations. We also aggregated related measures into pre-specified indices (unless otherwise noted) using inverse covariance weighting (Anderson, 2008).

Estimation

We estimate the effect of discussion in different cross-cutting groups against a control using a pre-specified weighted least squares regression of the form:

$$Y_{ijk} = \alpha + \beta_1 G2_{ik} + \beta_2 G3_{ik} + \beta_3 G4_{ik} + X_i'\gamma + \mu_k + \epsilon_{ijk}$$

where Y_{ijk} is the outcome for individual i in discussion session j in randomization block k. $G2$ is an indicator for whether a participant was randomly assigned to group 2 (mixed-sect, same-class); $G3$ to group type 3 (same-sect, mixed-class); or $G4$ to group type 4 (mixed-sect, mixed-class), making the β coefficients the key ones of interest.[22] The regressions also include $X_i'\gamma$, a vector of controls to improve efficiency and correct for any imbalance, and μ_k, which are randomization block fixed effects. ϵ_{ijk} is the individual level error term with errors clustered at the discussion level (see below). We use weights to account for unequal treatment assignment probabilities across blocks (Gerber and Green, 2012).[23] We show in Appendix K that our results are robust to a number of different specifications, including ones that exclude controls and that employ ordinal logistic regression for scale outcomes.

One important question that arises is whether the assumption of *noninterference* — the assumption that no one unit's treatment assignment affects another unit's potential outcomes — holds in our experimental design. The

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[22]For results showing the interaction effect of the mixed-sect and mixed-class treatments, see Appendix J.2.

[23]See Appendix A for more on why we need weights and how they were constructed.

assumption of non-interference is part of the stable unit treatment value assumption (SUTVA) and is often viewed as necessary for unbiased estimation of the average treatment effect (ATE). Yet, assumptions about non-interference could be unrealistic in experiments in which individuals interact with one another, which is precisely the goal of experiments designed to study social interaction. Indeed, the outcomes of social interaction can depend on the specific personalities or characteristics of the people with whom an individual engages, raising concerns about *partial interference* (or interference between units within well-defined groups). We emphasize that concerns about partial interference are not unique to our design and potentially arise in any experiment that involves randomly assigning individuals to group interactions, although few studies address this possibility. Fortunately, recent research has made progress in examining how to obtain unbiased estimates of treatment effects in the presence of interference (Bowers *et al.*, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2007; Sävje *et al.*, 2018).

We address concerns about partial interference in three ways. First, we note that partial interference changes the nature of the estimand but does not necessarily undermine the unbiased detection of causal effects. Importantly, Sävje *et al.* (2018) develop an estimand that generalizes the ATE to settings with interference and show that their estimand produces consistent results in the presence of moderate amounts of arbitrary interference. The key implication is that it is not appropriate to think of experiments with partial interference as estimating the conventional ATE but rather the expected marginal effect of changing the treatment assignment for a single unit holding all other units' treatment assignments fixed. Second, although treatment assignment was at the individual level, we cluster errors at the discussion level to account for dynamics that are particular to the group. Finally, we implement randomization inference as a design-based test of the sharp null of no treatment effect, with results reported in Appendix K. The null hypothesis of no effect means that every unit's outcome would be the same regardless of its treatment assignment, implying no primary or interference effect of the treatment (Fisher, 1935). Conversely, rejecting the sharp null provides evidence for treatment effects, whether primary and/or interference effects.

Main Results on Support for Sectarian Politics

We now present results for the effects of cross-cutting discussion on support for sectarian versus cross-sectarian, programmatic politics. All results are presented as coefficient plots for the three types of cross-cutting discussion with homogeneous discussion as the reference group. Corresponding tables with regression results can be found in Appendix J.

We begin by examining the effects of cross-cutting discussion on support for sectarian versus cross-sectarian politics as captured by our main behavioral
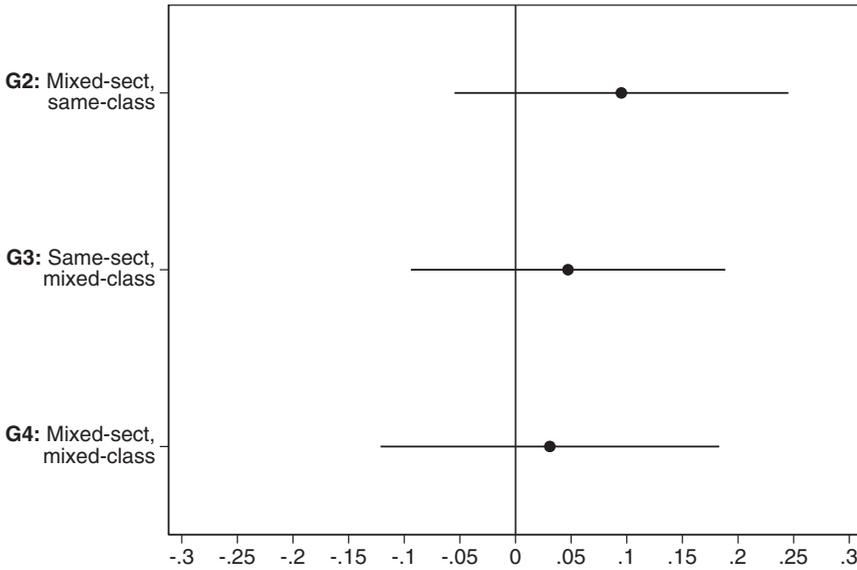
Figure 1: Petition results. Figure reports the effects of the three different types of cross-cutting discussion, with reinforcing discussion as the omitted category. Bars are 95% confidence intervals.

measure: willingness to sign the petition condemning the role of sectarianism in Lebanese politics and demanding a programmatic alternative. In homogeneous discussions, about 29% of participants signed the petition denouncing sectarianism. Figure 1 presents the effects of cross-cutting (relative to homogeneous) discussion. The coefficients on all three types of cross-cutting discussion are positive but they are especially large in magnitude for mixed-sect, same-class discussion. Notably, participants in mixed-sect, same-class discussion were about 10 percentage points more likely to sign the petition than those in homogeneous discussions (95% CI: -0.06 to 0.25).

