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Combatant Socialization and the Perpetration of Violence Against Civilians in Intrastate Conflicts

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Abstract

Although the civil war literature is replete with theories purporting to explain why rebel groups wield violence against civilians, we still have a surprisingly limited understanding of the processes and mechanisms driving *low-ranking combatants* to participate in civilian targeting. As I argue in this thesis, this is in part because much of existing research on rebel behavior relies on implicit, unstated, or even unfounded assumptions about the flesh-and-blood individuals who carry out such violence on the ground. Accordingly, a number of fundamental questions about the perpetrators of wartime violence and the micro-level drivers of their behaviors have remained largely under-addressed in the scholarship on civil war violence. This thesis thus asks the following question: how do low-ranking rebel combatants come to kill unarmed civilians during intrastate conflicts?

Leveraging mixed methods that combine statistical analyses with case studies and exploring a variety of empirical cases, the thesis draws from the conceptual repertoire of sociology and psychology and contends that violence perpetration can best be understood as a *socialization* process. Specifically, I conceptualize participation in violence against civilians as deriving from the *potent social influences, needs, incentives, sanctions, and constraints* that rebel combatants experience – and which often become overriding – in the midst of civil wars. In turn, these powerful social forces progressively shape combatants' attitudinal dispositions and behavioral tendencies, creating strong pressures for them to seek alignment with the violent norms and expectations of their leaders and peers. While the three articles that form this thesis tackle different topics, they are informed and united by this overarching theoretical approach.

In the first article, I synthesize existing theories of combatant socialization and combined them into an integrated framework, which charts five key pathways toward civilian targeting. The article also specifies the main underlying socio-psychological mechanisms through which socializing influences motivate participation in such violence. It then illustrates how these pathways map onto the actual experiences of civil war combatants by examining the drivers of individual participation in violence during the Sierra Leone Civil War.

In the second chapter, I explore how the environment in which rebel combatants operate can affect their repertoire of action by shaping the nature of the socializing influences to which they are exposed. Focusing on variations across and within rebel groups waging guerrilla warfare, this article argues that the extent of a group's *operational embeddedness* – that is, the degree to which its operational bases are physically integrated within civilian communities – can considerably affect the type of relations that combatants come to nurture with civilians. Bridging the rebel governance and combatant socialization literatures, the article mobilizes cross-national statistical analyses and case study evidence from the Taliban's insurgency in Afghanistan and finds strong empirical support for these arguments, highlighting the importance of the operational context in shaping socialization dynamics and, consequently, rebel behavior.

In the third chapter, I examine whether the organizational characteristics of "new new insurgencies" (NNIs) – as defined by Walter – affect the extent to which these transnational jihadist rebel groups target civilian populations. Specifically, this article argues that the increasingly fratricidal ideology of NNIs, the fact that their leaders anchor their authority claims in divine sources, and the presence of radicalized foreign fighters in their membership base create potent socialization dynamics that are likely to steer combatants toward violence. Using cross-national statistical tests and qualitative evidence from al-Shabaab's insurgency in Somalia, the article highlights that this new – and increasingly prevalent – breed of insurgents indeed tends to impose a particularly heavy toll on civilian populations, relative to both other types of rebel groups as well as earlier and non-transnational Islamist groups. The article thus emphasizes the need to account for ideology, authority, and membership when studying the determinants of rebel behavior.

Together, these three articles thus offer a systematic theoretical account of the processes and mechanisms through which low-ranking rebel combatants come to kill civilians during civil wars, placing debates over the determinants of rebel behavior on a more solid conceptual footing. As a whole, therefore, this thesis advances our understanding of civil war violence by casting the focus on low-ranking combatants and by calling attention to the fundamental diversity of their trajectories, to the inherent complexity of the perpetration process, and to the basic humanity of perpetrators of political violence.

Keywords civil wars, violence against civilians, combatants, socialization, perpetration

Résumé

Au courant des dernières années, les chercheurs s'intéressant aux guerres civiles ont proposé une multitude de théories pour expliquer pourquoi les groupes rebelles en viennent parfois à cibler les populations civiles. Malgré cette abondance théorique, notre compréhension des processus et des mécanismes menant les combattants de rang inférieur à participer à cette violence demeure, étonnamment, très limitée. Cette carence est en partie due au fait que les travaux existants reposent souvent sur des postulats implicites – et parfois infondés – à propos des combattants se situant au bas de la hiérarchie militaire et qui sont ceux qui mettent en œuvre la violence envers les civils sur le terrain. Ainsi, certaines questions importantes sur les micro-déterminants de la violence au sein des groupes rebelles demeurent, à ce jour, sous-étudiées dans la littérature sur les guerres civiles. Cette thèse pose donc la question suivante : comment les combattants rebelles en viennent-ils à tuer des civils non-armés durant les conflits intra-étatiques? Mobilisant des méthodes mixtes (i.e. analyses statistiques et études de cas) et explorant une variété de cas empiriques, cette thèse puise dans la sociologie et la psychologie pour soutenir que la participation des combattants rebelles à la violence envers les civils peut être comprise comme étant le fruit d'un processus de *socialisation*. Spécifiquement, la thèse conceptualise cette participation comme découlant des *puissants besoins, sanctions, contraintes, influences et incitatifs sociaux* auxquels les combattants font face – et qui deviennent souvent prépondérants – durant les guerres civiles. Au fil du temps, ces forces sociales façonnent les dispositions attitudinales et les tendances comportementales des combattants, motivant chez ceux-ci la recherche d'un alignement par rapport aux normes et aux attentes de leurs dirigeants et de leurs pairs. Bien que les trois articles qui forment cette thèse abordent des sujets distincts, ils sont tous informés et unis par ce cadre théorique.

Le premier article de la thèse synthétise les théories existantes sur la socialisation des combattants et les incorporent dans un modèle intégré, qui distingue cinq trajectoires pouvant mener ceux-ci à la violence. Ce faisant, l'article spécifie les principaux mécanismes socio-psychologiques au travers desquels les dynamiques de socialisation peuvent encourager la participation à cette violence. Sur cette base, l'article illustre la valeur ajoutée de ce modèle en explorant les trajectoires vers la violence des combattants rebelles durant la guerre civile au Sierra Leone.

Le deuxième article explore la manière dont le contexte opérationnel au sein duquel les combattants évoluent peut façonner la nature des influences de socialisation auxquelles ils sont exposés. S'intéressant aux variations entre et au sein des groupes rebelles utilisant des tactiques de guérilla, l'article soutient que le degré « d'intégration opérationnelle » (*operational embeddedness)* de ces groupes au sein des populations locales influence de manière importante le type de relations que les combattants développent avec les civils. Entamant un dialogue entre les littératures sur la gouvernance rebelle et la socialisation des combattants, cet article mobilise des tests statistiques et une étude de cas qualitative (l'insurrection des Talibans en Afghanistan), mettant en lumière la manière dont l'environnement opérationnel d'un groupe affecte l'essence des dynamiques de socialisation et, par conséquent, le répertoire d'actions des combattants.

Le troisième article examine comment les caractéristiques organisationnelles des « new new insurgencies » (NNIs) – tel que définies par Walter – affectent la propension de ces groupes djihadistes transnationaux à cibler les populations civiles. L'article soutient que l'idéologie de plus en plus fratricide des NNIs, le fait que leurs dirigeants ancrent leur autorité dans des sources divines et la présence de combattants étrangers radicalisés au sein de ces groupes créent de puissantes dynamiques de socialisation, qui tendront à motiver une participation accrue à la violence envers les civils. Mobilisant également des analyses quantitatives et une étude de cas qualitative (l'insurrection d'al-Shabaab en Somalie), cet article démontre que les NNIs sont associées à des taux de violence particulièrement élevés par rapport à la fois aux autres types de groupes rebelles, mais aussi aux groupes islamistes antérieurs et non-transnationaux. L'article souligne ainsi l'importance de prendre en considération l'idéologie, l'autorité et les processus de mobilisation transnationaux pour mieux comprendre le comportement rebelle.

Ainsi, les trois articles brossent un portrait théorique systématique des processus et des mécanismes au travers desquels les combattants rebelles en viennent à tuer les civils durant les conflits intra-étatiques, plaçant ainsi cette littérature sur une base conceptuelle plus solide. Ce faisant, la thèse met en lumière la considérable diversité des trajectoires, l'inhérente complexité des processus menant à la violence et la fondamentale humanité des combattants rebelles.

Mots-clés guerres civiles, violence envers les civils, combattants, socialisation, perpétration

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

AI	Amnesty International
AIAI	al-Ittihaad al-Islami
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AQIM	al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FMLN	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
GIA	Armed Islamic Group
GSPC	Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IGO	Inter-governmental organization
IRR	Incidence rate ratio
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IS	Islamic State
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MPLA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NNIs	New new insurgencies
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPWJ	No Peace Without Justice

NSA	Non-State Actors in Armed Conflict Dataset
OSV	One-Sided Violence
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
RELAC	Religion in Armed Conflict Dataset
RENAMO	Mozambican National Resistance
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
TFG	Transitional Federal Government (Somalia)
TR	Technologies of Rebellion Dataset
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Sierra Leone)
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program

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When I first began to brainstorm ideas for my thesis in the early days of my Ph.D. program, I was well aware that my "Plan A" would probably evolve into a "Plan B" and perhaps a "Plan C". What I didn't expect, however, was that a global pandemic would lead me to exhaust most of the other letters of the alphabet, forcing me to pull my doctoral project in ever-changing directions. My journey from these early days to the submission of this thesis was thus paved with uncertainty and doubt, with countless dead ends and detours. Fortunately, along the way, many people helped me to cope with this persistent uncertainty and with the need for constant adaptation, allowing me to overcome a set of challenges which, at times, admittedly seemed unsurmountable.

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INTRODUCTION[1]

[1] Parts of this introduction appeared in the following article: "The Radicalization of Insurgents in Civil Wars: Exploring the Microfoundations of Civilian Targeting." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Perpetrator Research*.

Introduction

When the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched an insurgency against the Sri Lankan government in the summer of 1983, the group proved remarkably popular among local communities in the northeastern regions of the country. In the first few months of its struggle to carve out an independent state for Tamil Hindus, the LTTE indeed managed to attract thousands of new recruits, who viewed the group as the most viable organization to fight back against decades of discriminatory rule by the Sinhalese-dominated government (Swamy 2002, 96; Tikku 2016). In this highly polarized society where ethnic violence had become an ubiquitous feature of daily life, "many moderate Tamils came to believe that peaceful co-existence with the majority Sinhalese was no longer possible" and thus resolved to "pick up arms and fight" (Richards 2014, 30).

Yet, becoming a "Tiger" was no easy process and not everyone could join the ranks of the incipient rebel group. Being aware that "accepting a surge of new recruits could be a recipe for disaster", the LTTE leadership "made a clear decision to limit the influx" of prospective fighters by setting up a "consistent screening and selection process" (Staniland 2014, 157; see also Richardson 2005, 480). This meticulous recruitment procedure served to root out individuals with criminal pasts or psychological disorders, who LTTE leaders thought could become liabilities on the battlefield. As one ex-combatant explained: "nobody with a criminal background or mental problem could get into the LTTE at that time. It was hard [to join]. It was mostly people from medical school, from law school, uneducated farmers, etc." (Author's interview). Despite the selectivity of its recruitment process, the LTTE progressively managed to build a sizeable and highly capable fighting force, formed of thousands of ordinary Tamils hailing from various walks of life (Subramanian 2014, 141–47).

Over the course of the war, however, many of these combatants came to adopt a variety of behaviors that appear particularly puzzling, especially when one considers the nature of their initial

motivations to join and their individual profiles. Somasundaram (1998, 78), for instance, recounts the story of a young LTTE combatant pseudonymized R., who by all accounts "had a normal upbringing in a farm in Eastern Sri Lanka" and nurtured "good relations with his family" and his community. In 1989, R. resolved to join the LTTE, not so much because he genuinely wished to do so, but because social pressures and expectations suggested he should. Yet, despite his lack of commitment to the cause, he ended up participating in numerous "village massacres", committing several gruesome atrocities like killing young children in front of their screaming mothers, before hacking the latter to death (ibid).

Similarly, on the evening of August 3rd 1990, a group of around 30 low-ranking Tigers entered two mosques in the township of Kattankudy, killing nearly 150 civilians gathered for Friday prayers. As a witness explained in a harrowing account, the rebels spared no one and carried out most of the killings on a face-to-face basis and at point blank: "Before I escaped from a side door and scaled a wall, I saw a Tiger rebel put a gun into the mouth of a small Muslim boy and pull the trigger" (The New York Times 1990; see also Subramanian 2014, 174). This sort of close-range violence by LTTE rebels against unarmed civilians occurred with baffling regularity during the Tigers' insurgency, raising several perplexing questions about the individuals who enacted these atrocities: How did LTTE combatants come to perpetrate violence against unarmed civilians? What were the drivers of their participation in these killings? How did ordinary Tamils turn into violent Tigers?

While R.'s behaviors and the Kattankudy massacre stand out due to their blatant brutality, the above questions are in no way limited to Tamil insurgents or even to rebel groups sharing the same organizational profile as the LTTE. Indeed, the empirical record reveals that a broad range of rebel groups – from left-wing organizations like the Maoist guerrillas in Nepal and the Shining Path in Peru, to religious extremist groups like al-Shabaab in Somalia and the Armed Islamic Group

of Algeria (GIA) – have made extensive use of lethal violence against civilians during intrastate conflicts. In fact, some estimates suggest that around 60% of rebel groups have engaged in at least one form of major civilian abuse such as massacres and terrorism since the end of the Cold War (Stanton 2016, 4). While some organizations like the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) have displayed considerable restraint on the battlefield (see e.g. Wood 2003; Hoover Green 2018), the reality is that most rebel groups eventually use violence against civilians at some point in their challenge against the state, albeit to varying extents.

Over the years, the empirical prevalence of this phenomenon has motivated scholars of civil wars to devise a host of theories to explain why rebel groups wield violence against unarmed civilians, laying the foundations of a burgeoning research agenda (for a recent review of this literature, see Balcells and Stanton 2021). In their quest to understand the drivers of such violence, scholars have emphasized a variety of determinants, including organizational (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Cohen 2016), institutional (Hoover Green 2018), ideological (Thaler 2012), and emotional (Petersen 2002; 2011) factors. Yet, the dominant approaches on this topic have undoubtedly been those arguing that the use of violence against civilians is driven by the *strategic calculations and interests of rebel leaders* (for a review, see Valentino 2014). Belonging to this school of thought are arguments suggesting that rebels use civilian targeting to deter defection and collaboration with the government (Kalyvas 2006); to counter battlefield setbacks (Hultman 2007); to compensate for military weakness (Wood 2010); to shape a rival's relationship with its civilian constituents and international audiences (Stanton 2016); to consolidate local political control (Balcells 2017); or to force the enemy to disperse its forces (Holtermann 2019). To a large extent, these theories thus share Arendt's (1970, 51) view that violence is "by nature instrumental", that it is a means to achieve an end.

Yet, a key issue with existing accounts – and, in particular, with this "strategic baseline" – is that they generally fail to differentiate between two interrelated, but conceptually distinct processes underlying civilian targeting: *violence origination* and *violence perpetration*. By *violence origination*, I refer to the emergence or formulation of violent policies and norms, which is often set in motion from the top-down but may also arise more organically from organizational dynamics. In contrast, I use *violence perpetration* to denote the processes through which low-ranking combatants are brought to kill. The key distinction here is thus between the initial development of violent expectations and their actual on-the-ground implementation (see Lipsky 2010). While the former has received a great deal of attention in recent research, the latter has comparatively attracted far less academic scrutiny.

Indeed, although a number of excellent case studies have examined the drivers of violence perpetration among specific rebel groups – for instance, Mitton's (2015) in-depth analysis of the RUF in Sierra Leone – we still lack a broader and more systematic theoretical account of the processes and mechanisms driving low-ranking rebel combatants to kill civilians during intrastate conflicts. One of the main reasons why much more has been written on violence origination than on violence perpetration is that scholars often assume that "violence is easy for individuals to carry out, so [they] skip the micro level as unproblematic and turn to conditions in the meso background or the macro organization […]. This turns out to be a pragmatic mistake. Violence is not easy, and the key stumbling blocks and turning points are at the micro level" (Collins 2009, 34).

As I suggest below, our understanding of violence perpetration by rebel combatants has indeed been limited by the fact that theories of violence origination are often based on implicit or unstated assumptions about low-ranking perpetrators. These assumptions are often rooted in an underestimation of the fundamental difficulty of close-range violence at the individual level, which scholars in military sociology and psychology have abundantly documented (see e.g. Shalit 1988;

Grossman [1995] 2009; Collins 2009; Wieviorka 2009; Malešević 2010). This has led scholars of wartime civilian targeting to only tangentially address broader questions about perpetrators and perpetration, about the nature of violence and the flesh-and-blood individuals who carry it out. Consequently, we still know rather little about the motives, experiences, and trajectories of low-ranking rebel combatants in relation to the use of such violence. Yet, as I discuss in the last section of this introduction, devoting more attention to the perpetration process can considerably improve our understanding of civil war violence and put debates over the determinants of rebel behavior on a more solid conceptual and theoretical footing.

Addressing this gap, this thesis shifts the focus down the hierarchy of rebel groups, examining the processes through which low-level perpetrators are brought to participate in violence against civilians in the midst of civil wars. Placing emphasis on the determinants of rebel behavior at the rank-and-file level, it asks the following question: *how do combatants come to kill unarmed civilians during intrastate conflicts*? To answer this simple but perplexing question, the thesis develops a number of theoretical arguments regarding the role of combatant socialization in violence perpetration, adopts a mixed methods approach that leverages qualitative and quantitative tools, and explores a variety of empirical cases.

This introduction proceeds as follows. The first section addresses the limitations of existing theories of rebel violence against civilians and draws on decades of research in the field of perpetrator studies to challenge some of the assumptions about rebel behavior that often guide dominant explanations. The second section then outlines the theoretical approach that I mobilize throughout the thesis. The third section provides a brief overview of the three articles that form this thesis and identifies the unifying threads that bind them together. The fourth section defines key terms and discusses scope conditions. I conclude this introduction by delineating the main contributions of this thesis to the scholarship on civil wars and political violence.

Understanding Rebel Behavior

When crafting theories about why rebel groups use violence against civilians – that is, theories of violence origination – scholars often rely on implicit or unstated assumptions about violence perpetration. There are four main assumptions that pervade much of existing research on rebel violence, informing the way in which scholars make sense of how such violence is actually produced by combatants on the ground. Specifically, when seeking to explain rebel behavior, scholars often construct their theories on implicit postulates that view violence perpetration as driven by *obedience, pathology, ideology,* or *self-interest*.

The Obedience Assumption

The first implicit assumption that often guides theories of rebel violence against civilians holds that the existence of strategic incentives among rebel leaders mechanically translates into corresponding behaviors by rebel combatants since the latter face powerful pressures to obey orders. By focusing strictly on the higher echelons of rebel groups and the strategic calculations of the leadership, many studies indeed tend to treat low-ranking combatants as "mere passive conduits of orders from above" (Collins 2009, 101), suggesting that the hierarchical nature of armed groups leaves little choice to combatants but to submit to these orders. While pressures to comply may certainly be strongly felt in military organizations and motivate participation in violence, the empirical record shows that combatants are far from being unagentic cogs-in-the-machine, who blindly act out commands at every turn. Indeed, the "linkage between a given order and its […] execution" is not always as seamless as existing studies often suggest and "depends in great part on the level of organizational commitment of the combatants", on the perceived legitimacy of the

order, on individual preferences, and on a host of other micro-level factors (Haer and Banholzer 2015, 42). As Manekin (2020, 16) remarks

> [The] argument that empirical violence patterns reflect leader incentives implicitly reduces soldiers to the puppets of [commanders], unquestioningly carrying out orders and serving their superior's interests. Although many armed groups […] tend to be hierarchical organizations where obedience is demanded, its supply can be a different matter. Combatants are a diverse lot who sometimes act opportunistically, exceeding and even undermining elite strategy, and other times dodge or resist orders, failing to produce the violence expected of them.

In fact, military theorists, historians, and political scientists have long documented the fact that, on the battlefield, combatants often adopt a broad range of behaviors – including avoidance, shirking, resistance, defiance, defection, etc. – that are not always in line with their superiors' interests and directives (see e.g. Hundman and Parkinson 2019). One of the earliest accounts of these dynamics came from military theorist Ardant du Picq who conducted surveys with French officers in the 1860s, uncovering a strong tendency toward intentional misfiring and nonparticipation in killing duty during warfare. In his *Battle Studies* ([1880] 2012), he documents a host of different ways through which soldiers of the Second Empire defied or shirked orders, revealing how important changes in the nature of modern warfare decreased commanders' capacity to monitor battlefield behaviors and thus increased soldiers' ability to exert agency. Indeed, as McLauchlin (2020, 33) notes, battlefield "[tactics] have changed radically since the eighteenth century, putting a premium on greater autonomy for soldiers, who often operate independently of any immediate oversight".

Several decades after du Picq made these observations, military historian S.L.A. Marshall ([1947] 2000) published his well-known "ratio of fire" data based on interviews with more than 400 infantry companies, suggesting that no more than 15 to 20 percent of soldiers fired their weapons during combat in the Second World War. While Marshall's methodology has been

criticized by a number of scholars (see e.g. Leinbaugh and Campbell 1986), his basic thesis has been corroborated by scores of studies, which have showed that combatants often intentionally shirk their firing duty or find ways to disregard orders to kill (for a thorough discussion on the topic, see King 2013, 40–61; see also Keegan 1976; Holmes 1986; Griffith 1989; Grossman 2009).

Empirical analyses of contemporary civil wars have also casted doubts on the assumption that orders from above will always mechanically translate into corresponding behaviors by rank-and-file combatants. In a recent study of counterinsurgency operations during the Second Intifada, for instance, Manekin (2020) shows that Israeli soldiers often shirked or resisted commands from their superiors in ways that ran counter to organizational goals, resulting in the underproduction of violence in many cases. Evidence from rebel groups similarly reveals that combatants often find ways to engage in various "forms of 'deviance'" from the behaviors that commanders expect, including "non-lethal shooting in combat [and] the provision of succour and assistance to 'enemy' civilians" (Maclure and Denov 2006, 129). The following statement by a low-ranking member of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) exemplifies the subtle ways in which combatants may subvert or resist orders from their superiors: "While on patrol if we came across [unknown] people they would order us to kill them. But I was not really interested in killing people … [I] normally fire, intentionally not aiming well. [I] would then report that the mission was completed without really killing the people" (in Denov 2010, 141–42).

Another issue with the obedience assumption is that it overestimates the extent to which "the strategies of elites are coherently articulated and clearly communicated. In practice, however, elite calculations are sometimes unspecified or unknown to soldiers, whether because of notoriously foggy conditions of operations or because senior commanders may deliberately choose to remain ambiguous regarding the scope of permissible violence" (Manekin 2020, 16). As I argue

throughout this thesis, this consideration suggests that, in many cases, we must look beyond vertical pressures and toward horizontal social influences to explain participation in violence.

As such, although strategic explanations of wartime civilian targeting often rely on the assumption that combatants' behaviors mirror leaders' orders and incentives, there are strong reasons to believe that violence perpetration cannot be fully explained by merely invoking obedience. In particular, this assumption overlooks the considerable agency that combatants often manage to exert on the battlefield and "denies the ability of combatants to shape facts on the ground regardless of elite preferences" (ibid, 199). This is especially the case in irregular civil wars, in which combatants are frequently highly mobile and dispersed in a variety of small units across the conflict landscape, making it "difficult [for commanders] to monitor their behavior in real time" (Worsnop 2017, 483). More generally, "in the chaos of contemporary battlefields", behaviors are typically "very hard to observe", offering combatants an important degree of latitude as to how to act (McLauchlin 2020, 11). To be sure, obedience to authority is certainly an important factor, which can play a key role in bringing otherwise reluctant combatants to kill in the midst of war. Yet, as this thesis will argue, it is only part of the picture and cannot in itself account for the full range of rebel behavior.

The Pathology Assumption

The second assumption about violence perpetration that implicitly informs many accounts of rebel behavior holds that combatants will eagerly engage in violence against civilians when ordered to do so or when the opportunity arises. Underlying this assumption is the view that combatants are "violence-maximizers" who are inherently inclined toward aggression, displaying a number of pathological psychological traits that make them distinct from the general population

(Hoover Green 2018, 16). When military authority gives free rein to these pathologies or "when the restraints of law and social order are peeled away", combatants are thus expected to seize the opportunity to act out their violent preferences (Leader Maynard *forthcoming*, 2).[2]

This assumption is particularly prevalent in some organizational theories, which suggest that, when commanders do not have the capacity to control or monitor the behaviors of combatants, the latter will engage in different forms of abuse (see e.g. Doctor and Willingham 2020; Humphreys and Weinstein 2006). According to this approach, this is mainly because failures in organizational control provide combatants with the "opportunity to act on their own preferences to inflict violence against civilians" (Doctor and Willingham 2020, 6). Implicit in these kinds of explanation, therefore, is the view that "if an opportunity presents itself and no authorities are around to prevent violence, then it pops out automatically" because combatants are naturally inclined toward it (Collins 2009, 22).

This view has a long history; in fact, it has been at the very heart of one of the defining debates of perpetrator studies ever since this field of research emerged in the wake of the Nuremberg trials. Following the atrocities of the Holocaust, many commentators indeed sought to make sense of this carnage by placing the blame on the sadistic tendencies or psychological disorders of perpetrators – an explanation that Waller (2007, 59) calls the "Mad Nazi theory".[3] Yet, as Smeulers (2019, 11) remarks, Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* and Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* were key turning points "in the way people thought about perpetrators of [political violence]". Arendt's (1964, 276) portrayal of Adolf Eichmann as "terribly

[2] As Kalyvas (2012, 667) notes, these approaches thus have a certain Hobbesian resonance insofar as they "rest on the assumption of a human propensity for violence which will express itself unless curbed by organizations".
[3] A prominent example of this approach is Miale and Selzer's (1975) book, entitled *The Nuremberg Mind*. On the basis of Rorschach inkblot tests, the authors concluded that Nazi leaders displayed psychologically abnormal traits. See also Adorno et al. (2019 [1950]) on the "authoritarian personality".

and terrifyingly normal" and Hilberg's (1961) depiction of genocidal violence as a bureaucratic process were indeed instrumental in humanizing perpetrators and in triggering a quest for answers that would go beyond psychopathological explanations.

Following these seminal contributions, the idea that perpetrators of political violence are "psychologically unremarkable individuals" has progressively become a point of near-universal agreement within academic circles (Haggerty and Bucerius 2020, 782; see also Leader Maynard *forthcoming*, 2).[4] Indeed, as scholars continued to investigate the drivers of participation in such violence, they failed to uncover an innate inclination toward violence among most perpetrators, but instead found that most display a basic "aversion to close-encounter killings" (Malešević 2010, 227; see also Austin 2020, 550).[5] In fact, this intrinsic aversion was one of the main factors identified by Marshall ([1947] 2000, 79) to explain why non-firing rates were so high during the Second World War:

> [The] average and healthy individual—the man who can endure the mental and physical stresses of combat—still has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance towards killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility. Though it is improbable that he may ever analyze his own feelings so searchingly as to know what is stopping his own hand, his hand is nonetheless stopped. At the vital point he becomes a conscientious objector.

More recently, a number of scholars have pointed out that this resistance is equally prevalent among rebel combatants. In her study of wartime rape, for instance, Cohen (2016, 43;

[4] See also, among many others, Shalit (1988, 31–32), Staub (1989, 67), Waller (2007, 20), Collins (2009, 27), McDoom (2013, 455–56), and Littman and Paluck (2015, 84–85). For instance, as Grossman ([1995] 2009, 180) notes, a variety of studies have suggested that no more than 2 to 5 % "of combat soldiers [appear to be] predisposed to be 'aggressive psychopaths' and apparently do not experience the normal resistance to killing". Relatedly, a number of scholars have concluded that around 5% of perpetrators of mass atrocities display sadistic tendencies (Waller 2007, 75; Baumeister 2015, 232).

[5] According to Grossman ([1995] 2009, 40), this aversion to killing "exists as a result of a powerful combination of instinctive, rational, environmental, hereditary, cultural, and social factors". For Malešević (2010, 130; 228), such resistance can be explained by the fact that killing goes "against the grain of moral universes in the great majority of social orders" and because it "stands in stark opposition to most processes and values inculcated through primary socialisation".

40) notes that, although "a small percentage of fighters may actively seek to [victimize] noncombatants", the vast majority of rebels must "overcome an innate hesitation to commit violence, and especially violence that is physically close". Similarly, Hoover Green (2018, 27) argues that "violence is not a 'natural,' or an obvious, response for most […] armed-group recruits". She adds that differences in personality or predispositions between rebel combatants and the general population are too small to argue that a process of "self-selection" may explain the use of violence by these combatants – that is, the possibility that rebel groups may attract an unusual concentration of individuals with violent predispositions, who actively seek out roles that give them an opportunity to act out their sadistic preferences. As she rightfully notes, "self-selection is [also] irrelevant to the large number of armed groups […] that recruit by force or at random" (2018, 29). The vignette opening this introduction, moreover, illustrates that many rebel groups go to great lengths to root out psychopathic, overly zealous, or sadistic individuals from their ranks, viewing them as unreliable recruits.

Therefore, assuming that combatants will enthusiastically perpetrate violence against civilians when authorized, ordered, or allowed to do so appears unwarranted in many – if not most – cases. More generally, rebel groups are often formed of thousands of combatants, making it highly unlikely that most of these individuals may be psychologically distinct from the general population in any meaningful way (Drakulic 2013). Accordingly, while violent predispositions may explain the involvement of some rebel combatants in civilian targeting, they are insufficient to fully make sense of violence perpetration during civil wars. As will become apparent below, this thesis instead echoes Malešević's (2019, 4) insight that "killing has less to do with biology […] and much more with the social processes that precede, accompany and follow the acts of violence".

The Ideology Assumption

The third tacit assumption about perpetration that underlies many accounts of rebel violence holds that combatants' commitment to a violent ideology represents a key motivation for them to kill civilians. According to this perspective, violence perpetration is driven by the adherence of combatants to anti-civilian norms or eliminationist ideas, which provide the necessary impetus for them to participate in civilian targeting when they are licensed to kill or when the warfare landscape provides the opportunity to do so. This view also has a long pedigree in perpetrator studies, taking center stage in one of the field's most emblematic debates.

In the early 1990s, Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen engaged in a fierce academic dispute regarding the extent to which antisemitism represented a contributing factor in motivating perpetrators to kill Jews during the Holocaust. In *Ordinary Men*, Browning ([1992] 2017) studied the behaviors of Reserve Police Battalion 101, a unit of older German policemen hailing from a working-class background in Hamburg who were sent to Poland and unexpectedly ordered to execute thousands of Jews. As Smeulers (2019, 20) explains, "[their] commander did not approve of the order and gave his men the possibility to opt out. Only a few did, most others did not, because they felt it was their duty to do as ordered" and because they were afraid to let their comrades down. She adds that "the story of this group proved that almost any group of ordinary men could be transformed into killers and that situational rather than dispositional factors could explain this" (ibid). For Browning, these policemen were thus not driven by hatred or ideology, but by potent pressures for conformity.

In *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Goldhagen (1996) advanced a contrarian view, suggesting that perpetrators of the Holocaust were not "ordinary men", but "ordinary Germans" who were swayed by the "eliminationist antisemitism" that pervaded German political culture and national identity at that time. According to this view, the behaviors of perpetrators were ideologically

motivated and may be explained by the fact "that all Germans carried with them a historically embedded desire to eliminate the Jew" (Overy 2014, 519). For Goldhagen, the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 were thus "willing executioners who were finally given the option to act upon their beliefs" (Smeulers 2019, 20).

As the above makes clear, the main bone of contention in the Browning-Goldhagen debate concerned the relative importance of situational factors and "strategies of psychological adjustment to perpetration" on the one hand, and the "dispositional influence of cultural or ideological conditioning" on the other hand (Overy 2014, 520).[6] Yet, as Overy remarks, "[few] historians were persuaded by Goldhagen's argument, since it relied on unverifiable assertions about the specifically anti-Semitic nature of German society and culture, and reduced the act of perpetration to a simple and invariable motivation" (ibid, 519). The renowned historian Raul Hilberg (2007), for instance, famously commented that Goldhagen was "totally wrong about everything".

