

# The Legacies of Civil War on Citizens' Preferences for the Rule of Law

Ana Arjona

Northwestern University

Ana María Ibañez

Inter-American Development Bank

Juan Camilo Cárdenas

Los Andes & U. Massachusetts  
Amherst

Patricia Justino

Institute of Development Studies  
and UNU-WIDER

# The rule of Law: Critical in post-conflict settings

- Democracy
- Peace
- Development



# Citizen support is crucial for the rule of law to prevail

- Rely on institutionalized mechanisms to resolve conflicts.
- Withdraw support from politicians who fail to abide by the rule of law.
- Prevent the rise of extremist and authoritarian political groups.
- Influence public responses to violations of the law.



# Critical barrier: The political culture of war-torn societies

- Weak civic culture
  - Discredited political institutions
- Weak support for the rule of law



# **Does civil war erode support for the rule of law?**

The democratic deficit of war-torn societies has been assumed rather than investigated.

# Does civil war erode support for the rule of law?

Goals:

1. Derive hypotheses about *how* civil war could erode support for the rule of law.
2. Test these hypotheses with data on individuals and communities in Colombia.

# 1. Hypotheses

- (1) **Exposure to armed actors** (proximity to wartime phenomena)
- (2) **Disorder** (high uncertainty)
- (3) **Violence** (insecurity)
- (4) **Armed groups' success at improving security** (insecurity & authoritarian preferences)
- (5) **Exposure to repressive institutions** (authoritarian preferences)

# 2. Testing hypotheses: Data

- The Colombian armed conflict
- Not a post-conflict setting but many areas did transition to having no presence of non-state armed actors.

# 2. Testing hypotheses: Data

- (1) Data on individuals' attributes and support for the rule of law:
- ELCA (2013): 4.555 rural households in +230 rural communities located in 17 municipalities.
  - Some communities endured presence of armed groups, some did not.

# 2. Testing hypotheses: Data

- (1) Data on individuals' attributes and support for the rule of law.
- (2) Wartime dynamics (Arjona 2014, 2016) in communities with armed group presence:
  - Memory workshops
  - Surveys
  - Local histories

# 2. Testing hypotheses: Models

- Outcome: whether the person reports either disagreeing or totally disagreeing with authorities' reliance on extra legal measures to control crime (i.e. supporting the rule of law).