While the 95% confidence interval includes zero, we view this result as suggestive of an effect for three reasons. First, a 10 percentage point increase is substantively notable insofar as the high social costs of petition-signing make it a difficult outcome to affect in the first place. Second, outcomes for this measure were especially highly correlated within discussions, most likely because the public nature of this action introduced conformity pressure. We are under-powered to detect effects in the presence of such high levels of intra-cluster correlation.[24] However, the randomization inference results reported in Appendix K.2 suggest that we can reject the sharp null of no

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[24]The intra-cluster correlation is $\rho = 0.24$. See Appendix C for our power calculations.

treatment effect with probability $p = 0.049$ (one-tailed test) and $p = 0.099$ (two-tailed). For these reasons, we interpret the petition results as suggesting that mixed-sect, same-class discussion resulted in a greater willingness to undertake costly action to support cross-sectarian, programmatic politics.

The results from the map exercise provide even clearer evidence that mixed-sect, same-class discussion increased support for cross-sectarian politics focused on economic need. While the map exercise offers numerous possible ways of constructing measures, we look at two sets of outcomes. First, as pre-registered, we examine the effects of cross-cutting discussion on allocations to cosectarian districts, non-cosectarian districts, and Beirut, which we include separately as the only district without a predominant sect. Additionally, we examine the effects of cross-cutting discussion on distributions by a district's level of economic development, where we view increased allocations to poorer districts — regardless of predominant sect — as indicative of preferences for allocations based on economic need.

Figure 2A presents results for the effects of cross-cutting discussion on allocations to cosectarian districts, non-cosectarian districts, and Beirut. We
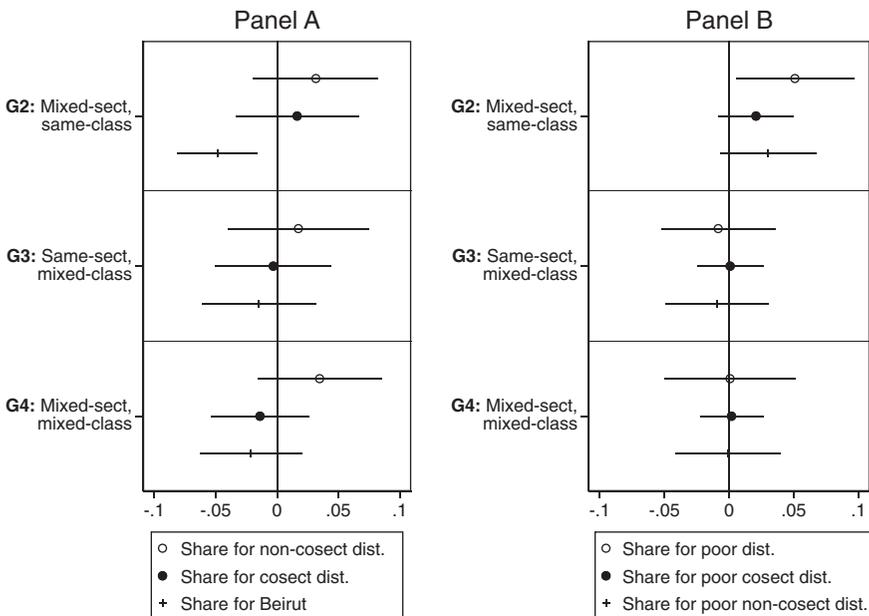
Figure 2: Map exercise results. Figure reports the effects of the three different types of cross-cutting discussion, with reinforcing discussion as the omitted category. Bars are 95 percent confidence intervals.

find that, of the three types of cross-cutting discussion, only mixed-sect, same-class discussion shifted distributive preferences. While mixed-sect, same-class discussion did not impact allocations to cosectarian or non-cosectarian districts in general, it did produce a five percentage point decrease in allocations to Beirut (95%CI: −0.08 to −0.01).

Moreover, the results in Figure 2B show that participants in mixed-sect, same-class discussion allocated a corresponding five percentage points *more* to poor districts overall (95% CI: 0.01–0.10). Furthermore, they did so regardless of the district's predominant sect. Specifically, when the results for poor districts overall are disaggregated, we see that mixed-sect, same-class discussion yielded about 2–3 percentage points higher allocations to both poor cosectarian and poor non-cosectarian districts alike. There is no indication that cross-cutting discussion affected allocations to middle or upper-income districts — whether cosectarian or not — consistent with a greater concern for economic development (see Appendix Table J.1). These results suggest that mixed-sect, same-class discussion caused participants to redistribute resources away from the relatively wealthy capital where they reside and towards poorer districts, without discrimination on the basis of sect. In other words, mixed-sect, same-class (relative to homogeneous) discussion shifted distributive considerations towards a programmatic, need-based logic.