In the wake of this debate, a growing number of scholars have indeed sided with Browning, arguing that combatants "rarely kill […] for grand abstractions such as the nation's liberty, Islam, democracy or socialism" but for more immediate concerns related to their socio-situational environment (Malešević 2010, 202).[7] In fact, in perpetrator research, "the consensus today is that many perpetrators are not motivated by ideology" but by more proximate socio-situational factors (Williams 2020, 4) and that "fervent ideological convictions are not necessary to explain the

[6] On the role of Nazi ideology, see also Bartov (1992). Bartov argues that, brutalized by the hardships of war, German soldiers on the Eastern front embraced Hitler's ideology in order to justify their sacrifices as a noble form of patriotism and sought to make sense of their atrocities by dehumanizing their victims in line with the Third Reich's antisemitic propaganda.

[7] Relatedly, Parkinson (2020, 2) notes that, in militant organizations, "there are usually relatively few true believers or committed ideologues", adding that "individuals' ideological commitments do not necessarily or directly flow from master cleavages or elite narratives; they are uneven, contingent, fraught with tension, and often ambivalent. Members of militant organizations frequently act in ways that diverge from what seem like foundational ideological commitments, sometimes comically so. Ostensibly gritty guerrilla leaders sport Gucci shoes at negotiations. Purportedly fundamentalist Islamist militants drink beer, smoke cigarettes, and consume pornography".

behaviour of most perpetrators" (Valentino 2004, 31). While ideology may play a more decisive role in dynamics of violence origination at the leadership level, it indeed seems to be considerably less prevalent as a "primary motivating factor" for action or as a key driver of violence perpetration among rank-and-file combatants (Anderson 2018, 108; see also Szejnmann 2008, 44).[8] The empirical record reveals that this is especially the case among contemporary rebel groups. Kilcullen (2009), for instance, notes that low-ranking combatants in many modern insurgencies are not motivated by grand transnational ideologies but fight for concerns, grievances, and objectives that are resolutely local. Similarly, as I highlight in the case study of Chapter 3, local al-Shabaab combatants were rarely driven to kill civilians by their commitment to Salafi-Jihadism, but usually engaged in violence on the basis of potent group dynamics and socio-psychological processes.

This is not to say that ideology never plays a role in bringing rank-and-file rebels to kill during civil wars. In fact, the first and third articles of this thesis show that different degrees of ideological commitment can coexist within the same organization, and sometimes even in the same individual at different points in time. In an indirect fashion, moreover, ideologies may "exert powerful influence *even over those who do not believe in them*" insofar as, when ideological frames of reference "[become] embedded in the institutions and norms of a group […], even non-believers are subject to considerable social or 'structural' pressure to comply with that ideology" (Leader Maynard *forthcoming*, 13). In my analysis of "new new insurgencies", for instance, I highlight how many local recruits of al-Shabaab in Somalia displayed a rather weak commitment to their group's ideology, but were nonetheless swayed by potent socialization dynamics that were structured by and imbued with the precepts of Salafi-Jihadism. Yet, the above indicates that scholars should

[8] This echoes Leader Maynard's (2014, 826) contention that "we might expect atrocity-justifying ideologies to be endorsed with greater conviction amongst policy-initiators than direct or indirect killers. We might also expect ideology to play a more active motivational role for the former, and a more passive enabling role for the latter".

exercise caution when treating Marxism, nationalism, jihadism, or other such ideologies as primary drivers of violence perpetration at the rank-and-file level.

The Self-Interest Assumption

The last implicit assumption that often guides explanations of rebel civilian targeting suggests that combatants seize the opportunities afforded to them by the warfare context to further their economic self-interests through the use of violence. This assumption was especially prevalent in the early days of the field's intellectual development. In particular, Paul Collier's arguments on the role of greed in civil wars and John Mueller's (2007, 1) depiction of modern warfare as "opportunistic predation waged by […] criminals, bandits, and thugs" were instrumental in disseminating this idea that rebel violence could be viewed as a self-serving method of resource extraction. According to this view, rebel combatants can thus be equated to "ordinary criminals" who, in their quest for profit, engage in a form of entrepreneurial violence whenever the opportunity arises (ibid, 4; on "opportunistic violence", see also Tilly 2003).

At first sight, this assumption may seem intuitive, especially considering the ubiquity of phrases like "blood diamonds" in popular and media accounts or the portrayal of rebel groups like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) as "narco-guerrillas".[9] Yet, recent empirical studies on civil wars provide strong reasons to cast doubts on the idea that violence perpetration by low-ranking rebels is driven by opportunistic profit-seeking. For one thing, there are important differences in the economic or material benefits that the leadership of rebel groups can reap from warfare and those that rank-and-file combatants may expect to gain. In the RUF, for instance, the uneven distribution of the spoils of war caused considerable tensions between combatants and their

[9] On the interplay between civil wars and organized crime, see Kalyvas (2015).

commanders: "The rift between the rank-and-file and the leadership […] deepened as the war progressed, with the rank-and-file bearing most of the costs and the leadership reaping most of the rewards" (Keen 2005, 44).[10] Relatedly, Staniland (2014a, 228) remarks that "[there] is a real danger of turning insurgents into simple criminals out for loot and lucre. The extraordinary costs many insurgents pay seem to belie this approach: it is impossible that the average insurgent […] [will grow] fabulously rich [during a war], but it is clear that they are facing the possibility of death, life-changing mutilation, or capture". As such, looting opportunities may represent a strong motivation for rebel leaders to initiate or perpetuate an insurgency, but are unlikely to constitute an equally potent driver of behavior among low-ranking combatants.

There is also a fundamental qualitative difference between looting and killing, insofar as the former may be carried out with minimal moral qualms while the latter typically requires the overcoming of major psychological hurdles. Combatants may thus succumb to the opportunities provided by warfare to loot goods and improve their own lots, but still encounter significant cognitive barriers when faced with the prospect of killing civilians. On a more aggregated level, moreover, recent research using geo-referenced data has casted significant doubts on earlier claims that the presence of lootable resources is associated with higher levels of violence against civilians (Wimmer and Miner 2020). As such, while it is plausible that rebel combatants may sometimes engage in opportunistic behaviors during civil wars, it appears unlikely that self-interest in itself represents a primary factor in bringing most perpetrators to kill civilians.

[10] As this combatant explains, the RUF even developed an organizational policy that prohibited low-ranking insurgents from accumulating wealth: "It was not allowed […] to have more than 20,000 Leones [at the time about US$20] in your pocket. Every time a commander will meet you with more money, it will be a problem for you" (in Peters 2011b, 89). This is confirmed by Humphreys and Weinstein (2004, 27) who, on the basis of their survey with over 1,000 ex-combatants, indicate that more than 70% of RUF combatants reported that "valuable goods were sent out of the unit or kept by the commander".

Beyond Obedience, Pathology, Ideology, and Self-Interest

In sum, while the four assumptions discussed above may seem superficially intuitive, decades of research in the field of perpetrator studies and in the broader scholarship on political violence have shown that all four are unsatisfactory – if not empirically inaccurate – premises on which to base our understanding of violence perpetration by rebel combatants. As I detail further below, moreover, many of these assumptions are founded upon an *asocial* view of violence perpetration, which overlooks the fact that the conduct of "warfare is inevitably a social event" (Malešević 2010, 3). Accordingly, while obedience, pathology, ideology, and self-interest may play a role in some cases, these factors remain insufficient in themselves to account for the whole range of rebel behavior. As I show in different parts of this thesis, the obedience assumption is probably the one that is the most consistent with the available evidence, but it is only part of the picture and needs to be incorporated into a broader theoretical framework to offer any analytical leverage.

Existing works in perpetrator studies can certainly offer useful tools to build such a framework. Yet, this body of research has predominantly been focused on state militaries and on a small number of high-profile episodes of mass atrocities (e.g. the Holocaust, the Rwandan Genocide, etc.), raising questions about the applicability of these works to the study of violence perpetration by rebel combatants. In the penultimate section of this introduction, I further address the scope conditions of this thesis, highlighting why I restrict my focus to rebel perpetrators waging civil wars. Next, I discuss how a theoretical approach focused on combatant socialization can help to address the limitations of existing research and inform our understanding of violence perpetration by rebel fighters.

Theoretical Approach

As the previous section emphasized, a long line of scholarship on perpetrators of political violence has shown that, while obedience, pathology, ideology, and self-interest may explain some instances of rebel violence against noncombatants, these four factors seem to be insufficient to explain participation in civilian targeting at the rank-and-file level. To better understand to determinants of rebel behavior during civil wars, therefore, we need to look beyond these explanations and strive to elucidate the key driving forces that lead combatants to kill.

This thesis argues that, at the rank-and-file level, violence perpetration can best be understood as a *socialization* process that is fueled by a number of key socio-psychological mechanisms, which ultimately bring combatants to kill the unarmed. Following Checkel (2017, 592), I define combatant socialization as the "[processes] through which actors adopt the norms and rules of a given community. This means to think of [rebel combatants] as embedded in social environments, which not only constrain and provide incentives to act, but also reshape interests and identities". More specifically, I conceptualize participation in violence against civilians as deriving from the *potent social influences, needs, incentives, sanctions, and constraints* that rebel combatants experience in the midst of civil wars. In turn, these powerful social forces progressively shape combatants' attitudinal dispositions and behavioral tendencies, creating strong pressures for them to align with the group's violent norms and expectations. To situate my approach within Weber's ([1922] 2019, 101) ideal-types of social action, I emphasize value-based rationality (*wertrationalität*) over instrumental rationality (*zweckrationalität*). In this view, combatants do not come to kill on the basis of self-interested calculations that lead them to select the most "efficient" course of action. Instead, combatants engage in violence as a result of their commitment to socio-psychological values that become overriding in the midst of war and that eventually come to represent the key factors guiding their choices between behavioral alternatives. To paraphrase

Varshney (2003, 87), I thus maintain that, through the act of killing, most combatants seek to satisfy vital social goals, even if the individual psychological costs of realizing them are high.

As such, I argue that, in most cases, the key factors that will bring combatants to perpetrate violence against civilians during civil wars are different forms of social influence – that is, the processes by which combatants' attitudes and behaviors are transformed by the presence or action of other actors in their immediate social environment (Kelman 1958). I maintain, therefore, that participation in violence against civilians should be understood in relational terms, "as a form of social action motivated […] through social interactions with other individuals and their direct context, as well as by the dispositions of the individual actors" (Reinermann and Williams 2020, 146; see also Parkinson and Zaks 2018, 272).

Yet, I do not intend to frame perpetration as the outcome of inexorable social forces or to present perpetrators as incapable of exercising free will or agency. Indeed, as Waller (2008, 162) aptly remarks, perpetrators are not 'hapless victims of […] their social context. On the road to committing atrocities, there are many choice points for each perpetrator". To be sure, combatants are likely to possess varying degrees of "behavioural freedom", depending on their individual traits, psychological makeup, and personal wartime experiences (e.g. the nature of their recruitment into the group, the type of operating conditions in which they fight, etc.) (Zimbardo 2007, 446). Yet, I argue that the role of individual differences will likely be minimized by that fact that group membership and interpersonal relationships serve vital reward and normative functions in the uncertainty of warfare, exerting potent effects on most combatants in most settings.

One of the guiding assumptions of this thesis is that socialization represents the most suitable concept to make sense of violence perpetration because it is, by definition, a *processual* notion. As such, it is fundamentally compatible with an understanding of perpetration as a process unfolding over time and through which combatants come to learn, adopt, or internalize a given

repertoire of attitudes and behaviors. A theoretical approach focused on combatant socialization thus explicitly recognizes that "perpetrators are not born but made", thereby motivating an investigation into the underlying process leading to this outcome (Overy 2014, 526).

The processual nature of my approach also helps to challenge works on rebel violence that depict combatants' preferences as fixed. In his seminal book *Inside Rebellion*, for instance, Jeremy Weinstein (2007) argues that rebel groups forming in theatres where material resources are widely available will tend to attract opportunistic and predatory recruits, who are particularly likely to victimize civilians. In contrast, groups without access to such resources will recruit "idealistic" combatants, who will tend to exhibit restraint toward noncombatants. According to this view, combatants' relationships and dispositions toward violence remain essentially the same over the course of the war, an assumption I find unconvincing and somewhat essentialist. Instead, an approach revolving around combatant socialization is based on the assumption that individuals join rebel groups "with diverse notions about the appropriate use of violence" and different sets of beliefs, values, and preferences, all of which are liable to change as combatants' social environment evolves (Manekin 2017, 607). Rather than attempting to develop a typology of "combatant types", therefore, this thesis focuses on the social processes that can bring combatants to engage in a particular form of wartime behavior.

There are obviously many reasons why combatants may participate in violence and I do not claim to provide an exhaustive explanation nor a full account of these reasons, but the central argument of this thesis is that socialization represents one of the most powerful processes through which violent norms and expectations are translated into violent behaviors during civil wars. Yet, a set of key questions remain unanswered: how do these norms emerge in the first place? What determines the nature of the normative and behavioral expectations that combatants are socialized into? Why does socialization promote violence in some rebel groups, and restraint in others? In

this thesis, I admittedly focus far more extensively on the *how* than on the *why*, leaving to a large extent the task of answering these questions to further research. I do, however, offer some preliminary reflections as to what might shape the "content" of socialization.

As detailed further below, I maintain that the *ideological* and *operational* contexts in which combatants evolve are key determinants that may strongly affect the property of social interactions within a given rebel group. In the third article, I highlight how the ideology around which a rebel group forms can structure and give meaning to socialization, creating violent behavioral expectations that most combatants are incentivized to meet, even if they do not truly believe in this ideology and join for more pragmatic reasons that have nothing to do with it. In the second article, I also suggest that the operational environment in which combatants find themselves can foster violent norms and incentives, especially when rebel units operate in protracted isolation from civilian communities. In these conditions, potent strategic pressures and sociopsychological dynamics are likely to become overriding and to trump other determinants of rebel behavior.

To a certain extent, moreover, this thesis is consistent with McLauchlin's (2020, 191) understanding of socialization as "a powerful force", whose content is primarily determined by the norms and preferences that combatants "bring into an armed group in the first place". For McLauchlin (2020, 11), the nature of these norms and preferences shapes the interpersonal relationships and interactions that combatants have with one another, ultimately "[giving] a direction to socialization [and] indicating what soldiers are socialized to do". Although he addresses a different topic (i.e. desertion), his account of socialization is largely in line with the findings that I present in the third article of this thesis. In particular, I show how the norms and preferences that radicalized foreign fighters import into conflict theatres can affect the nature of horizontal interactions within rebel groups, shaping the direction of the socializing influences to which local combatants are exposed.

Evidently, it is plausible that numerous factors may shape the content of socialization. Yet, some of the findings in this thesis provide strong indications that the ideological and operational contexts play an important part in determining the nature of the norms that combatants are socialized into and can, in some cases, lead social interactions to produce violent outcomes. In some parts of this thesis, I thus show how macro-level conditions (e.g. the ideological backdrop or the operational environment) can frame micro-level behaviors and steer socialization processes in specific directions.

The first chapter of this thesis outlines my theoretical approach in considerably more detail. In particular, it defines key terms, specifies the main mechanisms at work in these processes, and charts a number of pathways through which combatants may come to perpetrate violence against civilians. For now, I discuss how my approach differs from existing works on combatant socialization and how it may help to address some of the limitations of the broader literature on rebel violence.

In recent years, a growing number of studies have mobilized the concept of socialization to investigate how combatants come to adopt certain norms and practices during armed conflicts (see e.g. Cohen 2013; 2016; 2017; Hoover Green 2016; 2017; 2018; Wood 2009; 2018; Wood and Toppelberg 2017; Davis and Jang 2018; Manekin 2017; 2020). As I argue in the first chapter, these works have considerably improved our understanding of how combatants are inducted to the normative and behavioral standards of their organizations. Yet, the vast majority of these studies have focused on the manner in which socializing influences affect combatants' involvement in sexual violence, without fully elucidating how such influences may shape patterns of participation in other forms of victimization, especially lethal violence.[11] As Cohen (2016, 83) notes, however,

[11] A notable exception is Hoover Green (2018), who focuses on lethal violence. Yet, she is primarily interested in the other side of the equation – that is, when socialization contributes to the limitation of such violence.

"rape and lethal violence require different theoretical explanations" because they display distinctive characteristics and are arguably driven by different mechanisms and dynamics.[12] Accordingly, while this thesis draws inspiration from existing works on sexual violence, it casts the focus on the specific processes that may lead rebel combatants to kill civilians during intrastate conflicts, striving to highlight how processes of combatant socialization may diverge and overlap across different kinds of violence.

As Checkel (2017, 594) remarks, moreover, "a problem that has bedevilled" much of recent research on combatant socialization is the lack of attention to "the agency of the targets involved. Too often, they are construed as blank slates on which new values are inscribed". Indeed, this body of work has primarily been concerned with the institutional or organizational sources of socialization (in particular, institutions of political education and recruitment practices), largely glossing over the way in which socializing influences are lived and experienced by "socializees" – that is, low-ranking combatants. In contrast, this thesis casts the focus on the dispositions, motives, experiences, and trajectories of rebel combatants in relation to the act of perpetration, striving to elucidate the various socio-psychological mechanisms that may fuel their socialization to the use of violence against civilians.

As will become apparent below, this thesis also broadens the combatant socialization literature by examining a host of factors that have not been satisfacotrily addressed in existing studies but which, I argue, can exert potent socializing effects on combatants. Specifically, the thesis argues that, to fully appreciate how socializing influences can bring combatants to kill civilians, we need to pay close attention to the *operational* and *ideological* environments in which

[12] A recent study, however, argues that the use of sexual violence by a rebel group in times of inactive conflicts may be indicative of the fact that it is actively maintaining its operations and mobilizing fighters (Nagel 2020). As such, sexual violence in periods of inactivity may lead to subsequent re-escalations in lethal violence.

rebel combatants fight, to the *strategic incentives* shaping vertical socialization processes, and to the nature of *relational dynamics* between combatants and a range of other actors (i.e. peers, commanders, and civilians).

The second chapter, for instance, explores how the operational context in which rebel groups evolve can influence the nature of the socializing influences to which combatants are exposed, thereby affecting the type of relations that the latter nurture with civilian populations. In particular, this chapter demonstrates that different operational environments – for instance, isolated bush camps or bases established in populated areas – create distinctive structures of incentives for commanders and specific configurations of inter-personal relationships among combatants, which exert important effects on the outcome of socialization. The third chapter investigates how the distinctive organizational characteristics of "new new insurgencies" (NNIs) – this increasingly prevalent breed of rebel groups that embrace radical Islamist ideologies and pursue transnational goals – affect the socialization of its combatants to violent repertoires of action. Specifically, it places emphasis on the role of NNIs' fratricidal ideology, the divine nature of its commanders' authority claims, and the radicalizing influence of foreign fighters in shaping combatant socialization dynamics.

Evidently, expanding the list of variables that we factor into our analyses of socialization comes with a cost in terms of parsimony. Yet, I believe that this expansion is necessary and can allow us to recast and enhance our understanding of how socialization shapes behavior. This is mainly because organizational theories – which are the dominant explanations on this topic – often overlook the fact that macro-level or meso-level conditions (e.g. the operational context in which combatants evolve) can sometimes exert an overriding influence on micro-level behavior, creating vertical incentives and horizontal dynamics that may at times trump the effects of organizational features. By focusing on group-level characteristics, moreover, existing theories are often too

aggregated to capture key distinctions within the rank-and-file (e.g. the differences in dispositions and motivations between local and foreign fighters). To be sure, existing works on combatant socialization offer important insights to make sense of rebel behavior and I draw heavily on them in this thesis. Yet, I strive to bring this program of research forward by offering a more granular and multi-faceted theoretical account of how socialization can shape combatants' conduct. In the following sections, I provide a brief overview of the three articles that form this thesis, identifying the main unifying threads that bind them together.

Overview of the Articles

First Article

The first article – entitled "Pathways to Violence in Civil Wars: Combatant Socialization and the Drivers of Participation in Civilian Targeting" – reviews the relevant literature, lays the theoretical foundations of this thesis, and offers an empirical illustration of the added-value of a perpetrator-centric approach. The article synthesizes existing theories of combatant socialization and combines them into an integrated framework, which casts the focus on individual pathways toward civilian targeting and specifies the underlying socio-psychological mechanisms through which socializing influences motivate participation in such violence. Specifically, the article charts five pathways that operate through different mechanisms, and which are based upon varying degrees of internalization regarding the legitimacy of civilian targeting. In each case, I also identify several unit-level factors that are likely to make a given pathway particularly prevalent among combatants.

The article then illustrates how these pathways map onto the actual experiences of civil war combatants by examining the drivers of individual participation in violence against civilians among

low-ranking members of the RUF in Sierra Leone. The case study evidence highlights the equifinal nature of violence perpetration during civil wars, shedding light on the different social needs, expectations, incentives, sanctions, influences, and constraints that may motivate participation. In doing so, the article challenges some of the homogenizing assumptions about perpetrators that often pervade academic and popular accounts on rebel groups and foregrounds the diverse social processes through which combatants are brought to kill.

Second Article

The second article of this thesis – entitled "The Two Faces of Guerrilla Warfare: Operational Embeddedness and Civilian Targeting in Irregular Conflicts" and co-authored with Arthur Stein – begins from the observation that rebel groups using guerrilla tactics display considerable variation in the type of relations that they nurture with civilians. What explains this variation? Why do some guerrillas use violence against noncombatants extensively, while others exhibit restraint? The article argues that operational embeddedness – the extent to which guerrillas' operational bases are physically integrated within civilian communities – represents a key determinant of rebel behavior during irregular conflicts, shaping the repertoire of actions that rebels come to adopt both across and within guerrillas.

The article maintains that operational embeddedness creates strategic incentives for commanders and socialization dynamics among combatants that are likely to inhibit violence against civilians. In particular, the operational presence of guerrillas within civilian communities incentivizes rebel leaders to establish governance institutions, while also fostering trust-based relationships between combatants and noncombatants, thereby reducing the prevalence of civilian targeting. Operational disembeddedness, on the contrary, creates a situation in which vertical

incentives and horizontal socialization processes tend to converge to promote such violence. Specifically, the absence of integration within civilian communities will force commanders to rely on coercive resource extraction strategies and will create socialization "echo chambers" that are likely to act as incubators of violent dispositions among combatants.

To test these arguments, we mobilize a mixed methods research design, which allow us to examine both macro-level trends and micro-level mechanisms. Cross-national and case study evidence from the Taliban's insurgency in Afghanistan provide strong empirical support for our theory, highlighting how the operational context in which guerrilla units evolve affects their wartime conduct. By focusing on the physical distribution of human actors across the conflict landscape, this article extends research agendas on technologies of rebellion, the geography of civil wars, armed group embeddedness, rebel governance, and combatant socialization.

Third Article

The third article of this thesis – entitled "Are 'New New Insurgencies' More Lethal? Jihadist Rebels, Combatant Socialization, and Civilian Targeting" – begins from Walter's (2017a) observation that, since the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, an increasing number of civil wars have been fought in Muslim-majority countries by Jihadist rebels pursuing transnational goals. On this basis, the article explores how this emerging trend bears on patterns of violence against civilians across and within intrastate conflicts. I argue that these "new new insurgencies" (NNIs) display three key organizational features that not only distinguish them behaviorally from other types of rebel groups but that also make them an especially violent subset of Islamist insurgencies. Specifically, I contend that the *fratricidal ideology* of NNIs, their divine *authority claims*, and the transnational nature of their *membership makeup* will tend to produce powerful vertical and

horizontal socializing influences, thereby facilitating combatants' induction to their group's violent norms and behaviors.

I thus suggest that ideology operates both as "doctrine" and as "practice" in driving NNIs toward violence. On the one hand, the content of NNIs' formal doctrine matters in that it delineates the ever-expanding boundaries of these groups' "targeting portfolios" (Hafez 2020, 610) and sets the behavioral expectations that combatants must meet. Divine authority then creates pressures and incentives that facilitate vertical socialization and enable the translation of these expectations into actions. On the other hand, however, it appears that, among local members of NNIs, it is typically not the intrinsic appeal of Jihadism that motivates participation in violence. Instead, I argue that the violent norms and behaviors prescribed by the ideology of NNIs are often channeled through and promoted by quotidian relational dynamics between local combatants and radicalized foreign fighters within these organizations (Parkinson 2020). Over time, these horizontal social influences can "reinforce group boundaries, norms, and obligations", thereby shaping behavior in more informal ways (ibid, 3). Here, therefore, Jihadism does not serve as a primary motive for action, but as the ideological backdrop that structures and gives meaning to combatant socialization.

Leveraging cross-national statistical analyses and case study evidence from al-Shabaab's insurgency in Somalia, I show that NNIs have a significantly higher propensity to engage in civilian targeting relative to other types of rebel groups, while also being more violent than earlier and non-transnational Islamist insurgencies. The article therefore extends research agendas on combatant socialization, the role of ideology in armed conflicts, and the transnational dimensions of civil wars.

Unifying Threads

There are three main unifying threads that bind these three articles together, contributing to the cohesiveness of the thesis as a whole. At the theoretical level, all three articles develop arguments regarding the role of combatant socialization in violence perpetration. In particular, they are based on a similar theoretical structure, which emphasizes the interactions between vertical and horizontal socialization influences. As such, the three articles are guided by the assumption that socialization to violence occurs through relatively intentional processes engineered by the leadership of armed groups *and* through more spontaneous dynamics deriving from interactions between rank-and-file combatants – two sets of influences that reinforce one another.

At the methodological level, the thesis – and, in particular, the second and third articles – is guided by the conviction that mixed methods designs represent a highly valuable approach to conduct scholarly research on civil war violence (see e.g. Balcells and Justino 2014; Thaler 2017). Indeed, while the first chapter has a more qualitative bent, both the second chapter on guerrilla warfare and the third chapter on "new new insurgencies" leverage a methodological approach combining large-N statistical analyses and case study evidence, thereby allowing me to cast the focus on macro-level trends and micro-level mechanisms.

Finally, at the ontological level, all three articles are in line with this thesis' commitment to place the motives, experiences, and trajectories of flesh-and-blood perpetrators at the heart of our theories of civil war violence. By striving to shed light on the mechanisms through which rebel combatants are brought to kill, these articles thus seek to go beyond "abstract accounts that delete the personhood" of perpetrators (Austin 2020, 554). In doing so, the thesis hopes to motivate greater engagement by scholars of civil wars with important questions about perpetrators and perpetration. In the conclusion of this thesis, I address the limitations of these three articles and discuss their implications for theory and policy.

Scope Conditions and Definitions

Evidently, it is highly plausible that governmental soldiers committing atrocities during interstate wars, civilians partaking in genocides, or terrorists carrying out suicide attacks may be driven to kill through a number of overlapping mechanisms and processes. As Kalyvas (2019) argues, however, it is essential to differentiate between different forms of political violence by drawing distinctions between the type of perpetrator and target that they involve, insofar as the interface between these two factors considerably shapes the essence of each kind of violence. As such, while this thesis draws inspiration from and imports key concepts from the broader field of perpetrator studies, it focuses primarily on the processes leading *rebel combatants to use direct and lethal violence against civilians during intrastate conflicts*. Table 0.1. situates this form of political violence within the framework provided by Kalyvas. In the following sections, I discuss why I chose to restrict my attention to this subject matter.

Table 0.1. Rebel Civilian Targeting in the Landscape of Political Violence

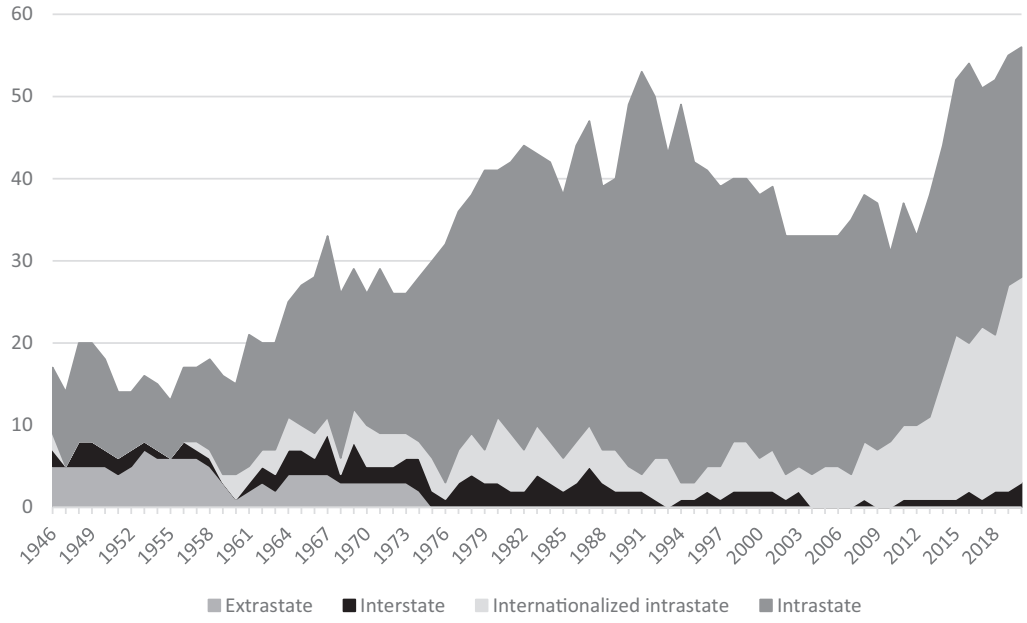
	State Target	*Non-State Target*
State Perpetrator	Interstate war	Civil war State repression Genocide Ethnic cleansing
Non-State Perpetrator	Civil war Organized crime Rebellion Military coup Terrorism	**Rebel civilian targeting** Intercommunal violence Terrorism

Source : Adapted from Kalyvas (2019, 13).

Intrastate Conflicts

The first reason why this thesis focuses on intrastate conflicts rather than interstate wars is that, as Figure 0.1. illustrates, conflicts fought between states have become increasingly rare since the end of the Second World War, while the number of active civil wars has risen steadily.[13] The end of the Cold War, in particular, was followed by a significant spike in the incidence of civil wars, as "an average of twenty intrastate wars have been in progress at any moment – about ten times the annual average globally between 1816 and 1989" (Armitage 2017, 5). In contrast, since 1989, "barely 5 percent of the world's wars have taken place between states" (ibid, 7-8).

Figure 0.1. Number of State-Based Armed Conflicts by Type (1946–2020)



Source: Pettersson et al. (2021, 4).

[13] Following Kalyvas (2006, 17), I define civil wars as armed conflicts waged "within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties that are subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities". Throughout this thesis, I use the terms "civil", "intrastate", and "internal" conflicts interchangeably.

Estimates suggest that about one-third of all countries on the globe have been afflicted by civil wars in recent decades (Blattman and Miguel 2010). According to figures from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 221 civil wars were fought in more than 100 countries across the world from 1946 to 2019 and, since the end of the Cold War, nearly one million civilians have been killed in intentional attacks by either insurgents or incumbents (Pettersson and Öberg 2020). In that regard, "[one] has only to think back to the Balkan wars of the 1990s or to those in Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique, Somalia, Nicaragua, and Sri Lanka, for instance, to realize how prominent and deadly internal struggles have been in recent memory, to say nothing of the ongoing suffering of those who live in their wake" (Armitage 2017, 8). As such, over the years, civil wars have "gradually become the most widespread, the most destructive, and the most characteristic form of organized human violence", emerging today as the primary form of armed conflict on the world stage and as one of the main threats to international security (ibid, 5). For these reasons, studying the drivers the violence perpetration in civil wars is arguably a more pressing concern – both from an academic standpoint and a policy perspective – than it is to analyze these issues in the context of interstate conflicts.

Despite the empirical prevalence of this type of armed conflict, the field of perpetrator studies has surprisingly paid far less attention to civil wars than to other forms of political violence, especially mass atrocities.[14] In fact, the vast majority of studies in this field zoom in on a small number of historically salient focal points – especially the Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. Yet, the number of insights that can be drawn from these studies to analyze violence perpetration

[14] Williams (2020a, 2), for instance, notes that, within this literature, "there is a preponderance on the study of perpetrators of genocide" whereas studies examining other forms of political violence are "seldom positioned explicitly in the realm of perpetrator research", resulting in limited cross-fertilization. The Holocaust, in particular, is "paradigmatic in almost all research on perpetrators and remains emblematic in representations of any violence, especially in representations of perpetrators" (ibid, 6).

in civil wars is limited by the fact that many of these large-scale episodes of violence have occurred in a very idiosyncratic fashion – often as government-sanctioned, highly-bureaucratized processes of mass extermination (see e.g. Hilberg 1961; Arendt 1964; Hinton 1998; Etcheson 2005). Theories of perpetration based on these historically singular events may thus have some – but limited – external validity.

