Elephants, tigers and safety in post-conflict Sri Lanka

Dinuk S. Jayasuriya and John Gibson

Abstract

Civilian suffering from civil war extends well after the ceasefire. Reliable ways to measure perceived safety are needed in post-conflict settings, since the extent to which safety improves may be crucial in maintaining the peace. Yet obtaining truthful reports from respondents in these settings is unlikely. Individuals traumatised by conflict may be reticent to reveal opinions that could expose them to sanction from either the authorities or their peers. List experiments, where respondents are given a list of statements and, without revealing particular answers, count how many listed items are true, can yield sensitive information. This paper uses list experiments to study perceived safety among civilians in areas where fighting was most intense during the recently-concluded 25-year civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the government of Sri Lanka. The results show substantial differences in reported safety, depending on whether they were elicited through direct questions or indirectly through the list experiment. Biased answers to direct questions about safety could alter conclusions about which ethnic and gender groups are most fearful. Qualitative interviews reveal some unexpected sources of fear.

Keywords: Conflict, Item-count technique, List experiment, Safety, Sri Lanka, Tamil

JEL: D74, O12
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1. Introduction

When the guns fall silent after a sustained period of civil conflict, it might be expected that safety would improve for both the affected civilians and the combatants. Yet the limited literature on safety in post-conflict environments suggests that civilian suffering caused by civil war extends well beyond the period of active warfare (Ghobarah, Huth & Russett, 2003). Indeed, in a review of civil wars, Hoeffler and Reynal-Querol (2003) find post-war fatalities and casualties to be about as high as during the war. For example, high rates of danger continued after war ended in Guatemala, with ongoing fatalities at about the same rate as during the war (Prophette et al., 2002).

This persistence of insecurity has many causes. First, when one group is vanquished and left under the control of another group, the winning group may want revenge (Hamber and Wilson, 2002). Violence also may be perpetrated by militia with enhanced access to weapons left over from the war (Muggah, 2004). Moreover, the breakdown of social norms during a period of conflict may lead to subsequent increases in homicide and other violence (Ghobarah, Huth & Russett, 2004). Finally, long-term damage to public health systems and the economy may contribute to ongoing fatalities, whether from infectious diseases (Hoeffler & Reynal-Querol, 2003) or from threats to food security (Spigel, 2004).

Since improved safety in post-conflict settings is not guaranteed, it is important to have reliable ways of measuring and understanding safety perceptions so that agents of conflict resolution and reconstruction can monitor trends and devise appropriate interventions. Yet obtaining truthful reports from respondents in these settings is unlikely. Individuals who have been traumatized by conflict are unlikely to reveal opinions that may expose them to sanctions from either the authorities or their peers. A reticence to truthfully reveal fears (or absence of fears) may especially be likely in the aftermath of civil conflicts where one ethnic group is charged with overseeing the
security and safety of members of another ethnic group. Studies in a range of other settings have shown that directly asking people about sensitive issues, such as racial or religious bias or the acceptability of political violence, may lead to unreliable results (Kane, Craig and Wald, 2004; Weghorst, 2011).

One technique that has proven useful for obtaining sensitive information is the “list experiment” which is also known as the “item-count technique” (ICT). Respondents are given a list of statements and, without revealing particular statements, are asked how many statements on the list are true. By varying the lists from respondent to respondent the researcher can estimate population proportions for the sensitive statements. Recent applications of the ICT include Holbrook and Krosnick (2010) on biased voting reports, Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. (2011) on experience of vote-buying, Karlan and Zinman (2012) on use of loan proceeds and McKenzie and Siegel (2013) on eliciting illegal migration rates. In this paper we add to the literature on post-conflict security by using list experiments to study perceptions of safety among civilians in Sri Lanka.

A 25-year civil war between the Tamil Tigers, or more formally, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the majority Sinhalese government was concluded in 2009 with the military defeat of the Tamil separatist movement. In 2012 we fielded surveys to investigate whether or not individuals in the areas where fighting was most intense currently feel safe from torture, death and/or abduction. Our survey of over 3,000 people includes those currently living in internally displaced person (IDP) camps, those formerly living in IDP camps, and victims of trauma.

The results show substantial differences in perceived safety, depending on whether we elicit these perceptions through direct questions or indirectly through the ICT. Using the ICT, perceived lack of safety is the same for the majority Sinhalese and the minority Tamils: 29 per cent of both groups are revealed to not feel safe now. Yet when asked
directly, only 19 per cent of Tamils and just 4 per cent of Sinhalese respondents in these post-conflict areas reported currently not feeling safe. The under-reporting of current levels of insecurity is also apparent when respondents compared their current feelings of safety with how safe they felt in 2005, a period of relative peace. In other words, using techniques that allow for biased answers to sensitive questions shows that members of both ethnic groups have greater fear than they are willing to reveal with direct questioning.

In order to further explore perceptions of safety and sources of risk, qualitative data were collected from interviews with 40 participants and from four focus groups. Among the main sources of insecurity revealed from these qualitative interviews are alcohol-fueled violence, robberies (some of which led to death), and sexual violence against women (considered torture). Interestingly, the totalitarian nature of the LTTE made some Tamils feel safer in 2005, before the final phase of the war, because alcohol was prohibited and crimes were summarily punished. Another example of an unexpected finding is that risks suppressed during fighting between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government are now becoming more prominent such as increased elephant attacks on villagers. The abandonment of fields during the civil war created large areas of regenerating scrubland, an optimal elephant habitat, so human-elephant conflict is a new source of risk as is alluded to in the title of this paper.

There are at least two reasons why it is important to refine measurement of safety in post-conflict settings. First, the extent to which perceived safety improves is likely to be a key factor in maintaining the peace. According to Collier, Hoeffler and Söderbom (2008), nearly half of all civil wars are due to post-conflict relapses, so it is important that peace-keepers and others charged with post-conflict reconstruction have reliable tools for measuring perceived safety. The second reason is that many countries that host refugees from civil conflicts would like to have better data on safety after the conflict. For example, in the specific context of Sri Lanka, countries such as Australia and
Canada are considering whether it is safe to deport Sri Lankan asylum seekers, and this depends in part on the ongoing risks to civilians.

