# Armed intervention and civilian victimization in intrastate conflicts

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## Abstract

Research has begun to examine the relationship between changes in the conflict environment and levels of civilian victimization. We extend this work by examining the effect of external armed intervention on the decisions of governments and insurgent organizations to victimize civilians during civil wars. We theorize that changes in the balance of power in an intrastate conflict influence combatant strategies of violence. As a conflict actor weakens relative to its adversary, it employs increasingly violent tactics toward the civilian population as a means of reshaping the strategic landscape to its benefit. The reason for this is twofold. First, declining capabilities increase resource needs at the moment that extractive capacity is in decline. Second, declining capabilities inhibit control and policing, making less violent means of defection deterrence more difficult. As both resource extraction difficulties and internal threats increase, actors' incentives for violence against the population increase. To the extent that biased military interventions shift the balance of power between conflict actors, we argue that they alter actor incentives to victimize civilians. Specifically, intervention should reduce the level of violence employed by the supported faction and increase the level employed by the opposed faction. We test these arguments using data on civilian casualties and armed intervention in intrastate conflicts from 1989 to 2005. Our results support our expectations, suggesting that interventions shift the power balance and affect the levels of violence employed by combatants.

## Keywords

civilian victimization, insurgency, intervention

## Introduction

Recent research indicates that the decision of belligerents to intentionally use violence against civilians is influenced by the power dynamics among civil war combatants (Hultman, 2007; Kalyvas, 2006; Wood, 2010; Ziemke, 2008). Theoretically, shifts in relative capabilities – such as access to war technologies, resource pools, and aggregate military capabilities – influence the ability of belligerents to control territory and populations. In turn, shifts in control and the ability to extract resources from the population influence the willingness of an actor to victimize civilians. To the extent that foreign military interventions reshape the balance of power between combatants, they directly influence variations in the levels of civilian victimization in civil wars.[1] We

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[1] By 'balance of power' or 'balance of capabilities' we mean the relative strength of combatants.

hypothesize that interventions that enhance an actor's capabilities contribute to a reduction in the recipient's anti-civilian violence while interventions that benefit the adversary increase an actor's willingness victimize civilians.

Below we develop our theoretical argument in more detail. We first review the literature on the strategic use of violence against civilians. We then discuss how changes in the balance of power alter belligerent war strategies. In the subsequent section we extend this argument to motives for civilian victimization. We then turn to the role of foreign intervention in altering the strategies of violence employed by both the supported and opposed sides. We test our theory using data on one-sided violence by rebel groups and the governments they challenge. The results support our expectations and give credence to the theory that armed interventions influence civil war violence by altering the balance of power between the combatants. In the concluding section we discuss the relevance of these results and their implications for policymaking.

## Motives and expectations

Violence against civilians is one of many war strategies that belligerents use in an attempt to control a changing conflict landscape (Kalyvas, 2006; Wood, 2010: 602). Much of the recent research assumes that violence is instrumental to the extent that actors employ it with the expectation that it produces positive returns (Arendt, 1970). While violence assumes diverse forms in civil conflict, it is routinely employed in an attempt to reshape the strategic environment in a manner that abets the user's conflict aims.[2] Targeted violence, for example, creates a clear selective incentive for civilians – if they avoid transgressions they can avoid sanctions (Kalyvas, 2006: 156; Mason, 1996). Belligerents often resort to more indiscriminate forms of violence as a means of altering the broader strategic landscape. Merom (2003) asserts that brutality is often central to victory. Indiscriminate violence abetted British victory in the Boer War (Downes, 2007) and successfully suppressed Chechen

insurgents in Russia (Lyall, 2009). Similarly, Syria's brutal repression at Hama in 1982 crushed an Islamist rebellion, and German forces in Southwest Africa thwarted an insurrection at the beginning of the 20th century through mass killing (Merom, 2003: 36–37). Conversely, indiscriminate bombings by the United States in South Vietnam facilitated Viet Cong control in targeted villages (Kocher, Pepinsky & Kalyvas, 2011). Additionally, Kalyvas's (2006: 150–153) anecdotal evidence suggests that collective violence is ineffective, especially when used intensely for a significant duration. Consequently, the effectiveness of mass violence in achieving long-term victories remains unclear and is likely conditioned by a variety of factors.

Regardless of the comparative efficiency of collective violence and terror, armed actors utilize them to shape the behaviors of the population (Kalyvas, 2006: 142, 150; Kydd & Walter, 2006; Merom, 2003: 35–42). Conflict actors largely employ violence in the pursuit of short-term rather than long-term objectives because the long-term consequences of severe violence are often difficult to predict (Arendt, 1970: 79). Collective violence can benefit users in the short term by disrupting their adversary's control over territory, undermining flows of resources to supporters, and punishing groups perceived as resistant to the user's goals. For example, disrupting the relationships between an adversary and civilians is a proximate strategic objective for insurgents (Vinci, 2005). Blatant attacks on civilians can demonstrate regime indifference or impotence to protecting civilians, thus altering civilians' incentives for supporting the regime (Henriksen, 1983: 77, 121). In order to exert control, belligerents must destroy their adversary's control and expel, convert, or liquidate regime supporters. Viet Cong violence in the early 1960s was intended to sever the relationship between the people and the government by effectively eliminating the government's presence in many rural areas, making the Party the de facto ruler and provider for the people (Race, 1972: 116). Insurgents also employ indiscriminate violence in an attempt to undermine other benefits to regime supporters. For instance, RENAMO targeted government health and educational facilities as well as their patrons (Hall, 1990; Hultman, 2009: 826). The erosion of public benefits provides the opponent with an opportunity to fill the void with their own system of order.