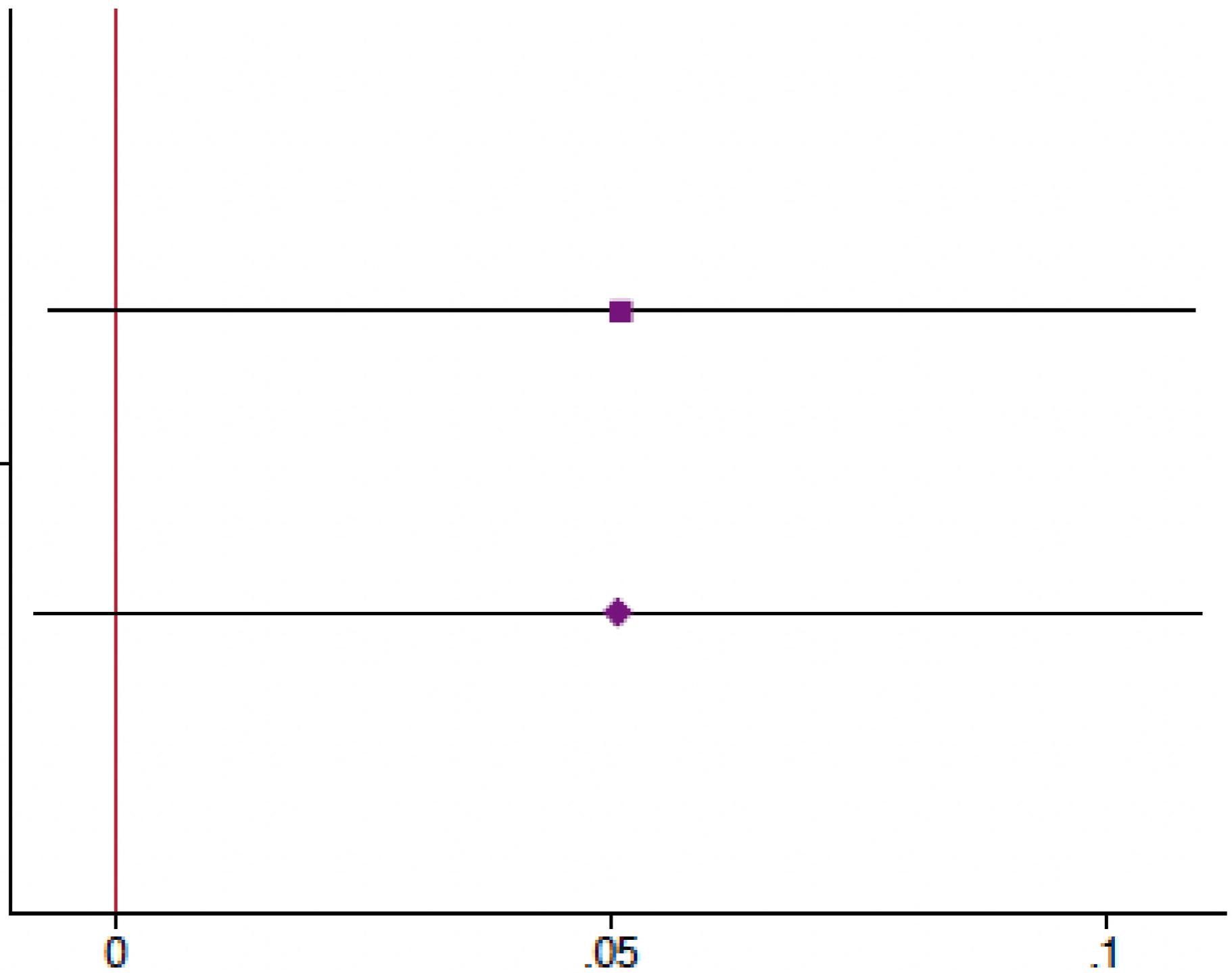
# 2. Testing hypotheses: Models

- Outcome: whether the person reports either disagreeing or totally disagreeing with authorities' reliance on extra legal measures to control crime (i.e. supporting the rule of law).
- Linear regression model
- Controls at the individual and locality levels.