More broadly, a range of questions on sensitive topics are asked in environments such as the one studied here. In most cases, these are asked directly of respondents with no consideration of the potential bias in the reports. Our results contribute to a growing body of literature that finds direct elicitation of answers on sensitive topics to be potentially unreliable. The current paper adds to the case for using methods like the ICT when investigators fear that respondents may not reveal their true feelings.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a brief review of the literature on safety in post-conflict settings. In Section 3 the context for our empirical research is described, highlighting the key aspects of the civil conflict between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka, and the post-conflict environment. Section 4 describes our surveys and the estimation approaches we use, contrasting direct and indirect ways of obtaining respondents’ feelings about their safety. The main results of the quantitative analyses are reported in Section 5. The discussion of the qualitative findings is in Section 6, while Section 7 contains conclusions and implications.

2. Previous literature of safety in post-conflict environments

The existing literature provides examples of the post-conflict persistence of insecurity. Sources of these ongoing threats to safety include militia with access to weapons left over from the conflict, the breakdown of social norms, and health-related causes. Insecurity during conflict can be due to emotional and physical torture (Steel et al., 2009; Modvig et al., 2000) and abduction (Nowrojee et al., 2005); hence, it is possible that these threats also persist in post-conflict situations. While abduction, torture and death in post-conflict settings are some of the most extreme sources of lack of safety and are documented in the media using “first-hand accounts” and through qualitative
interviews in the literature (Modvig et al., 2000), there appears to be no rigorous quantitative analysis of these sources of a perceived lack of safety in post-conflict environments.

It is believed that violence in post-conflict environments is exacerbated, the more drawn out the conflict (Ghobarah et al., 2004). This claim is pertinent to the current study given the long duration of the Sri Lankan civil war. Moreover, since the literature points to risks in post-conflict environments being comparable to or worse than during the conflict, we hypothesize (H1) that on average, most people will say that they do not feel safe from death, torture and abduction in surveyed post-conflict areas.

2.1 Ethnicity

The particular dangers faced by ethnic populations during civil war have long been established in the literature (Pedersen, 2002). It is also evident that “issues of ethnicity loom large in post-conflict discourse” (Collier, Hoeffler & Soderbom, 2008: 471). Indeed, 60 per cent of ethnic civil wars between 1945 and 2004 continued into low-level violence two years after the end of the war (Johnson, 2010). Despite this literature, we find little research focusing on whether previously marginalised ethnic groups feel safe in post-conflict environments. This is surprising given the prominent post-conflict situations where one ethnic group oversees the security and safety of another ethnic group. Examples include the case of ethnic Chechens under Russian rule after the Chechen war, Hutus under Tutsi rule in Rwanda after the Rwandan genocide of 1994, and even the situation in Iraq where post-Saddam Hussein, the majority Shiites have greater administrative control relative to the previous Sunni dominated leadership.

In settings where one group “loses” a war and is under the control of another group, it is conceivable that the winning group may want to take revenge (Hamber & Wilson, 2002), possibly through torture. Where the winning group is the government, state sponsored torture might be perpetrated in the belief that it may deter resumption in
hostilities. People from the “losing” side could be abducted by the “winning” side for reasons of extortion, physical torture (including rape) or under the guises of national security. Other perpetrators of such crimes could be armed militia who are working with tacit approval from the government.

In the context of post-war Sri Lanka, a majority Sinhalese government has jurisdiction over the minority Tamil population. We therefore hypothesize (H2) that Tamil civilians are more likely than Sinhala civilians to say that they do not feel safe. In addition to this hypothesis about safety in the current environment, we also expect differences by ethnic group in the change over time in perceived safety. In 2005, the areas where our surveys were fielded were at peace under the control of the LTTE (a Tamil dominated group) and in 2012 the entire country was at peace under the government (a Sinhalese dominated group). We hypothesize (H3) that Tamil civilians previously felt safer under the Tamil dominated LTTE than they now do under the Sinhalese-dominated government.

2.2 Displacement and women

In 2011, there were 26 million internally displaced people (IDP) worldwide, with armed conflict the most common cause of displacement (IDMC, 2012). The estimates for Sri Lanka are that 125,000 people remain internally displaced, down from a peak of 800,000 in the most intense stages of the civil war (IDMC, 2012). People living in IDP camps face many risks. Food insecurity is rife and the presence of armed personnel around the camps may increase risks of HIV/AIDS transmission (Spigel, 2004). While there is no literature specifically examining people who recently lived in IDP camps, it not unreasonable to assume that recently released IDPs are more fearful and vulnerable than people who have never been IDPs in post-conflict scenarios.

Furthermore, women are among the most vulnerable groups during war and its aftermath. There have been examples of women being trafficked by UN peacekeepers in
post-conflict Bosnia (Murray, 2003) and women have been beaten and raped in post-conflict areas (Muggah, 2005). But despite the potential vulnerabilities facing women, and especially those who have experience living in IDP camps in post-conflict environments, there has been no quantitative analysis focusing on this issue. We hypothesis (H4) that women are more likely to state they do not feel safe from death, torture and abduction than men. We also assume that people with experience living in IDP camps are more vulnerable and hence hypothesize (H5) that they are more likely to feel unsafe than people who have never lived in IDP camps.

3. Conflict in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is an island with a population of about 22 million people located off the southern tip of India. Approximately 75 per cent are Sinhalese, 15 per cent Tamil and five per cent Muslim. Since Sri Lanka achieved independence in 1948, members of the Tamil minority claimed discrimination at the hands of the Sinhalese majority. This tension culminated in the Sri Lankan civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting for a separate state for the minority Tamils, and the Government of Sri Lanka with a majority of Sinhalese legislators. The most reliable estimates are that at least 70,000 fatalities are attributable to the war (US State Department, 2009).

The civil war began in 1983 and continued intermittently until an internationally brokered ceasefire was declared in 2001. At that stage, the LTTE had been declared a terrorist organization by many governments, in part because of the high profile assassinations it carried out, including of a Sri Lankan president, an Indian prime minister and a Sri Lankan Foreign Minister (of ethnic Tamil origin). Other LTTE tactics included the use of suicide bombers, recruitment of child soldiers, use of civilians as human shields, attacks on civilians and alleged ethnic cleansing.

The first phase of the war ended with a brokered ceasefire, which held between 2002 and 2005. During this time, the predominately Tamil north and large portions of the
east with Tamil populations were under the administration of the LTTE. Following the breakdown of the ceasefire, conflict resumed in 2006 and lasted until 2009, with the greatest danger to civilians in late 2009. According to a thorough compilation of incidents by the US State Department (2009), dangers included shelling by government forces into the (shrinking) no-fire zones,¹ children being forcibly recruited by LTTE press-gangs, unlawful killings by both the government and the LTTE of Tamils seeking to surrender and escape the fighting, and desperate humanitarian conditions caused by food shortages and lack of medical supplies.