Government forces adopt similar strategies (Merom, 2003: 38–39). British violence against Afrikaner civilians broke the connections between Boer fighters and their supporters, depriving them of resources and eventually forcing surrender (Downes, 2007). Interdependence

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[2] Violence differs with respect to both intention and target. Kalyvas (1999, 2006: 142–143) dichotomizes noncombatant killings into 'selective' and 'indiscriminate' types according to the 'level at which guilt is determined'. Other scholars classify 'types' of noncombatant killing based on whether the violence was direct or indirect and intentional or unintentional (Kreutz, 2008; Eck & Hultman, 2007). _One-sided violence_, which is both direct and intentional, represents the most egregious abuse as it explicitly targets unarmed persons outside of conflict situations.

between insurgents and civilians prompts states to resort to mass killing in an attempt to eradicate insurgent infrastructure, clear territory, or simply 'drain the sea' around the insurgents (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Like rebels, state forces employ violence to undermine benefits provided by adversaries. State violence against civilians in Kosovo was in part aimed at convincing the Albanian population that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) was incapable of effectively defending the Albanian population in the province (Nation, 2003). As these examples illustrate, by breaking opposition control and eroding security, violence can eliminate the option of civilian neutrality or sever the ties between civilians and the adversary (Kalyvas and Kocher, 2007; Lichbach, 1995: 58).

## Capabilities and war strategy

Existing literature points to a strong link between the balance of capabilities (either at the micro or macro level) and an actor's war strategies. The type of warfare adopted and the strategies of violence employed are closely related to the war technologies available to belligerents and to the capability balance between them (Balcells, 2010: 295–296; Kalyvas, 2005; Lockyer, 2008, 2010).[3] Actors adopt warfare strategies subject to their physical resource constraints and those of their opponent; moreover, as the balance of capabilities shifts, the types of warfare adopted change as well (Lockyer, 2010). This observation is consistent with the models proposed by classical insurgency practitioners (Guevara, 1969; Mao, 1961), who suggested that insurgencies move through distinct phases, which are largely based on the balance of capabilities in the conflict. Weak rebels that lack the recruits or military technologies to fight the regime directly are more likely to adopt non-conventional or terrorist tactics. As the group strengthens, however, they may adopt guerilla tactics and later still may strengthen to more conventional tactics (Byman, 2008; Butler & Gates, 2009). It is important to note that this movement is not simply unidirectional. The FMLN adopted a traditional guerrilla strategy early in the Salvadoran conflict but moved to conventional tactics in the early 1980s. By the mid-1980s, however, they returned to a guerrilla-style strategy (Wood, 2003, 2008: 543–544).

Shifts in capabilities are not solely endogenous to the domestic conflict environment. Changes in the balance of capabilities in the Salvadoran Civil War were largely a function of changes in US military assistance and training. Indeed, according to Kalyvas and Balcells (2010), changes in foreign support for insurgents and governments have significantly shaped the types of warfare observed in civil conflicts over time. These findings demonstrate that macro-level changes in the balance of capabilities have implications for events at the micro level. For example, external interventions by biased actors shift the balance of capabilities in domestic conflicts which leads to changes in actors' strategies of civilian victimization.

## Power shifts and victimization

Recent literature points to a relationship between the use of indiscriminate violence or 'terror' and the capability balance between actors at both the local and aggregate levels. Kalyvas (2006: 170–171, 203–204), for example, suggests that conflict actors resort to indiscriminate violence in areas where the opponent has near complete control over the population because these areas are often 'opaque' and the information necessary to target collaborators selectively is simply unavailable.[4] Balcells (2011) similarly shows that in the Spanish Civil War *indirect* violence (indiscriminate bombings) was more common in areas controlled by rival factions. Hultman (2009) comes to similar conclusions about RENAMO's violence in the war in Mozambique. At the more macro level, Hultman (2007) argues that insurgents escalate violence toward civilians when they experience battlefield losses. Ziemke (2008) reports that both UNITA and Angola's government forces increased attacks on civilians when they suffered territorial or troops losses. Wood (2010) asserts that insurgents are more likely to target civilians when they are weak and cannot provide sufficient benefits to potential supporters (see also

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[3] The types of warfare defined by these authors differ somewhat, but they point to the manner in which changes in actors' capabilities alter the styles of warfare they adopt.

[4] Kalyvas's (2006) argument on the relationship between control and violence is not strictly linear, particularly in the case of selective violence. He argues that selective violence is likely to be higher where control is hegemonic but incomplete and lower where control is complete or where there is parity between the actors (e.g. the frontlines). His hypotheses regarding indiscriminate violence are more general and reflect a more linear relationship. He hypothesizes that greater control leads to less violence (selective or indiscriminate) and that less control causes the actor to be less likely to resort to selective violence and more likely to resort to indiscriminate violence (2006: 204). While we acknowledge the important nuances of the argument and the non-linear nature of violence generally, the more general and linear relationship posited between control and indiscriminate violence corresponds with our theory.

Mason, 1996). While the theoretical underpinnings of these arguments differ, they all point to a close relationship between the relative capabilities of an actor to control the population and its incentives for violence against civilians.

We extend existing arguments related to relative capabilities and war strategy, as well as those that suggest a direct link between capabilities and violence, to argue that exogenous shifts in relative capabilities contribute to changes in victimization. We identify two related mechanisms through which capability shifts modify civilian targeting. First, capability shifts alter belligerents' abilities to extract resources from the local population via nonviolent means. Second, capability shifts affect the ability to control the population and deter potential threats from within areas of weakening control. In either case, the incentive for violence is compounded because it is exactly during moments of declining capabilities brought on by exogenous capability shifts that additional resource acquisition and the deterrence of internal threats is most critical for the actor's survival. Thus, to the extent that intervention shifts capabilities, intervention can impact levels of civilian victimization.

