



Armed groups, Taxation and fishing in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines

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Rationale

Overall environmental impact of violent conflict is negative (destruction, cost, pollution, deregulation...)

Direct impact on priority regions: Amazon, Congo Basin, Sahel, Philippines archipelago

Yet, Limited disaggregated evidence of impact on environment

Conflict-affected regions are heterogenous (political, social, environmental)

Control over environmental resources (land, forests, sea) key stake of violent conflicts

'Conservation' often imposed by external (colonial, state, NGO) actors, along with taxes

Imposition can be part of grievances that underpin support for insurgent groups

Rationale

The role of local communities

Communal management of environmental resources is key for protection (Ostrom et al. 2012; Agarwal 2010)

But, communities impacted by armed groups

- taxation (widespread)
- other forms of interference and governance (Staniland 2012; Arjona, Kasfir, Mampilly 2015)
- **Likely to impact communal management of environment, yet limited evidence (particularly fishing)**

Research questions:

- 1. How does the presence of armed groups affect the fishing sector and environmental protection?**
- 2. What are the implications for policy interventions?**

Today, prelim. results of ongoing analysis, key work by Maria Adelaida Ortega; UNU Wider Working Paper 2024

Project on Zamboanga, Philippines

Partnership Universidad de Los Andes (Colombia), Western Mindanao State University (Philippines), Institute of Development Studies (UK) –
Funded by UK Economic and Social Research Council & UNU WIDER

Focus on municipal fishing communities in Zamboanga peninsula
largest sardines exporting region (70% of Philippines production)

Industrial fishing sector historically tied to 'colonial' presence

Tensions with municipal fishing sector

+ 2011 Seasonal Fishing Ban

Mixed methods

Quant: Survey of 1500 Fishing Households in 59 Barangays, In Zamboanga peninsula

Qual: 32 Key informant interviews with fisherfolk, military authorities, industrial fishers, state representatives

Expertise of WMSU on fishing, U. Los Andes on Conflict & Fishing



Armed Insurgency in Mindanao

Heritage of Moro Nationalism (against Spanish, US, and central government encroachment)

Since 1970s: Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF)

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)

+ Abu Sayyaf Group + Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters

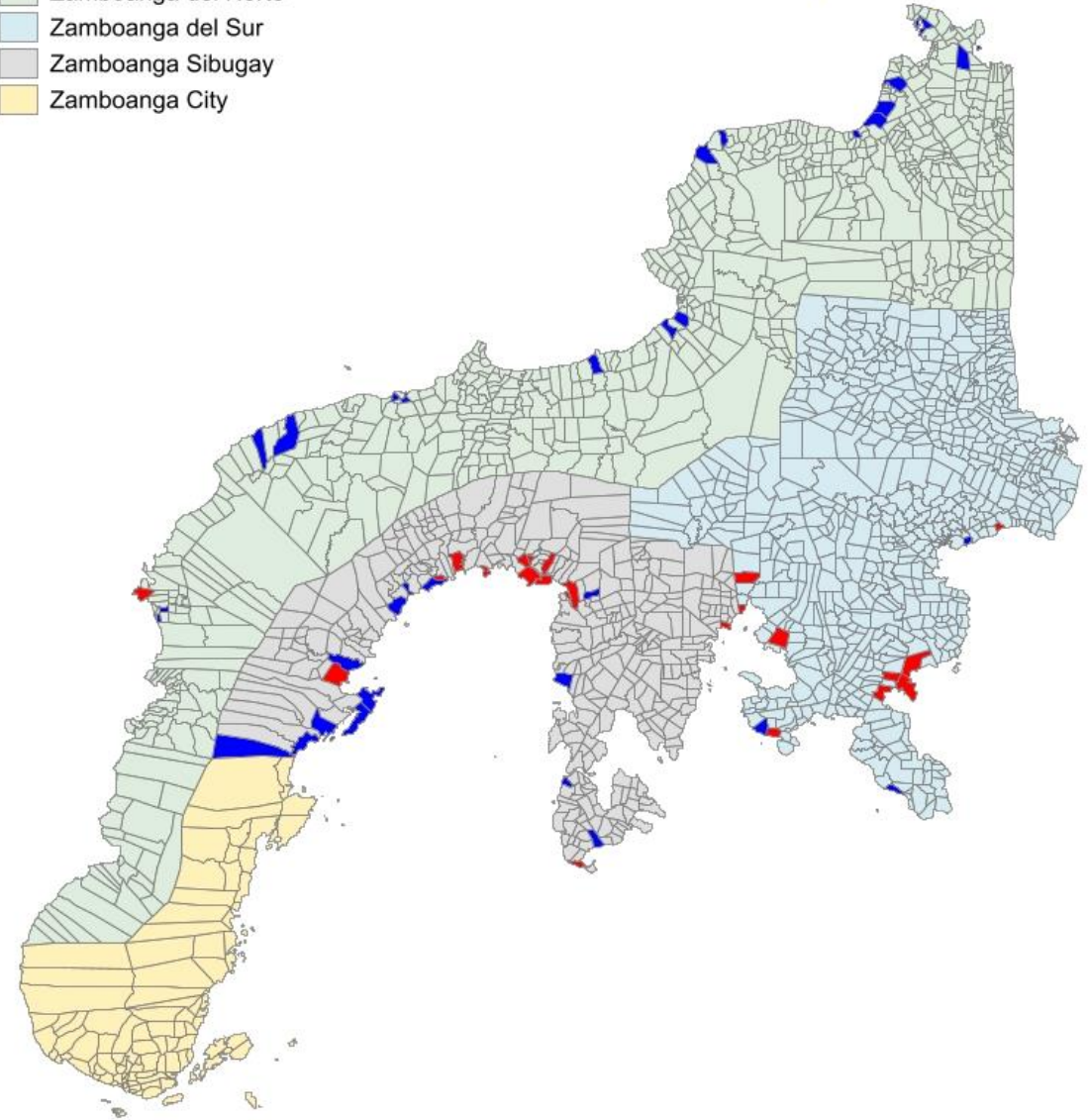
+ New People's Army (1969)