Recently, Sri Lanka has received attention from the UN Human Rights Commission with calls for accountability for alleged war crimes in the final phases of the war. This has also cast a spotlight on the current safety of civilians domiciled in key cities caught up in the war. There have been reports of ‘white vans’ and ‘armed militia’ involved in abduction and extortion in the post-conflict areas (Human Rights Watch, 2012) and accusations by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International of torture, abduction and violence (US State Department, 2011). There also has been an influx of refugees, particularly to Australia, claiming discrimination and torture at the hands of the government (Doherty, 2012).

The government counters these claims, citing a biased foreign media and the influence of an organised Tamil Diaspora. Claimed disappearances and abductions are argued to be false and include people that have left Sri Lanka or changed their identity (Defence, 2012). The government also contends that some people are economic refugees who tell foreign governments what they want to hear so as to be granted asylum. While there are sporadic interviews of people who have accused the Sri Lankan government of torture

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¹ A no-fire zone (NFZ) of about 60 square kilometers was established in January 2009 as a civilian safe zone into which the government would not fire weapons. As the army advanced and recaptured LTTE-controlled towns this was restricted to a 20 square kilometer NFZ in February and then to just a three square kilometre NFZ sandwiched between the Nanthi Kadal lagoon and the Indian Ocean by May 2009.
(Doherty, 2012) and those who have recanted their stories (Hodge, 2012), there has been no quantitative or systematic survey that investigates whether Tamil or Sinhalese people in post-conflict areas currently do not feel safe from abduction, torture and death. Our research appears to provide the first rigorous study to investigate perceptions of safety in this post-conflict setting.

4. Data and empirical strategy

In July 2012 the lead author implemented a survey in the four districts of Sri Lanka’s Northern Province and one district of the Eastern Province, where fighting during the civil war was concentrated. The first of these districts, Jaffna, was a stronghold for the LTTE until the late 1990s when the government regained control. Still, the LTTE maintained a significant influence, with Jaffna residents boycotting the 2005 Sri Lankan presidential election at the LTTE’s behest. The second district was Kilinochchi, with Kilinochchi town being the administrative hub of the LTTE from 1998 until their defeat in 2009. The third district was Mullaitivu, which was controlled by the LTTE from 1996 until 2009. Mullaitivu was the site of the heaviest battles during the final stages of the civil war, with over 200,000 people trapped on 3.4 sq kilometres of land (about the size of New York’s Central Park) in 2009.

The final two districts surveyed were Trincomalee, located in Eastern Province, and Vavuniya, pockets of which were under LTTE control during the final stages of the war. While the other three districts selected are predominately Tamil, Vavuniya and Trincomalee also have a large Sinhalese population. Following Fernado et al. (2010), we slightly oversampled areas in these two districts to ensure a sufficiently large number of Sinhalese people were surveyed. In total, these five districts have a population of just over one million, with just over one-half of these living in the Jaffna district.

A four-stage sampling approach was used, where the first stage was selection at the district level, the second stage was at the divisional secretariat (DS) level, the third stage
at the village (GN) level and the final stage at the household level. The first three stages correspond to the country's administrative units. Random sampling was used to select 2 DSs and 19 GNs across the districts of Mullativu and Vavuniya for the purposes of undertaking a pilot survey of 150 people. For the final survey, 95 GNs were randomly sampled from within 20 DSs across the five districts. The five districts have 973 GNs and 39 DSs in total.

In the final stage either 15, 30, 45 or 60 people were selected per GN, depending on whether the GN was small, medium, large or very large. The selected participants were divided into three groups of equal numbers within each GN (either five, ten, 15 or 20) who were interviewed using slightly different questionnaires (for the purposes of the list experiment). For each GN, where sufficiently large, the first household and subsequent households were selected randomly. One adult was interviewed in each surveyed household and where practical, selected randomly. The final survey involved approaching 3588 participants and with a response rate of 80 per cent, 2880 people were eventually surveyed.

The characteristics of the sample are described in Table 1. The average respondent was 43 years old and just over one-half were female. Most respondents were married. In terms of the ethnic breakdown, one-third were Sinhalese, 63 per cent were Tamil, and the remaining five per cent were Muslim or Burgher. The high levels of human development achieved by Sri Lanka are reflected in the almost total absence of uneducated respondents, so there should be no bias due to lack of comprehension of the questions. Almost two-thirds of the respondents were employed and mean per capita monthly income was Rs. 9696, with a median of Rs. 7000, which is double the national poverty line of Rs. 3570 at the time of the survey. These economic variables do not suggest an especially high level of economic insecurity, so responses should refer to personal safety, especially noting that the questions asked explicitly about fear of abduction, death and torture.
The particular experiences of trauma and displacement suffered by the respondents are described in Table 2. Three-fifths of the respondents had been displaced during the civil war, with one-fifth spending less than a year living in IDP camps, and two-fifths living in

Table 1. Demographic and Social Characteristics (n=2880)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage or Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-30</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-49</td>
<td>1245</td>
<td>43.23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-65</td>
<td>746</td>
<td>25.90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;65</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>8.16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td></td>
<td>43.27</td>
<td>14.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1236</td>
<td>42.93%</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1643</td>
<td>57.07%</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic background</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burgher</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.21%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>4.45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinhalese</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>33.07%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>1791</td>
<td>62.27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>7.87%</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2646</td>
<td>92.13%</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.31%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1627</td>
<td>56.49%</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary (Year 7 to year 10)</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary (Year 10 to year 12)</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>10.28%</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teritary</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>1.67%</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>64.93%</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>998</td>
<td>35.07%</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total monthly household income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household members</td>
<td>2874</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The particular experiences of trauma and displacement suffered by the respondents are described in Table 2. Three-fifths of the respondents had been displaced during the civil war, with one-fifth spending less than a year living in IDP camps, and two-fifths living in
these camps for longer (an average of two years). The respondents were also asked about six types of trauma. Understanding the sensitivity of these questions, for each dimension of trauma we asked how many of four different activities apply to their particular situation. To illustrate for the victimization dimension, we asked the respondent to rate from 0 to 4 how many of the following apply to their household: was a household member killed; was a household member injured; was a household member tortured; and, was a household member abducted? This approach allows respondents to mask which specific traumatic event(s) applies to their household while presenting an overall score from 0 to 4 for each dimension. An aggregate score for ‘trauma’ is calculated by adding up scores for each dimension. It appeared that suffering was concentrated most on the dimensions of physical welfare, ambient experiences and detrimental economic impacts. While forced participation and victimization were the least commonly experienced forms of trauma, many respondents had first-hand experience witnessing violence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>No. of</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time in IDP Camps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never*</td>
<td>1240</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 to 1 year</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year to 2 years</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 2 years</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Time in IDP Camps (years)</td>
<td>2866</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic Events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimization (score 0-4)</td>
<td>2874</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced participation (score 0-4)</td>
<td>2871</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambient experiences (score 0-4)</td>
<td>2868</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical welfare (score 0-4)</td>
<td>2869</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnessing violence (score 0-4)</td>
<td>2864</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detrimental economic impact (score 0-4)</td>
<td>2872</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Trauma Score (0-4)</td>
<td>2878</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Includes 103 people who were displaced but never lived in an IDP camp.
In order to elicit perceptions of current safety, and the change in safety since before the second phase of the civil war (since 2005) a series of questions were asked of the three groups formed randomly within each GN. The interview teams were of mixed ethnicity and gender, which enabled female interviewers to be assigned to female respondents, Tamil interviewers to Tamil respondents and so forth. This design was adopted to minimize discomfort for participants and, it was hoped, to yield the most reliable data. The questionnaire was translated into Sinhalese and Tamil, back-translated and underwent specialist review.