### Compliance

We begin with the axiomatic relationship between civilian collaboration and belligerents' incentives for violence: armed actors are less likely to abuse civilians that comply with their demands. In light of this proposition, violence and support should co-vary over the course of conflict. Understanding violence dynamics, then, requires understanding variation in civilian support.

Popular support is commonly considered the *sine qua non* of effective rebellion (Wickham-Crowley, 1992: 52). While the extent of belligerents' reliance on civilians varies, as a general rule armed actors have incentives to attract civilian loyalty, promote collaboration, and deter cooperation with the opposition.[5] Existing literature demonstrates an inverse relationship between the degree of support within a population and the willingness of an actor to target it. When civilians support the group, the incentive for violence is generally low; as resistance (or apathy) increases, armed groups are more willing to use

violence. Mkandawire (2002), for example, argues that much of the carnage observed in African rebellions stems from the inability of urban political movements to garner support among rural peasants. In Uganda, the LRA's failure to mobilize popular support among the Acholi contributed to Kony's turn toward violence against the population (Branch, 2005). Moreover, victimization is more likely in areas in which support for the adversary is high or where the group suspects disloyalty (Balcells, 2010, 2011; Hultman, 2009; Kalyvas, 2006). Violence should also vary as the group's ability to control territory and populations changes. While violence is often localized, a cumulative decline in civilian compliance should produce an observable escalation in violence at the macro level.

The ability to obtain voluntary cooperation is largely contingent on the group's ability to provide the population with security or resource benefits. The ability to provide such benefits is related to the group's relative capabilities. A group's ability to demonstrate its capabilities – and particularly its success on the battlefield – shapes the population's belief about likely conflict outcomes and influences its likelihood of providing support (Gates, 2002: 123; Lichbach, 1995; Migdal, 1974: 254). The expansion of the organization and success on the battlefield encourage participation (Wood, 2003: 238–239; Race, 1972: 40). Successes provide credible signals that the faction is increasing in power and that collaboration is likely to produce benefits (see Maranto & Tuchman, 1992: 257; Mason, 1996). In a competitive, zero-sum environment, changes in the power balance are critical signals of the war's eventual outcome and the streams of resources that will be available to civilians. Civilians are acutely aware of changes in factional power, and demonstrations of capabilities lead civilians to update their support strategies (Wood, 2003: 270–273).

When support for an actor is relatively high in a population, the task of mobilizing resources is made easier. Yet, as demonstrated above, declining relative capabilities and poor battlefield performance can undermine popular support. Contracting with the local population for vital resources is complicated when an actor has less to offer the population in return and when its chances of victory wane. The situation is further exacerbated by decline because these are the moments in which mobilizing resources to devote to the war effort is most critical to group survival.

Resource exhaustion necessitates rapid replacement. In the wake of major strategic setbacks the immediate acquisition of resources may determine the group's likelihood of survival to the next period. This effect is most

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[5] Many analyses of recruitment and support within civil wars implicitly focus on guerrilla conflicts (Balcells, 2010: 292; Lockyer, 2010). In part, this is because such conflicts represent the modal type since the Second World War (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010). We build primarily upon these models. However, as Lockyer (2010) and Kalyvas (2005) point out, while strategies may differ across conflicts, the desire to exert control, compel collaboration, and eliminate threats is largely constant across conflicts.

severe for groups already facing extreme relative capability deficiencies because they have less freedom to redistribute resources and less developed networks of resource extraction. Moreover, while some groups may count on the beneficence of external patrons or offset the decline in local support with alternative resource streams, the population represents the most proximate source of resources. Thus adverse capability shifts reduce the willingness of the population to provide support to conflict actors. Dramatic shifts increase the pressure to extract additional resources from the population during moments when support is in decline. This tension contributes to an escalation in violence.

Past research suggests that strategic losses and dwindling resources contribute to upticks in violence, especially among insurgents. Metelits (2010: 26–27) argues that increased competition over scarce resources shifts an actor's priorities from the longer term to the immediate. Facing steep declines in support, the inability to quickly acquire resources presents the real possibility of extinction. In such circumstances, the most efficient means to induce resources inflows is violence. For example, in Colombia the FARC increased violence toward the population as government-backed paramilitary repression suppressed civilian compliance with insurgents (Metelits, 2010: 112 –113). Hultman (2007) more generally shows that violence against civilians increases following troop losses. Facing unfavorable shifts in the balance of capabilities, actors turn to terror and intimidation as (temporarily) useful tools in enforcing compliance from the population. While sustained levels of extreme violence may produce backlash (Mason & Krane, 1989; Kalyvas, 2006; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007), in the immediate term it can paralyze the population into compliance and demonstrate the group's power to punish recalcitrance (Kydd & Walter, 2006: 66–69).[6]

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[6] Few studies have directly assessed the success of terror on the compliance of individuals within targeted groups. Kocher, Pepinski & Kalyvas (2011) show that indiscriminate bombings were counterproductive to US control of villages in Vietnam. However, other studies suggest that it may succeed under certain conditions (Downes, 2007). Furthermore, Humphreys & Weinstein's (2008) analysis of individual participation in the Sierra Leonean conflict shows that individual security strongly predicted voluntary participation with the RUF. Given that the RUF was the most violent actor in the conflict, we may infer that it was fear of the RUF that drove compliance. We note that the influence of victimization is not deterministic. Yet the wealth of studies that point to terror as a means to control, coerce, or intimidate the population indicate that terror can yield compliance.

## Deterrence

The ability of the belligerents to deter threats from within the population under their control represents an additional means by which capability shifts augment incentives for victimization. Weakening factions become increasingly unable to police the populations they seek to control. Inability to accurately differentiate between supporters and enemy collaborators increases the incentives for belligerents to resort to indiscriminate violence in order to eliminate potential threats. However, the threat level 'behind the lines' is likely to vary over time and in relation to changes in the balance of capabilities. As a belligerent's power declines, its ability to control the population weakens as does the perception among civilians of its likelihood of victory.