Project at Critical Juncture (2019-2020):

2014: Peace Agreement between MILF and government

2019: Creation of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)

Zamboanga not part of BARMM, but presence of armed groups



Fishing amid violent conflict

Dynamics of violence

Combat for territorial control, political influence, resources

Piracy, extortion, kidnappings + drug trade

Clan politics and violence (Rido)

General decrease in violence since 2010s

Clear evidence of targeting of fishing industry

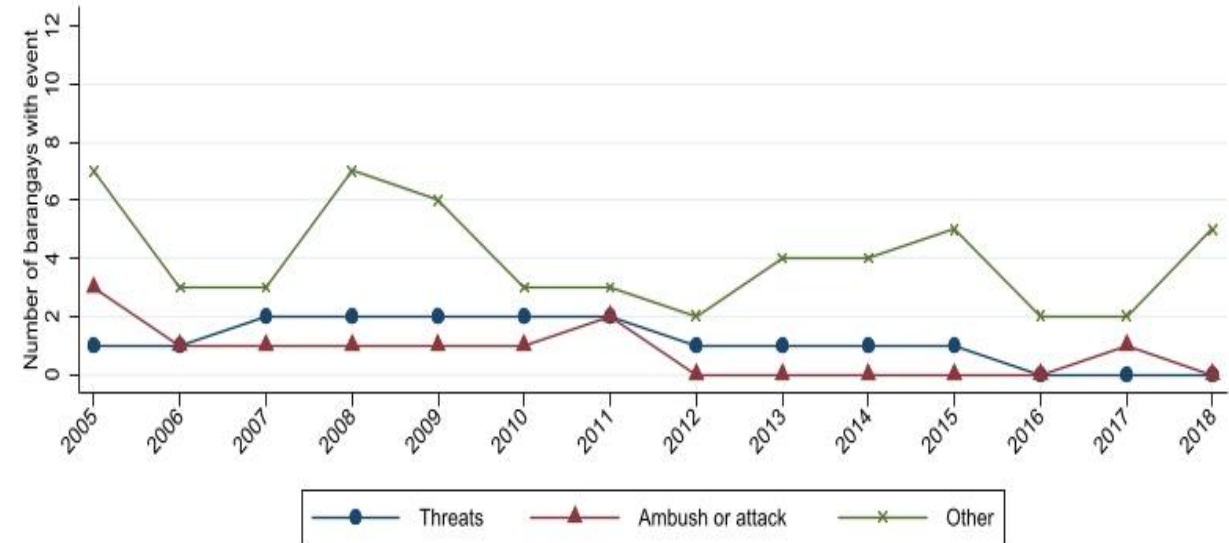
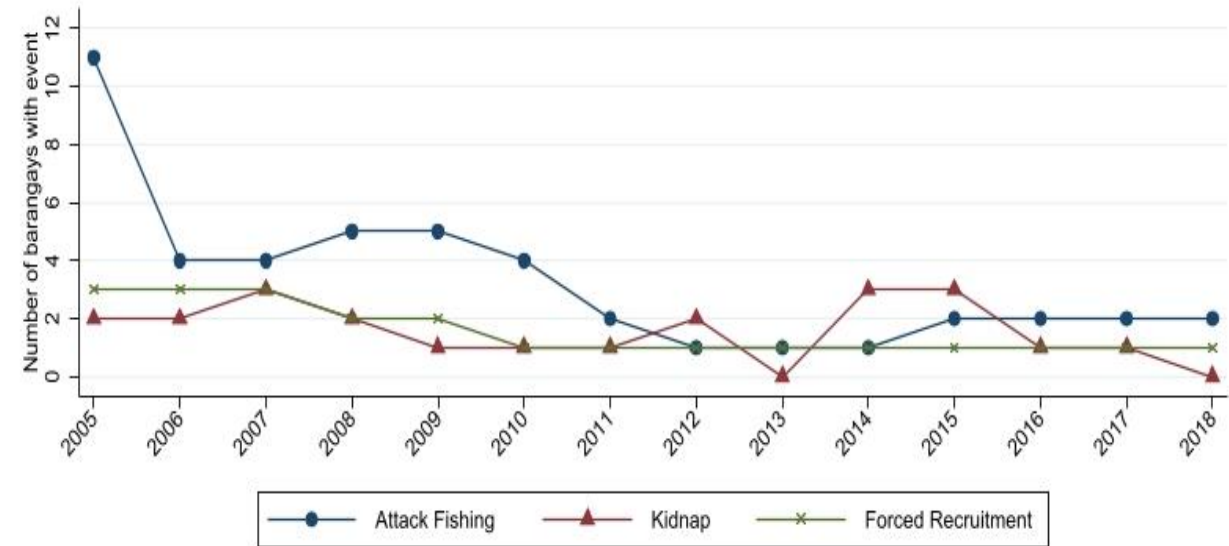
Violent extortion targets industrial fishing

Elite arrangements with army & armed groups (De Vera 2022)

Conflicts in fishing sector (zones, gear, catch) can lead to violence (also Lu & Yamazaki 2023 on Indonesia)

Little empirical evidence of effect on municipal fishing

Figure 1: Barangays with violent events (number)