# **Did civil war dynamics erode support for the rule of law?**

(1) Exposure to armed actors

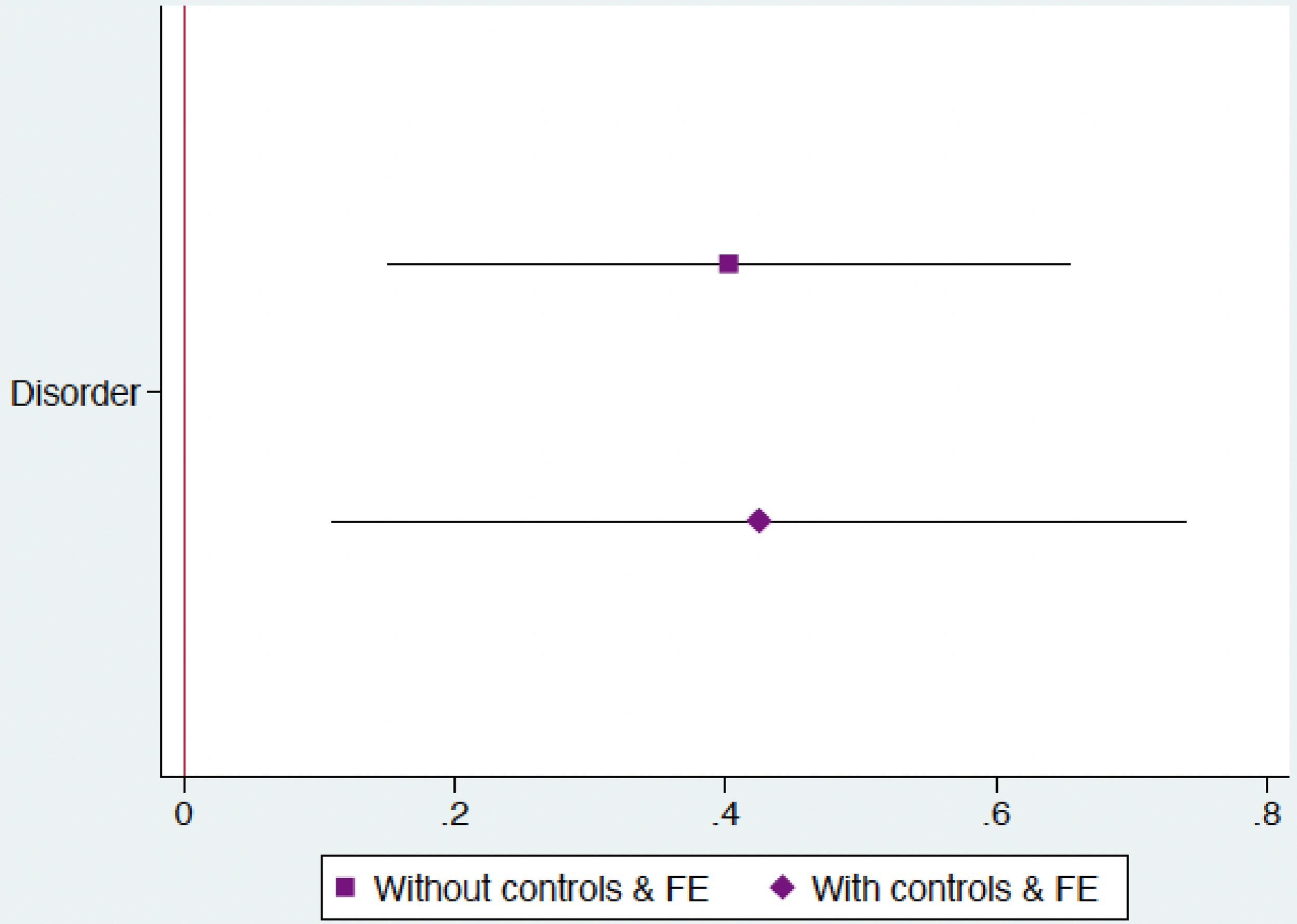
Presence of  
armed groups



■ No controls & FE    ◆ With controls & FE

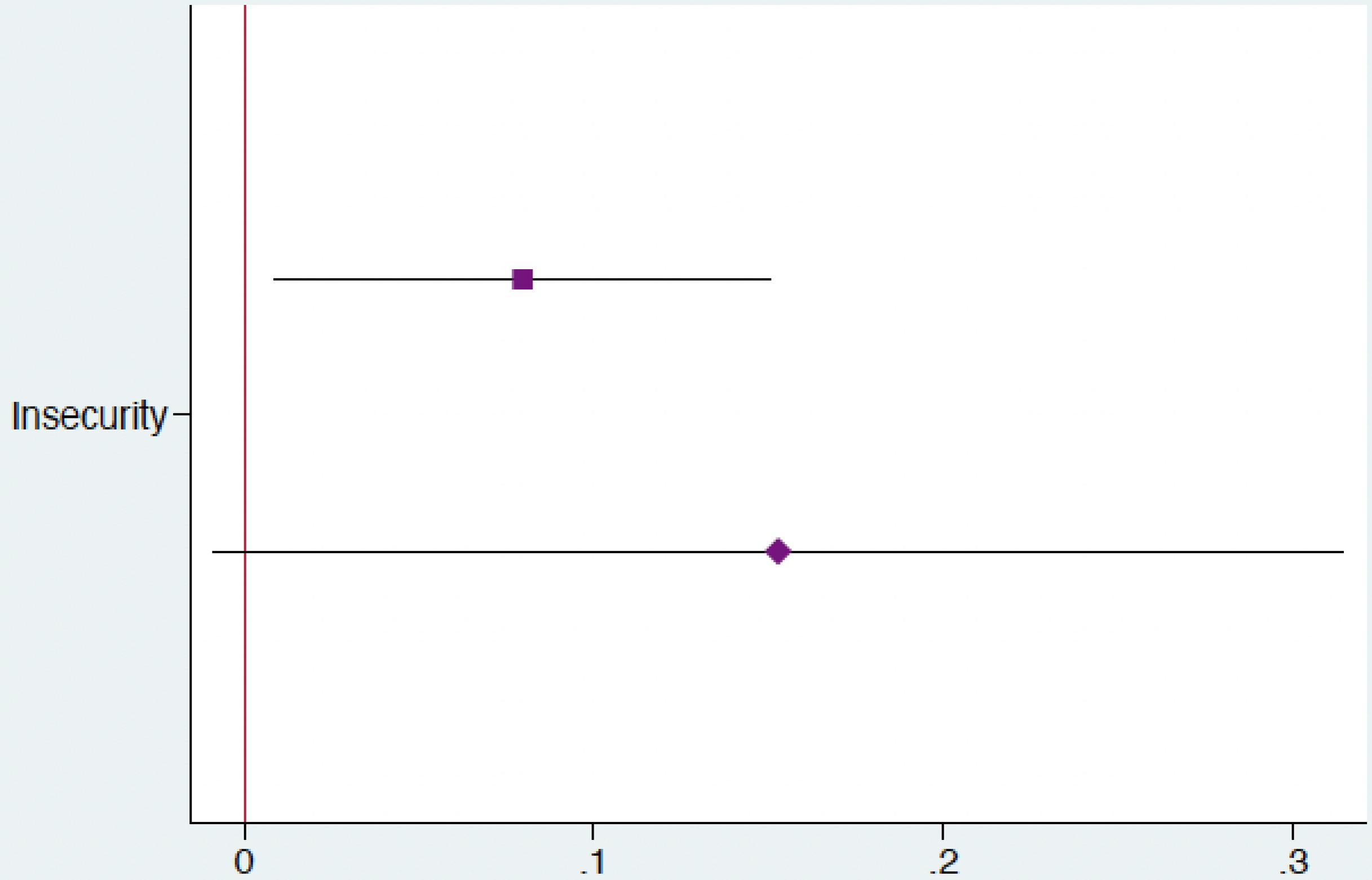
# **How can civil war erode support for the rule of law?**