Control is a critical predictor of support because civilians often hold weak political preferences: the strategic environment in which civilians find themselves molds their preferences (Kalyvas, 2006: 124–126). Effective control shapes civilian beliefs about the outcome of conflict, about the group's ability to provide promised rewards, and about the likelihood that they will suffer sanctions for collaboration with the adversary. Yet the causal arrow does not necessarily point in a single direction from control to collaboration. Rather, the relationship is largely endogenous because support allows belligerents to more easily control territory. Mason's (1996) model illustrates that the probability of an individual's cooperation with an adversary declines as the number of other 'non-elites' withholding support increases because the likelihood of being identified as disloyal decreases. As support for a faction increases, individuals are less likely to resist collaborating with it because the threat of sanctions from the opponent becomes more diffuse. Consequently, where belligerents find a sympathetic population they can more effectively extend control because their allies can assist them in locating those civilians whose loyalty resides with the adversary. By contrast, where the group encounters resistance from the population, the consolidation of control is more difficult. It is partly for this reason that fragmented sovereignty is likely to emerge in the first place and why zones of control often expand unevenly within irregular conflicts.

In more conventional conflicts, where battle lines are less fluid and control more stable, earning the loyalty of civilians may be less critical to belligerents. However, maintaining control over the populations 'behind the lines' is important to conflict actors regardless of conflict type. Moreover, when threats to control emerge, the local power is more likely to resort to violence to enforce

deterrence. Balcells's (2010) study of the Spanish Civil War demonstrates that belligerents in conventional conflicts have incentives to target civilians behind their lines in areas where prewar support for rival factions was near parity, largely because of the potential threat these civilians presented. Herreros & Craido (2009: 434) show that Francoist forces employed violence pre-emptively, using it to eliminate potential threats before they challenged the occupier. Victimization is therefore related to the belligerent's perception of threat: when a high level of active or potential threat exists, victimization should increase. This observation is broadly consistent with research on state terror and mass killing (Valentino, 2004; Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004).

The perceived level of threat posed by potential defectors varies in relation to both the local and broader balance of power within the conflict. Control and threat are closely related in that as control increases, the threat posed by potential dissenters is likely to diminish. Greater control and access to local intelligence should allow the belligerent to more accurately target disloyal civilians, thus allowing it to eliminate threats with greater precision (Kalyvas, 2006). Such targeted violence is likely to further reduce threats by sending a clear signal to potential defectors of the high price for disloyalty. Thus, civilians are likely to bury their sympathies in order to avoid punishment. Yet, this relationship is contingent on both the local and overall balance of power. As the local power of the belligerent declines, its ability to police the population and to apply sanctions selectively against defectors declines (Kalyvas, 2006). However, changes in the local balance of power often correspond to change in the macro-level power balance.[7] For example, as belligerents face defeat or troop losses in one theater, they are forced to redistribute forces from other areas to compensate. As control weakens, the ability to police the population declines.

This decline in control contributes to changes in violence in two ways. First, as stated above, waning control incentivizes increasingly random violence because local intelligence declines. Second, declining control increases the incentive for those civilians sympathetic to the opposition to defect and challenge the local power. Just as demonstrations of power encourage support among neutral civilians (Wood, 2003), shifts in the

power balance should also alter the sense of efficacy among civilians sympathetic to the opposition. The likelihood of counter-movements or subversion behind the lines therefore increases when the opposing faction's power is increasing, when it accrues battlefield victories, or when it is rapidly encroaching on the other's territory. Furthermore, as the threat of subversion increases in the face of an adversary's rising power, the incentive to 'clear the rear' of civilian threats increases as well. We therefore concur with Arendt's (1970: 53) observation that attempts to rule by 'sheer violence' emerge when power is rapidly diminishing. As the balance of capabilities shift against an actor, its incentive to use violence against civilians increases.

One potential caveat to this relationship deserves mention. The argument presented herein focuses primarily on factors that increase the willingness of conflict actors to victimize civilians. This arguably represents only one side of the equation of civilian targeting. The other is the capability to victimize civilians should the group desire to adopt such a strategy. Actors must, after all, enjoy some level of capabilities to carry out acts of violence. A capability shift might be so rapid and so extreme that it is debilitates an actor. While a 'knockout punch' might so weaken a group that it is rendered incapable of committing violence, this situation is unlikely overall. First, interventions are rarely so over whelming that they would immediately incapacitate an actor. Second, targeting civilians – even in large numbers –does not necessitate particularly powerful military forces. The LRA kills hundreds (or more) civilians annually with only a few hundred guerrillas. Similarly, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) committed thousands of killings across Algeria with a force that was miniscule compared with the state security apparatus. Consequently, while the absolute potential for victimization may be undercut by adverse capability shifts, the real ability to carry out violence is unlikely to be severely undermined until the group is essentially eliminated. Indeed, Wood's (2010) results suggest that weaker groups are the most likely to target civilians.

## Intervention and war strategy

While actors' capabilities (and thus the type of warfare in which they engage) are largely endogenous to the conflict, exogenous factors also influence the power balance. Civil wars are not exclusively domestic events: foreign powers intervene, factions form external partnerships, and rebels access foreign sanctuaries. These interactions augment the conflict capabilities of actors and therefore alter the types

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[7] Though his emphasis is on local control, Kalyvas (2006: 257–258) discusses the manner in which theater-wide shifts in the power balance between Axis and Allied forces contributed to changes in local-level power relations in Greece. Consequently, micro- and macro-level power dynamics are inextricably linked.

of warfare observed (Lockyer, 2010). Because foreign interventions influence the balance of capabilities, they should also influence the strategies of violence chosen by groups.