One possible concern is that the effects of cross-cutting discussion on preference change could be dampened by cross-pressure, which occurs when membership in multiple social groups produces contradictory influences on political preferences (Brader *et al.*, 2014; Mutz, 2002). Being cross-pressured can result in greater uncertainty about political preferences, making a shift in support from ethnic to cross-ethnic, programmatic politics less likely. We investigate this by examining the effects of cross-cutting discussion on self-reported uncertainty using a survey question that asked participants whether they felt they "rarely" or "never" know where they stand on issues. Results reported in Appendix Table J.1 (Panel D) provide no evidence that cross-cutting discussion produced greater uncertainty, helping to mitigate concerns that cross-pressure suppressed preference change.

All in all, the main results indicate that mixed-sect, same-class discussion did in fact help to shift support away from ethnic politics and towards a cross-ethnic, programmatic alternative. At the same time, the results highlight that not all types of cross-cutting discussion shifted support. We see little indication that same-sect, mixed-class discussion undermined support for ethnic politics or that mixed-sect discussion yielded effects in the presence of class heterogeneity. To help unpack these results and shed more light on how cross-cutting discussion does (or does not) shape political preferences, we turn next to examining the theorized mechanisms.

Mechanism Results

We investigate the effects of cross-cutting (versus homogeneous) discussion on our four theorized mechanisms: learning, social identity, social pressure, and emotions. To preview our findings, we observe that mixed-sect, same-class discussion produced both greater learning about shared preferences *and* less social pressure to support sectarian politics. The other types of cross-cutting discussion yielded more contradictory effects, highlighting why some forms of cross-cutting discussion might be more effective than others in shifting preferences.

Learning About Shared Economic Preferences

We first examine the effects of cross-cutting discussion on learning about the extent to which economic preferences are shared among non-cosectarians of the same class and among cosectarians of different classes. In Appendix H, we present an analysis of policy priorities and show that there are indeed similarities in preferences among non-cosectarians of the same class and dissimilar priorities among cosectarians of different classes. These descriptive results suggest that there is a foundation for such learning about shared or divergent economic preferences to occur.

We formally test whether learning about shared preferences occurred using five post-treatment survey questions. We create a "learning" index using three questions that capture whether participants felt they "learned something new about the perspectives of others"; "learned anything from the discussion of economic similarities or differences"; and "learned anything from the discussion of similarities or differences on confessional issues." To capture perceptions of shared preferences, we create an "agreement" index using two questions on the extent to which participants perceived shared preferences on economic issues and political reforms. We also create a pre-registered "learning about shared preferences" index that combines all five measures.

The results are presented in Figure 3. The main finding is that mixed-sect, same-class discussion resulted in 0.24 standard deviations more learning about shared preferences than homogeneous discussion (95%CI: 0.02–0.46), according to the index combining the five measures. While mean levels of self-reported learning were high in all four types of discussion, the positive coefficient on the learning index for mixed-sect, same-class discussion provides tentative evidence that participants felt they learned more in these groups.[25] Even more notably, however, the results for the agreement index indicate that

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[25]In homogeneous discussions, mean learning about others' perspectives was 3.34 (1–4 scale).
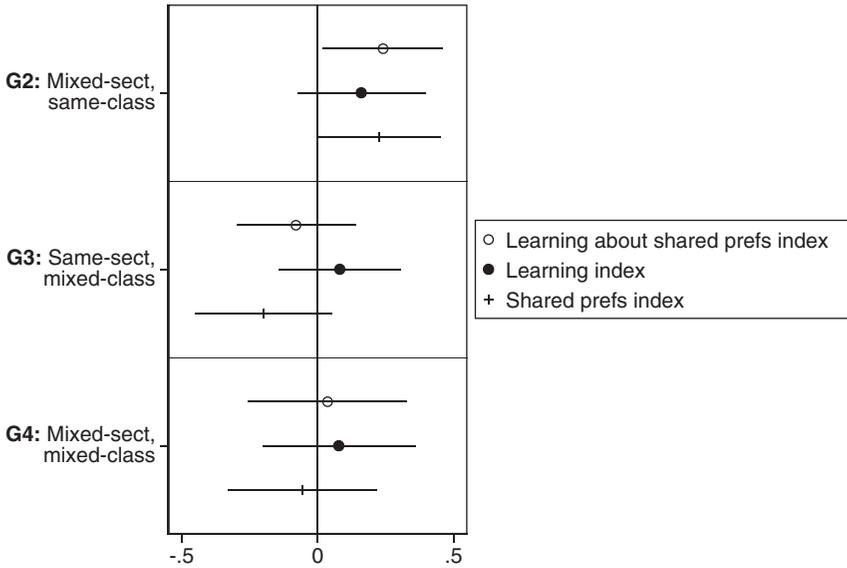
Figure 3: Learning about shared preferences. Figure reports the effects of the three different types of cross-cutting discussion, with reinforcing discussion as the omitted category. Bars are 95% confidence intervals.

mixed-sect, same-class discussion produced a significantly greater sense of shared preferences by about 0.23 standard deviations (95%CI: 0.00 to 0.45).[26]

We also find that same-sect, mixed-class discussion possibly revealed differences in preferences among cosectarians. The results provide suggestive evidence that agreement in these groups was 0.20 standard deviations *lower* than in homogeneous groups (95%CI: −0.45 to 0.05). Nevertheless, revealing such differences in economic preferences appears insufficient to have affected political preferences. Finally, we observe from the final set of results in Figure 3 that mixed-sect, mixed-class discussion did not facilitate learning about shared preferences, again underscoring the importance of shared class.