For key parts of the survey, the respondent received a copy of each question and was asked to count how many statements were true, thus concealing which particular statement(s) related to them. For the first (control) group, people were asked how many of three non-sensitive statements were true. With respect to treatment group A, the additional sensitive statement was phrased in terms of feeling safe now or feeling safer now compared to before the resumption of the war. For treatment group B, the additional sensitive statement was phrased in terms of not feeling safe now or feeling safer before the war resumed compared to now. To illustrate, for one question in treatment group A, the sensitive statement was “I feel safe from abduction, death and torture now”, while the three non-sensitive statements were identical to those for the corresponding question in the control group. In treatment group B, the same three non-sensitive statements were listed while the sensitive item was changed to “I do not feel safe from abduction, death and torture now”. The average difference between the count of true statements for the question in treatment A and the count for the corresponding question in the control group reveals the percentage of people who feel they are safe now. A similar difference between the average for the corresponding question in treatment B and the average for the control group reveals the percentage of people who do not feel safe now.
We also follow Imai (2011) and undertake multivariate analysis to show the relationship between variables of interest and the dependent variable from the item-count. As such, we estimate the following ordered logit regression:

\[ Y_i = X_i^T \gamma + T_i \delta + \epsilon_i \]

where \( Y_i \) denotes the response given by individual ‘i’ to an item-count question. The possible number of responses are 0 to 3 for the control group and 0 to 4 for group ‘n’ (where n is either ‘A’ or ‘B’). \( X_i^T \) is a vector of regressors and \( T_i \) is a dummy variable which equals 1 if the person is in the treatment group and 0 if the person is in the control group. \( \epsilon_i \) is the heteroscedastic consistent error term and \( \delta \) is the coefficient of interest. Given there are four different item-count questions (relating to currently feeling safe, currently not feeling safe, feeling safer in 2012 relative to 2005 and feeling safer in 2005 relative to 2012), four different ICT regressions are performed.

The control variables include age, ethnicity, gender, household monthly income, number of household members, and whether a person has experience living in an IDP camp. As an additional control variable, we also asked survey participants whether they experienced traumatic experiences across dimensions including victimization, forced participation, ambient experiences (e.g., hearing gunshots or seeing war victims), physical welfare, witnessing violence and detrimental economic impact (e.g., loss of housing or personal property).

For comparison purposes, respondents were also directly asked whether they currently felt safe from abduction, death and torture and whether they felt safer from these threats than they did in 2005. Hence, we also estimate the following ordered logit regression equation:

\[ Y_{ip} = X_{ip} \gamma + \epsilon_{i} \]
\[ P \in \{1, 2\} \]

where \( Y_{ip} \) denotes the ordered response (from 1 to 5 with 1 representing very unsafe and 5 representing very safe) given by individual ‘i’ when asked about their current level of safety from death, torture and abduction (when \( P=1 \)) and their current level of safety from death, torture and abduction compared with 2005 (when \( P=2 \)). Hence two regressions are performed. The other variables in the regression are as previously defined. The wording of all the direct questions and those relating to the ICT are reproduced in Appendix 1.

5. Quantitative results

Contrary to the hypothesis (H1) that a majority of people in this post-conflict setting in Sri Lanka would not feel safe from death, torture and abduction, the survey results indicate that most do feel safe. Nevertheless, there is a substantial gap when respondents are asked about safety using direct questioning compared to the results when the ICT is used to obtain this sensitive information (Figure 1). When asked directly, 15 per cent of respondents say they do not feel safe now, but almost twice as many (29 per cent) are revealed to not feel safe now when the count of reported true statements for treatment B is compared with the count of reported true statements for the control group. This gap also occurs when the questions are reversed; when asked directly 56 per cent said they feel safe now, but the ICT reveals just 42 per cent feeling safe now when allowed to report in a format that disguises answers to individual statements (Figure 2). Note, if 29 per cent don’t feel safe and 42 per cent do feel safe, then by the process of elimination, the remaining percentage of people cannot commit to saying they feel safe or unsafe; instead they are safe some of the time and unsafe some of the time. Prior to the pilot survey, these three possibilities were investigated and confirmed in focus group sessions with Tamil and Sinhalese interviewees.
The 14 percentage point gap between the revealed prevalence of not feeling safe and the reported rate under direct questioning is the same as the size of the gap if the questions are reversed, by asking about feeling safe now. Since the questions on feeling safe now are directed to a different sub-sample than the questions on not feeling safe now, this 14 percentage point gap for both cases is not some mechanical effect, whereby the numbers must balance in opposite directions. Instead, what these results indicate is that in this particular post-conflict setting, 14 per cent of the respondents believe that their feelings about current safety (or lack of safety) are sufficiently sensitive that they will not truthfully reveal them to interviewers when asked directly.