To be sure, it is clear that, while civil wars and mass atrocities are "conceptually distinct from each other and can be empirically observed in isolation, they are dynamically interlinked" in that mass atrocities often occur in the midst of wars, both international and civil (Kalyvas 2019, 15; see also Harff 2003). Yet, the reality is that, regardless of the threshold of civilian deaths used to define mass atrocities, most civil wars do not experience such large-scale episodes of violence. Instead, the most common form of civilian targeting in civil wars is typically more limited and less systematic, while also being very proximate and intimate, as combatants regularly find themselves "face-to-face with their victims, literally getting blood on their hands and registering pleas for mercy and screams of pain" (Mitton 2015, 74; see also Fujii 2009, 172). Civil war violence, moreover, often has a very "transgressive [and] 'fratricidal' nature", which makes its perpetration especially puzzling from a theoretical standpoint (Kalyvas 2019, 16). As the German jurist and political theorist Carl Schmitt puts it, "[civil] war has something atrocious about it […] because it is conducted within a common political unit and because both warring sides at the same time absolutely affirm and absolutely deny this common unit" (in Armitage 2017, 12). As such, civil war violence deserves to be treated as a distinctive object of inquiry in that it follows a logic of its own and displays a number of characteristic features (Kalyvas 2006).

These considerations thus suggest that the processes and mechanisms leading perpetrators to participate in episodes of mass killings may differ considerably from those driving involvement in civil war violence. While remaining cognizant of these differences, this thesis will nonetheless

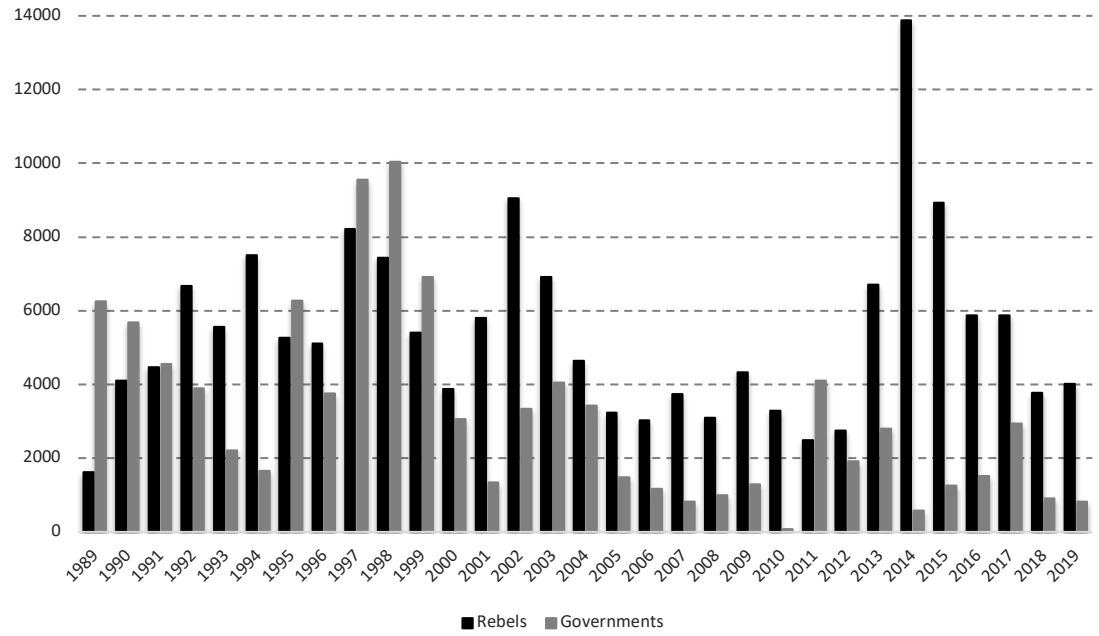
draw inspiration from the literature on interstate wars and mass atrocities, striving to elucidate how processes of perpetration diverge and overlap across different forms of political violence. The rich scholarship on the Rwandan Genocide, for instance, will prove especially useful in illuminating how group dynamics and situational pressures may turn ordinary people into killers (see e.g. Des Forges 1999; Straus 2006; Fujii 2009; McDoom 2013; Loyle and Davenport 2020). Some of the seminal studies in this body of work will also be valuable to make sense of how dynamics of obedience to authority, patterns of deindividuation, and processes of moral disengagement can lower individual thresholds of acceptability for violence (see e.g. Arendt 1964; Kelman and Hamilton 1989; Bandura 1999; Browning [1992] 2017).

Rebel Combatants

The first reason why this thesis focuses on rebel combatants – rather than their governmental opponents – pertains to the relative lethality of the former.[15] As Figure 0.2. illustrates, rebel groups are estimated to have caused more civilian fatalities than governments in nearly 75% (23 out of 31) of all years in the 1989-2019 period. Although the empirical record certainly shows that governments can also display abusive behaviors toward civilian populations during civil wars (see e.g. Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay 2004; Stanton 2016; Krcmaric 2018; Costalli, Moro, and Ruggeri 2020), the fact that rebels have been the most deadly side of civil wars in the post-Cold War era thus motivates this thesis' emphasis on perpetrators belonging to these organizations.

[15] Throughout this thesis, I use the terms rebels and insurgents interchangeably.

Figure 0.2. Civilians Killed by Rebels and Governments in Civil Wars (1989-2019)



Source: Based on data from the UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset. The bars represent the total number of civilians killed by every rebel groups and governments active in all civil wars in a given year. Two outliers (Srebrenica and the Rwandan Genocide) have been removed to improve legibility.

Another reason for focusing on rebel combatants stems from the fact that, as discussed above, much of what we know about perpetration comes from the study of mass atrocities, which are often carried out by civilian or governmental perpetrators. Indeed, some of the cases that figure prominently in this literature – such as the Rwandan Genocide – were primarily carried out by civilians with no direct affiliation to an armed group. The studies based on these cases are thus unlikely to capture the organizational and military dynamics that, as I show in this thesis, often underlie processes of perpetration among rebel combatants. While other works have focused on governmental soldiers – in the German Wehrmacht or the US Army, for instance – they have seldom addressed how theories about state perpetrators may translate to rebel combatants.

To be sure, there are certainly a variety of mechanisms that may exert a similar influence on combatants in both governmental militaries and rebel organizations. Still, there are strong theoretical reasons to believe that "state and non-state actors […] have different motivations to kill civilians" (Lis, Spagat, and Lee 2021, 4). Joshi and Quinn (2017, 228), for instance, showed that government soldiers and rebel combatants "[targeted] different types of individuals" and responded to different logics of action during the civil war in Nepal. As this thesis demonstrates, moreover, rebel combatants are often subjected to distinctive socialization experiences, evolve in specific operational contexts, and belong to groups with particular types of organizational structures and membership profiles. All of these factors, I argue, considerably shape the manner in which rebel combatants come to perpetrate violence against civilians, thereby justifying an investigation focused on this particular category of perpetrators.

There is one last strand of research in the field of perpetrator studies that may appear relevant for the purposes of this thesis: the scholarship on radicalization toward terrorism. Indeed, this literature also focuses heavily on perpetrators' lived experiences and on the processes through which individuals are brought to engage in terroristic violence.[16] While this body of research certainly provides important insights to understand the manner in which individuals come to carry out terrorist attacks, it offers more limited guidance to make sense of violence perpetration by rebel combatants evolving in intrastate conflicts. This is mainly because most studies on radicalization focus on "homegrown" terrorists with only loose connections to "established […] jihadi organizations" and who carry out attacks against Western countries (King and Taylor 2011, 613).

[16] A number of studies in this field place emphasis on individual-level factors like personal victimization (McCauley and Moskalenko 2011), cognitive dissonance (Maikovich 2005), status or thrill seeking (Venhaus 2010), significance or identity quests (Kruglanski et al. 2014), and perceived relative deprivations (Moghaddam 2005) to explain radicalization processes. Others turn to group dynamics to elucidate these patterns, highlighting the role of sociological or situational determinants such as group polarization (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008), social networks (Wiktorowicz 2004; Sageman 2004; 2008), outbidding spirals (Bloom 2004), or "condensation" effects (Della Porta 1995).

Thus, as Kalyvas (2019, 24) argues, the "violence exercised in the context of civil wars should be distinguished from terrorism" because the essence of terrorism "consists of non-state violence exercised primarily during times of peace", while the use of violence by rebel combatants occurs within a military organization and in a context of active warfare. Accordingly, existing models of radicalization may have some – but partial – analytical value to make sense of wartime violence perpetration.

The above suggests, therefore, that rebel combatants remain one of the categories of perpetrators about which our understanding is the most limited. Considering the distinctive feature of the groups in which they evolve and the context in which they operate, it thus appears justified to restrict this thesis' attention to the trajectories of these combatants toward violence.

Following Lazar (2015, 2), I define combatants as "members of the armed forces of a group at war […] who directly participate in hostilities". To receive this label, individuals must thus bear arms, have active membership in a rebel group, and direct involvement in war-making; they must be "in charge of a weapon and/or [work] in any job related to the military endeavor" (Balcells 2017, 20). When using the term "perpetrators", I refer to the sub-set of combatants who carry out violence against civilians. It should be noted, however, that "perpetrators" and "victims" are not mutually exclusive categories. As Williams (2018, 39) aptly remarks, while "there are many actors who fit neatly into categories as perpetrators who kill [and] victims who are killed", it appears that "people can often be more aptly located in the 'grey zones' between these categories" (see also Luft 2015). As the first article of this thesis highlights, for instance, individuals may initially be the victims of

brutal campaigns of abduction and then come to perpetrate violence themselves once they become combatants.[17]

Lethal Violence Against Civilians

The use of violence by a rebel group can take many forms and may vary along several dimensions, including the forms of violence that it employs, the type of victims that it targets, and the frequency and technique with which such violence is used (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017). In this thesis, I focus mainly on direct and lethal violence – that is, the non-accidental infliction of death on a face-to-face basis.[18] Accordingly, my analytic concern here does not lie with frequency or technique, but with one specific form of violence and one broad category of victims.[19]

I focus on direct violence because it represents arguably the most difficult form of harm to inflict. As noted above, Collins' (2009, 27) seminal book has shown that individuals "[encounter] a deep interactional obstacle" when faced with the prospect of committing violence. The difficulty of perpetrating violence is especially strong when one carries it out at close-range and on a face-to-face basis because, in this situation, perpetrators are confronted with direct physiological cues from their victims, activating potent "inhibitory mechanisms" that normally limit aggression among people (Moghaddam 2005, 166). As Grossman ([1995] 2009, 119) remarks, at close-range, "it becomes extremely difficult to deny [victims'] humanity. Looking in a man's face, seeing his eyes and his fear, eliminate denial. At this range the interpersonal nature of the killing has shifted.

[17] Baines (2009) offers an illustrative portrait of the multiplicity of roles in civil wars – that is, how someone can be at once victim and perpetrator – by examining the trajectory of Dominic Ongwen, who was initially abducted by the LRA in Uganda, but then became involved in many wartime atrocities.
[18] Indirect deaths caused by war-related issues like diseases or famine and unintentional deaths resulting from so-called "collateral damage" thus fall outside the scope of this thesis (Eck and Hultman 2007, 235).
[19] Throughout the thesis, I use the terms "violence against civilians" and "civilian targeting" interchangeably.

[…] [The] killer must shoot at a person and kill a specific individual".[20] A key distinguishing factor of close-range violence is thus "the undeniable certainty of responsibility on the part of the killer" (ibid, 114). Considering that rebel groups rarely have access to sophisticated weapons or aircrafts that could allow them to kill from long distances, this sort of face-to-face violence is typically the most common way through which rebel combatants inflict harm on civilians.[21] On the basis of the above, I thus view the perpetration of such violence as a theoretical puzzle.

I restrict my attention to lethal violence – or homicide – because, as discussed above, the scholarship on combatant socialization has devoted considerable attention to the topic of sexual violence but provides more limited guidance to understand the relationship between socializing influences and the perpetration of wartime homicides. Lethal violence also represents "an unambiguous form [of violence] that can be measured more reliably than other forms" (Kalyvas 2006, 20). I focus on lethal violence *against civilians* in particular because such violence clearly violates the "normative and legal injunctions against targeting noncombatants" (Downes 2006, 152) and arguably represents a more transgressive behavior than the "legitimate, sanctioned combat kill" of a military actor (Grossman [1995] 2009, 174). As Lazar (2015, 1) puts it: "Killing civilians is worse than killing soldiers. If any moral principle commands near universal assent, this one does. It is written into every major historical and religious tradition that has addressed armed conflict. It is uncompromisingly inscribed in international law. It underpins and informs public discussion of conflict – we always ask first *how many civilians died*?". In contrast, the "targeting of enemy

[20] As Malešević (2010, 227) notes, the "almost universal aversion to close-encounter killings is best illustrated by the fact that those who are not directly involved in such activities experience significantly fewer psychiatric disorders. For example, the data shows that sailors and high-altitude pilots who kill at distance have little or no psychiatric problems". He adds that the "situation is similar with civilian victims of bombing and prisoners of war under fire, who, despite their ordeals, express fewer symptoms of psychological illness than the military prison guards who remain in combat mode or the front-line soldiers".

[21] Data on "technologies of rebellion" indeed indicate that over 65% of rebel groups active between 1944 and 2004 had only access to "low-level" military technologies (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010, 423).

combatants is unsurprising and indeed expected, it rarely poses a puzzle for analysts" (Manekin 2020, 28).

While it is clear that not all rebel groups will dispense training about the norm of civilian immunity, I expect that most combatants will have at least a basic awareness about this principle, recognizing that the perpetration of violence against civilians represents a form of behavior that "crosses a line" (Kalyvas 2006, 20). Socialization, I argue, represents a key contributing factor in bringing combatants over this line.

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms civilians and non-combatants interchangeably. Following Valentino, Huth, and Balch-Lindsay (2004, 378–79), I define a civilian as "any unarmed person who is not a member of [an armed group] and who does not actively participate in hostilities by intending to cause physical harm to enemy personnel or property" (see also Geneva Convention IV 1949, Article 3). To be sure, the distinction between combatants and civilians is often far from clear-cut during civil wars, especially in irregular conflicts where rebels often try to blend into the civilian population. In fact, this "identification problem" – that is, the difficulty of distinguishing between rebels and civilians – represents one of the key challenges that governments face when deploying counterinsurgency operations (Kalyvas 2006, 89). Yet, the identification problem is usually less severe for rebel groups. While spies and infiltrators remain a danger, rebel combatants can indeed more easily distinguish between civilians and governmental soldiers, as the latter are often uniformed and use conventional weapons and tactics. When rebel combatants kill, therefore, they are more likely to know whether their victim is a soldier or a civilian.

A certain degree of ambiguity also derives from the fact that rebel groups often justify civilian targeting by invoking that some civilians collaborate with the enemy, arguing that such behavior nullifies their noncombatant status (Stanton 2016, 28). Yet, as I emphasize in the first and third articles of this thesis, the denial of civilian immunity can, in itself, constitute a powerful tool

of socialization, which rebel leaders commonly utilize to remove psychological barriers among their rank-and-file and bring combatants to kill.

Contributions to the Literature

One of the core claims of this thesis is that, if the use of violence against civilians sometimes seems so impervious to explanation, it is because we have paid too little attention to the processes and mechanisms through which low-ranking combatants are brought to kill. Although each article included in this thesis contains a section delineating its specific contributions to the relevant literature, it remains essential to address how the thesis as a whole allows us to recast and enhance our understanding of violence perpetration during civil wars. In particular, this thesis makes a number of key theoretical and ontological contributions to the literatures on intrastate conflicts, rebel groups, combatant socialization, and civilian targeting. As discussed above, this thesis sets out to extend the research agenda on combatant socialization by devoting more attention to lethal violence, by focusing on the trajectory of "socializees", and by considering a host of theoretical areas – operational, strategic, relational, and ideological determinants, in particular – that deserve to be charted more extensively in this literature.

The thesis also contributes to the field of perpetrator studies by examining a category of perpetrator and a type of political violence that has received only limited attention in this body of research: rebel combatants waging civil wars. Indeed, much of what we know about the process of perpetration comes from studies focusing on civilian or governmental perpetrators involved in episodes of mass atrocities or on the radicalization trajectory of homegrown terrorists. While recognizing overlaps and drawing inspiration from existing studies, this thesis pushes this literature forward by interrogating how the distinctive context in which rebel combatants operate and the

specific characteristics of the organizations to which they belong can shape their involvement in violence against civilians.

This thesis, moreover, illustrates that added value of mobilizing a microfoundational approach – that is, "an analytic strategy where one explains outcomes at the aggregate level via dynamics at a lower level" – to study rebel behavior and civil war violence (Kertzer 2017, 83). To be sure, I do not contend that recent studies on wartime violence against civilians "lack microfoundations", but rather that they too often "fail to specify what they are" (ibid, 86). Specifically, the three articles that form this thesis highlight the importance of crafting theories that are based on an explicit specification of micro-level assumptions about low-ranking combatants and on a clear delineation of the "micro-macro" causal mechanisms linking individual perpetrators to collective violence. The thesis thus emphasizes that, to fully make sense of a collective phenomenon like rebel group violence, "we need to understand the constituent parts that make it up: individuals and their social interaction" (Barney and Felin 2013, 139). In doing so, the thesis extends a growing body of research on conflict dynamics, "which takes the locus of agency to be concrete individuals and not abstract entities such as ethnic or political groups" (Balcells 2017, 9) and places emphasis on "micro-level motives for individual actions" (Lyall 2014, 190).

Rather than glossing over the mechanisms through which perpetrators come to engage in civilian targeting, this thesis indeed casts the focus on their backgrounds, motives, dispositions, experiences, and trajectories. The thesis thus advances our understanding of civil war violence by allowing us to challenge some of the simplistic and/or homogenizing assumptions about low-ranking combatants that often inform academic, media, and popular accounts on rebel groups. As I discuss in the first article, these homogenizing assumptions about rebel behavior often obscure the striking variations that we sometimes witness in the behaviors of different combatants belonging to the same organization and even in the conduct of specific combatants at different

points in time. They also mask the fact that "the same violent outcomes can be generated by very different types of people, [most] of whom give no hint of evil impulses" (Zimbardo 2005, 24). Instead, this thesis builds on the latest research on combatant socialization to demonstrate that rebel organizations should not be viewed as monolithic or unitary entities, but as "heterogenous [groups] of actors with their own preferences, beliefs, and propensities toward violence" (Manekin 2020, 199).

By foregrounding the diverse social processes and mechanisms through which rebel combatants become perpetrators, this thesis instead strives to restore the humanity of these individuals and to treat them as intentional agents, whose behaviors are underpinned by complex socio-psychological dynamics. Shedding light on the manner in which violence is lived and experienced by combatants thus provides safeguards against a common bias known as the "the fundamental attribution error" – that is, a tendency to underestimate the role of situational factors and to "make unwarranted attributions about traits [and] dispositions" (Ross 2018, 751; see also 1977).[22] Focusing on the trajectory of rebel perpetrators indeed leads one to avoid inferring goals, preferences, beliefs, or motives from observed behaviors, highlighting that what combatants do does not necessarily reflect who they are.

Accordingly, this thesis demonstrates the theoretical rewards that can be reaped by making an analytic commitment to investigate violence against civilians at a lower level of analysis and to craft theories which are based on a more "explicit stipulation of how individuals behave" (Pearlman 2013, 388). For one thing, this kind of microfoundational approach forces "us to think hard about the final unit of analysis of [our models], that is, about each individual (and his motives and actions)", thereby allowing us to craft "theories that are more transparent […] and easier to falsify"

[22] Zimbardo (2005) calls this tendency to link violent behaviors to innate pathologies the "rush to the dispositional".

(Boix and Stokes 2009, 545). Making our micro-level assumptions about individual perpetrators more explicit indeed facilitates the evaluation of the consistency and plausibility of the underlying postulates on which our theories of civilian targeting rest. By placing emphasis on micro-macro linkages, the thesis provides a framework to "meaningfully [address] the central issue of social aggregation" and to specify how the behaviors of rebel combatants combine to generate broader outcomes (Barney and Felin 2013, 138).[23] Beginning at a greater degree of specificity to then climb up the "ladder of abstraction" thus provides an opportunity to build our theories on firmer theoretical and ontological grounds (Sartori 1970).

Indeed, as Kalyvas aptly remarks, "[by] relying on the insights that micro-oriented research [on violence] produces, we can actually move up the ladder of abstraction in a way that's much more meaningful and useful" (in Kalyvas and Straus 2020, 6). While the resulting scholarship is not especially parsimonious nor does it offer neat explanations in which one cause generates one effect, I believe that it more accurately reflects the fundamental diversity of rebel perpetrators and the inherent complexity of the perpetration process.

As the three articles that form this thesis demonstrate, mobilizing a microfoundational approach focused on low-ranking perpetrators can allow us to gain a more granular understanding of wartime civilian targeting, without necessarily leading to "infinite regress" or having to "deny the role of structures and institutions" (Barney and Felin 2013, 139). This is, in large measure, because the purpose of such an approach is not to reduce violent outcomes to the idiosyncratic characteristics of each perpetrator, but to explain the origins of collective violence as the result of the actions of flesh and blood individuals and their interaction with other agents within a specified social environment.

[23] For a thorough discuss on the issue of aggregation in international relations, see also Gildea (2020).

A final way in which this thesis advances our understanding of wartime civilian targeting is by engaging in theoretical integration. As Balcells and Stanton (2021, 2–3) rightfully remarked in a recent review of the field

> significant work remains in order to develop an integrated theoretical understanding of patterns of violence against civilians that explicitly acknowledges the multiple actors and interactive social processes driving violence. Rather than privileging one single theoretical account over others, scholars ought to acknowledge that multiple theoretical explanations can coexist—often at different levels of analysis—and ought to explore how these theoretical explanations interact with one another.

By casting the focus on the interplay between vertical and horizontal socialization dynamics, the three articles that form this thesis highlight that theories about violence origination cannot be used as surrogates for theories about violence perpetration. Instead, they show that organizational-level factors and combatant-level dynamics should be considered conjointly in order to paint a fuller picture of the dynamics of rebel violence. In particular, the thesis reveals that the rationalistic or strategic approaches that are most commonly utilized to explain the incidence of rebel violence against civilians are often unsatisfactory to shed light on the processes through which low-ranking combatants come to perpetrate violence. Indeed, as Keen (2005, 54) notes, participation in civilian targeting "cannot easily be incorporated and explained within a 'rational violence' framework that conceptualizes individuals as calmy deciding between alternatives on the basis of their self-interest. […] The subjectivity of the violent – the way violence is seen by them, their perceptions and emotions as well as their interests – have to be taken seriously".

Instead, this thesis demonstrates that perpetration can in some cases derive from, overlap with, and reinforce the strategic interests of the leadership, while in others it may occur in the absence or in defiance of direct orders from commanders, reflecting the agency of combatants who may engage in violence to "advance their own interests, impulses, or social standing" (Manekin

2020, 7; see also Hundman and Parkinson 2019). By shedding light on various levels of analysis and on the different processes underlying the production of wartime violence, this thesis thus extends our understanding of when civilian targeting occurs as policy or as practice (Wood 2018). Focusing on violence perpetration, I argue, helps to clarify why and how each of these kinds of violence emerge.

It should be noted, in closing this introduction, that the global COVID-19 pandemic has disturbed my plans to conduct fieldwork and to gather first-hand testimonies from ex-combatants, an important limitation that creates a certain disconnect between the thematic focus of this thesis and the empirical evidence that I offer in support of my arguments. Indeed, as I was putting the final touches to this thesis, I reached the conclusion that the international sanitary situation remained too unstable – and the ethical concerns deriving from it too significant – to warrant such field research. Instead, the thesis provides an in-depth dive into the best available data on combatants' trajectory toward violence, which I carefully examine and repurpose to advance our understanding of the determinants of rebel behavior during civil wars. In the conclusion, I offer additional reflections on the contributions and limitations of this thesis, while also discussing its implications for research and policy.

CHAPTER I

Pathways to Violence in Civil Wars: Combatant Socialization and the Drivers of Participation in Civilian Targeting[24]

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Chapter 1. Pathways to Violence in Civil Wars: Combatant Socialization and the Drivers of Participation in Civilian Targeting

Introduction

How do low-ranking rebels come to kill civilians during civil wars? Although scholars have devised a host of theories to explain why rebel groups wield violence against noncombatants, we still have a surprisingly limited understanding of the processes and mechanisms driving combatants to participate in such violence. One of the main reasons why so little is known about rebel perpetrators can be traced back to the manner in which these combatants were portrayed in the early days of this field of study. As academic interest in intrastate conflicts began to grow in the 1990s, many accounts of wartime violence were indeed informed by somewhat simplistic assumptions about rebel combatants, depicting their behaviors in either a pathological (see e.g. Kaplan 1993; 1994) or criminal (see e.g. Mueller 2000; Collier 2000) light. From this perspective – which is also common in media and popular accounts – the perpetration of violence against civilians thus did not amount to a theoretical puzzle in itself, as it was understood as the inevitable corollary of combatants' inherent violent tendencies or predatory motivations.

As research on rebel behavior matured, however, these approaches appeared increasingly untenable, as a growing number of scholars began to highlight that most combatants are not "more predisposed to violence than the general population" (Hoover Green 2017, 690) and that rebel groups are generally "comprised of ordinary people, not sociopaths" (Cohen 2016, 12). In recent years, the literature on wartime civilian targeting has indeed considerably grown in sophistication, giving rise to a proliferation of theories about the underlying drivers of such violence (for a review, see Balcells and Stanton 2021).

While these more recent accounts have certainly improved our understanding of the determinants of rebel behavior at the macro and meso levels, they provide more limited guidance to explain the drivers of participation in violence among rank-and-file combatants. Recent research has indeed tended to focus primarily on the higher echelons of rebel groups and the strategic calculations of the leadership (Valentino 2014), attending only tangentially to the motivations and trajectories of those who actually produce violence on the ground. In comparison to the rich scholarship on low-level perpetrators of mass atrocities such as the Holocaust or the Rwandan Genocide, civil war research thus appears to be somewhat lagging behind in terms of theorizing the processes and mechanisms through which rebels come to kill.

Two main reasons explain this tendency. First, existing theories of rebel behavior often assume that "violence is easy for individuals to carry out", leading scholars to "skip the micro level as unproblematic and turn to conditions in the meso background or the macro organization" (Collins 2009, 34). As Collins remarks, "this turns out to be a pragmatic mistake. Violence is not easy, and the key stumbling blocks and turning points are at the micro level" (ibid). For instance, organizational theories often imply that, when commanders do not have the capacity to control or monitor behaviors, violence will automatically ensue because failures in organizational control provide combatants with the "opportunity to act on their own preferences to inflict violence against civilians" (Doctor and Willingham 2020, 6; see also Humphreys and Weinstein 2006). As I discuss below, this assumption is inconsistent with much of available evidence and underestimates the difficulty of close-encounter violence at the individual level. This kind of assumption has thus often led students of rebel behavior to pay only limited attention to the factors that enable combatants to overcome the psychological barriers to kill.

Second, another common tendency in previous research has been to "assume that combatants act uniformly" (Manekin 2020, 190). In some cases, these homogenizing assumptions

about rebel behavior are implicit in the theories outlined by civil war researchers. Strategic explanations, for instance, often treat combatants as unagentic cogs-in-the-machine who blindly act out commands at every turn, assuming that top-down strategic incentives mechanically and uniformly translate into corresponding on-the-ground behaviors. This tends to underestimate the degree of agency that combatants often manage to exercise on the battlefield and to obscure the striking variations that we often witness in the repertoire of actions of different combatants within the same organization – and even sometimes in the conduct of specific combatants at different points in time (see e.g. Marshall 2000 [1947]; Keegan 1976; Holmes 1986; Grossman 2009 [1995]; Manekin 2020).

In other cases, however, scholars do acknowledge combatant heterogeneity and motivational diversity but stop short of theorizing these dynamics in any substantive way, preferring to rely on the homogeneity assumption for the sake of parsimony. Yet, as this article emphasizes, theorizing the motivations and trajectories of low-ranking rebel combatants has important implications for how we understand the production of wartime violence, attribute responsibility and accountability, and manage post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration.

In recent years, a growing body of research on *combatant socialization* has begun to address some of these issues, seeking to elucidate the various processes through which combatants are inducted to the normative and behavioral standards of their organization. In their respective books on wartime violence, for instance, Hoover Green (2018) and Manekin (2020) both acknowledge psychological barriers to violence and theorize a host of different factors that can bring combatants to overcome such barriers. As a whole, this program of research holds the promise of improving our understanding of individual participation in violence against civilians during intrastate conflicts. This is mainly because this program is, by definition, interested in the *processes* leading to certain behavioral outcomes, while also being highly compatible with a focus on *equifinality*.

This literature, however, may be enriched by devoting more attention to the individual trajectories of "socializees" and by further specifying the intervening mechanisms through which socializing forces shape combatant behavior. As I show throughout this article, existing works in perpetrator studies – an interdisciplinary field specifically dedicated to the study of how people come to participate in political violence – offer important analytical tools to do so. Indeed, many contributions in this body of research adopt a mechanism-centric approach focused on low-level participants, while also explicitly acknowledging perpetrator heterogeneity and motivational diversity (for two recent syntheses, see Anderson 2018; Williams 2020). Yet, considering that much of what we know about perpetration has come from the study of a small number of historically salient episodes of mass atrocities, this cross-fertilization will only prove fruitful if scholars bear in mind the distinctive operational, organizational, and socio-situational context in which rebels participate in violence.

This article synthesizes existing theories of combatant socialization and combines them into an integrated framework, which casts the focus on the individual pathways through which low-ranking rebel perpetrators come to engage in violence against civilians. To bring this body of research forward, the article draws from the broader field of perpetrator studies and specifies the underlying mechanisms through which socialization shapes behavior. In particular, I chart five key pathways that operate through different socio-psychological mechanisms, and which are based on varying degrees of internalization regarding the legitimacy of civilian targeting. In each case, I also identify several unit-level factors that are likely to make a given pathway particularly prevalent among combatants. Placing emphasis on the equifinal nature of violence perpetration during civil wars, the framework thus catalogues the various social influences, needs, incentives, sanctions, and constraints – as well as the different agents – that may bring combatants to kill noncombatants during civil wars.

To illustrate how these pathways map onto the actual experiences of civil war combatants, I then examine the trajectories toward violence of rank-and-file members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) during the Sierra Leone Civil War. Drawing on a broad array of micro-level evidence, I show that all five pathways were at work in bringing RUF combatants to engage in civilian targeting. In particular, statements by perpetrators, civilians, and other relevant witnesses show that a variety of socializing forces motivated participation in violence at the individual level and that combatants differed markedly in the extent of their commitment to the RUF's violent norms. The case study evidence thus demonstrates how this synthetic framework can help us to recast and refine our understanding of violence perpetration during civil wars.

This article contributes to the literature by theorizing rebel behavior through the prism of perpetrator studies, thereby addressing the relative scarcity of scholarship on the drivers of individual participation in violence against civilians during civil wars, relative to research on other forms of violence such as mass atrocities.[25] The theoretical synthesis and empirical illustrations allow me to cast the focus on how dynamics of *violence perpetration* interact with what may be called *violence origination* – that is, the emergence or formulation of violent norms and policies. In particular, the article highlights how, even within a single rebel group, the processes through which low-ranking combatants come to kill may in some cases derive from, reflect, and reinforce leaders' strategic interests (Valentino 2014) or arise endogenously from organizational-level dynamics (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Cohen 2016). In other cases, however, dynamics of violence perpetration may unfold in a much more autonomous, spontaneous, and contingent

[25] It should be noted that my analytic concern here does not lie with participation in rebellion more broadly, a topic that has received a great deal of attention in a variety of foundational texts (see e.g. Gurr 1970; Moore 1995; Lichbach 1998; Wood 2003; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). Instead, my contention concerns more specifically the processes leading to participation in violence against civilians by low-ranking combatants. My claim is thus that we "need to analytically separate processes of participation in civil wars (i.e. joining an armed group) from those leading to the perpetration of violence against civilians, as these processes might […] occur for much different reasons" (Cantin *forthcoming*, 10).

manner, emerging in the absence of direct orders from commanders or even working against organizational goals (Manekin 2020).

By foregrounding the varied social processes through which rebel combatants come to kill civilians, this article also invites scholars to be more explicit about the individual-level assumptions upon which they build their theories of rebel behavior (Kertzer 2017). As I emphasize throughout this article, rebel combatants are intentional agents, whose behaviors are underpinned by complex socio-psychological dynamics that are not reducible to monocausal explanations or homogenizing assumptions. Understanding violence perpetration, therefore, is essential if we are to account for the whole range of rebel behaviors and for the diverse experiences, motives, and trajectories of combatants during civil wars. As I discuss in the conclusion, theorizing perpetrators' pathways toward violence – as well as the motivational diversity underlying their behaviors – has important implications for how we manage war-to-peace transitions.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section reviews recent advances in the combatant socialization literature. The second section aggregates findings from the broader field of perpetrator studies and delineates a theoretical synthesis that charts various pathways toward violence against civilians during civil wars. The third section offers empirical illustrations and the fourth section concludes, addressing implications for research and policy.