Overall, these results suggest that mixed-sect, same-class discussion reinforced awareness of class-based similarities across sectarian groups. This also finds expression in the transcripts. In the words of one participant: "Every religious community is made up of people from different social classes, and I would feel closer to someone who's in the same economic situation as me regardless of their religion." And, as stated by another: "We as members of

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[26]Interestingly, this appears to be driven by greater agreement on *political* concerns (see Appendix J), implying that participants in same-class discussions largely agreed on economic issues but that those in mixed-sect, same-class discussions also agreed more on potential political changes.

society come from all confessions and all regions of Lebanon, and still agree on common ideas. You don't have to be from the same confession as me for us to agree. And many people of the same confession don't have the same point of view as me."

Social Identity

We next examine whether cross-cutting discussion weakened sectarian identity or strengthened class identity, either of which could contribute to a shift in preferences away from sectarian and towards cross-sectarian, programmatic politics. We do so using pictorial spatial measures of "self-group overlap" that, to our knowledge, have not yet been used in political science. The measures, developed by Schubert and Otten (2002), capture the extent to which an individual feels close to (identifies with) a particular social group.[27] The measures take a value from 1 to 7 corresponding to pairs of increasingly overlapping circles where the left circle is small, representing the self, and the right circle is large, representing the group (see Appendix F). In the first pair (1 on the scale), the circles are far apart, indicating that a participant does not feel close to (identify with) the designated social group. The circles move closer together in each subsequent pair until they are fully over-lapped in the seventh pair (7 on the scale), indicating that an individual wholly identifies with that group.

We asked each participant to select the circle pair that best reflects how closely they identify with lower and upper income Christians, Sunnis, and Shia. We then construct four measures that capture how closely a participant identifies with: cosectarians from their own class (double in-group); non-cosectarians from their own class (a partial in-group); cosectarians from the other class (a partial in-group); and non-cosectarians from the other class (double out-group). Following on the discussion in our theory section, we focus on whether cross-cutting discussion resulted in greater identification with non-cosectarians of the same class or weaker identification with cosectarians from the other class.

We first note that, in homogeneous discussions, there is meaningful variation in closeness to the different social groups. Participants in these discussions report an average closeness to their double in-group of 4.91, compared to 3.10 for the double out-group. Perhaps more notably, those in homogeneous discussions do feel less close to cosectarians of the opposite class (mean = 3.69) but also feel almost equivalently close to non-cosectarians of the same class (mean = 3.58). This indicates that, even for participants in homogeneous

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[27]In comparison to other commonly used survey measures, these pictorial measures have the advantage of providing a comprehensive sense of an individual's relationship to a particular group in one measure. They also generate less unease among participants—confirmed in our piloting — than more direct questions about feelings towards out-groups.
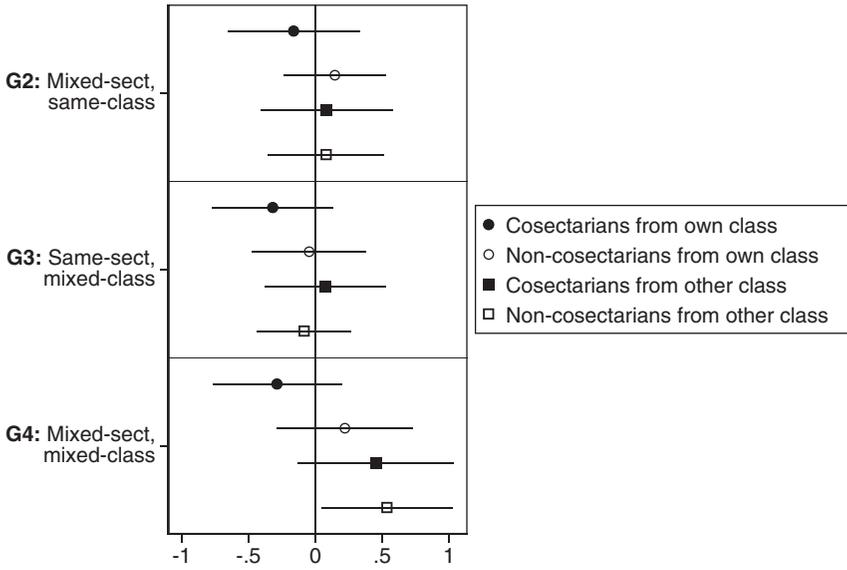
Figure 4: Social identification. Figure reports the effects of the three different types of cross-cutting discussion, with reinforcing discussion as the omitted category. Bar shows 95% confidence intervals.

discussions, class differences weaken sectarian group identification while a common class increases perceived closeness to non-cosectarians. These results raise an important question: If homogeneous interaction already yields such patterns, can cross-cutting discussion shift social identity even further?

The results in Figure 4 suggest three main findings on social identity. First, there is suggestive evidence that all forms of cross-cutting discussion resulted in relatively less identification with cosectarians of the same class. While these results are not significant at conventional levels, they are consistent with the notion that homogeneous discussion strengthens social identification with one's in-group(s). Second, with respect to our main measures of interest, we see no evidence that mixed-sect, same-class or same-sect, mixed-class discussion had any detectable effect on increasing closeness to non-cosectarians of the same class or reducing closeness to cosectarians of another class.