To see how this reporting gap differs according to ethnicity, gender and displacement, the results for Tamil and Sinhala respondents, for males and females, and for those never displaced and ever displaced, are also reported in Figures 1 and 2. Under-reporting not feeling safe now when asked directly compared to what is revealed by the ICT is higher for Sinhalese respondents, higher for females, and higher for those never
displaced (Figure 1). Specifically, while both ethnic groups under-report not feeling safe now when asked directly, the Sinhalese under-report it to a far greater extent (a 25 percentage point gap between the direct report and the rate derived from the item-count versus just a ten percentage point gap for the Tamils). Consequently, a survey approach that relies on direct questioning would find evidence that seems consistent with hypothesis H2, that the minority Tamil group is more likely than the majority Sinhala group to state that they do not feel safe in this post-conflict environment. But, in fact, there is no difference between the two ethnic groups in the proportion revealed to feel unsafe. This is found to be 29 per cent of both groups once the ICT is used to deal with the possibility of reticent respondents.

**Figure 2: Percentage currently feeling safe**

![Graph showing percentage feeling safe by group and gender](image)

Similarly, Sinhalese respondents are more likely than Tamils to overstate feeling safe when asked directly, compared with what is revealed by the item-count (Figure 2). Just under three-quarters (74 per cent) of Sinhalese respondents report feeling safe when asked directly but only 56 per cent are revealed to feel this way when they can disguise
their answers to individual statements. The comparable figures for the Tamil respondents are 47 per cent and 36 per cent.

The bias from direct questioning also has a gendered dimension. The underestimation of not feeling safe now is similar for males and females, at 15 and 16 percentage points, respectively. This underestimation comes from 12 per cent of females and 18 per cent of males saying they do not feel safe now when asked directly versus 28 per cent and 33 per cent revealed to not feel safe now when using the ICT. The gender gap in reporting emerges when considering the questions about feeling safe now, used for treatment A. When asked directly, 57 per cent of females say they feel safe now, which is very similar to the 55 per cent of males who say they feel safe now. But using the ICT, just 36 per cent of females are revealed to feel safe now, whereas 51 per cent of males feel safe now.2 Direct questioning overstates the proportion of respondents feeling safe by 21 percentage points for females but by just four percentage points for males.

In contrast to hypothesis H5, that ever-displaced respondents are more likely than the never-displaced to say they do not feel safe, the item-count shows a higher prevalence of not feeling safe for the never-displaced group (36 per cent versus 25 per cent). This difference would not be apparent if direct questions were relied upon, which showed only 13 per cent and 16 per cent not feeling safe. The gap between what the ICT reveals and the response to direct questioning is smaller when the questions are phrased in terms of feeling safe now. 61 per cent of the never-displaced and 52 per cent of the ever-displaced say they feel safe now, compared with 46 per cent and 40 per cent revealed by the ICT. Hence, over-stated safety rates are 15 percentage points for the never-displaced and 12 percentage points for the ever-displaced while understated rates of not feeling safe were 26 and nine percentage points.

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2 Hence there is mixed evidence for the hypothesis H4, that females feel less safe than males. Both the ICT and direct questioning show a higher rate of males not feeling safe now, but the ICT also reveals a lower proportion of females than males feeling safe now.
5.1 Retrospective comparisons

In addition to asking about current feelings of safety, respondents were asked to contrast their feelings with how safe they felt in 2005, which was a period of relative peace when the surveyed areas were under LTTE control. Since this is a retrospective question, rather than coming from genuine longitudinal data where the same people are questioned in both 2005 and 2012, we cannot rule out biases from some filtering of past memories. Nevertheless, the results are striking for showing potential bias in answers to questions about sensitive topics. When asked directly, 60 per cent of respondents claim to feel safer in 2012 than in 2005 but only 33 per cent are revealed to feel safer when using the ICT (Figure 3). Over-reporting feeling safer now is especially apparent for Sinhalese respondents, for females, and for those never-displaced. These groups over-report feeling safer now by 42, 30, and 34 percentage points compared with over-reporting rates of 18, 19, and 19 percentage points for Tamils, males, and ever-displaced respondents.

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3 Stillman et al. (2012) provide an example of the unreliability of retrospective reports on subjective variables when frames of reference change (due to immigration in their example). Since 2005 and 2012 were both periods of peace in Sri Lanka, there is no clear reason why respondents may use different reference scales to evaluate their feelings in the two periods. Nevertheless, it would be a useful innovation for a survey to combine list experiments with longitudinal data.
The gap between the proportion who say they feel safer in 2012 than in 2005 and the proportion revealed to feel safer using the item-count (27 percentage points) is much larger than the gap that occurs when the questions are reversed, by asking about feeling less safe in 2012 than in 2005. The results in Figure 4 show that when asked directly, 15 per cent of respondents say that they feel less safe in 2012 than they did in 2005. The size of the ‘feeling less safe’ group rises to 24 per cent when using the item-count, with this increase due especially to the Sinhalese respondents and those who were never-displaced. But for the Tamils (20 per cent) and the ever-displaced respondents (19 per cent), both the ICT and direct questioning give the same proportion of respondents reporting feeling less safe in 2012 than in 2005.
Even allowing for potentially biased answers to direct questions, the evidence is not consistent with hypothesis H3 that Tamil civilians felt safer under the Tamil-dominated LTTE in 2005 than under the Sinhalese-dominated government in 2012. Only 20 per cent of Tamil respondents report feeling less safe in 2012 than in 2005, regardless of questionnaire design. But either 26 per cent (using the ICT) or 44 per cent (using direct questioning) report feeling safer in 2012 than in 2005. Hence, on balance, Tamil respondents appear to feel safer in 2012 than in 2005, despite now being ruled by a Sinhalese-dominated government.

5.2 Multivariate analysis

The evidence reported in Figures 1 to 4 allows unconditional comparisons between groups defined by ethnicity, gender or displacement status. But it is also interesting to consider conditional comparisons from a multivariate analysis, where these characteristics and others are held constant. The results in Table 3 report on such an
analysis, using the method introduced by Imai (2011) for modeling the responses to the questions using the ICT and using ordered logits to model the responses to the direct questions.\textsuperscript{4}

The gap between results from direct questions about feeling safe and results from the ICT shown in Figures 1 to 4 also appears in the multivariate analysis. When asked directly it appears that, all else the same, older people, women and more highly educated people are significantly more likely to feel safe (Table 3, column (a)). Yet the analysis of the item-counts using the Imai (2011) method in column (b) shows that there is no significant (conditional) effect of age and education on feeling safe, while the effect of being female is opposite to what the direct questioning reveals. Specifically, the ICT reveals that females are significantly less likely to feel safe, all else the same, whereas direct questioning indicated that they felt significantly safer. While there are no other reversals of statistically significant coefficients in the first two columns, data obtained from direct questioning does not show the greater safety felt by people from larger households although it does concur with the item-count results in showing the significantly lower safety felt by Tamils. In contrast to the results for feeling safe now, none of the covariates are significant predictors of not feeling safe now (column (c)).