Combatant Socialization in Civil Wars

Although the notion of socialization has a long pedigree in the social sciences, scholars of political violence have recently rediscovered its heuristic value, mobilizing it to investigate how state militaries (Manekin 2017; 2020; Wood and Toppelberg 2017), militias (Bateson 2017), rebel groups (Cohen 2016; 2017; Wood 2009; Hoover Green 2018; Davis and Jang 2018), peacekeeping

operations (Moncrief 2017), and terrorist networks (Sageman 2008; Smith, Blackwood, and Thomas 2020) inculcate organizational norms to their members. In these studies, socialization is typically defined as the "process through which actors adopt the norms and rules of a given community. This means to think of soldiers, rebel combatants and gang members as embedded in social environments, which not only constrain and provide incentives to act, but also reshape interests and identities" (Checkel 2017, 592). In that sense, socialization can be conceived as "a combination of willed conformity and externally imposed rules, mediated by the expectations of other persons" (Höppner 2017, 1). Through socialization, individuals thus learn the relevant attitudinal dispositions and behavioral patterns that are expected of them in virtue of their membership in a group (Langton 1969, 4–5). Below, I review more specifically the literature on the socialization of combatants in civil wars. I synthesize recent advances in this body of research, highlighting how combatant socialization can be driven by different *agents*, exert effects at various *depths*, and generate different behavioral *outcomes.*

First, recent research has drawn attention to the fact that combatant socialization can be driven by different types of *agents.* On the one hand, a number of studies have shown that processes of combatant socialization can be activated by the leadership of armed groups through, for instance, the implementation of political education institutions, indoctrination programs, military training regimens, or reward and sanction systems (see e.g. Oppenheim and Weintraub 2017; Green 2018). In these cases, formal socializing instruments are more or less deliberately designed to inculcate members with the norms, rules, and practices of the organization. This type of vertical socialization can exert potent effects on the attitudes and behaviors of combatants, as it takes place in the immersive and totalizing context of military life (Wood 2008, 546; Manekin 2017, 606). In this environment, commanders generally yield a considerable degree of socializing power, which can

allow them to separate combatants from their prewar loyalties and to meld them into a cohesive whole (Shesterinina 2019, 11).

On the other hand, a host of studies have shown that more informal processes of socialization operating on a peer-to-peer basis can also be instrumental in refashioning combatants' attitudinal dispositions and behavioral tendencies. This sort of horizontal socialization may be driven, for instance, by pressures for conformity and group solidarity, by peer learning and imitation, or by the need to create unit cohesion (Wood 2018; Wood and Toppelberg 2017; Cohen 2013; 2017). Wood's (2018) work on wartime rape has been particularly influential here, showing how violence can occur as a "practice" – that is, "a form of violence that is driven from 'below' and tolerated from 'above,' rather than purposefully adopted as policy". As the above indicates, therefore, combatant socialization may be driven both by relatively intentional vertical processes engineered by the leadership of armed groups and by more spontaneous dynamics deriving from horizontal interactions between rank-and-file combatants (Bell 2016, 494–97). These two types of socializing agents can thus play a pivotal role in inducting combatants to the norms and standards of appropriate behavior of their organization.

Second, recent studies have shown that socialization can exert effects on combatants at different *depths.* Checkel (2017, 597) conceptualizes this by defining three types of socialization. With Type 0 – the shallowest form of socialization – individuals do not internalize group norms but merely act in accordance with them for reasons that are strictly instrumental. This form of socialization thus produces "public conformity *without* private acceptance" (Kelman 1958, 51 emphasis in original). In contrast, the psychological and attitudinal effects of Type 1 socialization run slightly deeper, as individuals exhibit "pro-group behaviour by learning a role – acquiring the knowledge that enables action in accordance with group expectations. The beliefs associated with this role do not replace earlier values, but are 'superimposed' on them; they are entirely dependent

on continuing membership in the group" (Checkel 2017, 597).[26] The deepest socialization process of all, however, is Type 2, where individuals come to internalize organizational norms and act in accordance to them because they believe this is the appropriate thing to do (Fujii 2017, 662). In this case, individuals identify with and adopt the interests and identity of the group to which they belong. As such, although "[i]nternalization is the ostensible goal of socialization", it is clear that "not every process reaches its theoretical endpoint. Recruits [also] experience socialization when they comply with armed-group norms and practices for instrumental reasons, as well as when they learn and perform roles that match group norms and practices" (Hoover Green 2018, 29).

Third, scholars have shown that socialization processes can generate different behavioral *outcomes*, including restraint and violence. Oppenheim and Weintraub (2017) and Hoover Green (2018), for instance, highlight how political training can induce combatants to exhibit restraint in their interactions with civilians. Manekin (2017; 2020) documents similar patterns of restraint among Israeli soldiers, suggesting that these represent a form of resistance to violent socialization and that combatants retain an important measure of agency in these processes. Cohen (2013; 2016; 2017), in contrast, shows that sexual violence can be used as a tool of socialization to build cohesion among rebel combatants, especially when groups are comprised of abductees who have little in common. Mitton (2015, 234) similarly shows that, in Sierra Leone, peer dynamics and indoctrination combined into a potent socializing force that inured RUF combatants to violent behaviors. These differences in outcomes indicate that what matters most is not socialization per se, but the content of this socialization and the organizational context in which it unfolds (Persell 1990). Whether socialization will yield violent or nonviolent outcomes is thus likely to be

[26] As Waller (2008, 158) notes, in these situations, "a merger of role and person" occurs, leading individuals to temporarily acquire "the attitudes, beliefs, values and morals consistent with that role and its behaviours", without necessarily agreeing with their content.

determined by the overall "structure of the socializing activity" – that is, "how intense and prolonged it is, who does it, how it is done, whether it is a total experience or only a partial process, how aware the individual is of alternatives, and how attractive those alternatives are" (ibid, 100).

Yet, as Checkel (2017, 594) notes, an issue that has been prevalent in much of recent research on combatant socialization is that scholars often fail to attend to "the agency of the targets involved. Too often, they are construed as blank slates on which new values are inscribed". In that regard, most studies focus on the institutional or organizational sources of socialization, paying only limited attention to the lived experiences, motivations, and trajectories of *socializees* – that is, the low-ranking combatants who are subjected to these socializing forces. By glossing over individual-level processes, existing studies have thus tended to reproduce some of the homogenizing assumptions about rebel behavior that often guide the broader literature on civil war violence. In turn, this tendency has prevented scholars of combatant socialization from painting a full picture of the diverse social dynamics that may motivate participation in violence at the individual level. In the next section, I address these issues by synthesizing existing theories of combatant socialization and combining them into an integrated framework, which casts the focus on a variety of individual pathways toward violence.

Pathways to Violence

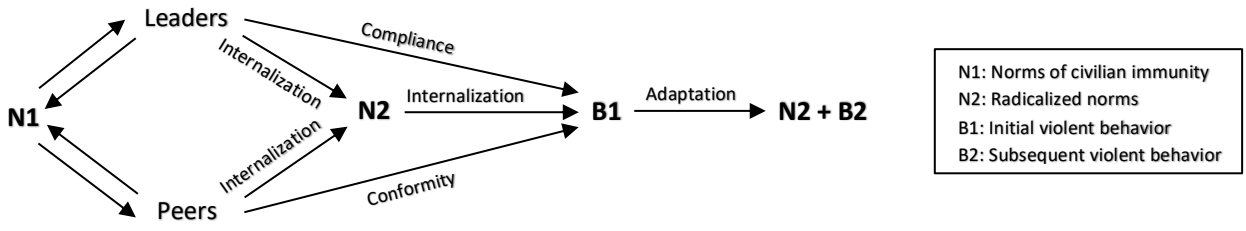
In what follows, I delineate five key pathways that may lead rebel combatants to participate in violence against civilians during intrastate conflicts, describing the main socio-psychological mechanisms at work in each pathway.[27] I define a "pathway" as the series of steps which, over

[27] While governmental soldiers may also be swayed by some of dynamics that I discuss below, I restrict my attention to insurgents in order to highlight some of the specificities of violence perpetration in the context of non-state armed groups.

time, lead a combatant toward a given outcome. For the purposes of this study, I restrict my attention to one specific outcome: individual participation in direct, lethal violence against civilians.[28] I focus on face-to-face homicidal violence because "there is a general consensus that homicide crosses a line", that it is "'the absolute violence'" (Kalyvas 2006, 20; quoting Sofsky 1998, 53). I thus consider killing civilians as a form of behavior that "carries social stigma, defies moral norms, and entails high psychological burdens for those who undertake [it]" (Scharpf and Gläbel 2020, 3).[29] Participation in this sort of behavior, I argue, will typically be preceded by the activation of powerful "social mechanisms of justification" (Malešević 2010, 130).

I consider "mechanisms" as conceptually distinct from "pathways", defining the former as the intervening factors that inch combatants along a pathway and toward the above outcome. As discussed below, the five pathways that may lead combatants toward violence are associated with different socio-psychological mechanisms and varying degrees of internalization with regard to the legitimacy of such violence. These pathways are schematized in Figure 1.1. and described below.

Figure 1.1. Five Pathways Toward Civilian Targeting



[28] I exclude "indirect" casualties (e.g. crossfire, collateral damage, etc.) as these events can seldom be traced to specific perpetrators (Eck and Hultman 2007). For the sake of parsimony, I also exclude sexual violence because, as Cohen (2016, 83) notes, "rape and lethal violence require different theoretical explanations".

[29] Importantly, my analytical concerns here do not lie with socialization to violence understood broadly, which is a necessary task for commanders in all armed groups, who need to transform individuals into soldiers and bring them to use violence on behalf of the group (Manekin 2020; Hoover Green 2018). Rather, I focus on *socialization to violence against civilians*, which I view as analytically distinct from the more general process of creating an army of combatants who are willing and able to use military force.

I begin with the assumption that, upon joining rebel groups, most recruits adhere to or recognize norms of civilian immunity (N1), displaying a basic aversion toward the use of violence against noncombatants (Grossman [1995] 2009, 57–87; Collins 2009, 27; Littman and Paluck 2015, 84–85; Green 2017, 690). Following their induction into the group, the attitudes and behaviors of new recruits start to get refashioned by two types of socializing agents within the organization to which they now belong: the leadership and fellow combatants. When vertical socialization by commanders or horizontal socialization among fellow combatants reinforce combatants' adherence to civilian immunity norms, low-ranking rebels will primarily direct lethal violence toward military actors. This situation is represented in Figure 1.1. by the two arrows pointing back at N1. This type of nonviolent socialization, however, falls outside the scope of this study (for an excellent account of such socialization, see Hoover Green 2018).

In what follows, I instead focus on the five socialization pathways which, I argue, can generate violent outcomes. These pathways are rooted in different levels of internalization regarding the legitimacy of civilian targeting. This framework, I argue, thus helps to partially iron out long-standing debates between situational and dispositional perspectives on violence perpetration. In particular, it highlights that multiple pathways may lead combatants to kill civilians and that radical beliefs may be involved in some – but not necessarily all – of these pathways (see also Neumann 2013; McDoom 2020).[30] In each case, I identify a number of unit-level factors that are likely to make a given pathway particularly prevalent among combatants.

[30] In that regard, I concur with Mariot (2020, 116–17) that "[d]isposition-based explanations are perfectly suited to interpreting the commitment of the most clearly ideologized" perpetrators but "have difficulty accounting for those who took part in [violence] but who remained aware of the fundamental immorality of their acts, or who participated reluctantly in the killings".

The Compliance Pathway

The first pathway which, I argue, can lead rebel combatants to kill civilians is one in which participation in violence is driven by authority pressures.[31] In these situations, civilian targeting derives primarily from instrumental calculations – that is, Type 0 socialization – in that the potential costs of disobedience are ultimately perceived as outweighing the psychological costs associated with killing noncombatants. Over time, this can also evolve into a form of Type 1 socialization, as combatants may eventually superimpose norms of unconditional obedience on their earlier values or become habituated to performing the role of compliant soldier (Grossman 2009, 141–48).

As Mitton (2015, 237) notes, there is a rich literature on the manner in which "ordinary individuals can, in certain circumstances, be led to conduct the most extreme acts of violence". From Arendt's (1964) reflections on Adolf Eichmann to Milgram's (1974) infamous experiments, from Bandura's (1999) work on "moral disengagement" to Kelman and Hamilton's (1989) study on "crimes of obedience", a vast array of studies have indeed shown that authority can play a key role in enabling perpetrators to kill, despite them finding such violence morally aversive.[32]

In the "totalizing social conditions of military service", these pressures to comply are even more acutely felt, as the rigidity of hierarchical structures and the expectation of unconditional obedience makes it difficult for combatants to even consider noncompliance (Manekin 2017, 617; 614). In that sense, vertical military socialization tends to be especially powerful in shaping

[31] As such, my analytic concern here does not lie with *violence origination* as defined above – that is, the formulation of violent strategies by commanders or the emergence of "organizational norms regarding the use of violence" (Balcells and Stanton 2021, 11) – but rather with the socializing influences bringing low-ranking combatants to implement such strategies and norms. For the purposes of this study, the latter are thus taken as given.

[32] It should be noted that some of these classic social psychological studies focus mainly on human tendencies to *conform* to authority through relatively unreflective and at least partially non-instrumental dynamics. Yet, I use the term *compliance* to reflect the more rigid nature of vertical pressures in military organizations – relative to, for instance, more informal ties between *génocidaires* and local leaders in Rwanda (see Straus 2006). The term compliance is also more in line with the self-preservation and careerism mechanisms discussed above, where the effects of authority on behavior derive from more clearly instrumental dynamics. See Williams (2020, 44; 64–96) for an insightful discussion on the distinction between coercion, compliance, and conformity.

combatants' conducts, insofar as the latter will often feel like there is no other option than to behave in accordance with commanders' expectations (ibid, 607). Examples of such processes abound in the empirical literature on civil wars. A former combatant of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, for instance, explained his involvement in civilian targeting as such: "You are supposed to kill. If you refuse to kill, they said they would kill you" (Anderson 2018, 163).[33] When asked to explain why he and his comrades killed civilians during the Mozambican Civil War, a Renamo rebel similarly remarked: "We knew what we were doing was wrong, but there was nothing we could do. We had to carry out our orders" (Cohen and Cohen 1987, 36:22).

In these cases, therefore, participation in an initial act of violence (B1) does not occur through the internalization of new radical norms legitimizing civilian targeting (A1). Rather, it operates through the fear-induced strategic calculations that the "trappings of military authority" generate, which in turn motivate combatants to behave in accordance with the behavioral norms of the group (Grossman 2009 [1995], 143). In that sense, the *Compliance Pathway* mostly amounts to a form of "behavioral adaptation", as combatants are brought to kill mostly out of self-preservation, without necessarily experiencing a shift from N1 to N2 – that is, adherence to radicalized norms (Checkel 2017, 594). Yet, over time, some combatants may undergo a slightly deeper form of socialization (Type 1), one in which they learn to perform the role of compliant soldiers. In such cases, the execution of violent orders may even come to derive from a form of careerism, when combatants want to climb the organizational ladder and expect promotion or professional recognition for the fulfillment of their role (see e.g. Scharpf and Gläbel 2020; on professional roles, see also Mann 2005). In this situation, however, the violent dispositions of

[33] Another LRA fighter likewise emphasized: "Those who did not want to kill, they would be singled out. Put them in the open and order others to kill them. So that they demonstrate and become a lesson for others. So, the next you do not refuse" (Anderson 2018, 164).

combatants are largely group-dependent in that they are unlikely to endure outside of the group context.

Given the mechanisms through which it operates, the *Compliance Pathway* is likely to be particularly prevalent among rebel groups who rely on abductions to recruit combatants. This is mainly because the culture of fear that these organizations often nurture and the close monitoring of combatants that they must implement to avoid mass defections tend to leave little room for overtly resisting or furtively shirking orders. The extent to which combatants may be brought to kill on the basis of authority pressures is also likely to be influenced by the physical proximity and legitimacy of the authority figure, as well as by the individual attributes of specific commanders (Grossman [1995] 2009, 144–45). It appears, moreover, that the nature of a group's organizational structure (e.g. decentralized or centralized, strong or weak control-and-command, etc.) may bear on combatants' ability to exert agency on the battlefield, thereby affecting the relative probability that they will travel along this pathway (see e.g. Worsnop 2017; Doctor and Willingham 2020). The above factors can thus provide commanders with both the operational capacity and interpersonal leverage necessary to enforce compliance. They are also likely to affect the extent to which combatants are able to exercise behavioral autonomy.

The Conformity Pathway

The second pathway which, I argue, can lead rebel combatants to kill civilians is one in which pressures for conformity and micro-level solidarity with fellow combatants represent the key drivers of participation in violence. Civilian targeting in these situations may also be viewed as deriving from Type 0 socialization, but in this case it is the social costs of letting fellow combatants down that comes to be perceived as outweighing the psychological costs associated

with killing civilians.[34] Over time, however, this can also evolve into a form of Type 1 socialization, as combatants may eventually superimpose norms of absolute group solidarity on their earlier values and learn the role of committed peer.

As Malešević (2010, 47–48) explains, "in combat situations most soldiers come to perceive their platoons and regiments in intensive kinship-like terms". In the "absolute situation" of war, the "soldier's sense of sociability is dramatically intensified" insofar as "his life hinges on the strength of small group ties", which tend to become sacred and to stifle individualistic tendencies (ibid). On this basis, Malešević concludes that combatants rarely kill "for grand abstractions such as the nation's liberty, Islam, democracy or socialism. Instead the principal motivating force for most is micro-level group solidarity" (ibid, 202; see also Holmes 1986, 291; Gabriel 1988, 134; Wong, Millen, and Kolditz 2003; Waller 2008, 160).

This sort of primary group solidarity represents a key driver of action for many perpetrators of wartime violence (Shils and Janowitz 1948, 281). For instance, explaining why ordinary German men participated in the Final Solution, Browning ([1992] 2017, 185) claims the following: "Those who did not shoot risked isolation, rejection, and ostracism – a very uncomfortable prospect within the framework of a tight-knit unit stationed abroad among a hostile population, so that the individual had virtually nowhere else to turn for support and social contact". He adds that one of the main factors that drove these men to kill unarmed civilians was "pressure for conformity – the basic identification of men in uniform with their comrades and the strong urge not to separate

[34] In this case, "Type 0" socialization should not be understood through the prism of classical rational choice theory, but mainly through Weber's ([1922] 2019, 101) notion of value-based rationality (*wertrationalität*), outlined in his work on social action. In other words, combatants traveling along the *Conformity Pathway* do not come to kill on the basis of self-interested calculations that lead them to select the most "efficient" course of action, but do so as a result of their commitment to socio-psychological values that become overriding in the midst of war. To paraphrase Varshney (2003, 87), I thus maintain that, through the act of killing, these combatants seek to satisfy vital social goals, even if the individual psychological costs of realizing them are high (see also Overy 2014, 521; Kühne 2008, 74).

themselves from the group by stepping out" (ibid, 71). Fujii (2009, 187) likewise notes that, in Rwanda, "powerful disincentives […] discouraged men from breaking ranks. Even though the majority of men found killing duty to be gruesome and abhorrent, they also felt pressure to go along with their group, no matter how violent the assigned task".[35] An important mechanism underlying most of these cases thus appears to be a form of status seeking – that is, the desire to maintain positive social evaluations in the eyes of valued peers and to avoid shame and group ostracism by taking up one's share of an unpleasant endeavor (Anderson 2018, 134; Williams 2020, 94; Scharpf and Gläbel 2020).

Once violence against civilians enters the repertoire of action of a rebel group, therefore, the number of active perpetrators is likely to increase, as combatants who were initially reluctant to kill may eventually be swayed to engage in committing actions to signal and confirm their status as group insiders (Hundeide 2003, 112). In these cases, participation in violence is thus mainly driven by a form of dependence on social support and approval, which tend to get magnified in the uncertainty of active warfare (Hogg, Kruglanski, and Bos 2013). Under these conditions, it becomes very difficult for combatants who are "bonded by links of mutual affection and interdependence to break away and openly refuse to participate in what the group is doing, even if it is killing innocent women and children" (Grossman 2009, 227). As such, while the need to build intra-group cohesion may motivate participation in violence – as Cohen's (2016) work on wartime rape has shown – it appears that the very presence of cohesion among combatants can also bring individuals to kill in order to express their loyalty to the group.

[35] Similarly, during the Nanking Massacre, many "Japanese troops were reluctant to engage in the slaughter of unresisting persons", but were eventually swayed into participating in the killings "by the pressure of their fellows" (Collins 2009, 98).

In the *Conformity Pathway*, horizontal socialization thus leads combatants to target civilians by increasing both the psychological rewards associated with group solidarity in a context of mutual dependence and the psychological costs associated with the prospect of breaking ranks. In that regard, this pathway could also be characterized as an instance of Type 0 socialization, insofar as combatants who travel along it engage in B1 without necessarily undergoing a process of normative radicalization from N1 to N2. Here as well, however, norm superimposition and role learning can eventually increase the depth of combatants' socialization (Type 1) by fostering group-dependent violent dispositions.

This sort of *esprit de corps* and this sense of "associative duty" (Lazar 2013) are likely to be especially prevalent among combatants who are linked by a dense network of pre-existing social ties (Staniland 2014). This is mainly because the presence of a web of interpersonal relationships based on kinship, ethnicity or other ascriptive identities will tend to reinforce perceived pressures for behavioral conformity and to increase the socio-psychological incentives to act in accordance with peer expectations. Indeed, as Williams (2020, 80) puts it, "the desire for conformity within a group will be particularly strong when it is rooted in a strong social identity, as this will provide an incentive to want to identify with the group with whom one shared such a strong identity (normative conformity) or to trust the others in the group and what they say and do (informational conformity)". Similarly, combatants belonging to rebel groups built on prior political networks may also experience these horizontal pressures in an especially powerful way, as shared involvement in prewar activism is likely to foster strong relational dynamics that may leave little room for nonconformity (McLauchlin 2020, 3; see also Balcells 2017; Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020). Moreover, combatants evolving in contexts of operational isolation – that is, in remote and sparsely-populated areas – are also particularly likely to travel along the *Conformity Pathway*. This is mainly because operational isolation tends to produce "extreme interdependence"

between combatants (van den Bos 2020, 569) and this interdependence is likely, in turn, to "bring about high ingroup cohesion and strong pressures for behavioral and value conformity" (Cantin forthcoming, 23).

The Internalization Pathways

The third and fourth pathways which, I argue, can lead rebel combatants to kill civilians are ones in which vertical indoctrination or horizontal social learning gradually bring about the internalization of radicalized norms – a manifestation of Type 2 socialization. There are a number of ways through which commanders can inculcate such attitudes into combatants, including the use of dehumanizing rhetoric, the framing of noncombatants as legitimate targets during military training – and of perpetrators as carrying out legitimate actions – or the denial of civilian immunity during political or ideological formations (Leader Maynard 2014, 829). Among insurgents in Uganda and Peru, for instance, "political indoctrination was a powerful socializing force. For many, new identities forged within the movement trumped old allegiances", creating a readiness to use all means necessary to achieve group goals (Weinstein 2007, 121). The "Black Tigers" – which were the Tamil Tigers' elite commando unit in Sri Lanka – similarly underwent a prolonged "training process [which focused] on building psychological strength" and ideological extremism before being sent out on suicide missions (Hopgood 2005, 76). Ideological indoctrination was also a key form of "top-down" socialization among Maoist guerrillas in Nepal (Gates 2017, 682; Eck 2009)

Among combatants, a host of group dynamics may play a similar role in the instillation of radicalized norms. The internalization of such norms can occur, for instance, through processes of social influence, persuasion, and learning, all of which can bring about a gradual remodeling of

prior attitudinal tendencies (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004). Social learning theory, in particular, suggests that violent dispositions can be internalized through observational learning and processes of imitation (Bandura 1978). This can lead individuals to adjust their beliefs to match those held in their immediate social environment and to eventually reproduce learnt violent behaviors.

In that regard, a small number of influential peers in a given unit may "play a pivotal role during social interactions by leading, shaping, and facilitating the collectivization of […] norms for violence" (Smith, Blackwood, and Thomas 2020, 338). Armed groups, in particular, are likely to include highly committed hardliners, who tend to enjoy increased status and to be particularly influential in socializing their more moderate peers to radical dispositions (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008, 422). In these conditions, a form of group polarization may occur, triggering a convergence of attitudes toward extremes and incentivizing even initially moderate members to adopt views that are more radical than those they would have adopted outside of the group context (Isenberg 1986). As the case of the RUF discussed below exemplifies, the horizontal inculcation of violent norms can also occur through peer mentoring practices, where a more senior combatant informally inducts a new peer to the normative and behavioral expectations of the group.

Either independently or conjointly, indoctrination and social learning can thus trigger the internalization of new radicalized norms among some combatants (N2), who will come to see violence against civilians as a legitimate course of action. In turn, these internalized beliefs will tend to "shape how individuals make intellectual and emotional sense of […] situations and how they evaluate actions […] as desirable, efficacious, and legitimate, influencing their likely behavior (Leader Maynard 2019, 639). The *Internalization Pathways* could thus be characterized as instances of Type 2 socialization, in that participation in violence is rooted in underlying adherence to radicalized norms.

The extent to which combatants may be brought to kill on the basis of vertical indoctrination is likely to be influenced by the time and resources that commanders devote to elicit the internalization of anti-civilian attitudes among combatants. In particular, the presence of formalized institutions of ideological training specifically designed to "brainwash" combatants or to inure them to dehumanized imagery about civilians will tend to increase the prevalence of the *Internalization Pathways*, provided that combatants are actually subjected to these trainings with a certain degree of frequency and intensity. As Hoover Green (2018) has shown, armed group institutions can contribute to the internalization of norms of restraint among combatants when the training dispensed by these institutions inculcates principles of civilian immunity. Yet, it appears that, when these institutions are put at the service of violent ideological programs, the outcome may instead be the internalization of radical norms and attitudes.

On their part, the effects of horizontal social learning are likely to be especially strong among combatants who are exposed to radical peer socializers in their immediate unit. Indeed, most rebel groups are comprised of a minority of hardliners and highly zealous members, which may exert strong influence over the unit-mates that they operate with on a daily basis. The key factors here are thus direct exposure and physical proximity with peer socializers in a combatant's immediate "micro-space" (McDoom 2013). Operational isolation may also be important in this case as well, increasing the likelihood that combatants will internalize radical dispositions through social learning. This is mainly because the status and influence of hardline members tend to be magnified within small groups operating in seclusion or clandestinity (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008, 422). To be sure, there seems to be no single profile of people who are more susceptible to internalize radical norms to this extent, although a young age, an absence of physical security, and a weak social network outside the group may be important factors increasing combatants' vulnerability to Type 2 socialization (Cohen 2017, 701).

The Adaptation Pathway

The fifth pathway is one in which combatants initially target civilians through pathways that are based on no or little internalization of violent norms, and then radicalize their normative commitments (N2) to accommodate past behaviors (B1).[36] In this situation, combatants may, for instance, target civilians reluctantly at t_1 because fears of reprisals lead them to submit to orders to kill or because pressures for conformity and group solidarity incentivize them to go along with group violence. Then, at t_2, the activation of potent processes of cognitive dissonance and rationalization motivates combatants to engage in further violent behaviors (B2), but this time on a volitional basis.

This process has recently been documented in a series of experimental studies in which participants – partaking in a "bug-killing paradigm" – were initially ordered to kill but eventually engaged in further killings intentionally in order to make sense of past behaviors and to restore inner consistency (Martens et al. 2010; Martens and Kosloff 2012). In other words, people transitioned from obedience to volition because a psychologically discomforting tension between positive self-images and dissonant behaviors incentivized them to neutralize this tension by adjusting their views. This allowed them to rationalize and cognitively accommodate their conduct.[37]

[36] Alternatively, given that the internalization of violent norms occurs along a continuum – rather than as an on/off switch – it is also plausible that combatants may tentatively develop some acceptance of their group's violent norms via performative role playing and then, through the commission of violence, rationalize or habituate to such a role in a way that leads to full acceptance of the justifications for violence.

[37] These findings are thus largely in line with a "well-established point in social psychology", which holds that "not only do attitudes drive behaviors, but behaviors also shape attitudes" (McDoom 2020, 1). Likewise, Newman (2002, 50–53) notes that, "[while] attitudes do indeed give rise to behavior, it is also the case that one's behavior affects one's attitudes and beliefs […]. The cognitive dissonance literature shows that when people are led to engage in behaviors that violate their normal standards, they will be motivated to change their attitudes and beliefs to reduce the discrepancy between their behavior and their cognitions".

As Checkel (2017, 596) notes, similar dynamics are often at work in civil wars, as violence-averse combatants who are ordered to kill often "resolve cognitive dissonance by adapting their preferences to their behavior, internalizing the justification". Beyond obedient killings, it is plausible that other types of initial motives such as group solidarity or social conformity may also come to give way to a more deliberate form of violence (Melenotte 2020, 51). This is consistent with research on genocide, which has shown that dehumanization and radicalization are sometimes not the cause but the consequence of killing, as people psychologically adapt to such violence by not seeing their victims as individuals (Balcells and Stanton 2021, 14; McDoom 2020; Luft 2015). To rationalize their behaviors and facilitate this cognitive adaptation, perpetrators often rely on a variety of neutralization techniques (Anderson 2017; Sykes and Matza 1957) and on a form of moral disengagement (Bandura 1999).

As McDoom (2020, 1) notes, these cognitive alterations occur mainly because "killing transforms individuals", triggering an "attitudinal shift [which serves as] a form of dissonance-reduction. Perpetrators come to espouse radical beliefs in order to justify their actions".[38] As such, "what begins as a rational search for physical security" or social acceptance may come to be "internalized as 'appropriate' violence" (Checkel 2017, 596). In the *Adaptation Pathway*, therefore, self-persuasion processes bring combatants who initially engaged in violent behaviors through Type 0 or Type 1 dynamics to participate in further violence on the basis of radicalized normative commitments (Type 2).

Given the mechanisms on which it is based, there seems to be no specific unit-level factors that are likely to make the *Adaptation Pathway* particularly prevalent among any given set of

[38] Here, it is plausible that more basic processes of routinization, habituation, desensitization, and deindividuation may also represent important "facilitative factors" in this transformation (Williams 2020). Indeed, a variety of studies have shown that people can get used to even the most gruesome acts of violence if they repeatedly carry them out (see e.g. Kelman and Hamilton 1989; Bandura 1999).

combatants. Instead, the propensity of combatants to travel along this pathway is likely to be influenced by more idiosyncratic factors deriving from the lived experiences of specific combatants, including the importance of the dissonant cognition for a given individual and the extent of the disparity between this cognition and the conflicting action (Festinger 1957). The traumatic nature of an initial dissonant behavior – such as when combatants are forced to kill members of their own community upon joining a rebel group – may also increase psychological pressures to resolve dissonance (Littman 2018, 1079–86). Finally, the length of a combatant's participation in violence may progressively increase the psychological toll of killing and the magnitude of cognitive dissonance, thereby strengthening the incentives to adjust one's beliefs.

Summary

Table 1.1. summarizes the theoretical framework. Although the mechanisms described above are certainly not the only ones that can lead rebel combatants to kill civilians, I argue that they are among the most potent and salient social forces to operate within armed groups. Accordingly, they are likely to constitute key drivers of participation in violence against civilians during intrastate conflicts.

An important caveat here is that these pathways are ideal-typical and not mutually exclusive, as a given combatant may be subjected to various socializing influences at the same time. In that regard, it is highly plausible that there may be an "interactive" relationship between "formal and informal mechanisms of socialization that can influence combatant conduct in conflict" (Bell 2016, 494). Although I have delineated a number of factors that are likely to increase the prevalence of each pathway among specific subsets of combatants, I expect that all five pathways may operate in tandem across or within different units in the same organization.