Finally, and surprisingly, mixed-sect, mixed-class discussion increased social identification with the out-class, and especially so for non-cosectarians where we observe a 0.53 unit increase in closeness (95%CI: 0.04 to 1.03).[28]   One

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[28]We obtain similar results using pre-registered spatial-pictorial results that capture the perceived closeness between the groups themselves rather than between the individual and the group. See Appendix F for more on this measure and Appendix J for the results.

likely explanation for this result is that the double out-group was the social group for which there was the greatest potential for improved closeness, as suggested by the descriptive statistics above. Alternatively, it is possible that in very diverse groups, participants sought to identify on the basis of some other common identity — such as Lebanese identity — making both class and sect differences less salient (Deschamps and Doise, 1978). We check the effects of cross-cutting discussion on the strength of Lebanese identity in Appendix Table J.2 (Panel B), finding suggestive evidence that it was higher in all three types of cross-cutting (relative to homogeneous) discussion, but not substantially so in fully-mixed groups.

Importantly, while these findings indicate that fully diverse discussions might increase identification with the double out-group, such a shift should not necessarily translate into greater support for programmatic politics. On one hand, it might make individuals feel closer to non-cosectarians, which could favor support for cross-sectarian politics. On the other hand, cross-class identification could weaken support for programmatic politics that involves class-based political competition. These contradictory effects could help to explain why we do not see mixed-sect, mixed-class discussion shifting preferences away from sectarian and towards a programmatic alternative.

Social Pressure and Social Costs

We next consider whether cross-cutting discussion created social pressure to support (or reject) sectarian politics and, consequently, the perceived social costs of supporting cross-sectarian, class-based politics. We measure fear of social sanctioning using two post-treatment survey questions that inquired into whether participants were afraid of taking action because "it creates enemies" or because "I worry about what people will think of me." We aggregate these measures into a "fear of sanctioning" index and report results in Figure 5.

As can be seen, both mixed-sect, same-class and mixed-sect, mixed-class discussion resulted in substantially less social pressure. In other words, social pressure to support sectarian politics was significantly higher in homogeneous sectarian discussions, regardless of the class composition of the group. This result suggests that social pressure within sectarian groups can undermine changes to political preferences. Thus, even while we found that same-sect, mixed-class discussions facilitated learning about divergent preferences, such learning could be undone by social forces. This underscores the challenges associated with increasing the salience of intraethnic class-based differences.[29]

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[29]These results are also important because they suggest that the higher levels of agreement reported above for mixed-sect, same-class groups cannot be attributed to conformity pressure but rather reflects genuinely shared preferences.
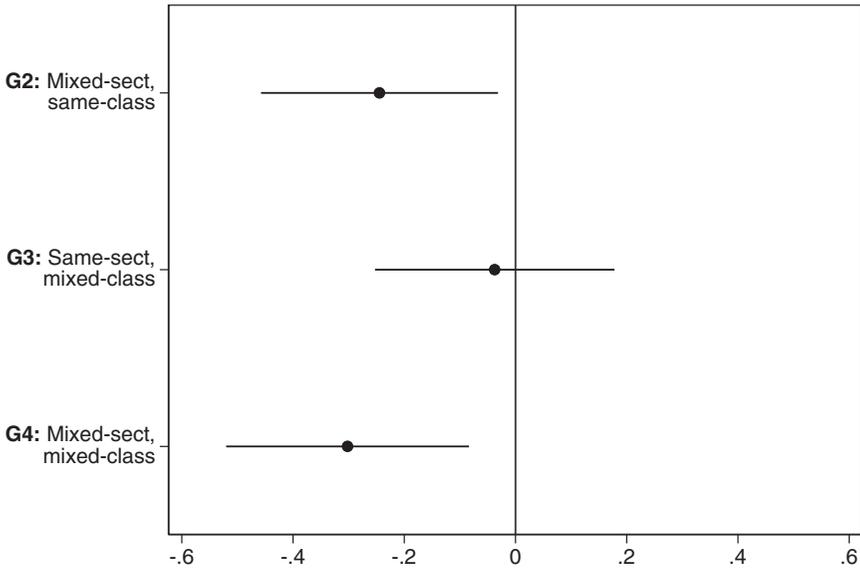
Figure 5: Fear of social sanctioning. Figure reports the effects of the three different types of cross-cutting discussion, with reinforcing discussion as the omitted category. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Emotional Responses

Finally, we examine whether cross-cutting discussion — especially mixed-sect discussion — affected empathy and anxiety. We create an empathy index using two measures from the post-treatment survey that inquired into whether people felt that they could empathize with others in the group and that others empathized with them. We measure anxiety using a single question that asked participants about the extent to which the discussion made them feel anxious. The results presented in Figure 6 are ambiguous. There is suggestive evidence that all three types of cross-cutting discussion resulted in both higher levels of empathy *and* anxiety relative to homogeneous discussion. Yet, these patterns do not suggest that emotional responses are as relevant to explaining the results in mixed-sect, same-class discussions as the other mechanisms investigated above.