- (1) Exposure to armed actors
- (2) Disorder



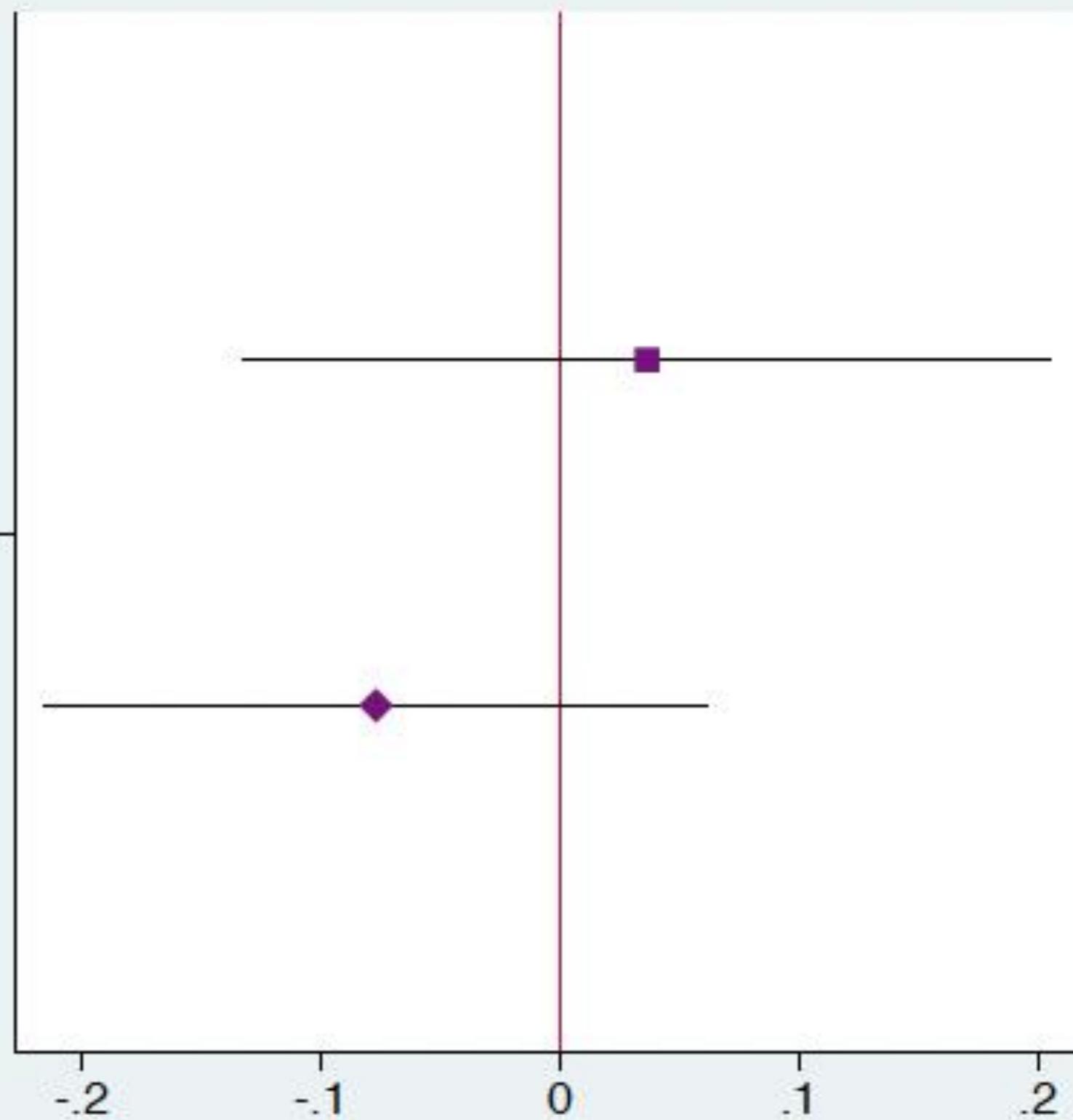
# How can civil war erode support for the rule of law?