The implantation of armed groups

Figure 2: Presence of Armed groups, by province

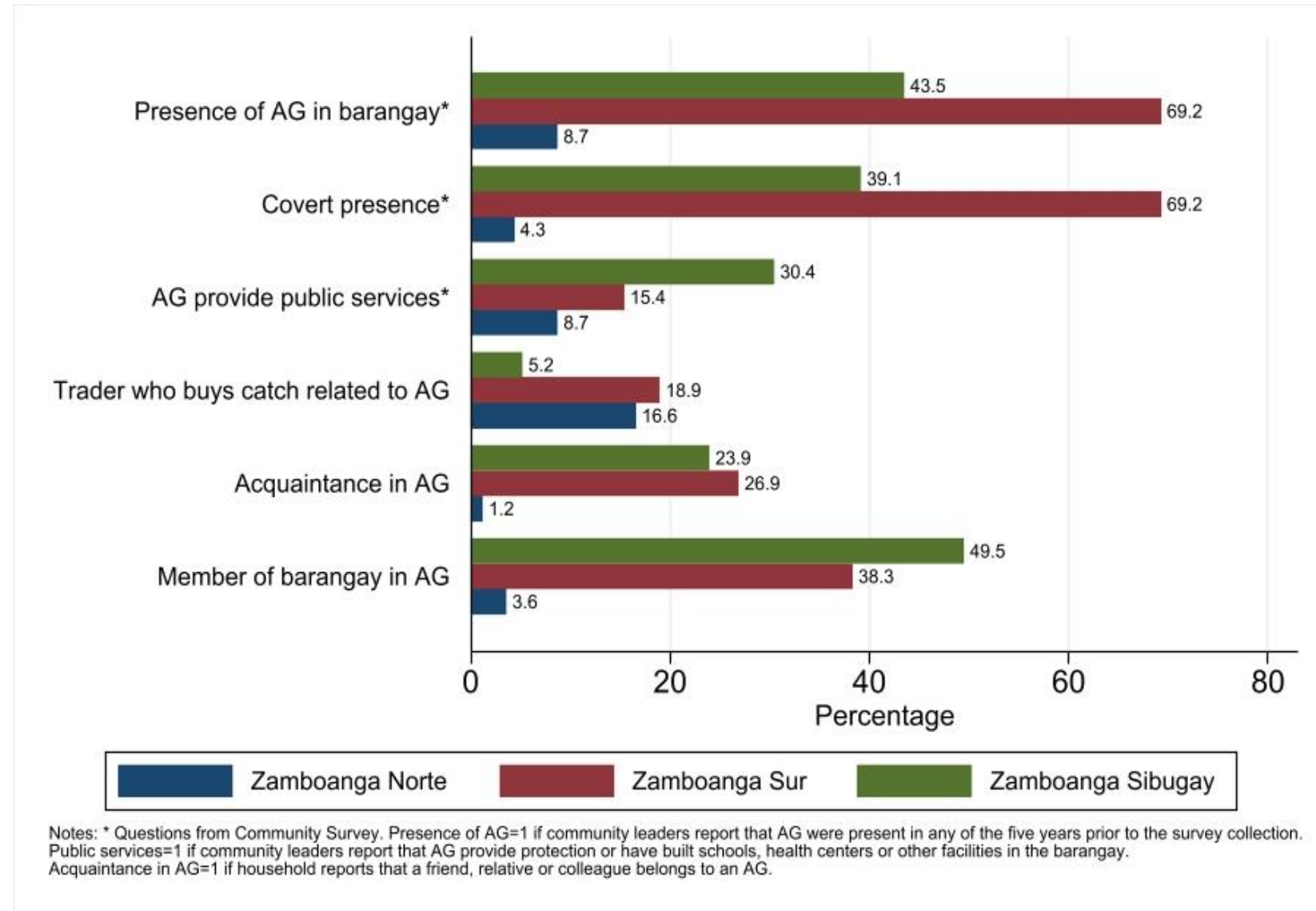
Clear evidence of presence of armed groups (MILF, 'pirates')

(much) stronger in Zamboanga Sibugay and Zamboanga del Sur than in Zamboanga del Norte

Presence is covert (rather than overt)