In summary, the mechanism results suggest that mixed-sect, same-class discussion shifted preferences away from sectarian politics and towards a cross-sectarian, programmatic alternative by facilitating learning about shared preferences and reducing the salience of cosectarian social pressure to support
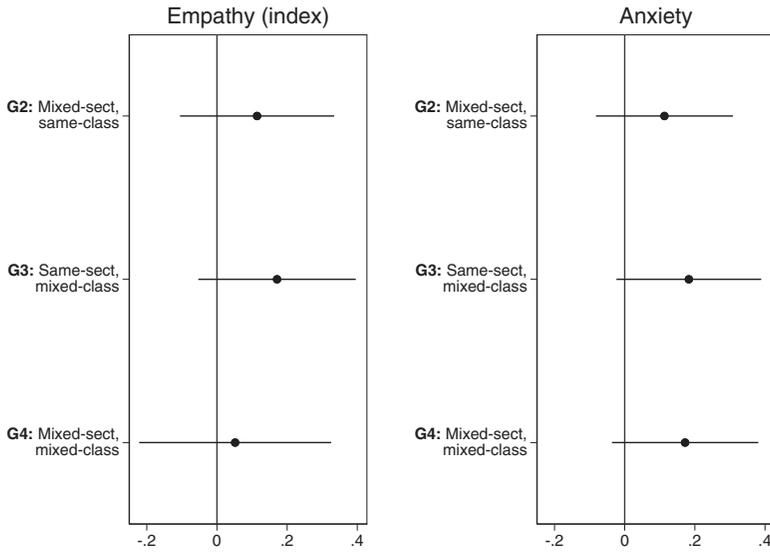
Figure 6: Emotions. Figure reports the effects of the three different types of cross-cutting discussion, with reinforcing discussion as the omitted category. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

the sectarian status quo.[30] Conversely, while same-sect, mixed-class discussion possibly yielded greater learning about *divergent* preferences, social pressure to support sectarian politics remained high. Finally, while fully mixed discussion also reduced social pressure, it did not facilitate learning about shared preferences and increased social identification with non-cosectarians from another class, perhaps undermining preference change. Overall, these results highlight why some forms of cross-cutting discussion might be more effective than others in shifting political preferences away from sectarian politics.

Additional Analysis: The Role of Cooperation

While our main focus is on the effects of cross-cutting discussion on political preferences, we also examine the consequences for cooperation. It is possible that the mechanisms investigated above shape preferences by strengthen-

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[30]These results also support the conclusion that our findings are due to the discussion rather than simply to identity priming since we would not expect the latter to affect mechanisms like learning about shared preferences.

ing interethnic, class-based — or weakening intraethnic, cross-class — cooperation, with important implications for coalition formation and collective action capacity. Strengthening cooperation across ethnic lines could be especially important in light of concerns that non-coethnics are less willing or able to cooperate than coethnics (Berge *et al.*, 2015; Habyarimana *et al.*, 2009).

As described earlier, an important feature of our public goods game is that we implemented one round just after discussion type was revealed and a second round immediately following the discussion, thus providing both baseline and post-treatment levels of cooperation. In both rounds of the game, participants played with 10,000 Lebanese pounds (LBP) and were allowed to contribute any amount in 1,000 LBP increments to the group pot, with contributions recorded in private. Contributions were multiplied by 1.5 and divided equally among all six participants.[31] To minimize consistency bias, participants were not reminded of their contributions in the first round. No results were revealed until the very end of the session when the round paid out was determined by a coin flip and participants were given their payments when they exited.

The main results are summarized in Figure 7, which shows the mean contribution levels in each of the four group types both before and after the discussion.[32] Looking first at the results for round one, the evidence suggests that there is indeed variation in cooperation levels across the four group types. Baseline cooperation levels were highest in same-sect, mixed-class groups and (perhaps unsurprisingly) lowest in fully mixed groups. Moreover, participants in same-sect, same-class and mixed-sect, same-class groups demonstrated similar levels of cooperation, providing little indication of a cosectarian cooperation premium. This is consistent with other studies that find little evidence of coethnic bias in public goods games. (e.g., Berge *et al.*, 2015).

We also find that neither reinforcing nor cross-cutting discussion had any effect on cooperation. Mixed-sect, same-class discussions did not strengthen collective action capacity among non-cosectarians. These results are similar to those provided by Chang and Peisakhin (2019), who also find no indication that cross-sectarian discussion in Lebanon improved cooperation. Similarly, same-sect, mixed-class discussion did not weaken cooperation. If anything, the results in Figure 7A suggest that homogeneous interaction increased cooperation, which could have yielded stronger support for sectarianism in

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[31]The average amount earned from the game was US $7.85. As a reference, hourly minimum wage in Lebanon is about US $3.78.

[32]For additional analysis and corresponding regression results, see Appendix J.3. We note that, despite relatively large effect magnitudes, the differences reported in this section are generally not statistically significant at conventional levels. We thus interpret all public goods game results as suggestive.
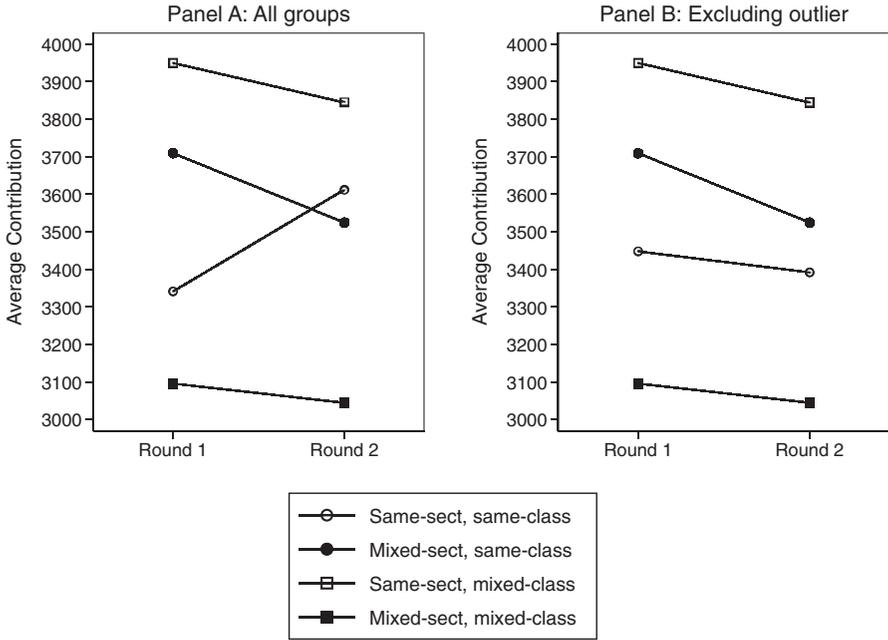
Figure 7: Public goods game results. Figure shows mean contribution levels in round 1 and round 2 of the public goods game for each group type and the change in contributions between rounds. Panel A shows results with all 120 groups, Panel B shows results dropping one outlier homogeneous group.

