

Research Statement

Dissertation Research

Capabilities and Constraints: Explaining Insurgent Violence against Non-combatants in Civil War

My dissertation joins a growing body of research that seeks to unpack the strategic motivations for insurgent violence against civilians. In order to explain the "logic" of rebel violence against non-combatants I examine the relationship between violence and recruitment. Consequently, I explicitly embed explanations for civilian recruitment and participation within theories of civilian victimization.

Both rebels and governments have incentives to entice civilian support and to employ sanctions to prevent them from collaborating with the enemy. The mix of violent sanctions and benefits that insurgents choose is a function of both their strength relative to the state as well as the counterinsurgency strategies chosen by the state. Weak insurgents choose indiscriminate violence because it is cheaper than either selective repression or protracted mass mobilization campaigns. Violence against civilians helps weak insurgents to overcome their collective action problem by altering civilians' expected returns for loyalty to the government or for remaining neutral.

This relationship, however, is conditioned by the counterinsurgency strategies employed by the government. Indiscriminate regime violence reduces the level of selective incentives necessary for insurgents to recruit support, but only when rebels can credibly guarantee security to civilian supporters. Because weaker insurgents are unable to offer protection or other incentives that balance the risk of supporting the rebellion, these groups are likely to escalate violence in the face of indiscriminate regime counterinsurgency tactics. Stronger groups, by contrast, employ comparatively less violence against civilians as regime violence escalates.

I rely on both quantitative and qualitative methods to test hypotheses drawn from the theory. In order to quantitatively test the hypotheses, I construct a dataset that captures violence employed by state and insurgent forces during conflicts. A National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant provided funding for the data project. An early chapter from this dissertation project is forthcoming from the *Journal of Peace Research*.

Other Research Projects

In addition to my dissertation I am currently involved in several other research projects. Included below is a short sample of ongoing projects:

Capturing and Coding Violence by Non-state Actors

The dataset used in my dissertation project is an extension of the Political Terror Scale (PTS), which I co-manage with Mark Gibney. This dataset is rooted in the conceptual logic of the PTS

but expands upon its progenitor in three important ways. First, it explicitly captures physical integrity violations committed by *non-state actors* in addition to state actors. Second, it disaggregates actor violence into three distinct categories: *abduction and arbitrary detention*, *torture and physical abuse*, and *extrajudicial execution and arbitrary death*. Third, it captures the selectivity of the violence—that is, it assesses the level of discrimination used by violent actors in selecting their targets. In this way, the dataset is of particular interest to scholars examining the strategies of violence adopted by state and non-state actors during civil wars.

Like the PTS, the scores are based on close reading and coding of publicly available human rights reports published by state agencies and NGOs. I have generated scores for all armed political actors that take part in a civil conflict resulting in a minimum of 25 battle deaths per year for the years 1995-2007. In the future these will be backdated to the early 1980s, and will incorporate supplemental resources into the coding process in order to improve the accuracy and specificity of the scores.

Militarized Intervention and Civilian Victimization in Civil Conflicts

This project examines the effects of peacekeeping missions and other forms of military interventions on levels of violence against civilians during civil wars. A paper co-authored with Jacob Kathman argues that intervention can effectively reduce the severity of state-sponsored mass killing episodes and genocides when two conditions are met: the intervention is neutral and the intervener demonstrates commitment to ending the conflict. We argue (and find) that neutral interventions can exacerbate violence in the short-term, but succeed in continuing to drive down violence the longer the intervention lasts. Other types of interventions either have no effect or increase the severity of the killing. This manuscript has received an invitation to revise and resubmit from the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*.

A second paper co-authored with Jacob Kathman and Stephen Gent argues that changes in the balance of power between the two competing political actors structure the perception of threat held by each side. As threat increases, the level of violence against the civilian population increases. Consequently, interventions that favor one side of a conflict increase the level of civilian victimization employed by the other.

Dynamic Patterning in Conflicts Between States and Non-state Actors

I am also a part of an NSF-funded project investigating learning and strategy evolution among state and non-state actors within conflict systems. In this project we focus specifically on violent political actors in the Levant. Several papers have emerged from this project. Most notably, a paper written with Mark Crescenzi and Christine Carpino examines the extent to which non-state actors with a common state-opponent learn from one another's behaviors. We also examine the extent to which the state considers these group-state interactions to be interdependent. For this manuscript we focus explicitly on the evolution of strategies and learning among Israel, Hezbollah, and Hamas.