- (1) Exposure to armed actors
- (2) Disorder
- (3) Violence



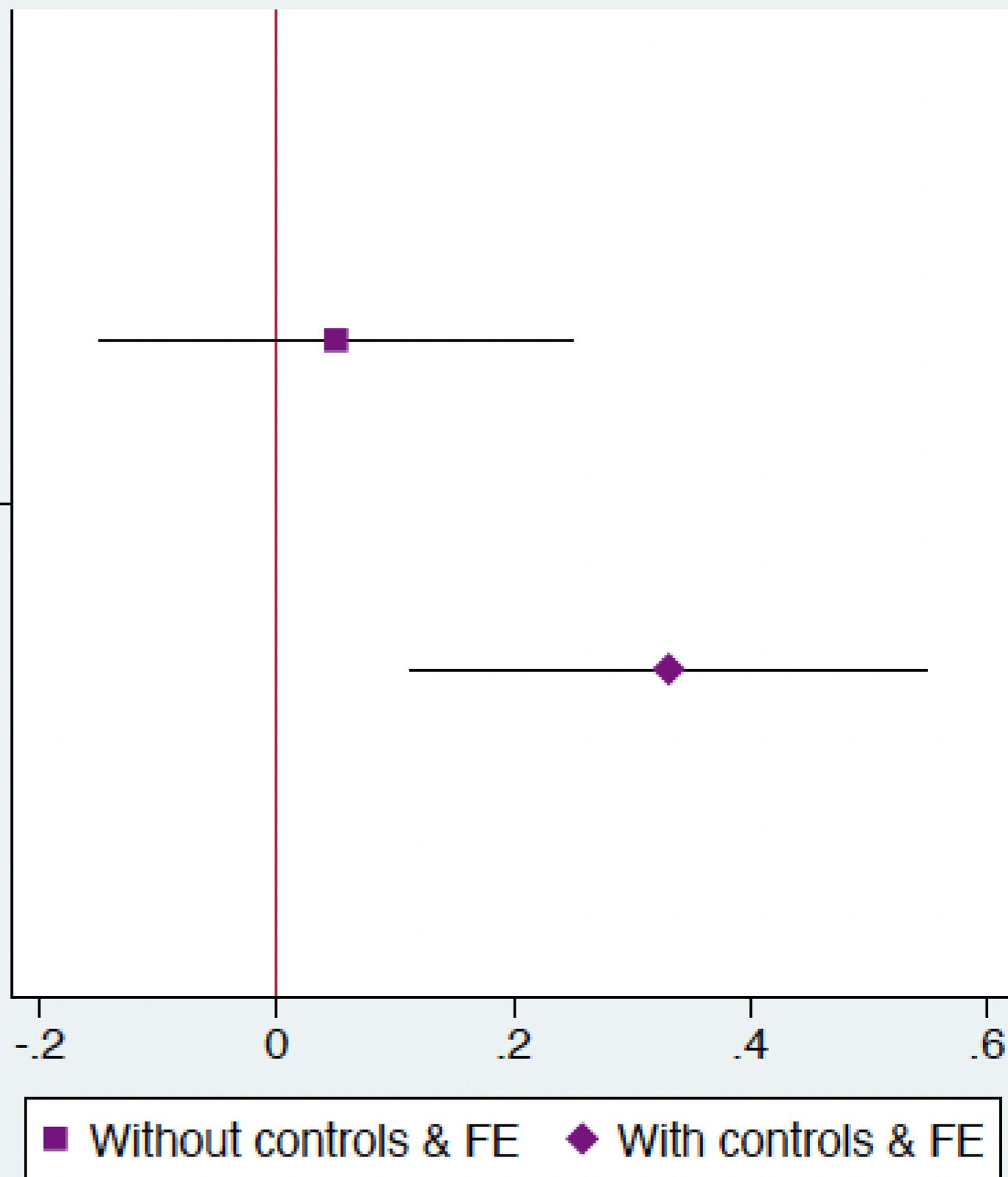
■ Without controls & FE    ◆ With controls & FE