these groups, akin to the findings in Scacco and Warren (2018). Yet, we are reluctant to put too much weight on this result because the increase was driven exclusively by contributions in one outlier group that coordinated contributions, despite agreed upon rules (see Figure 7B).

We thus draw two conclusions from the public goods game. First, mixed-sect, same-class discussion did not increase support for cross-sectarian, programmatic politics by increasing cooperation. Participants were about equally willing to cooperate with cosectarians and non-cosectarians from their class in the first place. Rather, increasing support for cross-sectarian, programmatic politics required shifting the perceived material benefits and social costs of doing so. Second, same-sect, mixed-class groups demonstrated exceptionally high levels of cooperation at both baseline and endline. While it is difficult to ascertain why, such results could reflect strong norms of cross-class social support or coordination within ethnic groups. Regardless, they underscore why it might be especially hard to reduce support for ethnic politics by fostering intraethnic, class-based divisions, as discussed more below.

Discussion of Results and External Validity

The main results suggest that mixed-sect, same-class discussion resulted in relatively greater support for cross-sectarian, programmatic politics, driven by more learning about shared preferences and less social pressure to support the sectarian status quo. The findings also offer insights into the limitations of other types of cross-cutting discussion. While discussion among cosectarians from different classes possibly produced a greater awareness of divergent interests, social pressure remained high, likely reinforcing the social costs of switching support. Finally, while fully mixed discussion resulted in stronger social identification with class out-groups and less social pressure, these shifts did little to decrease support for sectarian politics.

One important consideration pertains to the extent to which the effects of cross-cutting discussion vary for individuals from different sectarian and class groups. For instance, there is reason to believe that cross-cutting interaction could make traditionally higher status groups — like the wealthy or (in our context) Maronite Christians — feel more threatened and therefore more resistant to change (Myers and Mendelberg, 2013; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011). We conduct an exploratory analysis of heterogeneous treatment effects by sect and class in Appendix L. While we are generally under-powered to detect differences, the results suggest two conclusions. First, mixed-sect, same-class discussion possibly had the most pronounced effect on reducing support for sectarian politics among higher class participants. This suggests that mixed-sect, same-class discussion did *not* result in upper class participants feeling more threatened and, rather, made them the most likely agents for change. This could reflect the fact that the material benefits offered by clientelist ethnic parties matter less to wealthier individuals, making them more open to cross-ethnic, programmatic politics (Weitz-Shapiro, 2012). Second, mixed-sect, same-class discussion perhaps had the biggest impact on learning about shared preferences (and possibly petition signing) for Shia participants. This is notable insofar as Shia historically are poorer and perhaps less aware that there were similarly situated Christians and Sunnis. We encourage readers interested in the full set of heterogeneous effects results to visit Appendix L.[33]

A notable contribution of the mechanism results is that they help to shed light on why shifting support from ethnic to cross-ethnic, programmatic politics is so difficult. Say that individuals derive positive utility from the material (M) and identity benefits (I) associated with a given system but may have to pay a cost (C) if their support for a political system is unpopular within their social context. This implies that people support (e)thnic over (p)rogrammatic politics

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[33]This appendix also provides an analysis of how the sectarian and class heterogeneity of participants' actual social networks conditioned treatment effects.

because $M_e + I_e - C_e > M_p + I_p - C_p$. Importantly, even this simple equation can help to crystallize why shifting preferences is so difficult: small changes in one or more of the variables would be insufficient to reverse the inequality. Our results suggest that mixed-ethnic, same-sect discussion succeeded because it impacted both perceived material benefits *and* social costs such that $M_p > M_e$ and $C_p < C_e$. Conversely, same-sect, mixed-class discussion might have shifted the perceived material benefits of programmatic politics but the social costs of supporting it remained too high to change preferences.

This way of thinking about mechanisms could also help to explain why efforts to encourage preference change have yielded mixed results. For instance, while it is often suggested that improving information access should reduce ethnic voting (Chandra, 2004; Conroy-Krutz, 2012; Posner, 2005), recent work by Adida *et al.* (2017) indicates this is not the case because ethnic identity biases information processing. Consistent with this, we show why cross-cutting discussion might be a particularly powerful way to affect preference change over ethnic politics: because it can affect learning, social identity, and fears of social sanctioning *simultaneously*. Ultimately, our results underscore why, insofar as multiple factors shape preferences for ethnic versus programmatic politics, it is important to think about how they work jointly and how they can be jointly altered.