Evidence that AGs provide public services

Evidence of far-reaching social networks in population + fishing sector



Interference in fishing sector

Figure 3: Interference of Armed groups in fishing

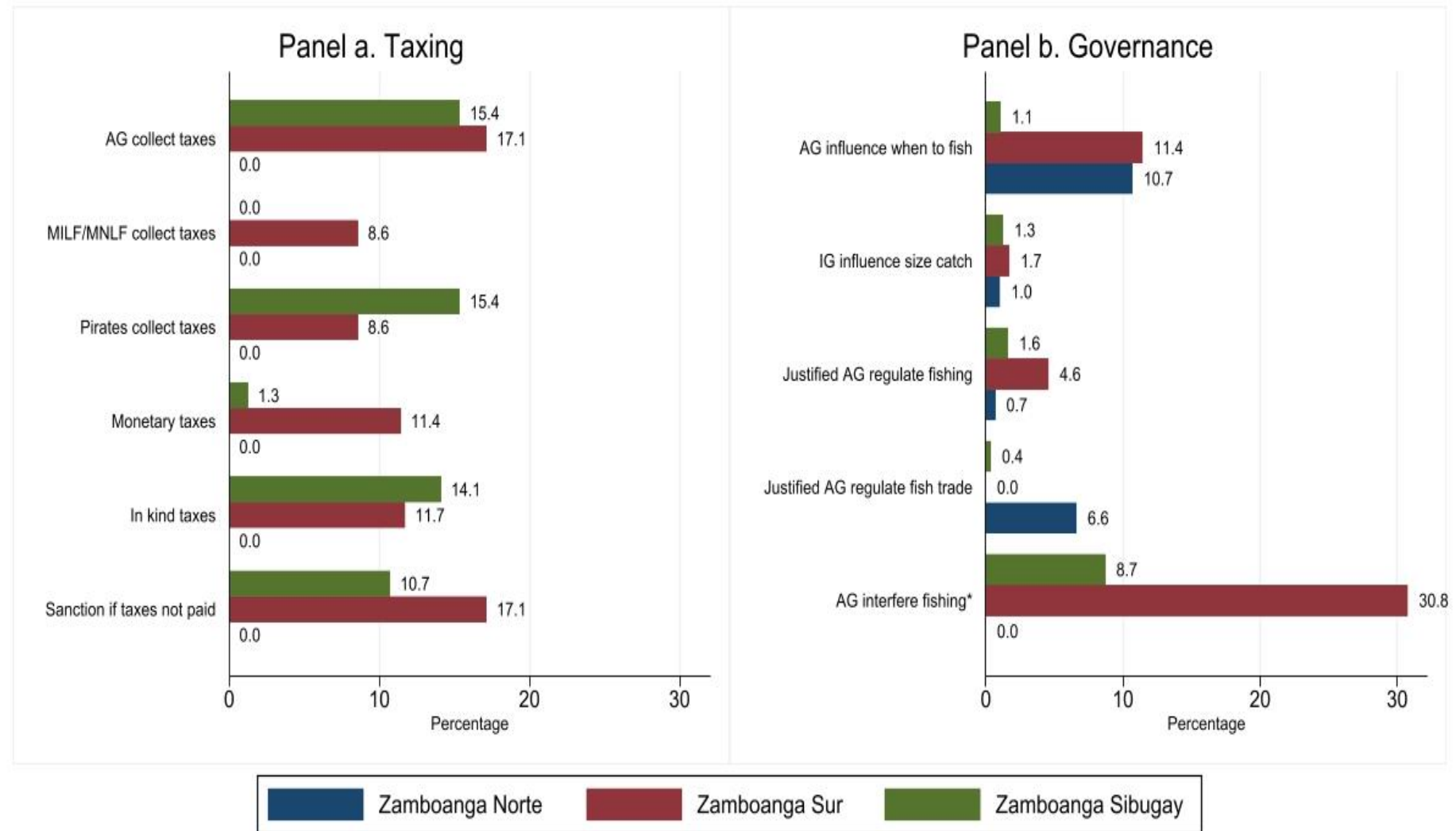
Taxation is main form of interference

Taxes levied both in money and in fish

Taxes enforced by sanctions (physical and harassment)

Some evidence of interference in **governance** of fishing sector

Little evidence of popular support for regulation of fishing sector by armed actors



Notes: * Questions from Community Survey. Frequencies with respect to the whole sample.