Table 1.1. Summary of Theoretical Framework

Pathway	*Main mechanisms*	*Socializing agent*	*Type of socialization*	*Factors influencing prevalence*
Compliance	Obedience to authority Self-preservation Careerism	Leadership	Type 0 or 1	Abductions Proximity/legitimacy of leaders Organizational structure
Conformity	Group solidarity Peer pressures Status seeking	Peers	Type 0 or 1	Horizontal social ties Prewar political networks Operational isolation
Internalization (*vertical)*	Indoctrination Dehumanization Legitimization	Leadership	Type 2	Time and resources devoted to indoctrination Ideological training institutions
Internalization (*horizontal)*	Social learning Group polarization Peer mentoring	Peers	Type 2	Clandestinity Operational isolation Micro-space (exposure/proximity)
Adaptation	Cognitive dissonance Neutralization Moral disengagement	Self-driven	Type 2	Combatants' lived experiences Length of participation

Empirical Illustrations

To illustrate how the above pathways map onto the actual experiences of civil war combatants, I examine the drivers of individual participation in violence against civilians among rank-and-file members of the RUF during the Sierra Leone Civil War. Rather than being an exercise in theory-testing, the following instead serves to demonstrate how the synthesis provided above can help us to recast and refine our understanding of violence perpetration during civil wars.

The RUF case was selected mainly because this conflict has been abundantly studied by academic researchers, non-governmental organizations, and state agencies, which produced a wealth of fine-grained data on the micro-level dynamics of the war. Importantly, in contrast to most other civil wars, the available evidence on the RUF includes a profusion of direct testimonies from perpetrators themselves and from other relevant witnesses, providing a unique opportunity to shed

light on the individual-level processes discussed above. Studying this well-documented civil war, moreover, allows me to illustrate how a focus on individual pathways can enhance our understanding of wartime violence against civilians, throwing into sharp relief both the shortcomings of prevailing perspectives and the added value of a perpetrator-centric approach.

I conduct an in-depth analysis of four main sources of micro-level evidence on the RUF's insurgency. First, I analyze transcripts from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which contain a large number of narrative statements by perpetrators, civilians, and other relevant witnesses. Although many of these statements are not directly relevant for my purposes, several testimonies therein offer important insights into the micro-level factors that motivated participation in violence, highlighting how both combatants and non-combatants made sense of such participation. Second, I examine eight book-length academic case studies, all of which were based on fieldwork in Sierra Leone and offer direct testimonies from rank-and-file members of the RUF.[39] Third, I explore two highly detailed reports by No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), two non-governmental organizations. The former details more than 5,000 incidents of humanitarian law violation that occurred in all regions of Sierra Leone throughout the conflict, providing information on perpetrators and command structures (Smith, Gambette, and Longley 2004). The latter describes a large number of human rights abuses committed by RUF rebels and offers a multitude of testimonies from civilian witnesses (HRW 1999). Fourth, I analyze the survey data that Humphreys and Weinstein (2004) collected with over 1,000 ex-combatants and which provide detailed information on the socio-demographics backgrounds of former RUF members, as well as on the "organizational structures [of their] faction" and their "patterns of interaction with civilian populations during the war".

[39] The eight case studies are the following: Richards (1996), Keen (2005), Gberie (2005), Denov (2010), Peters (2011b), Coulter (2011), Mitton (2015), and Cohen (2016).

Although the sample of combatants whose trajectories are reflected in the above data is not fully representative of the entire RUF membership, it is nonetheless fairly diversified in terms of perpetrator characteristics, covering both male and female, teenage and adult, as well as abducted and voluntary combatants. As Loyle and Davenport (2020, 507) have highlighted in an insightful new article, however, existing research on political violence often overlooks an important category of perpetrator – which they call the "murderers in the middle" – when collecting data on participation in violence. As the authors note, these individuals, who "zealously participate" in violence, are likely to have different motivations than those that scholars typically manage to study and tend to be excluded from samples for a variety of methodological and pragmatic reasons (ibid). Accordingly, it is plausible that the sources that I use may, to a certain extent, understate the prevalence of this kind of perpetrator. It should be noted, however, that Loyle and Davenport's argument concerns mid-level participants, whereas this article is primarily focused on low-ranking perpetrators.

Despite these sampling issues, I believe that the four types of data described above provide a diversified body of evidence, on the basis of which I can demonstrate the analytical value of my framework. In particular, they offer an opportunity to trace the trajectories of rank-and-file combatants toward violence and to paint a fine-grained portrait of the main factors that motivated individual participation in civilian targeting. To facilitate the analysis of this large body of qualitative data, I used the MAXQDA software, which allowed me to systematically organize, annotate, and analyze the evidence. That said, the purpose of this effort was not to compare the evidentiary value of socialization arguments against alternative explanations in any systematic fashion, but to document the motivational heterogeneity of RUF perpetrators and the coexistence of multiple pathways within a single organization.

Evidently, each of these types of sources comes with its share of biases. Former combatants, for instance, may report their wartime experiences in a partial or fragmentary manner, as "issues of reputation, of pride, of not wanting to malign other people needlessly, and even of libel" may affect the nature of their statements (Tripp 2018, 732).[40] In some cases, perpetrators may want "to aggrandize their role in events, or to distance themselves from certain behaviors and attitudes" (Khalil 2014, 208) or may have a tendency to engage in "moral neutralization" techniques to rationalize their conduct (Sykes and Matza 1957; Anderson 2017). Post-hoc reporting, moreover, may carry an interpretation bias and can raise concerns regarding the fallibility of memory (Wood 2003, 33–40). Yet, the most important problems here are arguably those arising from "social desirability biases" and "preference falsification" (Kuran 1997; see also Mkandawire 2002, 186). Perpetrators of atrocities, for instance, may be incentivized to make self-serving post-hoc statements or to hide the real reasons for their actions, describing their motivations as "following orders" to disavow responsibility or avoid stigmatization (Loyle and Davenport 2020, 507). Combatants may thus have held radical views during the war, but refrained from admitting it when being surveyed.

Although it is difficult to fully assess whether combatants were honest about their true motivations, many of these testimonies were collected in private conversations by researchers who guaranteed anonymity to respondents, thereby reducing the incentives to falsify responses. As I demonstrate below, this condition of confidentiality has led many combatants to be strikingly forthcoming about their involvement in violence and their dispositions toward killing during the war. Other types of statements – like those given to the TRC – were collected in contexts in which respondents were explicitly informed that their interlocutors had no "judicial powers to try or

[40] On the value of perpetrator testimonies – and the hermeneutic and moral challenges associated with their use – see also Schmidt (2017).

sentence anybody nor handover anybody to the police" (TRC 2003, 984). While far from alleviating all concerns, these considerations certainly minimize the risk that fears of self-incrimination or disapproval may have prompted combatants to give deceitful or self-serving testimonies. More generally, as Williams (2020, 50–53) remarks, attending to the "subjective meaning" of the act of killing for perpetrators themselves often offers more analytical leverage than seeking to determine the truthfulness of their statements.

To further minimize the impact of these biases, I also relied both on "internal triangulation" by drawing upon testimonies from combatants of different ranks and recruited through different means as well as on "external triangulation" by taking into account statements from noncombatants and other relevant witnesses (Peters 2011b, 81). The use of different types of data (i.e. testimonies, event narratives, surveys, etc.), moreover, helps to mediate some of risks that would be associated with relying only on perpetrator statements. As Cohen (2016, 101) notes, "drawing on numerous sources" is indeed "the best way to draw reliable inferences" on the drivers of violence perpetration, as this approach ensures that each type of evidence can at least partially offset the limitations of the others.

The RUF's Insurgency (1991-2002)

On the 23rd of March 1991, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – led by Foday Sankoh – launched an insurgency against the Sierra Leonean government, vowing to "overthrow the oppressive one-party regime of President Momoh's All People's Congress (APC)" (Peters 2011b, 19). While it is beyond the scope of this article to survey the entire history of this complex and multi-faceted civil war – which lasted over a decade and involved a multitude of actors, including

foreign fighters, civil defense militias, private mercenaries, and international peacekeepers – two important characteristics of the RUF insurgency should be noted.[41]

First, the RUF's "repertoire of violence" during the Sierra Leonean Civil War was particularly broad and included the widespread use of murder, rape, abduction, amputation, and torture (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017; Human Rights Watch 1999). When looking at lethal violence alone – which is the main focus of the analysis below – the RUF has been responsible for an average of nearly 600 civilian deaths per year during the 1991-2000 period, according to data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (Pettersson and Öberg 2020). As one of the most lethal rebel groups of the post-Cold War era, the RUF thus represents an "extreme case" within which to study the perpetration of violence against civilians (Seawright and Gerring 2008, 301).

Second, although in the early stages of the war, many people joined the RUF voluntarily, the group's dwindling support among local communities rapidly created a situation in which commanders had to rely on abductions to fill up its ranks (for a detailed survey of the RUF's recruitment practices, see Eck 2014). Estimates of the proportion of abductees among the RUF vary, but some commentators suggest that more than 80% of the group's fighting force was composed of forced recruits, over 70% of which were below 25 years old (Humphreys and Weinstein 2004; Peters 2011a, 80).

It could be argued that the high number of abductees within the RUF may limit the external validity of the evidence provided below. Yet, estimates by Cohen (2013, 468) indicate that nearly half of all insurgencies between 1980 and 2009 recruited their combatants by force. Relatedly, recent data by Haer et al. (2020, 246) suggest that over 56% of rebel groups active between 1990 and 2011 have relied on the forced recruitment of children, with nearly 20% of these groups using

[41] For more detailed overviews of the history of the war, see, among others, Gberie (2005) Keen (2005), Denov (2010), Peters (2011b), and Mitton (2015).

abductions extensively. Further, many other organizations – such as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Kinshasa (AFDL), the Congolese Democratic Rally (RCD), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, and Renamo in Mozambique – have relied on abductions at rates as high as those of the RUF, increasing our confidence that the trajectories that I examine below are not unique to Sierra Leonean rebels (Gates 2017, 675).

How can we explain, then, the widespread use of violence against civilians by the RUF, especially considering that so many rank-and-file combatants did not participate in the war of their own volition? In many ways, therefore, the RUF represents a "hard case" for socialization arguments, insofar as a large segment of its membership was in no way in line with the group's normative and behavioral expectations upon joining. The involvement of abductees in violence, moreover, is unlikely to be motivated by greed, opportunism or self-selection "because fighters are not selecting to join an armed group, nor are they recruited for their propensity to commit violence" (Cohen 2013, 468). In the next section, I illustrate how the framework outlined above can help make sense of this puzzle.

The Compliance Pathway

The narratives that many combatants shared across different types of sources reveal that authority pressures and fears of punishments for disobedience were permanent features of their experiences within the RUF, which punctuated their trajectory from their recruitment to their demobilization. When recounting their stories, ex-combatants indeed "spoke about violence as a feature of daily interaction that inculcated deep-seated fear and unquestioning compliance among […] recruits" (Maclure and Denov 2006, 126). Having "little opportunity […] to resist the relentless socialization process to which they were subjected", combatants explained that "a

primary compulsion among all recruits was to survive", a reality that "meant obeying any and all commands" (ibid 2006, 129; 126; see also Keen 2005, 56). As these quotes make clear, this culture of fear and obedience was deliberately nurtured by RUF commanders, who actively sought to socialize combatants to norms of unconditional compliance.

During the public hearing of the TRC, for instance, a former RUF combatants explained that he initially found ways to avoid killing civilians by intentionally misfiring or pretending not to see potential victims. Yet, this stratagem only worked until his commander noticed one such instance. After seeing someone hiding in a tree to avoid the rebels, the combatant indeed reported that he sought to shirk his killing duty once again but was ultimately forced to participate: "I did not say anything and I passed him, but when my senior saw him he ordered me to kill him" (TRC 2003, 283). After acknowledging that he was "amongst those causing the atrocities in that area [Koinadugu]", another combatant similarly remarked that he had no other option than to participate in violence, claiming that he "was only a junior obeying commands" (ibid, 787–88).[42] The following statements, drawn from different case studies, reflect similar dynamics:

> The commander would pass the order, then whatever the senior commanders said, I would do it. I was involved in most of these killings, because the order was from the senior commander. If we disobeyed the senior commander, it would get reported to him and then I would be in serious trouble (In Mitton 2015, 69–70).

> [The commander would say:]'To show that you are willing to be with us, we give you an assignment'. I said: 'okay what is the assignment?' They then bring some people and they say: 'you should execute those people'. I said: 'I am not somebody who can kill a civilian'. […] If I don't do that they will skin me and cut me in pieces. They force me so I decided to do that (In Pouls 2018, 50; see also 53).[43]

[42] More generally, the TRC transcripts are replete with such testimonies from combatants who point to obedience to authority and pressures to follow commands as the main reasons why they killed civilians, despite finding such violence morally aversive. These combatants offered rationales such as "I did that because I was ordered to do so" (TRC 2003, 292) or "I was under pressure when I committed all those atrocities" (ibid, 295).

[43] A combatant interviewed by Coulter (2011, 135; see also 143) likewise remarked: "The commander […] will just tell you to kill so-and-so person. If you refuse they will kill you. So you just have to do it".

As these statements make clear, violent behaviors were often adopted out of self-preservation and "fear of punishments, not because combatants felt that the order itself was the right thing to do", indicating the presence of Type 0 socialization (Pouls 2018, 55). Indeed, for many combatants, "obedience to authority and conformity to the values of the armed group were imperative to their very survival, there was little room for defiance or opposition" (Denov 2010, 133–34). This is consistent with the testimonies of many female combatants that Coulter (2011, 122) interviewed, who "describe[d] an everyday life characterized by strategies of survival" and claimed that "[this] culture of fear was […] definitely a motivator of violence".

While these behaviors may have initially been driven by fear-induced instrumental calculations, it appears that some combatants eventually came to experience a slightly deeper form of socialization, one in which role performance and habituation became the main drivers of participation. As Denov (2010, 102; 112) notes, the RUF developed a "well-planned training method to minimize resistance by instilling compliance without question", creating "a 'total' militarized environment [in which] rules and structures disallowed alternative behaviours". Through this violent socialization, which relied on "extremely violent punishments" (Peters 2011b, 87), many combatants thus "became accustomed to complying with the orders and expectations of those who commanded them" (Denov 2010, 115). This effectively "conditioned [some] fighters not even to consider the content of the order anymore" (Pouls 2018, 56).

As mentioned previously, the above statements should be considered with caution, as combatants face important incentives to absolve themselves of any responsibility by invoking their place at the bottom of the military hierarchy or to use neutralization techniques "to objectify themselves as servants of the group" (Anderson 2018, 171). Yet, a number of civilians corroborated these testimonies, further supporting the idea that many combatants did in fact travel across the *Compliance Pathway*. For instance, explaining why he was ready to forgive his former student who

joined the RUF and eventually came back to his village to perpetrate atrocities against civilians, a teacher noted that the combatant did not have "any grudge against" anyone in the community but was merely "acting on orders of [his] leaders" (TRC 2003, 3–5). The fact that these rationales recur across different types of sources, moreover, lend additional support to the claim that participation in violence was in many cases driven by vertical socialization pressures.

It should be noted, however, that authority pressures were not always effective in bringing combatants to participate in civilian targeting, as fighters in some units found ways to engage in various "forms of 'deviance' from normative rebel behavior", including "non-lethal shooting in combat [and] the provision of succour and assistance to 'enemy' civilians" (Maclure and Denov 2006, 129). Denov (2010, 141–42), for instance, shares the testimony of several female combatants, who "secretly [refused] to kill during battle" and "shot their weapons in such a way that human targets were able to escape without being hurt". One combatant remarked: "While on patrol if we came across [unknown] people they would order us to kill them. But I was not really interested in killing people … [I] normally fire, intentionally not aiming well. [I] would then report that the mission was completed without really killing the people". Yet, more research would be needed to elucidate which factors shaped combatants' capacity to resist these powerful socialization pressures.

The Conformity Pathway

While sharing their experiences as RUF combatants, several respondents explained how they came to forge strong interpersonal bonds with their peers, suggesting that these relationships progressively created potent pressures for behavioral conformity and group solidarity. Similarly to what Cohen (2016) found in relation to wartime rape, there were numerous instances of lethal

violence that seemed to be motivated by a need to build cohesion among RUF abductees. For instance, when asked why some forced recruits came to kill unarmed civilians despite finding such violence abhorrent, a witness from the TRC claimed that many combatants simply went along with the group and "copied from their peers" in order to fit into their new social environment (TRC 2003, 820). In contrast to Cohen, however, the analyzed evidence also indicates that a "sense of belonging and camaraderie" eventually formed within some RUF units and that these interpersonal relationships were in themselves important contributing factors in the production of wartime violence (Denov 2010, 103).

This testimony from a former combatant exemplifies how some of these bonds were formed: "I walked around the camp, befriending the others. The junior boys were advising me to be courageous and hope and pray that my mission would be successful so that at the end I will meet my parents. They were friendly" (in Mitton 2015, 234). As this statement illustrates, the creation of such horizontal bonds occurred both organically through daily interactions between combatants, but also through organizational practices such as "peer mentoring", which was "another effective way for the RUF to instill a sense of belonging within the armed group and socialize [fighters] into a new and highly militarized world" (Denov 2010, 103-105). Other combatants suggested that the isolation of the bush camps in which they operated played a key role in creating strong interpersonal bonds, as explained by Peters (2011b, 100–101): "Isolated from the wider society, the movement was consolidated – it became a kind of secular sect. Bonds of commitment and loyalty were forged in the militarised camps […], resulting in a new and durable solidarity".

According to Mitton (2015, 234), these types of interaction "served to create strong peer bonds" among combatants and "was an important dynamic in RUF socialization". The development of this social capital among the rank-and-file served to increase both the psychological rewards associated with group solidarity in a context of mutual dependence and the

psychological costs associated with the prospect of letting comrades down. When sharing their wartime experiences, some combatants claimed that these dynamics created strong incentives for them to act in accordance with their peers' expectations (Peters 2011a, 87). In these conditions, killing civilians became a "costly signal of loyalty and commitment", a form of "performative violence" (Cohen 2016, 22; 3).

Over time, this strong in-group solidarity and the overall "group pressure" that combatants experienced seem to have "[raised] the cost of not participating", creating a situation in which many combatants felt compelled to kill "even in the absence of direct orders" to do so (ibid, 36–37; see also Marks 2013, 360). This is mainly because, within the RUF, "refusing to participate" led to a "loss of social standing among peers", a very unattractive prospect in the uncertainty of warfare and in a context of high mutual dependence among combatants (Cohen 2016, 123). In contrast, participating in "violence could […] bring the satisfaction of bonding with a set of comrades" (Keen 2005, 74).

In some cases, peer pressures even materialized in the form of explicit threats by fellow combatants, as civilians explained to Human Rights Watch: "When witnesses reported that individual combatants did object and try to halt the abuses, those objecting were often met with death threats from their fellow rebels" (1999, IV; see also Keen 2005, 42-45; 230). In a 2000 Amnesty International (AI) report, several combatants similarly explained that intimidation and peer pressure were often instrumental in motivating participation in violence, describing how some fighters were shot dead simply for asking why the RUF was murdering unarmed civilians (2000, 4–5). As such, "through violence", many combatants sought to satisfy important social and psychological needs, thereby "[reinforcing] their bonds to the militarized world of the RUF" (Denov 2010, 114). These dynamics thus seem to have progressively fueled a self-reinforcing loop in which peer bonds promoted violence, and violence strengthened bonds.

The Internalization Pathways

As discussed in the theoretical framework, the internalization of radical norms and attitudes by combatants can occur through two main ways: vertical indoctrination and horizontal social learning. The narratives provided by RUF combatants and other respondents reveal that both of these forms of socialization were at work in bringing some fighters to kill civilians. Several combatants, for instance, explained how commanders used dehumanizing rhetoric to instill violent norms within their fighters: "The [commanders] killed a lot of civilians. They said [to the villagers], 'You don't know anything, we are killing you like fowl'" (Coulter 2011, 101). Commanders often referred to civilians as "sub-human" or "sub-rebel" and depicted them as infectious diseases that deserved to be "removed" from Sierra Leonean society, in a conscious effort to indoctrinate combatants to radical views (Mitton 2015, 213). Other combatants similarly noted that the "dehumanizing saying that 'the civilian has no blood' was […] common among RUF fighters" (Keen 2005, 43). This statement from a survivor similarly illustrates how commanders relied on humiliation and degradation to "otherize" and dehumanize civilians in front of rank-and-file combatants:

> [The] rebels formed a circle around us and got out their pistols and machetes. He [the commander] then ordered another rebel to sprinkle kerosene on us and threatened to burn us. That rebel then gathered up our clothes and set them on fire in the corner of the room. The one with the machete circled around us, threatening to cut off our hands. The commander […] [was] making crude comments about how ugly, dirty, and disgusting we were (Human Rights Watch 1999, IV).

According to Keen (2005, 76), there was important variation among combatants both in the extent to which combatants were exposed to this indoctrination and in the degree to which combatants internalized this dehumanizing imagery. Yet, he adds that "dehumanization frequently [facilitated] atrocity" by removing psychological barriers and inhibiting the moral shame

associated with killing defenseless civilians. Through this indoctrination, some combatants came to "really believe […] that what they have done is absolutely right" and that "their violence was justified" (ibid, 4; 230). In some – but certainly not all – cases, this vertical indoctrination thus seems to have resulted in deeply internalized radical beliefs (i.e. Type 2 socialization). This is consistent with other accounts, which report that a number of combatants expressed both their "strong dedication and affiliation" to the RUF's violent norms (Denov 2010, 142) and the hate that they felt against civilians, whom some came to view as "treacherous objects of disgust" (Mitton 2015, 224). During one attack, for instance, a combatant reportedly screamed "you bastard civilians; you don't like us and we don't like you", reflecting an underlying process of outgroup homogenization and dehumanization (Mitton 2012, 115). This deeper form of internalization seems to have been particularly prevalent among young combatants:

> Commanders actively manipulated young recruits' need for parental bonds and positive encouragement, understanding how this would help to secure their loyalty and mould them as fierce and fearless fighters. This encouraged combatants to take pride in their identities as warriors and to locate a sense of power through violence (Mitton 2015, 270; see also Gberie 2005, 149).

According to Denov (2010, 98), this was achieved through "physical, technical and ideological training", which was aimed at inducting combatants "into the dictates of the RUF" and at ensuring that they "gradually internalized and adopted the values, norms and practices of the militarized world" in which they now evolved.

When narrating their trajectories as members of the RUF, other respondents suggested that peer-to-peer influences were also instrumental in triggering the internalization of violent norms among some combatants. Several combatants, for instance, described how a "violent meritocracy" came to emerge within RUF units (Coulter 2011, 107; see also Keen 2005, 76; Mitton 2015). In that regard, Denov (2010, 112) remarks that "the more aggressive and violent that [combatants]

were seen to be […], the more valued they were within the ranks of the RUF". On the basis of his interviews with former combatants, Mitton (2015, 51) similarly emphasizes that the most violent and extreme combatants "rose to positions of influence" within RUF units, exerting "a violence-promoting influence" over their peers. These patterns of social learning and influence thus created "powerful incentives" for some combatants to radicalize their attitudes and to internalize the "upside-down moral codes" that some of their peers were embodying (ibid, 272). As such, many RUF units began to look like "[sects] driven by an 'enclavist' mentality", leading some combatants to "[see] everyone outside the enclave as an enemy meriting brutal death" (Gberie 2005, 136; see also Maclure and Denov 2006, 125).

The Adaptation Pathway

The *Adaptation Pathway* is perhaps the most difficult to document empirically, as it is based upon often unconscious cognitive dissonance processes that are seldom voiced explicitly by combatants. Yet, a number of key testimonies seem to indicate that some combatants who initially engaged in violence against civilians because of authority pressures or group solidarity may have subsequently radicalized their attitudes to accommodate their past behaviors. These two combatants, for instance, explain how they progressively came to view violence that they initially abhorred in an increasingly positive light:

> As time went on and the killing happened every day, we all became used to it. After some time, the violence became part of me (In Denov 2010, 121).

> I didn't have the mind to kill someone initially … but later on I enjoyed the wicked acts (ibid, 126).

As these testimonies suggest, it appears that the act of "violence itself was brutalizing" and that initial participation sometimes "[fed] into further killing", leading some combatants to "[ward] off [shame] by devaluating the lives of those killed" (Keen 2005, 231). These statements are indeed indicative of the fact that combatants – and especially forced recruits – who initially killed because of exogenous factors may have, over time, adjusted their belief system to reduce the dissonance between their self-image and their violent behaviors, eventually engaging in further killings on a volitional basis. Denov (2010, 128) describes how this process of incremental self-persuasion shaped the trajectories of some of the combatants that she interviewed: "At first, they perform milder aggressive acts that they can tolerate with some discomfort. After their self-reproof has been diminished through repeated enactments, the level of ruthlessness increases, until eventually acts originally regarded as abhorrent can be performed with little personal anguish". She adds that, through these processes of self-justification, habituation, and routinization, combatants " slowly began to perpetuate the very culture of violence that had been initially terrifying to them" (Denov 2010, 128). As such, "acts that were initially intolerable not only became acceptable, but also, in some cases, became synonymous with play, excitement and even skill" (ibid, 129).

Evidently, further research would be needed to assess the extent to which cognitive dissonance processes shaped the attitudes of RUF combatants over time, but the above provides preliminary indications that these dynamics indeed affected the relationship of many fighters with violence against civilians.

Conclusion

This article synthesized theories of combatant socialization and combined them into an integrated framework, which placed emphasis on individual pathways toward violence. Specifically, the article sought to bring this body of research forward by charting five key pathways

that may bring rebel combatants to participate in civilian targeting. Operating through distinctive socio-psychological mechanisms and through the influence of different socializing agents, these pathways are rooted in varying degrees of internalization regarding the legitimacy of killing noncombatants. Although a number of unit-level factors are likely to make a given pathway especially prevalent among certain subsets of combatants, case study evidence from the RUF's insurgency in Sierra Leone showed that all five pathways may be at work within the same organization. Ultimately, the aim of this paper was thus not to offer an alternative to existing theories of rebel behavior but to establish them on firmer theoretical grounds by providing a synthetic account of the individual experiences, motives, and trajectories that are often left unaddressed in civil war research.

Evidently, more research would be needed to assess the extent to which this framework travels beyond Sierra Leone, especially in cases where abductions were not as prevalent. Yet, it appears that, with sufficiently granular data, these pathways may be found across many cases of contemporary civil wars. This is mainly because these vertical and horizontal socializing forces are based upon fairly universal socio-psychological processes, which are likely to shape rebel behavior across a broad range of contexts. As previously noted, the influence of socialization dynamics on combatant behavior has already been documented in a variety of cases, including Colombia, El Salvador, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel, and Timor-Leste (see e.g. Oppenheim and Weintraub 2017; Green 2018; Cohen 2013; 2016; Manekin 2020). Yet, it is clear that more micro-level, cross-national evidence would be necessary to draw stronger conclusions about the broader applicability of these findings across rebel groups.

Several research agendas emerge from this study. In particular, further research should strive to elucidate why socialization sometimes steer combatants in the direction of violence, while sometimes it leads them to exercise restraint. How do violent/nonviolent norms emerge in the first

place? What determines the nature of the normative and behavioral expectations that combatants are socialized into – that is, the "content" of socialization? In that regard, it may prove rewarding to further investigate how variations in factors like ideology, ethnicity, control-and-command structures, or pre-existing social ties may shape the outcome of combatant socialization. Relatedly, more work is needed on the conditions under which socialization fails and on the factors explaining why vertical and horizontal socialization forces sometimes reinforce, and sometimes contradict, one another. What happens if vertical and horizontal influences go opposite directions, if leaders and peers send opposing socialization signals? How do combatants resolve this contradiction? Devoting more micro-level research to this topic would help us to answer these important questions.

In terms of policy implications, it is clear that a more explicit and theoretically-informed recognition of perpetrator heterogeneity and motivational diversity would help policy-makers craft rehabilitation and reintegration programs that are more suited to the needs and realities of each combatant in the post-conflict period. As this article highlighted, the wartime experiences and trajectories of combatants are indeed far from homogeneous. For one thing, low-ranking rebels differ markedly in the extent to which they embrace anti-civilian norms and in the factors that motivate them to participate in violence, with some combatants being coerced to kill and others doing so much more willingly. In the wake of civil wars, some combatants may thus experience "perpetrator trauma" and suffer from a host of other psychological ailments (Anderson 2018, 226; see also Mohamed 2015), while others may feel little remorse and could still hold radical beliefs long after violence has abated.

It appears, therefore, that policy-makers should bear this diversity in mind and remain sensitive to the equifinality of violence perpetration when seeking to attribute responsibility and accountability for wartime behaviors. They should also adopt a more tailored approach when

assessing the post-conflict rehabilitative needs of combatants. Recognizing that multiple pathways can lead to violent outcomes thus has important implications for combatant rehabilitation and transitional justice processes, suggesting that a more targeted and personalized perspective is more likely to facilitate combatant-to-civilian transitions and to promote societal reconciliation.

CHAPTER II

The Two Faces of Guerrilla Warfare: Operational Embeddedness and Civilian Targeting in Irregular Conflicts[44]

[44] This article – co-authored with Arthur Stein – is currently under review at the *Journal of Peace Research.*

Chapter 2. The Two Faces of Guerrilla Warfare: Operational Embeddedness and Civilian Targeting in Irregular Conflicts

Introduction

How does the use of guerrilla tactics by rebel groups affect their propensity to wield violence against civilians during irregular conflicts? Although guerrilla warfare is commonly portrayed as a struggle to capture the "hearts and minds" of civilian populations (Krcmaric 2018, 21), a cursory review of academic and popular accounts on the topic reveals two contradictory perspectives on the type of relations that these organizations nurture with noncombatants.

On the one hand, scholars and practitioners of guerrilla warfare have long emphasized the importance of civilian support for rebel success and, in particular, for the procurement of recruits, supplies, and information (Lewis 2020; see also Guevara 1960; Laqueur 1976). Mao Tse-tung (1961, 44), for instance, famously stated that, "because guerilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and co-operation". According to this logic, guerrillas will tend to exhibit restraint in their interactions with noncombatants, insofar as they must "be selective in their use of violence to avoid alienating the civilians on whom they depend" (Valentino et al. 2004, 385).

On the other hand, an alternative view holds that "'guerrilla' warfare and barbaric violence are causally connected" (Kalyvas 2006, 66) and that the use of guerrilla tactics by insurgents often leads them to engage in "dirty" wartime practices (Smith and Roberts 2008). Implicit in these accounts is the assumption that guerrillas, facing highly unfavorable odds, will often have to rely on violence to coerce noncombatants into supporting their movement and to forcibly secure the resources on which their survival depends (Downes 2006, 169).

Empirically, the historical record provides little guidance to adjudicate between these competing logics, as guerrillas have displayed considerable variation both in the popular support that they managed to garner and in the type of behaviors that they adopted toward civilians (Wickham-Crowley 1992, 51). Indeed, while guerrillas like the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador were known to spare noncombatants and to direct most of their violence toward military targets (Wood 2003), other groups like the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) have acquired a reputation for their abusive treatment of civilian populations (Weinstein 2007). Even more puzzling is the fact that different units within the same guerrilla sometimes display strikingly different behaviors, as was the case among divisions of the Tamil Tigers stationed in the east and north of Sri Lanka (Subramanian 2014, 167–77). What explains this variation? Why do some guerrillas display violent behaviors toward civilians, while others exhibit restraint? What are the main determinants of rebel behavior during guerrilla warfare?

To answer these questions, this article outlines a theory of *operational embeddedness*, which we define as the physical integration of rebel groups' operational bases within civilian communities. Merging insights from the rebel governance, combatant socialization, and territorial control literatures, we argue that operational embeddedness represents a key determinant of rebel behavior during guerrilla warfare, which shapes the repertoire of actions that rebels adopt both across and within guerrillas. This is mainly because operational embeddedness creates strategic incentives for commanders and socialization dynamics among combatants that are likely to inhibit violence against civilians. In particular, embeddedness promotes the development of cooperative relationships by incentivizing governance and by fostering trust-based quotidian interactions. Operational disembeddedness, on the contrary, will tend to create a situation in which vertical incentives and horizontal socialization processes converge to promote such violence. Specifically, disembeddedness typically gives rise to coercive resource extraction and to a form a "enclave

socialization". The different operational contexts in which guerrilla units evolve thus generate different structures of incentives and configurations of social interactions, which in turn shape the type of relationship that they build with civilian communities.

To test these arguments, we mobilize a mixed methods research design, which allows us to examine both macro-level trends as well as micro-level mechanisms and within-group variations. Using an original index of operational embeddedness, we first assess whether the extent of guerrillas' operational presence within civilian communities affects their propensity to use violence against noncombatants. Cross-national analyses of patterns of civilian victimization in irregular conflicts from 1989 to 2018 reveal that operational embeddedness is significantly correlated with levels of civilian targeting, indicating that embedded guerrillas exhibit considerably more restraint than their disembedded counterparts. To shed additional light on the micro-level dynamics involved in this relationship, we then offer a qualitative case study – the Taliban's insurgency in Afghanistan. The latter represents a fertile case for our purposes in that it allows us to leverage within-case variations to get a more granular understanding of the strategic and socio-psychological mechanisms that our quantitative analyses fail to fully capture. The qualitative evidence provides additional empirical support for our theory, highlighting how operational embeddedness can even affect the behaviors of different units within the same organization across time and space.