Military interventions influence the direction and outcome of intrastate conflicts by altering the distribution of capabilities between belligerents (Balch-Lindsay & Enterline, 2000; Regan, 2000, 2002). Indeed, managing conflict by shifting the balance of power is a central objective of foreign interveners (Regan, 2002; Gent, 2007). Pro-government interventions occur because the intervener believes that its participation increases the probability that the regime will defeat the insurgency while pro-rebel interventions are undertaken to bolster the rebels or weaken the regime. Potential interveners monitor the changing dynamics of the conflict and intervene when they expect to have the greatest impact on the outcome (Gent, 2008: 720). Interventions thus often influence the duration and outcome of civil war (Balch-Lindsay & Enterline, 2000; Regan, 2002; Collier, Hoeffler & Söderbom, 2004; Cunningham, 2010). The degree to which interventions influence outcomes is largely determined by the strength of the intervention as it affects the power balance between the belligerents.

Given that interventions can significantly alter the conflict process, belligerents adjust their strategies in response to the changed conflict environment following intervention (Lockyer, 2010). Furthermore, to the extent that interventions shift the conflict balance of capabilities, they should also influence the strategies of violence that factions adopt. Specifically, biased intervention should decrease the weakened side's capacity to police the population, reduce its ability to provide resources to attract supporters, and revise downward civilian expectations about the expected utility of supporting the side weakened by the intervention. For instance, following US intervention in Vietnam, the NLF increasingly employed 'terror' to control civilians (Joiner, 1974: 274). Similarly, in Sierra Leone, the RUF resorted to extreme violence against the population following the intervention of Nigerian troops under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its military component (ECOMOG). While the RUF had a reputation for violence against civilians, the escalating brutality in the wake of its defeat at the hands of ECOMOG troops was directly related to its reduced battlefield capacity (Gberie, 2005). The Serbian regime's response to NATO's intervention in Kosovo was similar. NATO's Operation Allied Force (OAF) meant to counter Belgrade's military advances and mistreatment of Kosovar Albanians. While OAF's bombing campaign reduced the JNA's fighting capacity, the regime responded by immediately escalating the violence against civilians, particularly against those it perceived to be supporting the KLA (Nation, 2003).

These examples suggest that interventions can influence the strategies of violence adopted by the belligerents by shifting the balance in capabilities. As argued above, factions have incentives to employ violence against civilians as they experience greater difficulties in recruiting support, controlling and policing territory, or convincing the population of their eventual success. Under such circumstances, belligerents may victimize civilians to compensate for their decline in relative power and to deter rising threats. For instance, pro-rebel intervention enhances insurgent capacity relative to the regime, thereby increasing the rebels' ability to provide benefits to their supporters (Balch-Lindsay, Enterline & Joyce, 2008: 349). Such resource provision thus increases the group's ability to recruit additional supporters. Capability shifts should therefore reduce the group's reliance on coercive tactics. Furthermore, by enhancing the military capabilities of the belligerent, the intervener subsidizes the policing capacity of its ally, allowing it to deter potential threats.

Lastly, the entry of an external power helps shape civilian expectations. On the one hand, neutral civilians are likely to revise upward their estimate of victory for the supported faction, increasing their likelihood of cooperating with it and reducing the belligerent's incentives for violence. Conversely, in the case of interventions that counter a faction, potential subversives should revise upward their expected utility for challenging the weakened side. The rising threat of a potential fifth column coupled with declining policing capabilities increases an actor's incentive for pre-emptive violence.

All told, armed interventions should reduce the supported faction's reliance on victimization to coerce compliance, control the population, and quash threats while having the converse effect on the opposed side. To the extent that interventions shift the power balance, they should have an effect on the level of violence employed by belligerents. Thus, our theoretical argument yields the following testable hypothesis:

*Hypothesis:* As external interventions in civil war favor a target group, the number of intentional civilian killings committed by the target will decrease while the number of intentional civilian killings committed by the adversary will increase.

## Data

To test our hypothesis, we analyze data on one-sided violence in armed intrastate conflicts from the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP) (Eck & Hultman, 2007). These data provide a count of intentional and direct killings of civilians by rebel groups and governments and are therefore well-suited for testing our hypothesis. For the analysis of rebel groups, the sample of cases includes all intrastate conflict dyads for the years 1989 to 2005, as identified by the UCDP Dyadic Dataset (Harbom, Melander & Wallensteen, 2008).[8] In total, there are 640 dyad-year observations, which include 129 rebel groups participating in 80 conflicts in 55 countries.[9] Because data on government violence are only available at the state level, we cannot analyze the level of one-sided government violence related to an armed conflict with a specific rebel group. The dependent variable for our second analysis is thus the number of civilians killed by a state involved in an intrastate armed conflict in a given year. Aggregating the dyad-year cases to the state level provides 388 country-year observations.

To operationalize our primary independent variable – military intervention – we examine cases where a foreign state actively participates in an intrastate conflict. Using the UCDP Dyadic Dataset, we identify dyads in which an external state sends troops to actively support the government or the rebel group in a conflict (Harbom, Melander & Wallensteen, 2008). This operational definition of military intervention is relatively conservative because it excludes cases in which a foreign state merely provides arms, safe haven, or military training to one side. By focusing on cases where an intervener actively enters a war with troops, we are confident that we identify cases in which intervention shifts the power balance between the government and rebels.

To create our measure of intervention, we identify the number of foreign troops that intervened on each side of the conflict in a given year. We then take the natural log of the ratio between the number of troops intervening on behalf of the rebels and the number of troops intervening on behalf of the government.[10] Positive values of the *Intervention Ratio* indicate cases where the balance of intervention troops supports the rebels. Negative values indicate cases where the balance of intervention troops supports the government. Cases where the interventions are at parity (or there is no intervention on either side) are coded as 0. To avoid issues of reverse causality we lag this variable one year.