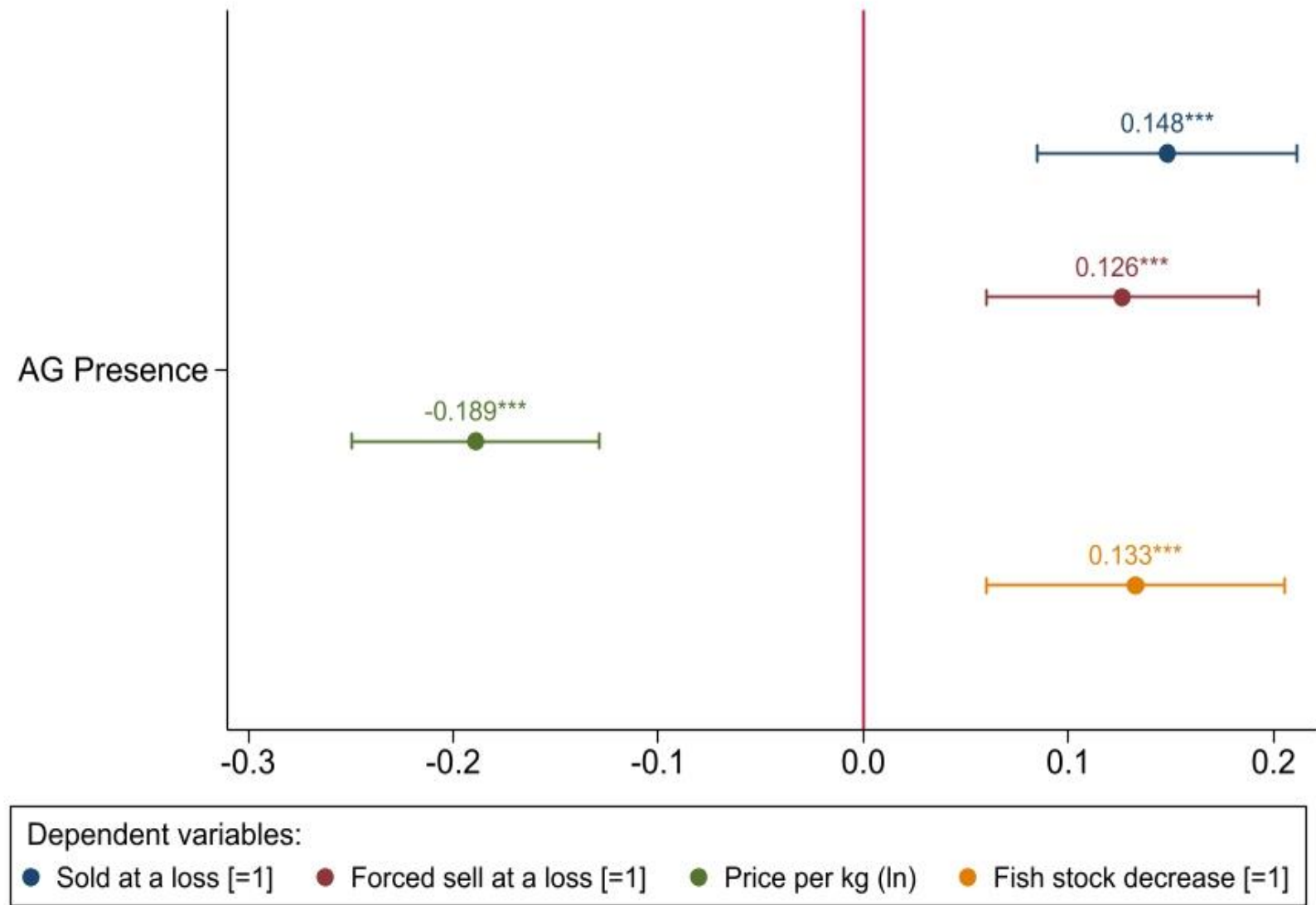
Effects on fishing

Figure 4: Impact on fish trade and fish stocks

Regression analysis of impact of AG presence (FEs, and controls)

Negative impact on fish trade: HHs more likely to sell at a loss and to be forced to sell at a loss in Barangays where AGs are present (form of taxation?)

Signs of negative impact on fish stocks: HHs more likely to report that fish stocks have decreased over the last 10 years



Next steps of analysis

1. Consolidate results on environmental impact (additional sources and datasets)
2. Taxation for what? find evidence of 'exchanges' & 'social contract'
3. Uncover mechanisms that mediate impact of AG on fishing and fish stocks:
 - Illegal & environmentally destructive fishing practices (political economy argument)
 - **Collective action and communal management of fishing resources**; Looking at impact on social capital & trust & participation in associations, in municipal fishing sector

Policy implications

Peace process at a critical juncture in Mindanao, both ‘on track and in peril’ (ICG 2023)

- Threats: Ongoing insecurity, political dynamics, COVID-19 delays
- Fishing sector is key stake in ongoing negotiations: Municipal waters and taxes

Taxation in conflict-affected contexts

- The ‘social contract’ that underpins state taxation is severely challenged
- ‘Invisible’ Tax burden on population and economic activity – needs to be taken into account
- Durable implantation & support for armed groups, can persist beyond ‘formal peace’
- Durability of protection & taxation arrangements: often, they serve a purpose

Environmental protection and violent conflict

- Alongside hidden tax burden, there is often a hidden toll on the environment
- Given protracted nature of violent conflict, how to protect the environment in regions that are not controlled by the state?

References and further readings

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