Our study extends research agendas on territorial control, rebel governance, and combatant socialization, highlighting how these factors intersect to shape patterns of civilian victimization. Our article also contributes to the existing literature by underscoring the added value of considering both vertical strategic incentives and horizontal socialization dynamics to understand whether rebel groups will steer toward violence or restraint during civil wars.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section defines key terms and surveys the main explanations on the relationship between guerrilla warfare and civilian targeting. The second

section outlines our theoretical argument. The third section then presents the methods and data used in our statistical analyses. The fourth section describes our findings and situates our results in relation to existing studies. The fifth section presents our qualitative case study. In the concluding section, we discuss implications for scholarship and policy.

Guerrilla Warfare and Civilian Targeting

Recent research has drawn attention to the importance of demarcating civil wars according to the "technologies of rebellion" through which they are waged, highlighting the distinctive features of "conventional" wars on the one hand, and "irregular" or "guerrilla" wars on the other (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010).[45] Conventional civil wars typically "have clear frontlines, attacks are waged mostly from barricades and stable positions, and major battles occur that usually determine the final outcome" (Balcells 2017, 10; see also Costalli et al. 2020). These wars, moreover, are characterized by military symmetry, meaning that both sides display similar fighting capacities and hold heavy weaponry at a relatively high level of sophistication. Another central feature of conventional civil wars is that opponents usually possess fairly stable territorial holdings and exert "overwhelming" control over local populations in the rear areas situated behind the frontlines (Balcells 2010, 292). This typically leads to a form of "positional warfare" in which offensive and defensive actions are clearly distinguishable (Lockyer 2010, 101). Conventional civil wars, however, are rather "rare instances appearing only under specific and rather exceptional circumstances" (Derriennic 2001, 166).

[45] Kalyvas and Balcells (2010) distinguish a third type of warfare – symmetric non-conventional (SNC) – in which incumbents and insurgents are matched at a low level of weaponry and capacity. As will be explained below, we place SNC conflicts in the same category as irregular conflicts because both categories entail the same characteristics on the rebel side. Evidently, this typology is "an ideal-typical one with [each type's] edges blending into each other" (Kalyvas 2009, 427). This typology also fails to capture the fact that "civil wars frequently exhibit considerable spatial and temporal variation in their form of warfare" (Lockyer 2010, 91–92).

Much more common in the landscape of contemporary intrastate conflicts are *guerrilla* or *irregular* wars. In contrast to conventional wars, guerrilla conflicts have no clear frontlines insofar as insurgents, having lower military power and less sophisticated weaponry, generally avoid direct confrontations with their mightier opponent (Laqueur 1976). Given the asymmetry in military resources, rebels waging guerrilla wars typically favor "hit-and-run operations, attacking when an advantage presents itself and melting away into the wilderness […] when reinforcements or superior firepower are brought to bear" (Downes 2007, 423). Guerrilla insurgents indeed tend to compensate for their inferiority by relying on "harassment and surprise, stealth and raid", and by favoring tactics such as ambushes and sabotages (Kalyvas 2006, 67). In doing so, guerrillas hope to gain the tactical initiative and to set the rules of military engagement, refusing to match the government's expectations in terms of how warfare should be waged (Kalyvas 2009, 428).

In these conditions, however, guerrillas will often be forced to establish themselves in remote or peripheral regions with rugged terrain (Fearon and Laitin 2003, 80) and to opt for strategies of long-term attrition (Mack 1975). The structure of territorial control in guerrilla wars will thus tend to be much more fluid than in conventional conflicts, as the tactical importance of mobility for guerrilla success will often impair insurgents' ability to secure stable territorial holdings.[46]

In recent years, scholars have begun to discern that the dynamics of rebel violence against civilians "in irregular wars are very different from what one expects to find in conventional conflicts" (Kalyvas and Kocher 2009, 352).[47] Balcells (2017), for instance, argues that violence

[46] Even in guerrilla wars, however, the government may not hold control over the entire territory, as rebels can hold certain peripheral regions. This has allowed some guerrillas such as the FARC in Colombia to secure fairly stable zones of territorial control (Arjona 2016). Guerrillas may also establish operational bases across international borders (Salehyan 2007).

[47] In the counterinsurgency literature, scholars have also highlighted differences in governmental violence across different types of warfare. Valentino and al. (2004, 377), for instance, contend that governments facing guerrillas are more likely to perpetrate mass killings than governments engaged in conventional wars, as the former have strategic

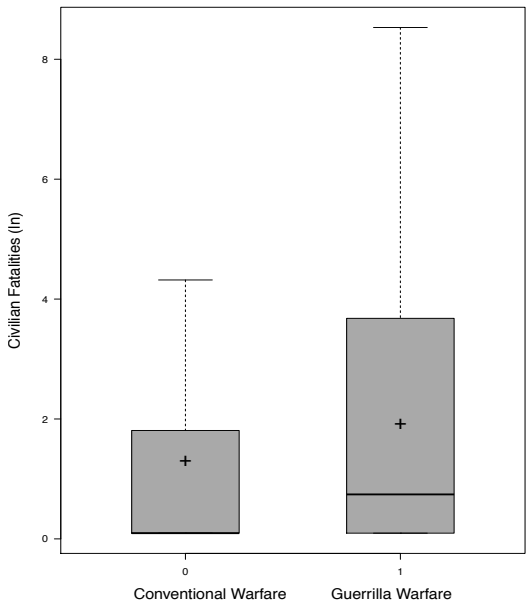
tends to follow a distinctive logic in conventional civil wars, one in which local political rivalry and revenge motives combine to shape patterns of civilian targeting.[48] In contrast, Kalyvas (2006) shows that the use of violence against noncombatants in guerrilla wars tends to be shaped by dynamics of collaboration and control, in a process of "joint production" by civilians and insurgents (see also Kalyvas and Kocher 2009).

In addition to the distinctive logics of violence that they follow, guerrilla and conventional wars also tend to differ in the levels of civilian targeting that they generate. Cross-national studies have indeed shown that guerrilla warfare has been the most violent technology of rebellion at the conflict level since the end of the Cold War, leading Balcells and Kalyvas to conclude that these conflicts have been "the 'dirtiest' civil wars of all" (2014, 1407). Their findings echo earlier empirical studies, which portrayed violence against civilians as "a far more regular, even 'natural,' concomitant of modern guerrilla warfare than of modern conventional warfare" (Wickham-Crowley 1990, 225). As Figure 2.1. illustrates, when one disaggregates conflict dyads to focus solely on insurgents, the trend remains largely similar, with rebel groups using guerrilla tactics being more violent on average than insurgents fighting conventionally.

incentives to root out the civilian base of support on which guerrillas rely (see also Wickham-Crowley 1990, 225). Krcmaric (2018, 19), on the contrary, suggests that incumbents facing guerrillas will generally favor a "hearts and minds" strategy, recognizing that "protecting the population is the key to success in counterinsurgency".

[48] For an analysis of governmental violence in conventional wars, see Costalli, Moro, and Ruggeri (2020).

Figure 2.1. Rebel Violence Against Civilians Across Types of Warfare (1989-2018)



Note: This box plot is based on one-sided violence data by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, matched with the Technology of Rebellion Dataset (Kalyvas and Balcells). For the purposes of this figure, SNC conflicts were coded as guerrillas. We used logged values for the one-sided violence data to improve legibility. The thick lines represent the medians and the crosses represent the means.

The above studies have undoubtedly furthered our understanding of the overall lethality of guerrilla warfare in comparison to conventional fighting, and of the manner in which guerrilla violence is likely to be physically distributed across the conflict landscape. Existing research, however, provides more limited guidance to appreciate why we often witness striking variations in the use of civilian targeting across rebel groups using guerrilla tactics. To be sure, an extensive literature has examined the drivers of group-level variation in violence against civilians during civil wars (see, among many others, Kalyvas 2006; Weinstein 2007; Hultman 2007; Wood 2010; Stanton 2016; Cohen 2016; Hoover Green 2018). Yet, existing studies have paid only tangential attention to the manner in which the use of irregular tactics and the very nature of guerrilla warfare may shape the behavioral tendencies of rebel groups. This is especially puzzling given that, as

Figure 2.1. reveals, guerrillas differ markedly in the extent to which they use violence against noncombatants during such conflicts.

Missing from the literature, in particular, is a theoretically-grounded account of the mechanisms explaining why some guerrillas use violence against civilians extensively, while others exhibit restraint. Importantly, moreover, we still have a limited understanding of the dynamics underlying within-group variations in guerrilla violence – that is, why different units within the same organization sometimes display strikingly different behaviors. In the next section, we tackle these issues by developing a theoretical argument on the determinants of rebel behavior during irregular conflicts, highlighting the role of *operational embeddedness* in shaping patterns of civilian targeting across and within guerrillas.

A Theory of Operational Embeddedness

Being weaker than their governmental opponents, guerrillas face distinctive operational challenges. While the main obstacle that incumbents need to surmount during irregular conflicts is the "identification problem" (Kalyvas 2006, 89) – that is, the difficulty of distinguishing between uninvolved civilians and active insurgents – one of the key challenges that guerrillas must overcome is what could be termed the *mobility problem*. This problem revolves around the difficulty of striking a balance between two often conflicting wartime imperatives: the need to remain "on the go" to evade a mightier opponent and the necessity to secure reliable sources of vital supplies.

One of the main ways through which guerrillas typically attempt to resolve the mobility problem is by gaining control over key populated areas, thereby allowing them to establish relatively stable operational bases and supply lines. The extent to which guerrillas will be able to

achieve this is likely to depend on a number of factors, including the geography of the conflict landscape (Fearon and Laitin 2003), the relative power of the belligerents (Wood 2010), the outcome of key battles (Hultman 2007), and the extent of the state's "informational reach" (Lewis 2020). The ability to establish bases within populated areas is thus likely to vary both across guerrillas and across different units within the same organization, resulting in varying degrees of what we call *operational embeddedness.*

We argue that operational embeddedness represents a key variable shaping the type of behaviors that guerrillas adopt toward civilians during irregular wars. We define operational embeddedness as the physical integration of rebel groups' operational bases within civilian communities. This involves that, when operationally embedded, rebel combatants conduct most of their quotidian activities – including eating, sleeping, recouping, training, and so on – among civilian actors in populated areas. An example of such embeddedness would be the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) which, for most of its insurgency, controlled vast swaths of densely-populated territory in Eritrea and stationed the vast majority of its combatants in large cities like Nakfa and Massawa (Pegg 2019). In contrast, operationally disembedded combatants carry out these same quotidian activities in isolated and sparsely-populated settings such as jungles, bushes, forests, or mountains, where contacts with civilians are minimal. An example of such disembeddedness would be the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which was "largely segregated from civilians" in Sierra Leone and operated in "isolated conditions" for much of its insurgency (Keen 2005, 76).

Although territorial control is in most cases a prerequisite for operational embeddedness, the two notions should not be equated since guerrillas may hold territory but still remain disembedded from civilian populations. As Kasfir (2015, 29) remarks, for instance, "[some] insurgents occupy terrain that contains no civilians, perhaps preferring an unpopulated area because

it creates less of a threat from an incumbent state". Operational embeddedness thus refers to a specific kind of territorial control, one in which guerrillas exert control over populated areas and establish an operational presence therein. It should be noted that, in some cases, guerrillas hide in populated areas under government control to respond to various strategic imperatives, creating a situation in which a certain degree of operational embeddedness may be achieved despite a lack of territorial control (see e.g. Lewis 2020; Parkinson 2013). This was the case for several guerrillas in Latin America, who sometimes operated covertly in large cities to evade counterinsurgency operations (Wickham-Crowley 1990; see also Marighella 1969). Yet, the clandestine nature of this type of operational presence will typically prevent commanders from establishing systems of governance and combatants from having quotidian interactions with civilians – two factors which, as we argue below, strongly inhibit civilian targeting.

Operational embeddedness, moreover, is distinct from social embeddedness – that is, the network of social or kinship ties that bind rebel groups to civilian constituencies (see e.g. Parkinson 2013; Staniland 2014; Larson and Lewis 2018; Moore 2019; Shesterinina 2019). As Worsnop (2017, 487) aptly notes, "[s]ocial foundations are indeterminate because, while scholars have demonstrated the power of social ties generally, organizations face the challenge of leveraging these ties". It is plausible, therefore, that some guerrillas may be linked to civilian communities by a network of social ties but lack the operational capacity to exploit these ties. As our case study illustrates, for instance, the Taliban had deep roots in the Pashtun regions of southern Afghanistan but, for most of the 2000s, evolved in an operational context characterized by isolation and clandestinity, which prevented them from marshalling these ties to further their strategic goals and to satisfy their wartime needs.[49]

[49] The opposite may also be true, in that guerrillas may have a strong operational presence in populated areas, without having much in the way of social bonds to the civilian communities living in these areas (e.g. Moore 2019). As such,

Importantly, we do not conceptualize operational embeddedness as a binary category, but as a continuum on which guerrilla units display different levels of embeddedness between these two extremes. For instance, while some disembedded groups may operate in near complete isolation from civilian communities, others may develop "underground networks" in populated areas to secure vital logistical resources, thereby minimizing the extent of their operational isolation (Parkinson 2013, 423). Relatedly, the operational embeddedness of different units within a single organization may vary across time or space.

We expect that guerrilla units who are operationally embedded within civilian communities will exhibit more restraint toward noncombatants than those who are disembedded from such communities. We argue that this is, in large measure, because operational embeddedness creates strategic incentives for commanders and socialization dynamics among combatants that are likely to inhibit civilian targeting. Operational disembeddedness, on the contrary, is likely to bring about a situation in which vertical incentives and horizontal socialization processes converge to promote violence against civilians.[50] In what follows, we flesh out these arguments.

Operational Embeddedness

We expect that guerrilla units whose operational settings are embedded within civilian communities will nurture largely nonviolent relations with noncombatants, as vertical strategic incentives and horizontal socialization processes will tend to promote restraint. First, we posit that operational embeddedness will exert restraining effects on insurgents' behaviors because it

our argument differs from theories stressing the role of social and material endowments in the production of violence against civilians (e.g. Weinstein 2007), highlighting instead how the context in which guerrillas operate can either bolster or constrain the latter's ability to exploit these endowments.

[50] By "violence against civilians" or "civilian targeting", we refer to the deliberate and direct killing of noncombatants. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, we do not address indirect or unintentional violence such as so-called "collateral damage" or deaths caused by war-induced factors such as famine or disease (see Eck and Hultman 2007).

provides both the incentive and the opportunity for rebel commanders to develop cooperative, mutually beneficial relations with noncombatants (Mosinger 2018). As the burgeoning literature on rebel governance has shown, many insurgent organizations indeed perform state-like duties in the regions under their control, providing public services, adjudicating disputes, managing health clinics and schools, certifying marriages, and so on (Arjona et al. 2015).

Yet, "[to] have the capacity to [govern], rebels must control territory populated by non-combatants" (Kasfir 2015, 21), suggesting that operational embeddedness will generally be "a precondition for the attempt by any insurgent group to construct a civilian governance apparatus" (Mampilly 2012, 63).[51] When guerrillas do manage to achieve such embeddedness, however, commanders will face strong incentives to "limit violence against civilians and establish governance to legitimate and regularize resource extraction" (Stewart and Liou 2017, 285). For one thing, governance facilitates the harnessing of resources and permits "the establishment of stable income-generating" activities, thereby creating strong incentives for "limiting outright predatory behaviour that can ruin future income possibilities" (Hansen 2019, 32; see also McColl 1969). Accordingly, when this possibility is available, cooperation and governance will typically be a more cost-effective strategy for rebel groups, as this type of approach "lowers the costs of maintaining a presence" in the areas under guerrillas' control (Palmer 2020, 5).

The establishment of governance institutions, moreover, tends to "[legitimize] rebels' political authority and may help them achieve their long-term goals" (Stewart and Liou 2017, 285). Rebel governance indeed acts as a signaling device that adds credibility to a group's candidacy as a prospective political actor, serving as a form of "delivery-based legitimization" (Giustozzi 2009,

[51] It should be noted that, in some cases, rebel governance may occur despite a group's lack of operational embeddedness, as the Taliban's "mobile courts" in Afghanistan exemplify (Weigand 2017, 371). These cases, however, seem to be somewhat unusual, the general rule being that groups need integration to establish systems of governance.

193–94; see also Stewart 2018). In turn, this incentivizes civilians to offer a form a "quasi-voluntary compliance" to their rebel rulers in exchange for security and services (Levi 1988), thereby reducing "the need for a rebellion to use force to ensure compliance" and creating a positive feedback loop (Mampilly 2015, 74).[52]

For embedded guerrillas, therefore, using violence could jeopardize both the wartime military benefits that they can accrue through governance, as well as the prospective political rewards that they may reap in the post-conflict phase as a result of their service provision.[53] In terms of wartime benefits, rebels can receive "vital inputs in the form of intelligence, war taxes, weapons, shelter, food, and logistical aid", in exchange for providing "varying degrees of order, protection, and welfare to civilians" (Huang 2016, 32). As for prospective political rewards, rebel groups – and especially secessionist insurgencies – may expect to garner postwar political support as a result of their wartime restraint, service provision, and statebuilding efforts (Stewart 2018). In these circumstances, we expect that commanders will strive to nurture nonviolent relations with noncombatants and invest in the development of cooperative relations with civilian communities.

Second, we expect that operational embeddedness will also exert restraining effects on guerrillas' behaviors because low-ranking combatants will be socialized to military roles on the basis of quotidian interactions with civilians.[54] Decades of research on intergroup contact theory have shown that sustained interactions between groups tend to reduce prejudices, enhance intergroup trust, generate affective ties and rapport, increase perspective taking, and pacify

[52] As Breslawski (2020) shows, there are important variations in the extent of civilian input across different rebel governance systems, depending on the type of constituency that is located in rebel held areas.
[53] This also echoes Mancur Olson's (1993) famous conceptualization of roving and stationary bandits, which emphasizes that the rewards reaped from consensual resource extraction are generally much greater than those offered by strictly coercive accumulation strategies.
[54] Following Checkel (2017, 592), we define socialization as the "process through which actors adopt the norms and rules of a given community. This means to think of [combatants] as embedded in social environments, which not only constrain and provide incentives to act, but also reshape interests and identities".

intergroup behaviors (Tropp and Pettigrew 2005; Pettigrew et al. 2011). As Martinez Machain (2020, 5) explains, "[t]hese positive perceptions are created as individuals share common experiences and are more likely to feel empathy toward each other". As such, we expect that, when military socialization occurs in a social environment in which contacts with civilians are regular and protracted, combatants will progressively internalize pro-civilian norms and dispositions, developing "strong, quotidian ties [that will] serve bridging functions" between them and local communities (Parkinson 2013, 422).

In particular, combatants belonging to embedded guerrillas will often serve as the agents of the governance institutions established by their group, effectively acting as the "street-level bureaucrats" who become the face of the organization and "regularly interact with citizens in the course of their jobs" (Lipsky 2010 [1980], xi). Additionally, embedded insurgents are more likely to be able to leverage pre-existing social networks to recruit new combatants in the local communities in which they are integrated (Staniland 2014).[55] In turn, these new recruits will tend to reinforce interactive socialization by strengthening the ties between civilian communities and the insurgent rank and file, serving as "informal bridges" between military and non-military actors (Parkinson 2013, 419). As such, we posit that operational embeddedness, by promoting this type of interactive socialization and by facilitating the emergence of "trust-based quotidian relationship[s]", will tend to create important psychological barriers inhibiting civilian victimization (Parkinson 2013, 419).

[55] As Mampilly (2012, 237) argues, "[r]ecruitment [is] linked to the density of social relationships that connect individuals to the insurgent organization. […] The relevant mechanism here is that as the number of points of contact with an insurgent organization increase, individual participation tends to swell in tandem". He adds that, "[as] as result, an increase in the density of social relations linking an organization to the society it seeks to control has an impact on the ability of the insurgency to recruit members" (2012, 237).

We suggest, therefore, that guerrilla units whose operational bases are highly integrated within civilian communities – and, in particular, groups that can leverage pre-existing social ties within these bases – are likely to exhibit restraint toward noncombatants, as the above dynamics will "[expand] the scope of [their] interface with civilians" (Mampilly 2012, 237). The resulting interpersonal relationships and social interactions will thus tend to shape the attitudes and behaviors of guerrillas, inhibiting the use of violence against civilians.

Operational Disembeddedness

In contrast, we expect that operationally disembedded units will be particularly prone to victimize civilians because the strategic calculations of commanders and socialization processes among combatants are likely to promote violence against civilians. First, we argue that operational disembeddedness will tend to bring about a situation in which civilians are unlikely to offer "quasi-voluntary compliance" to insurgents, given that the latter's lack of operational presence within local communities precludes them from providing security and services in exchange for that compliance (Levi 1988). In particular, operational disembeddedness undermines insurgents' ability to establish institutions of governance or to strike cooperative bargains with noncombatants, creating strong incentives for the latter to defect to the other side or to look for alternative service and security providers. As De la Calle and Sanchez-Cuenca (2012, 584) remark, "[i]nsurgencies without territory have more superficial contact with civilians", suggesting that the "constraints of clandestinity [will tend to] make the process of recruitment harder" and to impair these group's "capacity to extract rents from the population".

In these conditions, commanders will often be compelled to rely on coercive resource extraction and to nurture violent relations with noncombatants in order to secure the assets that are vital for their group's survival (Stewart and Liou 2017, 285). Guerrillas indeed tend to "resort to

brute force when they are unable to secure compliance through consent", and this is mainly because no other viable options are available when disembedded guerrillas can't reliably provide compensations to elicit cooperation (Gross 2015, 60). As our case study illustrates, this may even be the case for guerrillas who have social ties to civilian communities because, in a context of disembeddedness, rebels often lack the operational capacity to leverage these social endowments and eventually end up resorting to forcible means of resource extraction. In that regard, our argument echoes Wood's (2010, 601) theory of rebel capability, which holds that weakness – a factor that is likely to correlate with disembeddedness – will tend to increase the extent to which rebel groups target civilians, as these organizations will generally "lack the capacity to provide sufficient benefits to entice loyalty".

Second, we argue that the attitudes and behaviors of low-ranking combatants operating in isolation will tend to be shaped by a form of "enclave socialization", which is likely to yield violent outcomes. Several socio-psychological mechanisms may explain why isolation can exert violence-inducing effects over the membership of guerrillas. As social psychologists have shown, for instance, organizations operating in seclusion are particularly susceptible to experience "group polarization" – that is, a convergence of group members' attitudes and behaviors toward a more extreme position than that which most of the members would have adopted outside of the group context (Isenberg 1986). This shift toward the extremes is in part driven by the fact that the most radical members tend to enjoy increased status and socializing power within groups which are unexposed to external influences (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008, 422). It may also be explained by the fact that, in such settings, social learning dynamics become particularly prevalent, leading to the reproduction of violent behaviors learnt through observation and imitation (Bandura 1978).

A group's operational isolation, moreover, will tend to foster high ingroup cohesion and strong pressures for behavioral and value conformity (Della Porta 1995). Isolation indeed

contributes to a form of "bridge-burning" that severs combatants' previous social ties, thereby reinforcing their dependence on the armed group and the influence of horizontal socialization dynamics (Hafez and Mullins 2015, 965). As Van den Bos (2020, 569) notes, "radicalization often takes place in isolation and under threat, resulting in strong cohesion among the group members". In these conditions, group members "depend on one another for their lives in fighting the enemy, and this extreme interdependence produces extreme group cohesion. The resulting group's consensus about value and morality acquires enormous power, including the power to justify and even require violence against those who threaten the group" (ibid). This is consistent with findings in social psychology, which indicate that groups evolving in seclusion tend to overestimate the threat posed by outsiders and to view the latter in an increasingly dehumanized manner – a process commonly known as the "ingroup-outgroup bias" (Stephan 1985; Brewer 2007). Importantly, this bias can not only prompt further withdrawal and cohesion, but may also lead to the legitimization of violence against anyone who is not a member of the group (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008, 422).

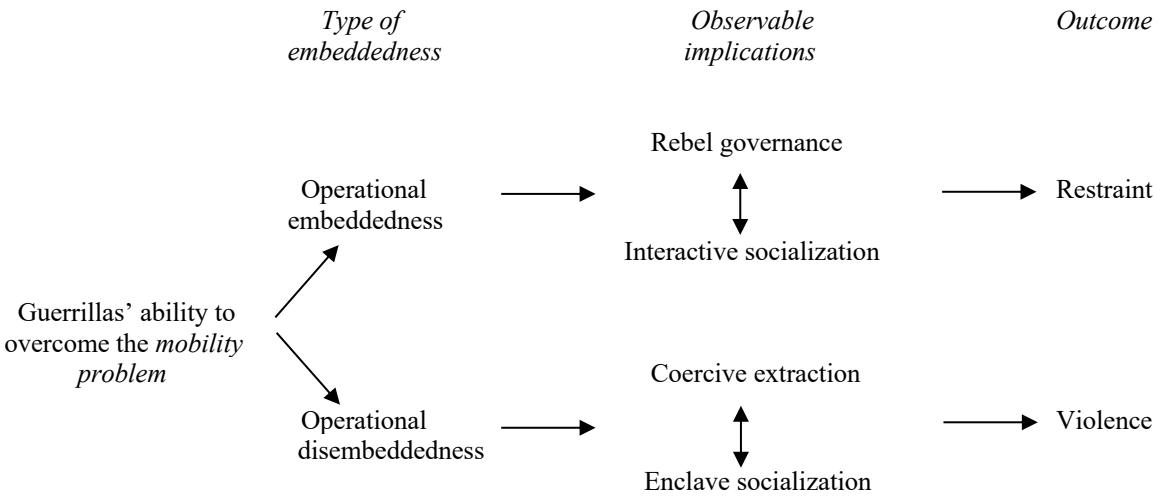
Therefore, in the "echo chambers" that operational disembeddedness produces, radical socializers will exert a particularly strong influence over their peers (Della Porta 2018, 468). Through the influence of these different socio-psychological mechanisms, disembedded guerrillas may thus come to view civilians as threatening and dehumanized outsiders, thereby increasing the appeal of violent remedies to neutralize that threat. In that regard, operational disembeddedness creates environmental conditions conducive to civilian targeting because it fuels processes of violent socialization, fostering an enclosed world that can become an incubator of radical dispositions.

Observable Implications

Figure 2.2. presents a schematization of our theoretical framework. The above leads to two sets of observable implications. First, *operational embeddedness* will tend to incentivize commanders to nurture cooperative relations with civilians by establishing systems of civilian administration and institutions of governance. Operational embeddedness will also tend to promote a form of "interactive socialization" between civilian and combatants, leading the latter to display pro-civilian dispositions and to forge bonds of trust and affective ties with noncombatants. We expect that the interactions between these vertical strategic incentives and horizontal socialization dynamics will considerably limit the extent to which embedded guerrilla units target civilians.

Second, *operational disembeddedness* will force commanders to nurture violent relations with civilians by adopting coercive strategies of resource extraction. Operational disembeddedness will also tend to promote "enclave socialization" among combatants, which will give rise to anti-civilian attitudes and behaviors. We expect that, when feeding into one another, these vertical strategic incentives and horizontal socialization dynamics will tend to increase the extent to which disembedded guerrilla units target civilians.

Figure 2.2. A Theory of Operational Embeddedness



In what follows, we first conduct large-N statistical analyses to establish whether a correlation exists between the extent of guerrillas' operational embeddedness at the group level and their propensity to use violence against civilians during intrastate conflicts. We then draw on a qualitative case study to test more directly the various components of our theoretical framework that do not easily lend themselves to quantification and to shed additional light on within-group dynamics. This qualitative data allows us to cast the focus upon some of the key strategic and socio-psychological mechanisms which, we argue, link operational embeddedness to rebel behavior.

Methods & Data

To test our arguments, we built a dataset with the rebel-group-year as the unit of analysis. The universe of cases is derived from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Dyadic Dataset (Pettersson et al. 2019), which we matched we data on "Technologies of Rebellion" (TR) by

Kalyvas and Balcells (2010; 2014).[56] This allowed us to identify all rebel groups who have used guerrilla tactics between 1989 and 2018, resulting in 1,172 observations on 205 rebel groups that were part of 116 conflicts in 61 countries (Pettersson et al. 2019).[57] We use two main dependent variables. The first dependent variable – *Civilian Fatalities* – is the annual number of civilians killed by rebel groups, based on the best estimates of the UCDP Georeferenced Dataset (GED) (Högbladh 2019). The second dependent variable – *OSV Events* – is the annual number of recorded events of civilian victimization caused by rebel groups, also drawn from the UCDP GED. These two variables thus allow us to evaluate the impact of operational embeddedness on both the *magnitude* of guerrillas' use of violence against civilians as well as the *frequency* with which they engage in such violence. Because of the non-normally distributed structure of our dependent variables, we use negative binomial models in our analyses.

Explanatory Variables

To measure our explanatory variable, we created a composite index of *Operational Embeddedness*, which combines two indicators: the extent of guerrillas' effective territorial control and the extent to which they engage in governance. The first indicator is based on the Non-State

[56] The TR dataset ends in 2008 and includes only the cases crossing the threshold of a 100 battle-related deaths per year. We used manual coding for the 2009-2018 period and for the cases that are included in the more granular UCDP data but not in the TR dataset. The TR dataset, moreover, contains only 147 observations, providing conflict-level information instead of group-year observations. Considering that most civil wars are fought with the same technology of rebellion throughout the conflict, we imputed the same TR data to every group-year observations included in the UCDP dataset, unless the TR dataset indicates a change in warfare during a single conflict (e.g. Afghanistan, Chechnya, etc.). See Appendix A for more detail.

[57] Kalyvas and Balcells (2010) distinguish a third type of warfare – symmetric non-conventional (SNC) – in which incumbents and insurgents are matched at a low level of weaponry and capacity. For the purposes of this article, we code SNC conflicts as guerrillas, since the distinction between SNC and irregular conflicts mainly pertains to a difference in the capacity and weaponry of *governmental* forces, the characteristics of insurgents being largely the same in both types of warfare. In other words, rebel groups entangled in SNC conflicts mobilize the same kind of tactics and weaponry than insurgents fighting in irregular wars, although against a much weaker opponent. In alternative model specifications, we coded guerrillas and SNC conflicts as distinct categories, but the results remain largely similar. See Appendix A for more detail.

Actors in Armed Conflict (NSA) Dataset and is scored from 0 to 3, depending on the extent to which a group exerts effective control over a given territory (Cunningham et al. 2013).[58] The second indicator is derived from three main sources – Huang (2016), Stewart (2018), and Florea (2020) – and is also scored from 0 to 3, depending on the number of social services (health, education, and justice) that a group provides in the areas under its control.[59]

Based on these indicators, we attribute a score to each rebel group, which can take any value between 0 and 6. Groups scoring 6 thus have a firm hold over territory and provide education, health, and justice to noncombatants. We maintain that this situation entails high operational embeddedness for two main reasons. First, as previously mentioned, territorial control is in most cases a prerequisite for embeddedness, insofar as guerrillas need to exert control over a populated area in order to establish an operational presence therein. Second, the sustained provision of social services necessitates an important degree of permanency and integration within civilian communities.[60] Groups scoring 0, on the contrary, have no territory under their control and provide no services to local communities, suggesting that they are considerably less likely to be embedded in populated areas.