We also include several control variables. First, we account for the static level of combatant capabilities. We include a measure of the relative troop strength of the rebel group in a dyad: *Rebel Strength*. Following Wood (2010), for the analysis of rebel violence, we measure rebel capability as a ratio of a rebel organization's active troops to the number of government troops reported in the UCDP database (UCDP, 2010). For the analysis of government violence, we use the ratio of the aggregate number of all rebel organizations' troops in the state to the total number of government troops. Given the positive skewness of ratio variables, we include the natural log of the ratio in our analysis.[11] We also include a dummy variable that indicates whether there were *Multiple Rebel Groups* challenging the same government in a given year. One would expect that the presence of multiple rebel groups would increase the threat to the regime, which in turn should increase the level of government violence while decreasing the level of rebel violence.[12]

We also include independent variables that take into account the conflict environment. First, we expect that the severity of the conflict will increase violence against civilians. Previous research has shown that combatants have greater incentives to target civilians in more intense conflicts (Downes, 2006; Hultman, 2007; Wood 2010).

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[8] We use the 2010 version of the UCDP dataset, but our sample only runs through 2005 due to data availability on independent variables.
[9] We exclude the case of Rwanda in 1994 from our analyses of government violence because it is an extreme outlier, over 26 times greater than the next highest observation. We estimated alternative analyses including a dummy variable for this case. The results were consistent.

[10] Often, third parties intervene on opposing sides of a conflict. By calculating the ratio of troops, we are able to determine the increase or decrease in *relative* power that is the product of intervention. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out. To accommodate cases in which there were no interventions, we calculate the intervention variable as $\ln[(\alpha+1)/(\gamma+1)]$, where $\alpha$ is the number of intervention troops supporting the rebels and $\gamma$ is the number of intervention troops supporting the government.
[11] Given the static nature of *Rebel Strength*, we include it only to account for the factions' overall capabilities. However, it does not speak to our arguments on exogenous *changes* in the power balance between combatants.
[12] Alternatively, if the presence of multiple rebel groups yields increasing levels of interfactional competition, this could potentially lead to more violence among the rebels. However, without access to fine, geographic data that can account for the direction of violence between factions, we are unable to examine these dynamics directly.

*Conflict Severity* is operationalized as the natural log of the number of total battlefield deaths in the conflict in a given year (Lacina & Gleditsch, 2005). Second, we control for the age of the insurgency. According to Kalyvas (2006: 168–169), indiscriminate violence should diminish over time as actors recognize its counterproductive effects. We code *Age of Insurgency* as the natural log of the number of years since the first battle-related death associated with the rebel group. Finally, as the size of the conflict zone increases, the combatant factions will have less control over their foot soldiers and less ability to access information about the loyalty of the population (Gates, 2002; Kalyvas, 2006; Weinstein, 2007). We expect that this will lead to more violence against civilians. Using geo-referenced conflict site data from the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO) (Raleigh et al., 2006), we measure *Conflict Area* as the natural log of the estimated area of the conflict zone in square kilometers.

Previous research has also shown that characteristics of the conflict state can influence one-sided violence. First, conflict behavior may differ in different types of regimes. Democracies may encourage violent attacks on civilians by rebels by virtue of democracy's participatory nature and the links between the preferences of the population and the actions of the state (Goodwin, 2006; Pape, 2005). On the other hand, democracies are generally more constrained in their use of violence than other regimes (Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004). Thus we would expect higher levels of rebel violence and lower levels of government violence in democracies than in non-democracies. We measure *Regime* using the 21-point scale from the Polity IV dataset (Marshall & Jaggers, 2006). Next, more developed states may be better able to institute security measures to protect civilians from rebel violence and have less need to engage in violence (Wood, 2010). We operationalize economic development as the natural log of *GDP Per Capita* (Gleditsch, 2002). Finally, one might expect that the level of one-sided violence will increase with population size. In countries with larger populations, there are more opportunities for violence. Additionally, a larger population will be more difficult to control, which could increase the factions' incentives to use violence as a means of control. *Population* is coded as the natural log of a war state's total population (Singer, Bremer & Stuckey, 1972).

Finally, we include the log-transformed value of the count of civilian killings perpetrated by the opposing conflict actor in the dyad to account for the possibility that high levels of violence by the government should increase the level of rebel violence, and vice versa. Also,

to address the potential for temporal dependence, we included a variable indicating whether each conflict actor engaged in one-sided violence in the previous year.[13]

## Statistical analysis

Given that our dependent variable is a count of civilian deaths, we estimate negative binomial regression models to test our hypothesis for both rebel groups and governments.[14] The results are reported in Table I. Owing to the potential for correlation within dyads (countries) in the analysis of rebel violence (government violence), we report robust standard errors clustered on the dyad (country). The results from the negative binomial analyses support our theoretical argument. First, consider the rebel violence model. According to the results in the second column of Table I, the *Intervention Ratio* has a negative and statistically significant effect on the level of one-sided violence by rebels. Therefore, as the size of a pro-rebel intervention increases relative to the size of a pro-government intervention, rebels are less likely to target civilians. On the other hand, as the balance of intervention forces favors the government, rebels increasingly turn to violence against the population. This result strongly supports our hypothesis.

To examine the substantive significance of this relationship we simulate the expected level of one-sided rebel violence for changes in the balance of intervention forces.[15] As Figure 1 demonstrates, when the balance of intervention forces shifts to favor the rebels (positive movements along the x-axis toward 0 or parity), the group reduces its use of anti-civilian violence. Conversely, as the balance shifts against them, the rebels increase violence. Specifically, a one standard deviation decrease in the intervention variable from parity (i.e. an intervention of 1,293 troops in favor of the government in a conflict with no previous intervention) raises the expected number of civilians killed by insurgents from 107 to 134 – an increase of 25%. Intervention clearly has a substantial effect on the scale of one-sided rebel violence.