\textsuperscript{4} A limitation is that we do not consider survey weights in our multivariate analysis. This is driven by the fact that the multivariate analysis method developed by Imai (2011) does not allow for this consideration. However, it is unlikely that use of weights would reverse the key finding that results from the multivariate analysis applying the ICT are substantially different to results based on ordered logit regressions.
Table 3. Conditional perceptions of safety measured using either the item-count technique or direct questioning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>(0.01)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>(0.25)</td>
<td>(0.24)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
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<td>Log(monthly hhold income)</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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<td>-0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
<td>(0.08)</td>
<td>(0.10)</td>
<td>(0.04)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
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<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.70**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.19)</td>
<td>(0.21)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
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<td>(0.26)</td>
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</table>

ICT refers to the item count technique. Direct questions (in Columns 3 and 6) have responses from 0 to 5 where '5' represents the highest perception of safety. Heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors in parenthesis, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Trauma is an aggregated score ranging from 0 to 4 (averaged over six dimensions). If dimensions included separately, they all remain insignificant for regressions using the ICT data.

Coefficients are not marginal effects.
In addition to the significant differences in the coefficients for the models using direct and ICT measures of feeling safe now, there are also coefficient differences when modeling responses to the questions about whether respondents felt safer in 2012 than in 2005. The results in column (d) using direct measures of safety suggest that all else the same, people in richer households are significantly more likely to feel safe now compared to 2005. But when using the ICT measures of change in safety, in column (e), no such effect is apparent and in fact there is a negative (but statistically imprecise) relationship between household income and feeling safer now than in 2005. Conversely, some relationships missed when modeling data from the direct questions become apparent when modeling the ICT results. Specifically, the fact that females, in larger households and experiencing more trauma, are less likely to believe they are safer now compared to 2005, while those with longer stays in IDP camps are more likely to feel safer than before, would be missed if the multivariate modeling relied on using the results from direct questioning. The only significant effect that is not masked when using the results from direct questioning is that Tamils are significantly less likely to feel safe now compared to 2005, irrespective of using the ICT or direct questioning.

6. Qualitative findings

In addition to the quantitative survey, qualitative analysis was undertaken to learn more about the particular sources of fear. A purposive selection of 40 individuals from among those providing the quantitative survey data was made, selecting to ensure sufficient variation (Liamputtong, 2009) in ethnicity, (20 Tamils, 20 Sinhalese), gender (20 male, 20 female), geographic location, and in survey answers about perceptions of safety (20 who stated they felt safe and 20 who stated they felt unsafe from the quantitative survey). Four focus groups were also conducted. Interviews were administered in Tamil or Sinhalese, translated and transcribed. N-Vivo (v.10) was used for thematic analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the qualitative data.
Interviewees revealed reasons for feeling unsafe that are consistent across Tamil and Sinhalese interviewees and throughout different geographic areas. The main sources of current insecurity were robberies, violence against women, especially from men under the influence of alcohol, and elephant attacks, which were all mentioned more frequently than abductions and other sources of risk. Similar risks are prevalent in other post-conflict areas (Handranhan, 2004). The following draws predominately on quotes from the 20 people who responded in the quantitative survey that they felt unsafe from death, torture and abduction.

6.1 Robberies

When asked what scares them, overwhelmingly Tamils complained about robbers. A 54 year-old Tamil woman from Kilinnochi stated: “One of the old women was trapped by the guys who came to buy mango from the particular lady. These guys forcibly robbed all the jewels off the old lady after plastering her mouth and hands.” Many of these robberies in Tamil areas are associated with deaths, with one women stating: “A 60 year old lady was killed and the entire house was robbed by an un-identified gang in the village”, while another women commented, “We are now afraid of these robbers. They have been killing the people when they come for robbery.”

Some Tamils and Sinhalese people stated that robberies were perpetrated by the local gangs. A 21 year-old Tamil man from Kilinochchi revealed: “We found a dead body of a lady in our village and two more dead bodies in the neighboring village. These killings were undertaken by the local robbers when they went to rob the house. The robbers were caught by the villagers and given to the army for action. If they were not caught, the blame might have gone on the army.” One Sinhalese man from Trincomalee stated: “We are threatened by robbers in the village. I am sure these are local people used to come and engage in robberies.” However, unlike in the Tamil areas, the reported instances among the Sinhalese were less pronounced and the robberies were reportedly
less violent. To illustrate a Sinhalese man in Vavuniya disclosed, "We didn’t even hear any robberies in the village. These are some of the common issues in other villages but we are free of robberies and other tortures by the gangs."

6.2 Alcohol-fueled sexual violence

Alcohol-fueled violence by husbands towards wives is increasingly an issue in formerly LTTE controlled areas where alcohol was prohibited during the war. For example, a 36 year old Tamil woman from Kilinochchi noted: “Even my husband tortures me after consuming alcohol. He fights and hit me. I am used to this culture and helpless. There are many other families facing the similar issues. If we complain to the army they will cruelly punish him but I do not like to see that happening.” Another Tamil woman, a 39 year old from Vavuniya, stated: “Alcohol consumption has increased [since the war] in the village among the males. They used to fight with their spouse in the nights and sometimes during the day. A neighbor lady came and asked the police telephone number from me two days ago. She was utterly tortured by her husband and she wanted to complain to the police.”

The influence of alcohol on young men and the consequences for young women is clear from the interviews. One 30 year old woman from Mullativu claimed: “The boys are now addicted to alcohol and smoking habits. They are now purposely sexually torturing the female children. We are really scared about these guys”, while a 38 year old Tamil man from Kilinochchi stated: “It is only the conflict sometimes by the youth in the village. They tend to misbehave with female children. I heard few child pregnancy cases in the district. These are the biggest threats that we have in the village.”

These effects of alcohol are not restricted to Tamil communities. One Sinhalese woman from Vauniya stated: “The father abused the daughter after he consumed alcohol, another one was done by cousin, another one by an old man ... even my husband used to drink alcohol at nights and fight with me. He used to torture and hit me and my children.
He is very normal and calm if he doesn’t consume alcohol. The government should prohibit alcohol consumption to protect the families that are suffered by conflicts.”