Community leaders threatened

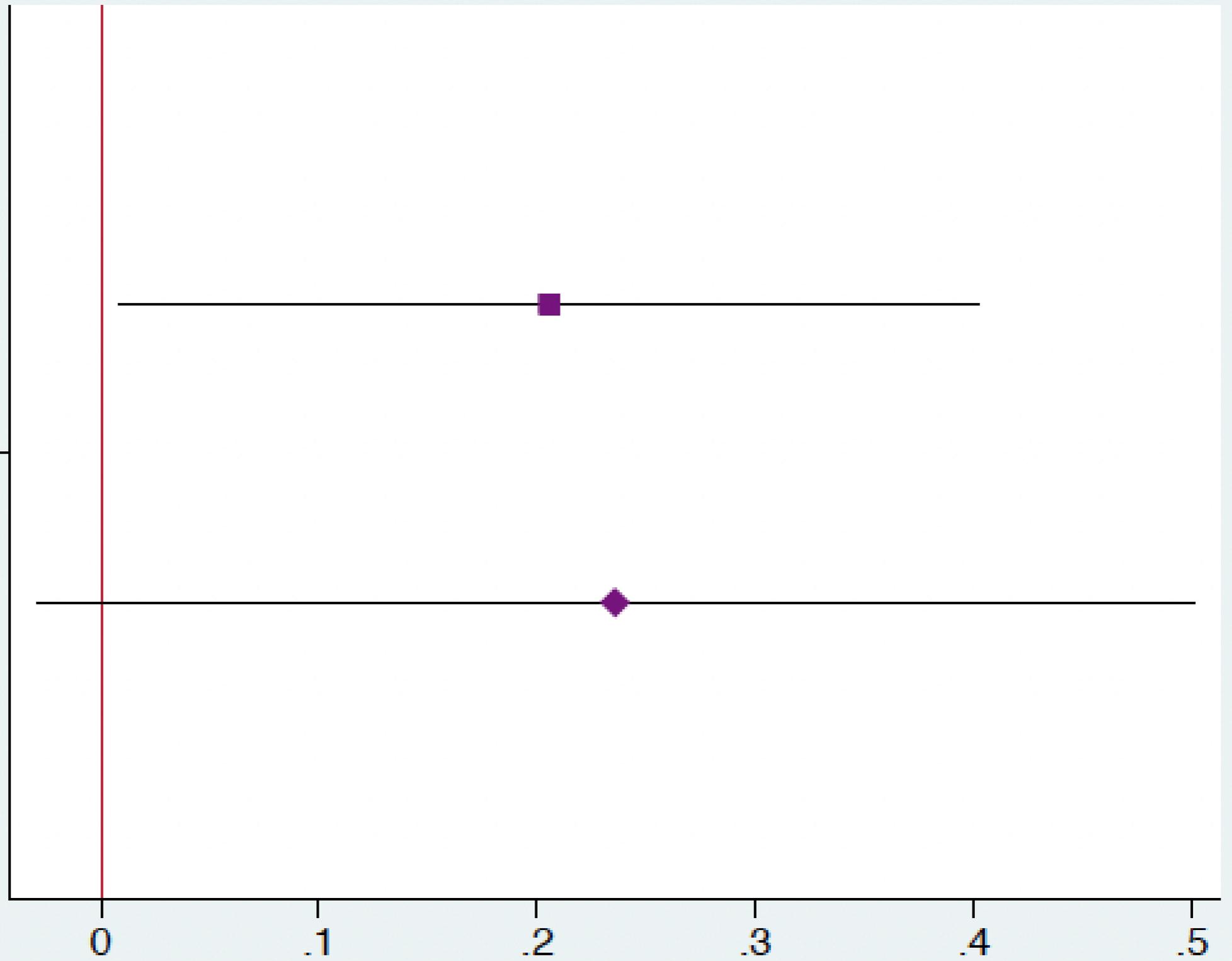


■ Without controls & FE    ◆ With controls & FE

Community sector was targeted



Displacement

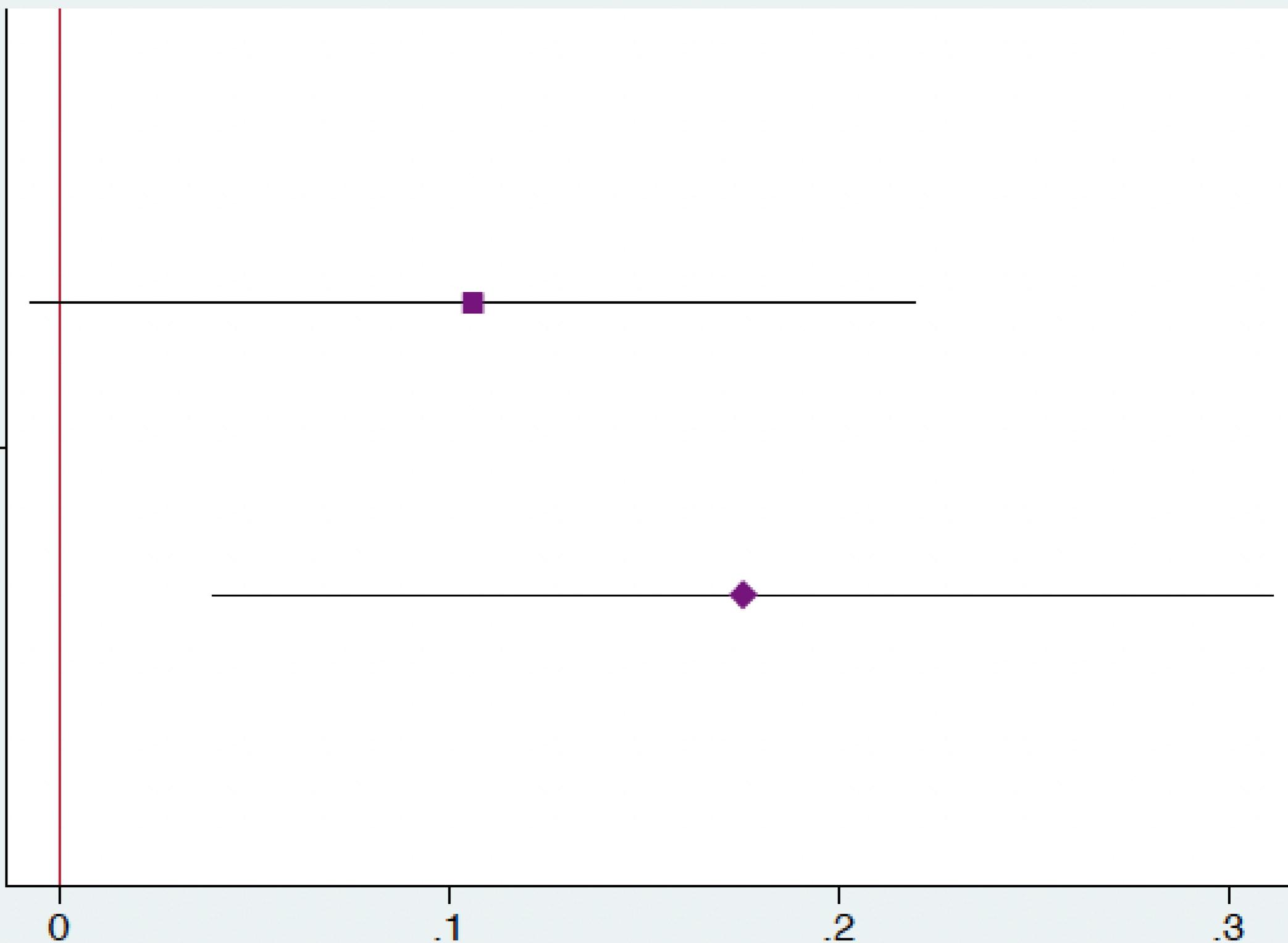


■ Without controls & FE    ◆ With controls & FE

# **How can civil war erode support for the rule of law?**

- (1) Exposure to armed actors
- (2) Violence
- (3) Disorder
- (4) Armed groups' success at improving security