Now consider the analysis of government violence presented in the third column of Table 1. The intervention ratio variable has a positive and statistically

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[13] We also estimated the models using a lagged dependent variable. The results were consistent.

[14] Likelihood ratio tests indicate overdispersion in both cases, so a Poisson model would be inappropriate.

[15] All simulations were performed using Clarify in Stata 11 (King, Tomz & Wittenberg, 2000). Simulations were conducted with all continuous independent variables at their means and dichotomous variables at their modal values, assuming that actors perpetrated one-sided rebel violence in the previous year.

Table I. One-sided violence (negative binomial)

| Variable | Rebel violence[†] | Government violence[††] |
|---|---|---|
| Intervention ratio $_{(t-1)}$ | −0.269** | 0.380** |
| | (0.127) | (0.171) |
| Rebel strength | −0.133 | −0.199 |
| | (0.130) | (0.208) |
| Multiple rebel groups | −0.194 | 2.590*** |
| | (0.350) | (0.434) |
| Conflict severity | 0.344*** | 0.468*** |
| | (0.073) | (0.159) |
| Conflict area | −0.022 | −0.584*** |
| | (0.121) | (0.200) |
| Age of insurgency | −0.042** | −0.086*** |
| | (0.017) | (0.016) |
| Regime $_{(t-1)}$ | 0.091* | −0.132** |
| | (0.047) | (0.053) |
| GDP per capita $_{(t-1)}$ | −0.500* | −0.193 |
| | (0.267) | (0.262) |
| Population $_{(t-1)}$ | −0.193 | 0.307 |
| | (0.139) | (0.251) |
| Government violence | −0.008 | – |
| | (0.056) | |
| Rebel violence | – | −0.174* |
| | | (0.097) |
| Rebel violence dummy $_{(t-1)}$ | 2.305*** | – |
| | (0.210) | |
| Government violence dummy $_{(t-1)}$ | – | 3.705*** |
| | | (0.535) |
| Constant | 6.900*** | 4.456* |
| | (2.338) | (2.492) |
| α | 11.270*** | 12.644*** |
| | (1.661) | (2.855) |
| N | 640 | 388 |
| Log-likelihood | −1833.59 | −1019.28 |

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.
[†]Robust standard errors clustered on dyad in parentheses.
[††]Robust standard errors clustered on country in parentheses.

significant effect on the level of one-sided government violence. Thus, as the size of a rebel intervention increases relative to the size of a government intervention, governments target civilians in greater numbers. This result also indicates that interventions favoring the government over rebel forces decrease the regime's use of anti-civilian violence, providing further support for our hypothesis. Figure 2 reports simulation estimates to demonstrate the substantive effects of the relationship. From parity, a one standard deviation increase in the intervention variable (i.e. a 1,398 troop intervention in favor of the rebels in a conflict with no previous intervention) increases the expected number of annual civilian killings by government forces from 73 to 102, nearly a 40%
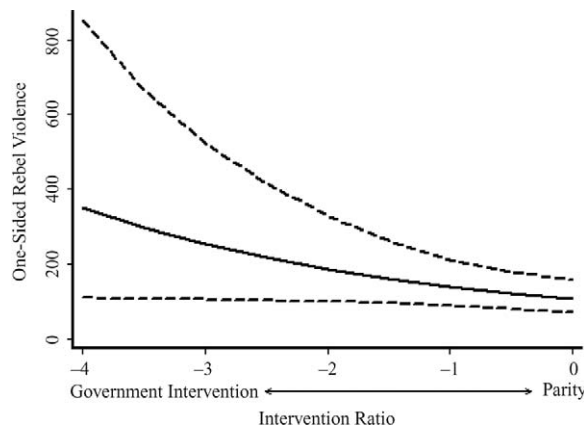


Figure 1. Substantive effect of intervention on one-sided rebel violence

Predicted level of one-sided rebel violence based on Model 1. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.
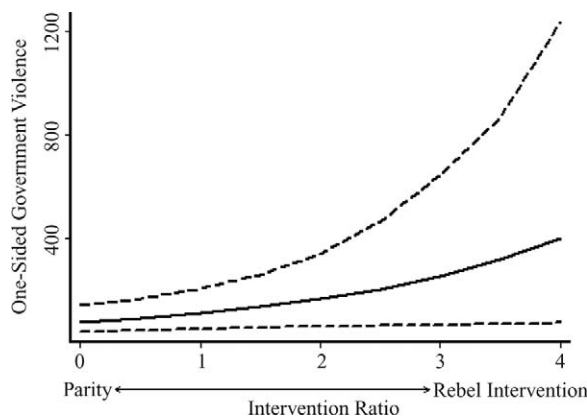


Figure 2. Substantive effect of intervention on one-sided government violence

Predicted level of one-sided government violence based on Model 2. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

increase in government violence. These results demonstrate that shifts in the power balance by external military interveners contribute to changes in the use of violence.

Turning to the other independent variables, we find that the static level of rebel strength is not significantly related to one-sided violence levels committed by the factions. As we have argued, *dynamic changes* in the power distribution as opposed to more static measures of strength drive changes in insurgent violence against civilians.[16] This provides a

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[16] While *Rebel Strength* is insignificant in the most fully specified models reported in Table I, this variable did achieve significance in different robustness checks. The insignificance may be due to the fact that we account for several aspects of power relationships in our models.

refinement of Wood's (2010) argument regarding the role of rebel strength in influencing belligerents' incentives for violence. The presence of multiple rebel groups has a positive and significant effect on the level of one-sided violence perpetrated by governments, but it has no significant effect on the behavior of rebel groups. This perhaps indicates that the increased level of threat presented by multiple rebel groups leads governments to pursue greater violence. However, the presence of other rebel groups may not reduce the threat perceived by an individual rebel organization.