6.3 Other violence against women and children

The war left many people without fathers or husbands, making women and children vulnerable to sexual violence. A 42 year-old Tamil male from Kilinochchi noted “There are plenty of children who lost their parents or father during the war and these children are either living at their relative’s places or with their mother. There are plenty of opportunities for these children to be abused.” But even some with fathers are vulnerable. The same man stated: “The female children are in real danger … There were two incidences I heard recently. One eight year old and other twelve year old girl were pregnant. When we asked them about the incident, both of them pointed to their fathers.” Reports of violence were also evident in other districts, with a Tamil man in Mullativu stating “We recently had a fight in a family closer to our house and the husband was severely hitting the children and the wife due to a personal conflict at the house.”

Many of these crimes appear to happen at night. A Tamil mother from Kilinochchi stated: “We are sometimes scared to send our female children in the night because the number of rape cases and child pregnancy has increased [since after the war] in Kilinochchi.” Another male from a different village in the same district claimed: “The female children are facing threats and sexual tortures when they walk along the road in the day and mostly in the night … in order to avoid these bad incidences we always try to do all our works during the day.”

A particularly harrowing account was conveyed by a 51 year old Tamil female in Trincomalee: “A fifteen year old school girl was sexually tortured and murdered by a group of boys. There was another killing of another same age girl after the sexual abuse. Those two girls were kidnapped in a vehicle, sexually tortured and then finally killed.”
The same person also stated: “Six months ago I was admitted at the female hospital in Trinco. I came to know over five sexual abuse cases in the same ward. All of them were female school children.”

Violence against women and children also appears in Sinhalese communities. One 21 year old Sinhalese male from Trincomalee stated “We have tortures for the female children by the males. Even the male children are sometimes tortured by males. So, we are worried and scared to protect our children from this violence.” An 80 year old woman from the same district concurred, stating “there are some silence tortures happening at domestic levels. A child was sexually tortured by her relatives who stayed at their home for few months.”

In both Tamil and Sinhalese communities, local gangs are overwhelmingly blamed for violence, with one Tamil respondent stating: “The torturing of women is done by the local people. The youth in the village has become bad-mannered and engage in minor crimes in the village.” Sinhalese people also blamed criminals wearing nothing but grease and underwear, ‘grease men’, for both robberies and sexual assaults.

6.4 Elephant attacks

An issue that was raised by many Sinhalese respondents was fear due to elephant attacks. One Sinhalese man stated: “These elephants didn’t come into the village during the war time due to shooting noises but they are freely getting into the villages and damaging the paddy and houses. We feel unsafe by these elephants at nights.” Another male from Trincomalee: “The main safety issues of the people is the elephant attacks. These elephants come in groups into the village and damage everything in their route. Many paddy fields, houses and home garden were damaged by these elephants.” Some respondents worried that elephants also target humans: “One farmer was attacked by an elephant in the recent past and hospitalized. The army forces help us to chase these elephants.” Some Tamil people also raised this concern; a 60 year old man from
Mullativu stated “Just a month ago elephants suddenly entered the village and damaged over 20 houses and 4 shops. The elephants mainly targeted houses where the people stored rice, cowpea and seeds. We didn’t have elephants in our village before [the war].”

6.5 Army and ‘white van’ abduction

Most Tamils state they are not scared of the army or police. A 21 year old Tamil male from Kilinochchi stated “We have no problem by army. They just stay in the camp and sometimes move around the village in the night after 9pm. ... My elder brother was rehabilitated and released by the government in the recent past ... Many of these guys are given employment at the army agricultural farm to earn money”. A 34 year old female from the same district but a different village noted: “I have no problem to do my work any time during the day. The army troops are all the times on the road. They never trouble us.”

Some Tamils were scared of the army, but perhaps due to the prior war rather than any current incident. A 30 year old Tamil female from Mullativu stated: “We feel little uncomfortable when we see army forces around us. We have a little fear in our mind.” Another Tamil woman (36 years old) from the same district but different village also stated: “We are not afraid of anyone except few army guys. We have a little fear of army because they killed so many people during the last war.” A 44 year old Tamil male in Kilinochchi stated: “[We are] sometimes [scared] by the army. We have not heard any major incidents by the army but we feel like afraid of them.”

Fears may also reflect actions of individual soldiers rather than the army overall. As one female Tamil respondent in Kilinochchi stated: “One or two army guys were trying to play around with young girls and widow women in the village. We informed the army Brigadier in this regard. He came and sorted out this issue and warned all the army guys who work in the field. The Brigadier had instructed us to cut/injure the person(s) (using a knife) who hangs out there and creating violence. Then it is easy to identify them even
if they escape.”

There were some reports of abductions by people in ‘white vans’. One 47 year old Tamil male based in Kilinochchi revealed “Four guys were kidnaped in a white van (the van didn’t carry any number plate) in Kilinochchi town few months ago. They are still missing,” while a 54 year old Sinhalese woman in Tincomalee stated “About one year ago, a Sinhalese person was kidnaped at Serunuwera junction when he came out from the bank. He was kidnaped by un-identified people in a white van. He is not released yet and no information about him so far.” These kidnappings help fuel claims by members of parliament that the government is complicit in white van abductions, a claim the government denies (Francis, 2012).

6.6 Safety under the LTTE versus under the government

The survey found 20 per cent of Tamils feel less safe in 2012 than in 2005 (using either direct questioning or the ICT). The interviews revealed some unexpected sources for this fall in perceived safety. It appears that the totalitarian nature of the LTTE made some Tamils feel safer under their rule because alcohol was prohibited and crimes were summarily punished. One 21 year old Tamil man from Kilinochchi stated: “There are some incidents between husband and wife. These are small problems created by the men who consume alcohol. We didn’t have such issues before when LTTE was here, [back then] no one can drink and shout on the road. Because the LTTE had such severe punishment schemes for different crimes and violence. A man was shot dead by LTTE in the middle of the road as he had an illegal connection with a lady. This happened in our village in front of villagers. So, we had discipline and smooth civil system during the LTTE period.” Another 38 year old woman from Kilinochchi agreed, stating: “The LTTE punished the person who engaged in any violence on the spot, it created a situation where people were scared to do any crimes. So, the safety for the public was little higher during the LTTE period.”
Conversely, some Tamils felt safer under government control. A person in Kilinochchi revealed: “We had abduction issues during the LTTE period. They used to abduct adults (male and female) on a regular basis. This is now well diminished. We have no fear of the same.” According to a 39 year-old woman from Mullativu: “[Abduction] was freely happening when LTTE were ruling. They abducted many children and adults to their military. The parents are still in search of their children whom they lost during the war. It is now well reduced. I have not heard any abduction, tortures and death in our village.” Likewise, none of the Sinhalese interviewees reported that safety has decreased since 2005, although this contrasts with some of their survey answers. When asked about this, one respondent attributed the discrepancy to the death of her husband during the war.