Efficacy

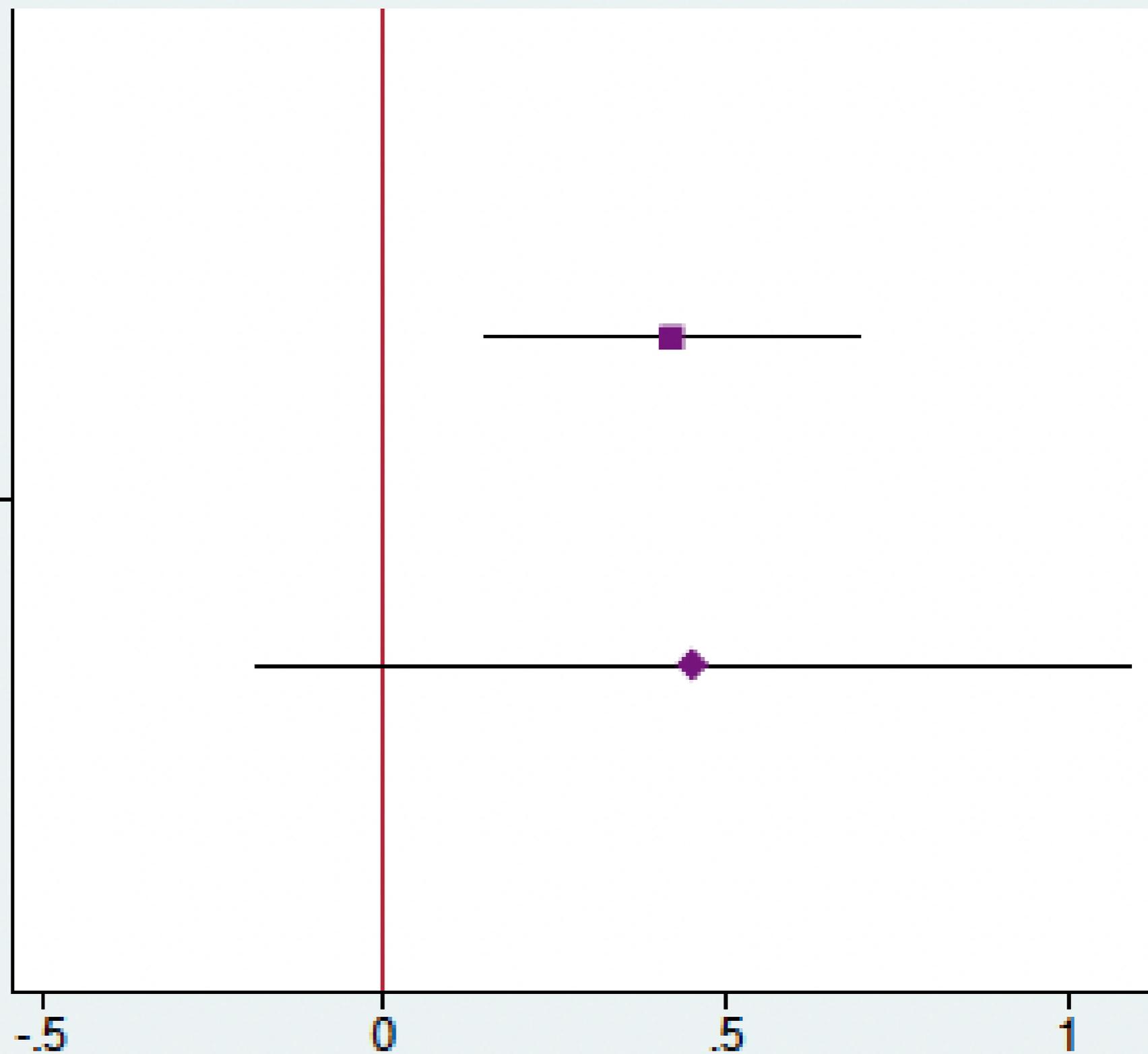


■ Without controls & FE    ◆ With controls & FE

# **How can civil war erode support for the rule of law?**

- (1) Exposure to armed actors
- (2) Violence
- (3) Disorder
- (4) Armed groups' success at improving security
- (5) Exposure to repressive institutions

Repressive institutions



■ Without controls & FE

◆ With controls & FE

# Conclusion

- The rule of law is essential for democracy, peace and development in post-conflict settings.
- Citizen support for the rule of law is crucial.
- Civil war is assumed to erode support for the rule of law—but this has been assumed rather than investigated.
- We find that none of the wartime dynamics that, based on different literatures, would be expected to erode support for the rule of law did so in Colombia.

# Conclusion

- There is a positive and significant association at best, and an insignificant association at worst.
- We do not claim that these phenomena *cause* higher support for the rule of law. Rather, we show that there is no evidence of a negative association.

# Implications

- The widespread assumption about the effects of war on citizen support for the rule of law needs to be investigated.
- The assumption that war zones have a higher democratic deficit may be wrong.
- We need new theoretical approaches to trace the effects of the complex experiences of conflict zones on political behavior.
- We need to be cautious when making assumptions about the political culture of conflict zones when designing policies and interventions.

**Thank  
you**