It could be argued that the establishment of governance institutions may be motivated by a broader pro-civilian ideology, which would call both for the provision of welfare services *and* for a strict prohibition on civilian targeting. This may raise endogeneity issues for our analyses. To address this possibility, we use an alternative specification of our index – *Operational Embeddedness 2* – in which the first indicator remains the same, while the second indicator

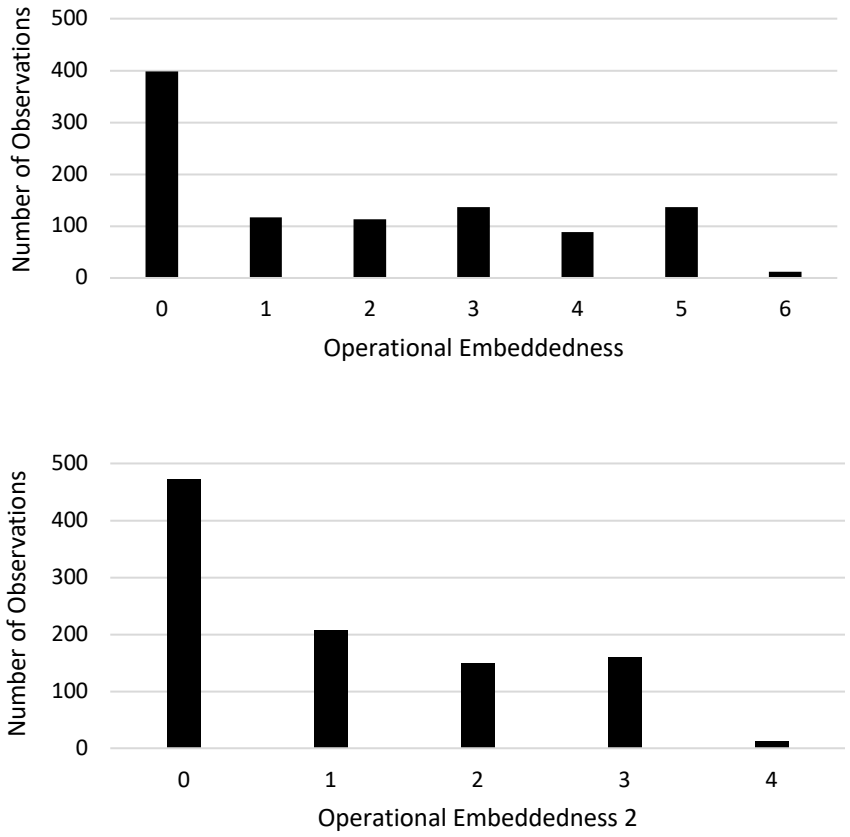
[58] 0 = no territory; 1 = low control of territory; 2= moderate control; and 3 = high control. See Appendix A for manual coding of years not covered by the NSA dataset.
[59] 0 = no service provision; 1 = provision of one type of service (education, health, or judiciary); 2 = provision of two types of services; 3= provision of all types of services. See Appendix A for manual coding of years not covered by Huang (2016), Stewart (2018), and Florea (2020).
[60] As noted above, however, there are some exceptions to this general rule, including the Taliban's "mobile courts".

becomes binary, concerning only the provision of justice (Huang 2016). In this alternative 0-4 index, the second indicator thus specifies whether or not guerrillas administer justice through the establishment of courts, legal systems, or other types of judiciary institutions in the areas under their control.[61] The rationale behind this alternative specification is that the establishment of judiciary institutions is typically a more pragmatic and immediate concern for guerrillas who first gain control of a populated area, as adjudicating disputes and creating a "system of law" allow rebels to achieve "a degree of stability" and order in the territory under their command (Mampilly 2012, 63). Justice, moreover, can be delivered in a host of different ways which are not necessarily pro-civilian in nature – for instance, the harsh administration of sharia-based justice by rebel groups in Afghanistan and Somalia. These considerations thus minimize the risk of endogeneity.

Figure 2.3. presents the distribution of the two specifications of our operational embeddedness index, which show a disproportionate share of lower values. This is consistent with the observation that guerrillas, facing a stronger opponent, are confronted with important operational challenges that often prevent them from achieving a high degree of embeddedness.

[61] By using this approach, however, the territorial control component of the index has more statistical weight than the governance component. Hence, in Appendix A, we run robustness checks in which we divide the first indicator by 3, thereby balancing the relative weights of our two indicators. The results remain largely the same.

Figure 2.3. Operational Embeddedness Across Guerrillas (1989-2018)



An important limitation of our operational embeddedness index is that the data on which it is based are not granular enough to capture within-group variations – that is, fluctuations in the embeddedness of a given guerrilla across time and space. Given the lack of reliable cross-national data on the exact location of rebel units' zones of territorial control over time, however, we believe that our index – despite being an admittedly blunt instrument – is the most suitable measure to compare relative levels of operational embeddedness across a large universe of cases. As will become apparent below, moreover, our case study also offers an opportunity to partially address this limitation by shedding additional light on key mechanisms and within-group variations.

Control Variables

We control for a set of group-level, conflict-level, and state-level factors. Due to space limitations, we provide the sources for these controls, as well as the rationale behind their inclusion in Appendix A. Table 2.1. provides descriptive statistics on our dependent, explanatory, and control variables.

Table 2.1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	*N*	*Mean*	*Median*	*SD*	*Min.*	*Max.*
Civilian Fatalities	999	96.56	0	857.23	0	30,110
OSV Events	999	9.63	0	27.26	0	320
Operational Embeddedness	999	1.87	1.00	2.04	0.00	6.00
Operational Embeddedness 2	999	1.04	1.00	1.31	0.00	4.00
Rebel Strength	999	1.57	2.00	0.68	1.00	5.00
State Sponsorship	999	0.26	0.00	0.46	0.00	1.00
Communist	999	0.26	0.00	0.41	0.00	1.00
Religious	999	0.45	0.00	0.49	0.00	1.00
Ethnic	999	0.49	0.00	0.50	0.00	1.00
Intensity	999	1.15	1.00	0.41	1.00	3.00
Rebel Number	999	1.57	1.00	1.03	1.00	6.00
Government OSV (ln)	999	1.38	0.10	2.31	0.10	8.33
Material Endowments	999	1.32	1.00	0.92	0.00	3.00

Notes: OSV = One-sided violence

Results and Discussion

We estimate a set of four distinct models. Model 1 provides a baseline test of the relationship between *Operational Embeddedness* and *Civilian Fatalities*, controlling for group-level and conflict-level factors. Model 2 evaluates the impact of *Operational Embeddedness* on *OSV Events,* including the full set of controls as well. Model 3 and 4 use *Operational*

Embeddedness 2 as the independent variable and assess its effects on *Civilian Fatalities* and *OSV Events*, respectively. We also include group-level and conflict-level controls in these two models. Table 2.2. presents the results and Figure 2.4. plots the estimated coefficients.

Across all models, the coefficients for *Operational Embeddedness* and *Operational Embeddedness 2* are large, negative, and statistically significant. Results from Model 1 indeed indicate that, as the extent of guerrillas' operational embeddedness increases, the extent to which they target civilians decreases. Estimates from Model 2 reveal that an increase in *Operational Embeddedness* also decreases the frequency with which guerrillas victimize civilians. The explanatory variable retains its sign and strong statistical significance when we use the second specification of our index (Model 3-4). All models are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level and their results are robust to alternative controls, measurements, and specifications.[62] As a whole, therefore, the results offer strong support for the argument that disembedded guerrillas use violence against noncombatants more extensively and more frequently than groups that have a greater operational presence in civilian communities.

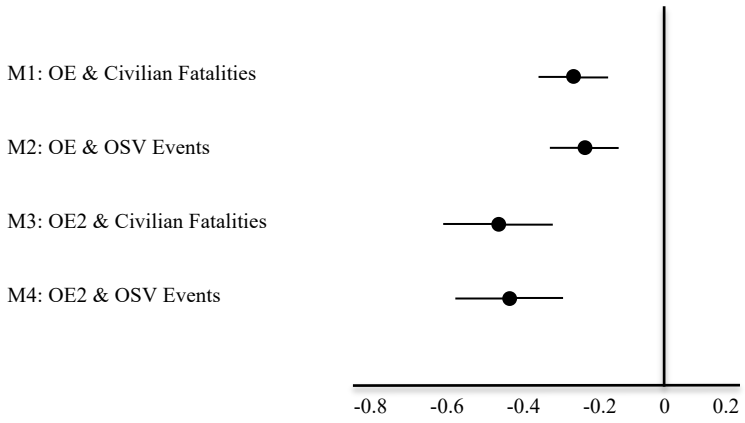
[62] See Appendix A.

Table 2.2. Operational Embeddedness and Civilian Targeting

	Dependent variables			
	M1 Civilian Fat.	**M2** OSV Events	**M3** Civilian Fat.	**M4** OSV Events
Op. Embeddedness	-0.285***	-0.277***		
	(0.047)	(0.059)		
Op. Embeddedness 2			-0.493***	-0.487***
			(0.077)	(0.087)
Rebel Strength	0.490***	0.730***	0.504***	0.788***
	(0.097)	(0.109)	(0.097)	(0.112)
State Sponsorship	0.291*	0.346**	0.163	0.276
	(0.163)	(0.167)	(0.168)	(0.170)
Communist	0.912***	0.354	0.882***	0.360
	(0.172)	(0.278)	(0.168)	(0.279)
Religious	-0.153	-0.009	-0.078	0.082
	(0.179)	(0.193)	(0.180)	(0.203)
Ethnic	-0.493***	-0.771***	-0.438***	-0.694***
	(0.162)	(0.210)	(0.160)	(0.204)
Intensity	1.628***	2.010***	1.696***	2.097***
	(0.147)	(0.180)	(0.151)	(0.190)
Rebel Number	-0.258**	-0.102	-0.292***	-0.146
	(0.101)	(0.103)	(0.102)	(0.098)
Government OSV (ln)	-0.045	0.085*	-0.022	0.109**
	(0.035)	(0.046)	(0.035)	(0.049)
Material Endowments	-0.300***	-0.197**	-0.328***	-0.194**
	(0.081)	(0.081)	(0.082)	(0.079)
Constant	0.953***	1.385***	0.854***	1.143***
	(0.286)	(0.409)	(0.279)	(0.439)
Observations	999	999	999	999

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses; Unit of analysis = rebel-group-year; OSV= One-sided violence.

Figure 2.4. Coefficient Plot



Note: Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals

Our results contribute to the literature by showing that, while guerrilla warfare may be more violent than conventional fighting, there are important variations in the propensity of guerrillas to partake in such violence (Balcells and Kalyvas 2014). In that regard, our findings indicate that an important factor influencing this variation is the extent to which guerrillas are operationally embedded within civilian communities. Although our results provide strong evidence in support of our arguments, a lack of disaggregated data prevents us from testing each of the theorized mechanisms directly and separately. In particular, our analyses cannot satisfactorily capture the strategic and socio-psychological factors which, we argue, affect rebel behavior during guerrilla warfare. To offset these limitations, we exploit within-group variations in the Taliban's insurgency to shed additional light on the mechanisms at work in this relationship.

Operational Embeddedness and the Taliban Insurgency

After ruling the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under strict Sharia law for nearly five years, the Taliban was quickly ousted from power when the United States launched Operation Enduring Freedom, in response to the September 11 attacks. While the group initially disintegrated under the fire power of the US-led coalition, the Taliban managed to regroup in Pakistani sanctuaries and, by 2004, had "revived the movement […] as a force for guerrilla insurgency" (Staniland 2014, 136–37; see also Rashid 2010, 225–26).

As discussed below, the Taliban's insurgency from 2004 onwards allows us to exploit within-group variations in the operational embeddedness of a single organization, while holding other macro-level variables constant. In particular, we focus on the Taliban's insurgency in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar, partly because the hostilities were particularly intense there but also because, in these Pashtun-dominated areas, the group had access to a "deep well of social resources", owing to the ethno-linguistic and religious ties binding it to local communities (Farrell 2018, 61). This allows us, therefore, to examine in more detail the interactions between operational and social embeddedness.

We first analyze a period spanning from the Taliban's revival as a guerrilla insurgency around 2004 to the major drawdown in international troops at the end of 2014, before looking at the post-2014 period. The case reveals that significant changes in the operational context in which the Taliban fought in southern Afghanistan produced important shifts in the type of relations that the group nurtured with civilians over the years.

2004-2014: Operational Disembeddedness

Following their removal from power, the Taliban turned to "classic guerrilla tactics" in their fight against the Afghan government and international troops, operating in small groups and relying on mobility, ambushes, and surprise cross-border raids from Pakistan (Staniland 2014, 105; see also Angstrom 2017, 851). After suffering important losses, the group was indeed forced into isolation and clandestinity, retreating from most of its prior strongholds in southern Afghanistan to "avoid exposure to superior state-based security forces" (Farrell and Giustozzi 2013, 846). The Taliban's turn to guerrilla warfare and the operational pressures that it faced during this stage of the war thus prevented the group from settling in "the more densely populated, flat areas near the watercourses". Instead, the group was forced to establish its operational bases "in the outlying sparsely populated areas on the edge of the desert in Marjah, Nad-e Ali, Musa Qala, Garmser and Nahr-e Seraj" (ibid, 869).[63] A former Taliban combatant interviewed by Fazli, Johnson, and Cooke (2015, 5) indeed remarked that, "as pressure from the government and international forces increased it became difficult to operate", forcing his unit to retreat to remote sanctuaries along the Afghan-Pakistani border. During these years, most Taliban units in the Kandahar and Helmand provinces would thus function as "roving armed [bands]", whose "operational patterns" would be to fight as a "mobile column, working in one valley for a period of days or weeks". They would do so "until the security forces' response to their presence [became] too intense, at which point they [dispersed] into smaller groups and [melted] away across the hills into the next valley" (Kilcullen 2009, 83–86).

[63] Farrell and Giustozzi add that the Taliban initially "maintained underground operations even in the more populated areas of central Helmand garrisoned by ISAF and ANSF, but gradually their underground network wore out under the weight of the government security operations" (2013, 869).

Consistent with the expectations of our theoretical framework, the Taliban's lack of operational presence in populated areas in this period had two major consequences. First, despite having a "strong social base" in southern Afghanistan, the Taliban's ability "to extract sufficient material support from local sources" was severely undermined when the group found itself in this new, isolated "operating environment" (Farrell and Giustozzi 2013, 867–69). Giustozzi (2019, 19) notes, for instance, that "there were very few funding sources at this point, and no supplies were being delivered. […] Efforts to raise Islamic taxes […] also produced little. In addition, tribal elders were almost unanimously opposed to [the Taliban] and denied them support and facilitation". As this quote suggests, the Taliban's operational disembeddedness also considerably undermined the group's ability to garner popular support. A Taliban commander, for instance, remarked: "[it] was very dangerous back then. We had to run quickly and stay out of sight. We didn't want villagers to see us. At that time they weren't very supportive" (ibid, 30). Accordingly, the Taliban's "early re-mobilisation was limited not only by scarce resources. These isolated, small insurgent groups were fighting against the odds and faced huge risks; they did not enjoy widespread support among the villagers" (ibid, 30).

As Farrell (2018, 66) notes, this lack of support was largely due to the fact that the Taliban "were not able to provide public services" to local communities and thereby failed to attract the same degree of legitimacy that they enjoyed as an incipient insurgent organization in the early 1990s. Being physically detached from civilian communities, the Taliban indeed lacked the operational capacity to offer cooperative bargains in the form of security and services to civilians in exchange for their compliance. In the precarious conditions of guerrilla warfare, the Taliban thus faced strong incentives to nurture coercive relations with civilians, having no other recourses than to forcibly secure the resources on which their group's survival depended. As Farrell and Giustozzi (2013, 869) explain, these incentives derived mainly from the imposing "logistical demands of

supporting [an insurgency] in a sparsely populated area". Throughout the 2000s, these dynamics led to numerous episodes of violence against uncompliant villagers and to the use of brutal means of resource extraction in unsupportive communities (United Nations 2009). As such, despite the deep roots that the Taliban had in the Pashtun communities of southern Afghanistan, the operational context in which the group evolved generally prevented it from exploiting these social ties, forcing the leadership to turn to coercive means of resource extraction.

The second consequence of the Taliban's operational isolation during this phase of the insurgency was that this disembeddedness seems to have exerted important radicalizing effects on the rank-and-file, shaping combatants' psychological dispositions. After seeing a large proportion of its ranks wiped out in the early 2000s, the Taliban was indeed forced to engage in intensive recruitment efforts. As Giustozzi (2019, 19) notes, "[r]e-mobilising old members and recruiting new volunteers was difficult in the absence of a visible, 'over-the-ground' presence". As such, while the membership makeup of the early Taliban in the 1990s was very homogenous owing to the dense web of social ties on which the group was originally built (Staniland 2014, 129–33), the group had to recruit considerably more broadly after 2001, "stretching the spectrum of Taliban membership and making the group more diverse and less homogeneous" (Giustozzi 2019, 76).

Many of these new recruits joined for "more mundane and material motives […]. For some young men, the Taliban offered a way out of unemployment and the boredom of rural life. As one elder observed: 'They were jobless, the young. They didn't talk to the mullahs, they went straight to the Taliban. They saw it as work.'" (in Farrell and Giustozzi 2013, 854). Evidence suggests that these new cohorts of combatants were subjected to potent processes of indoctrination and violent socialization when they found themselves in the remote and isolated operational bases described above. Landbury (2009, 4), for instance, notes that "most radicalisation appears to [have happened] after young men" left their communities and became combatants. She adds that "[t]he evidence

from the field study is that young men become Taliban combatants for a mix of reasons […] but their peers then 'radicalise[d]' them". A report by the US Institute for Peace similarly emphasizes that the "radicalization [of Taliban combatants] often [occurred] after recruitment", suggesting that potent group dynamics were instrumental in shaping their attitudes and behaviors (Fazli, Johnson, and Cooke 2015, 4). As Zahid (2013) remarks, it is plausible that these radicalization processes may have been driven by the fact that these new members of the "Taliban [were] socialized" to combatant roles "with no other interference" than that of their peers and that "their exposure to the outside world" was severely limited. Evidence indicates, moreover, that the socialization of recruits to radical dispositions during this phase of the insurgency may also have been fueled by processes of social learning and group polarization. Dzardanova (2015, 13), for instance, notes that, when individuals found themselves in this new, enclaved "social setting", their peers often became "role models […], whose behavioral patterns they […] readily [copied] and [repeated]". This echoes our arguments regarding the role of social influence in processes of violent socialization within operationally disembedded groups.

Although there were important variations in the extent to which different Taliban units were disembedded from civilian communities, the secluded operational setting in which most combatants evolved for much of the 2000s in southern Afghanistan thus appears to have served as a breeding ground for radical dispositions (Landbury 2009). In this enclosed world, the near-absence of interactions with civilians and the influence of potent group dynamics brought many to view civilians as untrustworthy accomplices of the enemy, thereby broadening the range of victims that the group deemed to be legitimate.

2015-2020: Operational Embeddedness

In the early 2010s, a number of battlefield developments caused the tides to turn in favor of the Taliban, transforming the operational environment in which the group evolved in southern Afghanistan. Although the Taliban began to gather momentum as early as 2010, the withdrawal of thousands of international troops at the end of 2014 considerably accelerated this process. As Jackson and Rahmatullah (2019) note, the drawdown in coalition forces after years of unproductive military endeavors allowed the Taliban to gain control over large "swaths of rural Afghanistan" and to increase its operational presence in an increasing number of Pashtun areas in the southern provinces (see also Roggio and Gutowski 2020). Evidence suggests that this increased level of operational embeddedness has created strong incentives for local commanders to establish systems of governance akin to the ones that the group had put in place in its formative years. Consistent with the expectations of our theoretical framework, the Taliban indeed began to reinstitute, in most of the regions in which it consolidated its operational presence, a "sophisticated governance structure, including the management of schools, clinics, courts, tax collection, and more" (Jackson 2018; see also Krieger 2018). On the basis of fieldwork in Afghanistan, Terpstra (2020, 1157) similarly emphasizes that, "as its territory expanded, the Taliban became more involved in governance" in recent years.

This has been especially apparent in the regions of southern Afghanistan where the Taliban has been able to leverage its social ties to Pashtun communities to further its statebuilding efforts – an ability that it did not have for much of the 2000s (Farrell 2018, 73). Several authors report that this "alternative administration […] [is] widely perceived as legitimate" among the civilian populations under Taliban control (Farrell and Semple 2015, 96; see also Johnson 2017; Weigand 2017; Terpstra 2020), prompting many communities "in rural areas [to] provide active support to the insurgency" (Jackson 2018). Johnson (2017, 186) notes, in particular, that the Taliban's

judiciary institutions are "easily one of the most popular and respected elements of the Taliban insurgency by local communities, especially in southern Afghanistan". This legitimacy is also apparent in the testimonies of Afghans recently interviewed by Weigand. The author indeed reports that civilians tend to "assess the Taliban pragmatically, predominantly based on the day-to-day experience of their behaviour rather than on their history or ideology" (2017, 374–75; see also Terpstra 2020a). He adds that, "[while] people in most parts of the government-controlled territories looked at them through the lens of 'insecurity'" and denounced their coercive behaviors, "people in the Taliban-controlled territories viewed the Taliban more favourably, focusing on their effective role in" security and service provision (ibid). It thus appears that the group's consolidated operational presence within the latter communities has provided Taliban leaders with both the incentives and the opportunity to nurture cooperative, mutually beneficial relations with noncombatants. This is mainly because, in a context of operational embeddedness, this approach has been considerably more cost-effective for the Taliban than a purely coercive approach would have been, allowing the group to achieve a form of "delivery-based legitimization" (Giustozzi 2009, 193–94).

Although data on horizontal socialization dynamics are scanter regarding this most recent phase of the insurgency, the available evidence indicates that the positive interpersonal relationships that our theory expects to find in contexts of operational embeddedness have begun to emerge between combatants and civilians in a number of localities controlled by the Taliban. For instance, Thruelsen (2010, 269) notes that "quite positive relations between locals and the Taliban have developed" in the regions of the Helmand province where the group began to consolidate its operational presence starting in the late 2000s. Jackson (2018) similarly reports that the Taliban cadres that were administrating a village that she visited were "widely seen as fair and honest" by the local population. A civilian interviewed by Terpstra (2020, 1157) likewise remarked

that the combatants stationed "in his village [behave] respectfully with people", giving rise to benevolent and generally positive relationships between the Taliban and local civilians. While the available evidence is admittedly far from conclusive here, these indications are consistent with our theory's expectations regarding the type of civilian-combatant interactions that operational embeddedness is likely to foster.

Discussion and External Validity

Although far from being the only factor that shaped the Taliban's relationships with Afghan civilians since the early 2000s, the different operational contexts in which the group evolved over the years – and, in particular, the distinctive configurations of vertical incentives and horizontal socialization dynamics that they brought about – have certainly influenced its conduct toward noncombatants in southern Afghanistan. While a lack of sufficiently granular data prevents us from drawing causal inferences here, it should be noted that, as expected by our theory, the increase in the Taliban's operational embeddedness that we described above has unfolded in tandem with a sizeable decrease in civilian targeting in the Helmand and Kandahar provinces. In comparison with the previous period, the average annual numbers of victimization events and fatalities in these provinces have indeed decreased by around 31% and 52% respectively in the 2015-2019 period.[64] To be sure, more micro-level research would be needed to evaluate the actual causal influence that operational embeddedness has exerted on the Taliban's behaviors over the years, but the qualitative evidence provides strong preliminary support for our arguments.

[64] We arrived at these figures by using data on one-sided violence from the UCDP GED, aggregating the Helmand and Kandahar provinces and calculating the annual number of events and fatalities between 2004 and 2019. We then calculated the means for the 2004-2014 and 2015-2019 periods.

Evidently, the Taliban's insurgency is characterized by several features – including the significant presence of international troops and the protracted nature of the war – which may raise concerns regarding the generalizability of our findings beyond Afghanistan. Yet, a number of other cases seem to attest to the broader validity of these findings outside of the Taliban case. Units of the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, for instance, evolved in very different operational settings in the north and east of the country: "Whereas in the east the LTTE seemed to have been confined to rural hinterlands, jungles and its occasional camps, in the north they were clearly masters in their own house" and managed to establish bases in cities like Jaffna and Kilinochchi (Fagerlund 2011, 102). These different operational environments seem to have significantly shaped patterns of governance, popular support, and rebel behavior across these two regions (ibid, 108).

In his study of jihadist insurgencies in Africa, Hansen (2019, 34; emphasis added) similarly shows that "the organisational behaviour of [these] groups is partly dependent on the *type* of territorial presence they hold", noting that groups with a consolidated territorial presence tend to display more behavioral restraint than those who are forced to remain "on-the-go" and to operate in clandestinity. Likewise, in the few populated areas of Sierra Leone that it controlled, the RUF's operational embeddedness also appears to have exerted restraining effects on the behaviors of the units stationed in these localities. Indeed, Peters (2011b, 171) explains that, "[d]eep inside RUF territory, civilians had more opportunities and time to build relationships with the […] fighters present" and that the formation of these relationships was "a crucial factor in preventing harassment". In the rest of Sierra Leone, however, "the provision of social services was inhibited by the [RUF's] concentration on hit-and-run tactics" and its reliance on mobility, resulting in highly coercive relationships with local communities (Keen 2005, 43).

Conclusion

This article explored the determinants of rebel behavior during guerrilla warfare. Using cross-national and case study evidence, it highlighted how differences in the operational embeddedness of guerrillas can help explain the striking variation that these organizations display in their behaviors toward civilians, both across and within irregular conflicts. By examining how the different environments in which guerrillas operate may generate different structures of incentives and configurations of social interactions, we showed that the physical distribution of human actors across the conflict landscape shapes patterns of civilian targeting in important ways. This is mainly because embeddedness influences both vertical strategic calculations and horizontal socialization dynamics which, together, are likely to lead to restraint when integration is strong and to violence when integration is weak.

Several research agendas emerge from our study. First, our article highlighted that the operational conditions under which armed groups evolve represent a key – and often overriding – determinant of rebel behavior, which can shape the effects of other factors like territorial control or social ties. In that regard, it would be worthwhile to determine whether accounting for operational embeddedness may allow us the recast our understanding of other conventional explanations of rebel violence, like those stressing organizational dynamics (Cohen 2016; Green 2018), audience costs (Stanton 2016), battlefield losses (Hultman 2007) or rebel strength (Wood 2010). In particular, future research could assess whether factors like ideology and ethnicity may make guerrillas more or less likely to be swayed by the opportunities and constraints created by the operational context in which they wage insurgency.

Second, it may prove rewarding to conduct more micro-level studies to better appreciate how spatial and temporal variations in embeddedness can affect the trajectory of different units within a single organization. Third, our study highlighted the value of considering conjointly the

strategic calculations of the leadership and the socio-psychological microfoundations underlying combatants' behaviors. Yet, more work is needed on the interactions between these vertical and horizontal processes and on the conditions under which they reinforce or contradict one another. Finally, pulling together incumbents and insurgents into an integrated theoretical framework could represent a fruitful avenue for further research and may allow us to determine whether the notion of operational embeddedness can also help to explain the behaviors of governmental forces.

A number of policy implications also derive from our study. In particular, it appears that considering "insurgent governance practices as a precondition for recognition would be an improvement over the […] approach that currently typifies the international community's engagement with violent actors", and could incentivize insurgents to exhibit restraint toward civilians in order to garner international legitimacy (Mampilly 2012, 24; Stewart 2018). Our case study also suggests that governments and international actors should prioritize security and service provision both during and after civil conflicts in order to prevent civil war recurrence and ensure post-conflict stability. Indeed, many Afghan civilians identified insecurity and poor governance – instead of ideological affinity – as the key factors motivating their support for insurgents (Jackson 2018). Placing these concerns at the heart of conflict prevention, management, and resolution strategies could thus help policy-makers to minimize the human costs of civil wars.

CHAPTER III

Are "New New Insurgencies" More Lethal? Jihadist Rebels, Combatant Socialization, and Civilian Targeting[65]

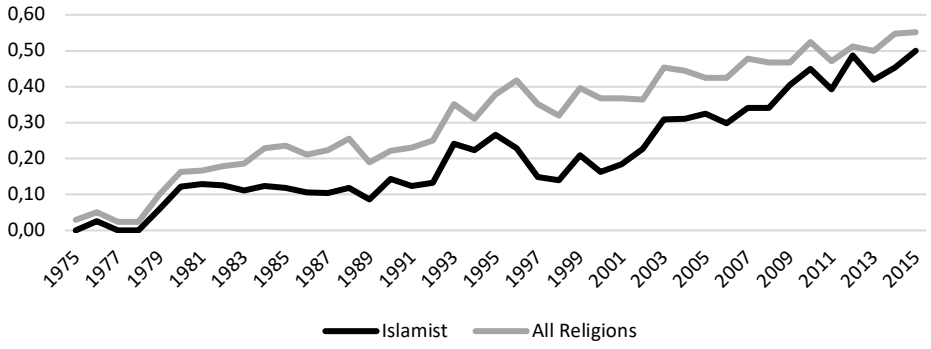
[65] This article is currently under review at the *Journal of Conflict Resolution.*

Chapter 3. Are "New New Insurgencies" More Lethal? Jihadist Rebels, Combatant Socialization, and Civilian Targeting

Introduction

Recent research has drawn attention to an emerging trend in the nature of twenty-first century civil wars: the proliferation of conflicts fought in Muslim-majority countries by radical Islamist groups pursuing transnational goals (Walter 2017a; see also Toft 2021). Over the last two decades, internal conflicts waged by Islamist rebels have indeed come to represent a growing share of all civil wars, while the religious claims made by these groups have become both more salient and increasingly transnational (Svensson and Nilsson 2017). The following figures – based on recent data from the Religion and Armed Conflict (RELAC) project (Svensson and Nilsson 2017) – illustrate these trends, highlighting the striking ways in which the "master narratives" of civil wars have evolved since the turn of the millennium (Kalyvas 2003, 487).[66]

Figure 3.1. Civil Wars Fought by Islamist Rebels, 1975-2015[67]
(% of all dyads per year)



[66] More specifically, Walter (2017a, 471) identifies the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 as the starting point of these developments.

[67] This is measured by assessing whether the rebel group in a given civil war dyad has made explicit and self-proclaimed Islamist political claims at the onset of the war. Here, "'*Islamist claims*' refer to stated positions that advocate an increased role of Islam in the society or the state" (Svensson and Nilsson 2017, 1132).

Figure 3.2. Salience of Religious Claims by Islamist Rebels, 1975-2015[68]
(number of dyads with Islamist Rebels per year)

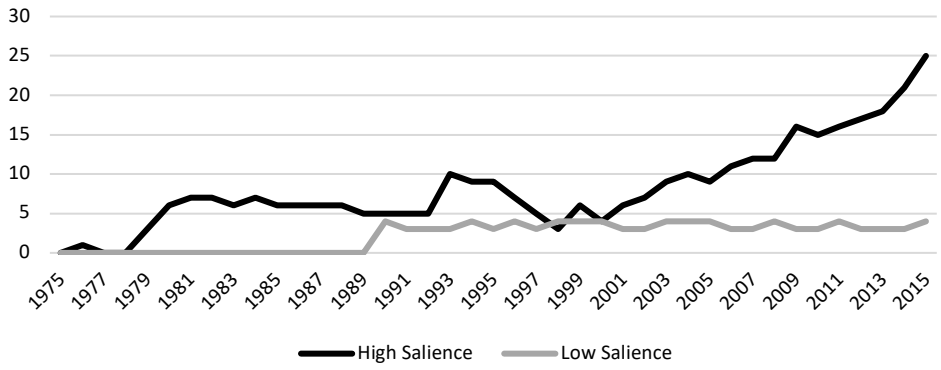
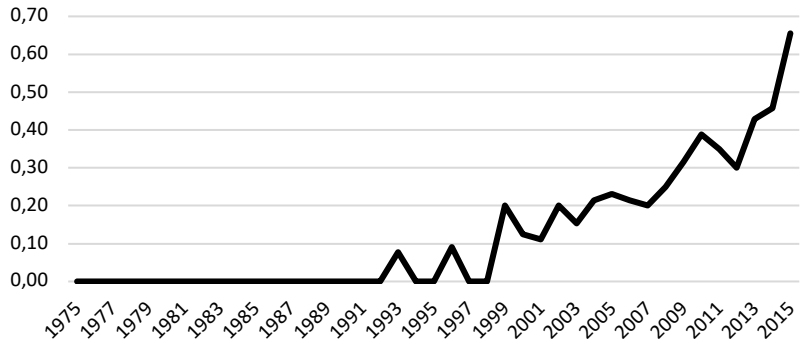


Figure 3.3. Transnational Claims by Islamist Rebels, 1975-2015[69]
(% of all Islamist rebels making transnational claims)



The increasing prevalence of these "new new insurgencies" (NNIs) in the international landscape is worrying for several reasons, including that they tend to be protracted, resistant to

[68] As Svensson and Nilsson (2017, 1135) explain, two main criteria are used to "code the salience of the religious claim. Firstly, we distinguish between religious claims where the religious issue represents the main question at stake for the rebel group and claims where the religious issue is only one among several key issues at stake. Secondly, we make a distinction between those cases where the claim is made by one organization or a unified alliance and cases where the rebel organization is represented by an alliance where only a few of the groups view the religious issues as the main question. In order to consider a claim to be of high salience, both these criteria need to be fulfilled; thus, a religious claim is of high salience when it represents the main issue at stake and when the rebel actor making this claim is not part of a broader alliance including at least one secular rebel actor".