In finding little evidence that same-sect, mixed-class discussion affected preferences, our results also resonate with other studies that illuminate the challenges of fostering class-based divisions among coethnics. Scholars have long tried to explain the existence of intraethnic, cross-class alliances that do not seem to be in the material interest of the poor. Existing explanations highlight the importance of preserving the social status of the ethnic group (Suryanarayan, 2019) or the ability of rich coethnics to use their wealth to compensate poor coethnics for participating in ethnic conflict (Esteban and Ray, 2008). Our results, which show both exceptionally high levels of cooperation (and strong social pressure) in same-sect, mixed-class groups, support such arguments.

Overall, while our results are striking, it is important to consider the extent to which they might generalize beyond our sample and empirical context. We note that one advantage of our focus on mechanisms is that it provides structure for thinking about how the effects of cross-cutting interaction might travel. Critically, our approach suggests that, for any individual in any particular context, it is important to consider whether there is scope for cross-cutting interaction to facilitate learning about shared preferences, alter social identification, or shift social costs. It could be, for instance, that individuals living in more rural areas or segregated neighborhoods are more ethnically biased, making these mechanisms harder to move.

Our approach also helps to underscore why Lebanon might in fact be a hard case in which to observe effects of cross-cutting discussion. As in

other consociational democracies such Iraq and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lebanon's power-sharing arrangements are viewed by many as critical to preserving peace. This implies that Lebanese could obtain high identity benefits from their sectarian attachments or anticipate high social costs for supporting programmatic politics, whereas individuals in countries such as India and Uganda with emergent social norms against ethnic politics might feel less constrained.[34] In this way, cross-cutting discussion could have even bigger effects beyond the Lebanon case. All in all, while questions of external validity can only be answered through more empirical testing, we hope this study provides a foundation and motivation for more investigation into how these findings might vary in different contexts.

Conclusion

It has long been observed that ethnic divisions are less severe in societies in which other social cleavages cut across rather than reinforce the ethnic cleavage. This article argues that how *cleavages* at the societal-level translate into *interaction* at the individual-level is critical to understanding the formation of political preferences. We present some of the first evidence as to how cross-cutting social interaction can affect support for ethnic versus cross-ethnic, programmatic politics. We show that cross-sectarian, within-class discussion in Lebanon resulted in less support for sectarian politics by facilitating learning about shared preferences and reducing social pressure. We also provide evidence as to the limits of other types of cross-cutting discussion, shedding light, for instance, on why same-sect interaction among members of different economic classes fails to drive a wedge among cosectarians. All in all, the results presented here highlight both the possibilities and challenges offered by cross-cutting discussion for the emergence of interethnic class-based alliances and intraethnic class-based antagonisms.

In doing so, this article speaks to two enduring and related puzzles in political science: Why do cross-cutting cleavages become salient in some contexts but not others? And, why does class seem to have such little influence on political behavior, especially relative to ethnicity (Huber, 2017)? Existing answers to these questions often focus on how cleavage structures at the societal level shape electoral competition and identity salience. For instance, Huber (2017) argues that the emergence of ethnic or class politics depends on the size of the ethnic majority relative to the number of nonrich voters, which determines whether an ethnic or class party can offer more material benefits to voters. While social structure and individual material benefits are

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[34]https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/03/indias-top-court-bans-religion-and-caste-from-election-campaigns.

undeniably important, this approach downplays how a lack of information (Casey, 2015; Chandra, 2004), psychic attachments to ethnic parties (Chandra, 2004; Horowitz, 2000), or social pressure (Corstange, 2013; Paler *et al.*, 2018) contribute to support for ethnic politics over possible alternatives. Acknowledging these other factors underscores the importance of thinking about what shapes them, and social interaction can be a vital element.

While political science research focuses on how cross-cutting cleavages affect political behavior via electoral competition, research in psychology emphasizes the impact of cross-cutting cleavages on social categorization and identity (Deschamps and Doise, 1978; Hewstone *et al.*, 1993; Urban and Miller, 1998). While these studies consider the effects of cross-cutting interaction on prejudice (Dovidio *et al.*, 2006), they do not generally investigate political behavior. This article bridges these literatures by theorizing and testing how cross-cutting social interaction influences the political preferences and behavior of individuals. In doing so, this article also has important implications for understanding the consequences of social interaction in ethnically homogeneous or heterogeneous networks, neighborhoods, or intergroup contact settings. Recent studies on interactions in ethnically homogeneous or heterogenous settings do not generally consider how outcomes might vary when a second dimension of identity or interest is involved (see e.g. Larson and Lewis, 2017; Scacco and Warren, 2018). In one seminal exception, Varshney (2002) argues that strong interethnic associations — built upon cross-cutting interests — mitigated Hindu–Muslim conflict in India. Building on such insights, our article provides some of the first experimental evidence that ethnically heterogeneous interaction can shape political preferences *when there exists a second dimension of common interest or identity.*

This result has notable implications for thinking about how to structure public discourse and social interaction in ethnically divided societies with a cross-cutting class cleavage. We emphasize that this study aimed to shed light on what happens when individuals discuss politics in different social environments, not to bring about enduring attitude change. Nevertheless, our findings can inform the work of political parties, trade unions, and civil society organizations (like our study partner) seeking to bring citizens together and mobilize them across ethnic lines. In demonstrating the potential benefits of social interaction that leverages a second dimension of common interest or identity, this study could in fact be relevant to the many organizations encouraging dialogues across numerous different social divides, including those related to gender and partisanship. While important questions remain — for instance, on the effects of cross-cutting interaction involving other social identities, modes of interaction other than discussion, interactions that are repeated instead of one-off, or interactions with members of one's social network rather than with strangers — this article underscores the importance of deepening understanding of the consequences of cross-cutting

interaction for political and social behavior and, ultimately, for political change.

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