The qualitative interviews suggest that some current fears are by-products of the fall from power of the LTTE. Under their totalitarian rule, alcohol was prohibited and offences were dealt with by summary justice. Under the current conditions, any fear is largely driven by robbery, alcohol-related and sexual violence against women, and elephant attacks. Some robberies resulted in death, sexual violence is considered torture and there were examples of ‘white van abductions’, linking back into the 29 per cent of people stating they did not feel safe from death, torture and abduction under the ICT. Perhaps because of the gender-specificity of these fears, just 36 per cent of females are revealed by the ICT to feel safe now. While some Tamils may have a general distrust of the army, specific fears were difficult to pin down. Finally, we note that while the interviews yield some reasons why people feel unsafe currently, the possibility that other more sensitive matters that were not divulged cannot be ruled out, notwithstanding our professions of confidentiality. Indeed, the ICT is specifically designed to allow people to mask their true answers, so it would be unsurprising if interviews of people who participated in the quantitative survey still result in concealed answers.
7. Conclusions and implications

When asked directly, people in this post-conflict setting in Sri Lanka over-report feeling safe and under-report feeling not safe. Regardless of whether we compare direct questioning with what the item-count reveals to be the proportion feeling safe, or compare with the proportion revealed to not feel safe, one-seventh of survey respondents show that their feelings about safety (or lack of safety) are sufficiently sensitive that they will not truthfully reveal them to interviewers when asked directly. In the current setting, this reporting bias would interfere with tests of hypotheses about ethnicity and fear, and it is likely that in other settings the bias from direct questioning may also distort inferences. In particular, if the under-statement of fear when direct questions are used in post-conflict settings holds more generally, it implies that peacekeepers and others tasked with conflict-resolution and reconstruction may have a larger job confronting them in any goal of returning the population to some degree of normalcy that is free of fear.

The qualitative interviews reveal that some of the risks that respondents are fearful of, and especially those directed at women, come from unexpected sources. The increased access to alcohol and the reduced likelihood of summary justice in this post-conflict setting create risks that may not have been apparent during the war. Similarly, the risk of human-elephant conflict has emerged because of the end of the fighting. However, we emphasize that we lack longitudinal data and so rely on self-reported recall for how safety now compares with 2005. A task for future research is to consider the combination of longitudinal surveys with list experiments that span both conflict and post-conflict situations, which could help to answer important questions about whether people in post-conflict settings feel safer in peacetime.

In terms of limitations, it is important to note that there are two key assumptions when using the ICT. One assumption is that there is ‘no design effect’ where the answer to a
previous statement in the list (i.e. one of the three non-sensitive statements in treatment A and B) will not influence the answer to the additional sensitive statement. Another assumption is that there are no liars due to 'floor' and 'ceiling' effects. Floor effects occur when a respondent believes all statements to be false but instead of denoting a ‘0’, denotes a ‘1’ to conceal their response to the sensitive statement. Similarly, ceiling effects occur when a respondent believes all four statements (for treatments A and B) to be true but instead of denoting a ‘4’ they denote a ‘3’. While no design effects and no liars have been implicitly or explicitly assumed throughout the previous literature, (Holbrook and Krosnick, 2010; Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2011; Karlan and Zinman, 2012, McKenzie and Siegel 2013), the presence of such effects could bias results.
References


Appendix: Direct elicitation and item count questions

Direct questions

All groups

Question 1. Where on a scale from 1 to 5 are you currently in terms of feeling safe?

____________

(98) Not sure
(99) Refused to say

Question 2. How have your feelings of safety from death, torture, and abduction changed from 2005 until now?

(1) Strong Negative Change
(2) Negative Change
(3) No Change
(4) Positive Change
(5) Strong Positive Change
(98) Not sure
(99) Refused to say

Item-count technique

Group A

Question 1. Please refer to the following and tell me the number of statements that are true. Please don’t tell me which specific statements you believe to be true.

i. Religion is at least as important in my life now as it was in 2005
ii. There are as many opportunities for me to find full-time work now as there was in 2005
iii. I feel safer from abduction, death, and torture now than I did in 2005
iv. At least some children in my district went to school in 2005, just as they do now

Count_____

Question 2. Please refer to the following and tell me the number of statements that are true. Please don’t tell me which specific statements you believe to be true.

i. Religious worship is important to my life now
ii. There are many opportunities for me to find work now
iii. I feel safe from abduction, death, and torture now
iv. Children in my area are generally healthy now
Count____

Group B

Question 1. Please refer to the following and tell me the number of statements that are true. Please don’t tell me which specific statements you believe to be true.
   i. Religious worship is at least as important in my life now as it was in 2005
   ii. There are many opportunities for me to find full-time work now as there was in 2005
   iii. I felt safer from abduction, death and torture in 2005 than I do now
   iv. At least some children in my district went to school in 2005, just as they do now
Count____

Question 2. Please refer to the following and tell me the number of statements that are true. Please don’t tell me which specific statements you believe to be true.
   i. Religious worship is important to my life now
   ii. There are many opportunities for me to find work now
   iii. I do not feel safe from abduction, death and torture now
   iv. Children in my area are generally healthy now
Count____

Control group

For the purposes of the item-count technique

Question 1. Please refer to the following and tell me how many statements are true. Please don’t tell me which statements you believe to be true.
   i. Religious worship is at least as important in my life now as it was in 2005
   ii. There are many opportunities for me to find full-time work now as there was in 2005
   iii. At least some children in my district went to school in 2005, just as they do now
Count____

Question 2. Please refer to the following and tell me how many statements are true. Please don’t tell me which statements you believe to be true.
   i. Religious worship is important to my life now
   ii. There are many opportunities for me to find work now
   iii. Children in my area are generally healthy now
Count____
Direct questions for comparative purposes

Question 3 Please indicate which of the following statements are most accurate:

i. I feel safer from abduction, death and torture now than I did in 2005
ii. I felt safer from abduction, death and torture in 2005 than I do now
iii. I feel just as safe from abduction, death and torture now as I did in 2005
iv. No comment

Question 4 Please indicate which of the following statements are most accurate:

i. I feel safe from abduction, death and torture now
ii. I do not feel safe from abduction, death and torture now
iii. No comment