Our results also indicate that aspects of the conflict environment influence the targeting of civilians. A conflict's intensity significantly increases the level of one-sided violence by rebels and governments. On the other hand, the annual number of civilian killings by both groups decreases over the duration of the conflict. Finally, the size of the conflict area decreases the propensity of the government to perpetrate one-sided violence, but it has no significant effect on rebel violence. The analysis also indicates that regime type influences the strategies of both sides. As one would expect from the literature, one-sided rebel violence is greater in democracies, while government violence is greater in non-democratic states. Additionally, economic development has a negative effect on rebel violence. Finally, we find that while both factions are more likely to target civilians if they committed one-sided violence in the previous year, the contemporaneous level of one-sided violence by the rival group only has a significant effect on government violence. These findings generally comport with previous studies (Eck & Hultman, 2007; Hultman, 2007; Wood, 2010).

## Discussion and conclusion

Research on the motivations for civilian victimization appears to be converging on a general empirical finding that significant adverse changes in the conflict environment contribute to the escalation of violence against civilians in civil wars. Significant military setbacks – especially those that represent existential threats to an armed actor – shift the actor's strategic calculus, leading it to prefer immediate goals, such as the acquisition of resources, stemming losses, and preventing group collapse. Facing steep declines in capabilities and the subsequent difficulty of attaining resources from increasingly reluctant populations, actors turn to intimidation, coercion, and victimization to achieve their short-term goals.

Much of the previous research in this area has focused on micro-level changes in control and local power. This research has advanced our understanding of the motives for anti-civilian violence and the relationship between conflict dynamics and violence off the battlefield. Macro-level analyses have provided general theories regarding the conditions that incentivize violence that have been tested quantitatively on a large number of cases. While the two approaches have produced distinct theories, there is significant overlap in their arguments regarding power shifts and incentives to kill. Moreover, macro-level events inform changes in violence at the micro level. While previous research has given some attention to the micro–macro connection, our study aims to better understand this relationship. We have specifically focused on the influence of biased military interventions on civilian victimization because the entrance of additional military personnel and resources often exerts a substantive and decisive impact on the balance of power within a conflict. As such, interventions significantly influence conflict actors' willingness to target civilians.

Our results strongly support the relationship between international-level events and changes at the micro level. Specifically, we find that the entrance of foreign troops on the side of an actor's adversary leads the opposed group to escalate its anti-civilian violence. By contrast, when a group receives foreign military support, it is more likely to reduce its violence levels. These findings comport with recent research that demonstrates that system level changes shape actors' war strategies (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010; Lockyer, 2010) and earlier studies that demonstrated the impact that foreign interventions have on conflict duration and outcome (Balch-Lindsay & Enterline, 2000; Regan, 2002; Cunningham, 2010). As such, our theory and findings further support the connection between international interactions and events at the domestic level.

These findings raise additional questions regarding the relationship between foreign support for conflict actors and their decisions regarding violence against civilians. For example, Weinstein (2007) argues that insurgent organizations that rely on foreign support are *more* likely to brutalize civilians because the presence of foreign-supplied resources encourages profit-seeking rebels and reduces the group's reliance on civilians. While this explanation is probable and even likely, the theory is essentially static and does not discuss the manner in which the arrival or departure of foreign support results in changes to group strategy. This represents an unfortunate gap in our understanding of how external actors may indirectly influence the conflict behaviors of protégés. These relationships may not always be so clear-cut. For example, Metelits's (2010) analysis of the

Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) reveals a dynamic and complex interaction between international factors, including foreign support, and the group's attitude toward civilians. The loss of support from Ethiopia and the Soviet Bloc corresponded to an uptick in SPLA attacks on civilians at the end of the Cold War. However, following this initial escalation, the lack of foreign sponsorship forced the group to contract with civilians, spurred the development of more democratic institutions, and lessened violence over the following years. Later still, the increased penetration of foreign NGOs and aid from abroad further contributed to reductions in violence as the group solidified control in the south. Consequently, while support does perhaps reduce reliance on the population and remove a constraint on group violence, the evaporation of support may, at least temporarily, lead to more radical surges of violence. Unpacking the complex relationship between foreign support and violence represents an important opportunity for researchers of domestic violence dynamics, and our findings represent one important step in addressing this puzzle.

Our argument should also resonate with policymakers. It demonstrates further that interventions have consequences beyond simply determining who wins, who loses, and how long the conflict endures. While previous research has shown that interventions have implications for the level of killing observed in genocides (Kathman & Wood, 2011; Krain, 2005), few studies have looked at this relationship in a more general sample of civil conflicts. Moreover, we believe that ours is the first study to examine their effects on insurgent violence.

Our results, therefore, present a practical conundrum for even well-intentioned interveners. Supporting a faction's quest to vanquish its adversary may have the unintended consequence of inciting the adversary to more intense violence against the population. Thus, third parties with interests in stability should bear in mind the potential for the costly consequences of countering murderous groups. Potential interveners should heed these conclusions when designing intervention strategies and tailor their interventions to include components specifically designed to protect civilians from reprisals. Such strategies could include stationing forces within vulnerable population centers, temporarily relocating susceptible populations to safe havens that are more distant from the conflict zone, and supplying sufficient ground forces to be consistent with such policies. These actions could fulfill broader interests in societal stability in addition to interests in countering an organization on geopolitical grounds. Successful policies will thus not only counter murderous factions but will explicitly seek to protect civilian populations.

## Replication data

The dataset and do-file for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets.

## Acknowledgements

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