[69] This is measured by assessing whether the "rebel group's Islamist aspirations go beyond the national boundaries and the group seeks to establish a transnational caliphate" (Svensson and Nilsson 2017, 1134).

negotiated settlements, and susceptible to spread to neighboring states (Walter 2017a, 470).[70] In addition, media reports suggest that NNIs often impose a particularly heavy toll on civilian populations in the countries in which they operate, causing widespread noncombatant casualties. Although NNIs have recently cropped up in a host of countries – including Mali, Niger, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, and Bangladesh – it is undoubtedly the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) that has come to epitomize the destructive potential of these organizations. Upon capturing large swaths of territory straddling the Iraqi-Syrian border, the group has indeed rapidly acquired a reputation for the brutal manner in which it treated noncombatants in the areas under its control (United Nations 2017).

While the horrific images that emerged from Iraq and Syria have certainly left an indelible imprint on scholars, policymakers, and publics across the world, we still have a rather limited understanding of how the recent proliferation of NNIs has affected the incidence of violence against civilians beyond these two countries. Although a number of excellent case studies exist (see e.g. Baczko, Dorronsoro, and Quesnay 2018; Hansen 2019; Ahmad 2019), missing from the existing literature is a cross-national assessment of the impact of these trends on levels of civilian victimization across civil wars, as well as a specification of the micro-level mechanisms shaping NNIs' behaviors toward noncombatants.

Addressing these issues, this article tackles the following questions: Are NNIs more violent toward civilians than other types of rebel groups? Are they more prone to victimize civilians than earlier or non-transnational Islamist rebels? In particular, how do their ideological extremism and transnational character affect their propensity to target noncombatants? Drawing from the literatures on combatant socialization (Cohen 2016; Green 2018; Wood 2018) and the role of

[70] The phrase "new new insurgencies" is a reference to the title of Barbara Walter's (2017a) article "The New New Civil Wars", which is itself an implicit reference to Mary Kaldor's (1999) book *New and Old Wars*.

ideology in armed conflicts (Sanín and Wood 2014; Schubiger and Zelina 2017; Leader Maynard 2019), I argue that NNIs display three key organizational features that not only distinguish them behaviorally from other types of rebel groups but that also make them a distinct and especially violent subset of Islamist insurgencies. Specifically, I contend that the *fratricidal ideology* of NNIs, the divine sources of their leaders' *authority claims*, and the transnational nature of their *membership makeup* will tend to produce powerful dynamics of violent socialization, which will promote widespread participation in civilian targeting.

First, I argue that Islamist rebels have undergone a form of ideological radicalization since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, leading group leaders to reinterpret theological concepts like *Takfir, Qisās*, *Tawhid,* and *Al-wala' wa-l-bara'* in increasingly sectarian ways. These important changes in the doctrinal and normative repertoire of Islamist rebels – and, in particular, the growing influence of Salafi-Jihadist principles – have gradually led NNIs to license almost any form of wartime behavior, including intra-Muslim violence (Ahmad 2019; Maher 2016).

Second, the fact that the authority of NNIs' leaders is regarded as emanating from a higher power affords considerable legitimacy to commanders, who can more effectively order rank-and-file combatants to engage in violent behaviors. By anchoring their authority claims in divine sources, commanders can also mobilize selective incentives and disincentives in the form of afterlife rewards and punishments to motivate fighters to partake in violence against civilians (Walter 2017b).

Third, the increasingly transnational nature of NNIs – which has been fueled by rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) – has led to a growing influx of foreign fighters within the ranks of these organizations. Facing higher hurdles to enter these conflicts, foreign recruits often join NNIs with already radicalized beliefs and will tend to exert

powerful influence over their local peers, who often participate in war-making for more pragmatic reasons.

I expect that the confluence of these three organizational factors will increase the extent to which NNIs target civilians relative to both other types of rebel groups, as well as to earlier and non-transnational Islamist insurgencies. This is mainly because these factors fuel both vertical and horizontal processes of violent socialization, which in turn promote the induction of combatants to the violent norms and standards of appropriate behavior of their group. On the one hand, the divine sources of commanders' authority claims will give them a significant degree of socializing power, which they can leverage to bring low-ranking combatants to comply with the behavioral expectations of the group's fratricidal ideology. This increased legitimacy will thus create pressures and incentives that facilitate the translation of top-down orders into on-the-ground actions. On the other hand, radicalized foreign fighters will further reinforce these dynamics by socializing their local peers to violent behavioral tendencies. Over time, patterns of social influence and quotidian interactions between foreign and local fighters will thus create strong pressures for group solidarity and conformity, bringing even ideologically non-committed combatants to participate in violence. Accordingly, I argue that ideology operates both as "doctrine" and as "practice" in driving NNIs toward violence (see e.g. Parkinson 2020).

To test these arguments, I mobilize a mixed methods research design, which allows me to analyze both macro-level trends and micro-level mechanisms. I first conduct cross-national statistical analyses of rebel violence against civilians in all civil wars from 1989 to 2019. The results provide strong evidence in support of my arguments, showing that NNIs have a higher propensity to engage in civilian targeting relative to other types of rebel groups and that they represent a particularly violent subset of Islamist insurgencies. While these tests provide an opportunity to shed light on broad patterns, they are not sufficiently granular to directly evaluate how the ideology,

authority, and membership mechanisms actually influence NNIs' behaviors on the ground. To address this limitation, I then offer a qualitative case study of al-Shabaab's insurgency in Somalia, highlighting how these three factors converged to shape the group's relationship with civilian populations. Drawing from a broad array of micro-level evidence (case studies, NGO and IGO reports, survey data, perpetrator testimonies, etc.), this section provides further support for the above arguments, illustrating how the confluence of fratricidal ideology, divine authority, and transnational membership promotes socialization to violence within the ranks of NNIs.

By exploring how the organizational characteristics of NNIs affect their wartime behaviors toward civilians, this article extends research agendas on combatant socialization, the role of ideology in armed conflicts, and the transnational dimensions of civil wars. The article proceeds as follows. The first section outlines the theoretical framework of the article. The second section describes the data and methods that I use in the statistical analyses. The third section presents the results. The fourth section then traces the trajectory of al-Shabaab in Somalia, illustrating how the mechanisms linking NNIs to violence operate on a more micro level. I conclude by addressing the implications of this study for research and policy.

New New Insurgencies and Wartime Violence against Civilians

As discussed above, NNIs are rebel groups that are defined both by the period in which they emerged (i.e. post-2002) and by the location in which they wage civil war (i.e. in Muslim-majority countries). More important, however, are two key organizational characteristics that demarcate NNIs from other types of rebel groups and, to some extent, from other Islamist insurgencies: the radical Salafi-Jihadist ideology to which they adhere and their transnational orientation.

Broadly defined, Islamist rebels are non-state armed groups challenging a recognized state for control of either government or territory on the basis of a political ideology, which strives to derive legitimacy through "primary reference to Islam" and to reconstruct society on the basis of Islamic laws and institutions (Kalyvas 2018, 38; see also Ahmad 2016, 356). Most NNIs, however, are located at the ideological extreme, adhering to one of the most radical versions of Islamism known as Salafi-Jihadism. Indeed, although NNIs display important variations in the specific contours of their ideology (see e.g. Wiktorowicz 2006, 207), they generally converge in their belief in Salafi-Jihadism's core principle, which may be encapsulated in the phrase "progression through regression" – that is, the achievement of salvation through the violent revival of an earlier and purer form of Islam (Maher 2016, 7).

The second key organizational feature defining NNIs is their resolutely transnational character (see e.g. Toft and Zhukov 2015; Ahmad 2016). This feature is manifest not only in the "immediate or future [aims]" of these organizations – which aspire "to establish a caliphate across internationally recognized borders" – but also in the linkages that bind these groups to transnational networks of financial, military, human, and symbolic resources (Pettersson and Öberg 2020, 603; see also Svensson and Nilsson 2017). As discussed below, one of the most striking ways in which the transnational nature of NNIs has shaped dynamics on the ground is through the large influx of foreign fighters that have joined the ranks of these organizations (Malet 2013).[71]

In what follows, I discuss how the organizational characteristics of NNIs may increase the extent to which they wield violence against civilians during intrastate conflicts. In particular, I

[71] Following Hegghammer (2010, 57–58), I define a foreign fighter as an individual "who (1) has joined, and operates within the confines of, an insurgency, (2) lacks citizenship of the conflict state or kinship links to its warring factions, (3) lacks affiliation to an official military organization, and (4) is unpaid". Yet, it should be noted that, in some cases (like within ISIS in Syria and Iraq), foreign fighters do receive a salary, which may even be higher than the one that local fighters receive.

focus on the fratricidal inclinations of Salafi-Jihadism, the divine authority claims of NNIs' leaders, and the presence of radicalized foreign fighters within these organizations, highlighting how these factors intersect to socialize combatants to the use of violence against noncombatants.

Fratricidal Ideology

A cursory review of the empirical literature reveals that the radical Salafi-Jihadist worldview that NNIs embrace differs markedly from the ideological precepts that earlier Islamist rebels endorsed. Although rebel groups like "Darul Islam in Indonesia or the Taliban in Afghanistan [also] adopted an ultraconservative interpretation of Islam", these organizations were indeed considerably more "indebted to local traditional practices [and] they lacked the kind of aggressive and expansionary radical discourse that came to characterize the most recent manifestation of jihadism, exemplified by Al Qaeda and ISIS" (Kalyvas 2018, 39). The origins of these ideological evolutions can, in many ways, be traced back to the onset of the Second Iraq War in 2003.

As Maher (2016, 67) explains, the pressures brought about by the American invasion of Iraq and by the broader War on Terror proved to be an important "catalyst of theological change" for many Islamist organizations. These ideological transformations were in many respects the product of emerging fault lines "between theorists and those who [were] operationally active in the field", as the latter began to demarcate the boundaries between the faithful and the infidels in increasingly rigid ways to respond to the exigencies of warfare (ibid, 68). In this context of war and crisis, groups like Al-Qaeda in Iraq and al-Shabaab in Somalia began to revise and expand Islamic principles concerning *jus in bello*, giving rise to important doctrinal shifts on topics like the nature of the rules of engagement, the acceptability of certain kinds of wartime behaviors (e.g.

sexual violence), and the identity of legitimate targets (Ahmad 2019; Barclay 2010; Turner 2011). This is consistent with Ahmad's (2019, 84) claim that "external trigger [events]" like the US invasion of Iraq often act as key catalysts of normative change among jihadist groups because such events represent critical windows of opportunity, when jihadist leaders can "exploit moments of collective outrage" to revise otherwise very sticky Islamic norms against violence. According to Ahmad, trigger events are therefore likely to bring about "the rapid erosion of former taboos, the adoption of previously proscribed behaviors, and the emergence of radical new norms" (ibid, 85).[72]

After 2003, many organizations thus came to interpret Islamic concepts like *Qisās* (i.e. the Islamic *lex talionis* or law of retaliation), *Tawhid* (i.e. the oneness of God), and *Al-wala' wa-l-bara'* (i.e. loyalty and disavowal for that sake of Allah) in increasingly sectarian and violent ways. This was especially the case for the notion of *Takfir* (i.e. excommunication), which many groups reinterpreted in ways that progressively expanded the spectrum of communities that were deemed to be deviators, infidels, disbelievers, or apostates (i.e. *kafirs*) (Alshech 2014, 420; see also Hafez 2011; Maher 2016).[73] These doctrinal changes, therefore, led a growing number of Islamist insurgencies to establish their military struggle on an increasingly uncompromising rejection of religious compromise at home. By reinterpreting these concepts, Islamist rebel leaders thus came to license a broad range of wartime behaviors, including intra-Muslim violence.

[72] Consistent with the arguments of this article, Ahmad (2019, 113) also hypothesizes that normative changes may have transnational ramifications, claiming that "[if] a trigger event sparks jihadist norm change in one war theater, jihadist groups in other parts of the world may be inspired to follow suit", as contagion effects may help spread new norms across state borders.

[73] As Hafez notes, to reinterpret these theological concepts and justify violence against "ordinary Muslims", Islamist groups had to "interpret away the prohibitions in the inherited tradition" against behaviors like suicide, killing fellow Muslims, or intentionally harming non-combatants (2011, 26; see also 2020). This was commonly achieved by invoking either operational necessity and/or theological legitimacy. Relatedly, Kilcullen (2009, xvii) remarks that "Takfirism is a heresy within Islam: it was outlawed in the 2005 Amman Message, an initiative of King Abdullah II of Jordan, which brought together more than 500 'ulema (Islamic scholars) and Muslim political leaders from the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Arab League in an unprecedented consensus agreement" (see also Firro 2013). On the role of *Takfir* in ISIS' ideology, see also Al-Ibrahim (2015).

For NNIs, the internal cleansing of the faith indeed became a task as important as that of fighting the external enemies occupying their lands or the secular regimes they were striving to overthrow. As Maher (2016, 83) remarks, "[t]he destructive implications of [this shift toward internal enemies] are evident across the Muslim world today", where Islamist rebel groups frequently invoke doctrines like *takfir* "to justify mass casualty attacks against ordinary Muslims—ironically, the very constituency in whose defence they often claim to act". Accordingly, over time, the "targeting portfolio" of NNIs effectively became boundless, leading these groups to negate and alienate what would in essence have been their natural constituency (Hafez 2020, 610).

Whereas earlier Islamist rebel groups often had local roots in – and sometimes overlapping ethnic ties to – specific communities that they viewed as laying outside the realm of legitimate victims, NNIs thus seem to have either no clearly delineated or extremely narrow constituencies, viewing most segments of Muslim-majority societies as insufficiently Islamic and, consequently, as potential targets.[74] In their desire to purge Muslim countries of all non-Islamic elements, NNIs indeed tend to cultivate highly rigid in-group/out-group boundaries and to adhere to very broad definitions of who represents the enemy (Alshech 2014, 420). In contrast to their predecessors, therefore, NNIs appear to have little "interest in winning the 'hearts' of Muslims", their aim being rather to violently "subjugate" every community that does not fully embrace their interpretation of Islam (Neumann 2016, 68).[75] This includes both Shi'a Muslims as well as "Sunnis who are not fully devoted and embrace folk customs, mysticism, or simply a more compromising form of

[74] The same applies to most other types of rebel groups, which also typically have ethnic, religious, national, or linguistic ties to specific constituencies on behalf of which they fight and who, for the most part, they try to spare.
[75] In other words, this ideology holds that "the correct existential role and vocation of the "true believer" is to wage permanent jihad to recreate the utopia of Dar al-Islam. There are no subtle gradations of the Islamic faith, as recognised by mainstream Sunni and Shia Islam. One is either a mu'min (true believer) or a murtad (apostate). Pragmatism, compromise and engagement are mortal sins and proof of apostasy, punishable by death" (International Crisis Group 2010, 4).

political Islam" – a particularly broad pool of potential victims (Byman 2013, 353; 356).[76] Casting "all non-Salafis as apostates" thus allowed these organizations to frame wartime violence against unarmed Muslim civilians as a legitimate course of action, rendering the act of "killing them more acceptable" (ibid, 362).

Authority Claims

Most NNIs would qualify as what Fazal (2018, 28) calls "religionist rebels" – that is, insurgent organizations that "rely on a divine source of sovereignty [and] reject the legitimacy of other units in the world whose sovereignty claims rest on secular sources". In other words, the leaders of NNIs tend to "fundamentally reject the regulative principles of the Westphalian system and legitimate their authority in nonterritorial terms", justifying their leadership by appealing to a transcendent jurisdiction (i.e. *Hakimiyyah*) and by presenting themselves as agents of a higher power (Spruyt 2017, 121). In many ways, the legitimacy that leaders enjoy within NNIs echoes Max Weber's (1968, 48) definition of "charismatic authority" in his work on legitimate domination (*herrschaft*):

> [A] certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men, and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.

As Hofmann (2015, 713) notes, these attributes tend to serve as a powerful source of legitimacy within Islamist militant groups: "For example, successful charismatic Islamist leaders

[76] For instance, NNIs have been "violently hostile to religious minorities such as Shi'a in Afghanistan and Iraq and 'Alawis in Syria" or to adherents of "mystical traditions, such as the Sufi brotherhoods in Algeria and Mali" (Byman 2013, 361).

like Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi […] inspire and attract followers due to their perceived ability to interpret Allah's will". Accordingly, it is not the qualities of individual leaders per se that creates an aura of legitimacy around Islamist rebel commanders, but the divine foundations in which they anchor their authority claims.[77] The invocation of a higher power thus allows NNIs' leaders to create "a black-and-white scenario" in which "only one side can be in the right", whereas the other "must be guilty of a wrong which has to be expiated" (ibid, 718).

The fact that the leadership of NNIs promote distal goals and promise utopian outcomes to their combatants, moreover, is likely to increase their dedication and commitment to the cause that charismatic leaders embody, while also bolstering behavioral conformity (Shamir, Arthur, and House 1994, 28). Indeed, one of the distinctive strengths of NNIs' commanders is that they can offer "cheap, deferred compensation in the form of an 'eternal afterlife' or 'rewards in paradise'" to their fighters to entice compliance with the group's standards of appropriate behavior (Walter 2017b, 9). At the same time, commanders can also threaten low-ranking combatants with a "potentially devastating type of personal punishment" in the form of excommunication or damnation "that is both costless to enforce and impossible for targets to escape" (ibid, 9). The ability of commanders in NNIs to marshal these selective incentives and disincentives is thus likely to increase their ability to shape combatants' behaviors in accordance with organizational goals.

More generally, given that the only source of sovereignty that their group recognizes lies in the realm of the divine, combatants belonging to NNIs may face few incentives to observe *jus in bello* rules – regarding, in particular, the treatment of civilians – because these obligations derive from an international system that their organization does not recognize (Fazal 2018). Instead, the

[77] It should be noted, however, that charismatic authority is, in essence, a relational concept, insofar as a leader must be recognized as such by followers, who grant him authority on the basis of this recognition.

only codes of wartime conduct to which they are likely to submit are the ones prescribed by God, whose orders are viewed as being channeled through the voice of their commander. As I argue below, the divine sources of authority claims within NNIs are thus likely to afford considerable socializing power to commanders, who will possess the symbolic and strategic resources necessary to obtain widespread obedience among the rank-and-file, even when orders prescribe fratricidal violence against ordinary Muslims.

Membership Makeup

Another key feature of NNIs is their resolutely transnational orientation. One of the most tangible ways in which this characteristic has shaped dynamics on the ground is through the large influx of foreign fighters that have left their home countries to join NNIs. Although the use of foreign fighters by insurgent organizations is far from being a new phenomenon (Malet 2013), recent developments in ICTs have considerably increased the capacity both of rebels to appeal to global audiences and of potential foreign recruits to access information about distant struggles.

Recent research has drawn attention to the fact that the reliance of rebel groups on foreign fighters can increase the extent to which these organizations use violence against civilians. This is mainly because foreign fighters, having "fewer personal stakes in the conflict (no personal grievances, no land, assets, relatives, or prospects of political office, for example)" (Gates and Podder 2015, 107–8; Malet 2010, 114), often lack the social embeddedness or the sense of perceived accountability that may lead local combatants to exhibit restraint (Moore 2019; Doctor and Willingham 2020). Li (2009, 364), for instance, notes that foreign fighters are often regarded as the most "fanatical and dangerous type of enemy" because "they have less regard for the welfare

of civilians" than their local counterparts, leading many to feel that they "are beyond the realm of political legitimacy".[78]

Empirically, these dynamics have been apparent in a host of cases ranging from Chechnya (Bakke 2014) and Georgia (Human Rights Watch 1995) to Afghanistan (Williams 2011) and Iraq (Rich and Conduit 2015; Coolsaet 2016), where foreign fighters have reportedly radicalized domestic insurgent organizations and been responsible for a disproportionate share of wartime atrocities.[79] Recently, this has been especially the case in Syria, where foreign fighters "have been among the worst perpetrators" of different types of abuses, including kidnapping, torture, and extrajudicial executions (Human Rights Watch 2013). Evidence indeed indicates that, in many Syrian insurgent groups, foreign fighters are "less willing to accept compromise and participate more frequently in acts of extreme violence. They are the most dangerous part of [these organizations]" (Neumann 2016, 72).

Another key reason why foreign and local combatants may differ in their repertoire of action is that these two types of recruits often display significant differences in their motivations for joining rebel groups. Indeed, the "nature of 'what one is fighting for' undoubtedly varies between those recruited from abroad and those recruited" locally, insofar as the former will often self-recruit out of "ideological commitment (since going abroad to fight is entirely voluntary)", whereas many "native recruits [might] not have joined unless pressed to do so" or if other opportunities were

[78] It should be noted that the relationship between NNIs' behaviors and the presence of foreign fighters may be to some extent co-constitutive. Indeed, given their transnational orientation, NNIs may be entangled in dynamics of outbidding with other groups seeking to establish an Islamic caliphate, leading each group to use violence in order to secure "market shares" and to attract foreign recruits (Bloom 2004; see also Findley and Young 2012; Biberman and Zahid 2019). As such, NNIs may employ brutality to establish their brand, to capture the attention of international audiences and to prompt foreigners to join their organization, but foreigners may then perpetuate and exacerbate the group's brutality after their arrival.

[79] Estimates suggest, for instance, that "70 per cent of the Islamic State's suicide attacks can be attributed to foreigners – many of them Europeans. The same goes for beheadings and mass executions, in which Western Europeans are also disproportionately represented" (Neumann 2016, 104).

available (Gates and Podder 2015, 107; see also Neumann 2016, 156). The high ideological commitment of foreign fighters is apparent, for instance, in the testimonies of individuals who joined ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra, and Ahrar al-Sham in Syria. Dawson and Amarasingam (2017, 192) note that the statements made by "these individuals were so heavily mediated by religious discourse [that] it seems implausible to suggest that religiosity (i.e., a sincere religious commitment, no matter how ill-informed or unorthodox) is not a primary motivator for their actions".

Moreover, having to manage their own travel and deployment to the battlefield – and to scrape together the resources necessary for this journey – foreign fighters also face higher hurdles to entry and will thus often display a significant degree of dedication and motivation (Borum and Fein 2017, 255; Malet 2010, 111; Mironova 2018). Indeed, most foreign fighters "do not have to be persuaded to accept the extreme ideology and have already travelled far to become part of the [organization]" (Neumann 2016, 102). These high hurdles thus act as a screening mechanism, which filters out poorly motivated individuals and leaves a pool of recruits with a higher proportion of radicals, relative to the local membership base. Accordingly, although they are certainly variations in the extent of their ideological commitment, foreign fighters are especially likely to self-radicalize at home through social media or interpersonal connections, and then import their radicality into the conflict theatre (Botha 2014, 896).

Rebel leaders, moreover, often recognize that foreign fighters represent a segment of their troops which is particularly amenable to carry out violence against civilians (Neumann 2016, 104). For instance, "leaders from both the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra rebel groups – each of which have attracted large numbers of foreign recruits – have commanded their foreign regiments to target civilians when their locally based combatants would not" (Doctor and Willingham 2020, 7–8). One of the reasons why these organizations may get foreigners to commit atrocities is that this sort of violence can act as a vetting mechanism "to test the commitment of suspected spies and infiltrators"

among foreigners, about whom little is known (Gates and Podder 2015, 111). As I argue below, however, an often-overlooked factor in the relationship between the presence of foreign fighters within the ranks of a rebel group and the incidence of civilian targeting is the socializing influence that these foreigners can exert over their local counterparts. Within al-Nusra, for instance, British foreign fighter Ismail Jabbar held considerable radicalizing sway over the local members of his unit, consistently pushing for more brutal wartime practices (Neumann 2016, 158). Through mechanisms of social learning, peer pressure, and group solidarity that operate in a more horizontal fashion, foreign fighters can indeed socialize local combatants to violent behaviors and steer their repertoire of action in increasingly radical directions. I discuss these dynamics in more detail in the following section.

Violent Socialization among NNIs

I argue that the three factors discussed above – the destructive impact of a fratricidal ideology, the divine sources of authority claims, and the radicalizing influence of foreign fighters – are likely to converge to increase the extent to which NNIs target civilians, relative to both other types of rebel groups as well as earlier and non-transnational Islamist rebels. Specifically, I maintain that these organizational features will facilitate the socialization of combatants to the violent norms and standards of appropriate behavior of their group.[80] Drawing from recent research on combatant socialization, I suggest that this can occur both through relatively intentional vertical processes engineered by the leadership of armed groups and by more spontaneous dynamics

[80] As Checkel (2017, 592) notes, socialization is commonly defined as the processes "through which actors adopt the norms and rules of a given community. This means to think of soldiers, rebel combatants and gang members as embedded in social environments, which not only constrain and provide incentives to act, but also reshape interests and identities".

deriving from horizontal interactions between rank-and-file combatants (Cantin 2021; Cohen 2016; Wood 2018; Hoover Green 2018).[81]

First, the perceived divine nature of commanders' authority will afford them a considerable degree of socializing power, which they can mobilize to induct combatants to the fratricidal norms and behaviors that the group's ideology prescribes. Evidently, commanders from a host of rebel groups – such as the Sendero Luminoso in Peru or the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, for instance – have enjoyed a considerable degree of authority, while also endorsing a violent ideology. Yet, I argue that the very expansive array of enemies that NNIs have developed over time – including most of the Muslims in whose defense they purport to fight – and the invocation of a higher power to legitimize orders will create a situation in which violent behaviors will be prescribed frequently and enacted consistently. I thus expect that the convergence of fratricidal ideology and divine authority will minimize principal-agent problems and increase commanders' ability to translate top-down orders into on-the-ground actions. The legitimization of violence through divine justifications may also help commanders to reduce the prevalence of shirking behaviors, which often occur when orders are deemed illegitimate or burdensome by low-ranking combatants (see e.g. Scharpf and Gläbel 2020; Grossman 2009 [1995]; Manekin 2020). This is especially the case during irregular warfare, where commanders do not always have the possibility to "monitor [combatants'] behavior in real time" (Worsnop 2017, 483).

Second, I expect that the presence of large contingents of foreign fighters within the ranks of NNIs will reinforce the above dynamics, insofar as radicalized foreigners will socialize their

[81] It should be noted, moreover, that this socialization process may affect combatants' attitudes and dispositions at various depths. This means that some may act in accordance with group expectations out of mere instrumental calculations, while others may come to act in such ways out of habituation or role learning, and still others on the basis of a genuine internalization of group norms. Checkel (2017) refers to these three levels as "Type 0", "Type 1", and "Type 2" socialization, respectively.

local peers to the group's violent norms and behavioral expectations through quotidian interactions within small units. In particular, social learning theory indicates that violent attitudes may be internalized through observational learning and imitation, leading individuals to adjust their beliefs to match those held by influential peers in their immediate social environment (Bandura 1978). These processes can thus generate a form of "group polarization" where the average inclination of group members will shift and converge toward a more extreme position (Isenberg 1986). As the qualitative evidence presented below highlights, foreign fighters often possess the status and influence necessary to shape attitudes in this manner. In armed groups, moreover, pressures for conformity and group solidarity tend to be particularly strong, creating potent incentives to act in accordance to peers' expectations (see e.g. Browning 2017 [1992]). In turn, these horizontal socialization dynamics will reinforce the capacity of commanders to order violence, resulting in widespread participation in civilian abuse.

In that sense, my argument reconciles diverging views on the role of ideology in armed conflicts, suggesting that ideology operates both as "doctrine" and as "practice" in driving NNIs toward violence (Parkinson 2020; see also Sanín and Wood 2014; Leader Maynard 2019; Schubiger and Zelina 2017). On the one hand, the content of NNIs' formal doctrine matters in that it draws the boundaries of these groups' "targeting portfolios" and sets the behavioral expectations that combatants must meet (Hafez 2020, 610). Divine authority then creates vertical pressures and incentives that facilitate the translation of these expectations into actions. On the other hand, however, the case study evidence provided below reveals that, among local members of NNIs, it is typically not the intrinsic appeal of Jihadism that motivates participation in violence. Instead, I argue that the violent norms and behaviors prescribed by the ideology of NNIs are often channeled through and promoted by everyday social practices and relational dynamics between foreigners and local combatants within these organizations (Parkinson 2020). Over time, these horizontal

social influences can "reinforce group boundaries, norms, and obligations", thereby shaping behaviors in more informal ways . Here, therefore, Jihadism does not serve as a primary motive for action, but as the ideological backdrop that structures and gives meaning to combatant socialization.

To a certain extent, my argument is also consistent with McLauchlin's (2020, 191) understanding of socialization as "a powerful force", whose content is primarily determined by the norms and preferences that combatants "bring into an armed group in the first place". For McLauchlin (2020, 11), the nature of these norms and preferences shapes the interpersonal relationships and interactions that combatants have with one another, ultimately "[giving] a direction to socialization [and] indicating what soldiers are socialized to do". Although he addresses a different topic (i.e. desertion), his view of socialization is thus largely in line with my account of how the norms and preferences that radicalized foreign fighters import into conflict theatres can affect the nature of horizontal interactions within NNIs, shaping the direction of the socializing influences to which local combatants are exposed.

Hypotheses

The above arguments thus suggest that NNIs display specific organizational features that not only distinguish them behaviorally from other types of rebel groups but that also make them a distinct subset of Islamist insurgencies. Indeed, NNIs are not just distinctive because they are Islamist, but because they are Islamist at a particular post-2002 moment in Islamist ideology, and because they are resolutely transnational. I expect that these differences will bear on the relative propensity of NNIs to engage in civilian targeting. On this basis, I formulate three hypotheses:

H1: NNIs employ more violence against civilians than other types of rebel groups.

H2: The relationship between Islamist ideology and violence against civilians increases over time.

H3: Islamist insurgencies with transnational linkages employ more violence against civilians than Islamist insurgencies without such linkages.

In what follows, I test these hypotheses through a two-pronged methodological approach. I first conduct cross-national statistical analyses of rebel violence against civilians in civil wars from 1989 to 2019. I then shed additional light on the micro-level mechanisms at work in these relationships by presenting a qualitative case study, which illustrates how the interactions between ideology, authority, and membership can fuel violent socialization and shape the behaviors of combatants within NNIs.

Data and Methods

In order to assess whether NNIs are associated with a higher average incidence of violence against civilians than other rebel groups at the group level, I run a series of tests on a dataset with the rebel-group-year as the unit of analysis. The universe of cases is drawn from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Dyadic Dataset, resulting in 1,545 observations on 296 rebel groups, spanning 1989–2019 (Pettersson and Öberg 2020).[82] The dependent variable – *Civilian Fatalities* – is the annual number of civilian fatalities caused by insurgent groups, based on the best estimates of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) One-Sided Violence (OSV) Dataset (Eck

[82] A small number of outliers (e.g. the mass killings perpetrated by the AFDL 1996, which caused over 30,000 civilian fatalities) have been removed to avoid the possibility that these extreme values may distort the results.

and Hultman 2007; Pettersson and Öberg 2020). Because of the non-normally distributed structure of the dependent variable, I use negative binomial models in the main analyses.

Explanatory Variables

I use two specifications of my independent variable to test Hypothesis 1. My primary independent variable – *NNIs* – is a dummy coded 1 if a given observation meets *all* of four distinct criteria, and 0 otherwise. These criteria are the following: (1) whether the conflict began in or after 2003; (2) in a Muslim-majority country (above 50% of the population); (3) and was fought by an Islamist rebel group; (4) pursuing transnational goals.[83] The first years of conflict are based on the UCDP Dyadic Dataset, whereas data on Muslim populations by country come from the Pew Research Center (2017). The last two criteria are coded using the Religion in Armed Conflict (RELAC) Dataset (Svensson and Nilsson 2017). In the RELAC Dataset, however, the transnational nature of an armed group's objectives is assessed on the basis of its professed claims, which may be merely rhetorical and not truly reflect the internationalized dimension of a given organization.

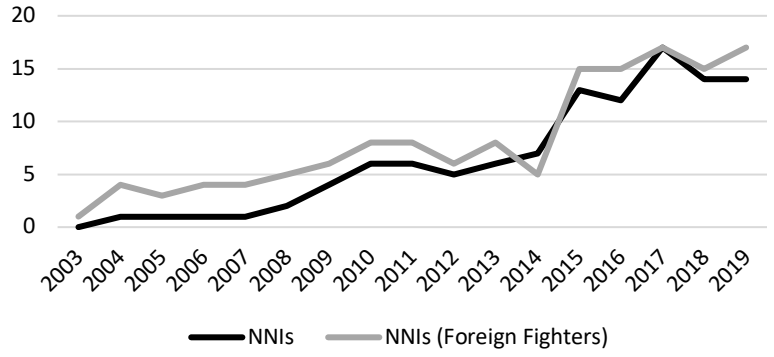
As such, in an alternative specification of my independent variable, I capture a more tangible manifestation of a group's transnational orientation by using a different measure of the fourth criteria: the presence of foreign fighters in the ranks of an insurgency (Malet 2016).[84] *NNIs (Foreign Fighters)* is thus coded as 1 if a conflict was initiated after 2002 in a Muslim-majority

[83] These are all coded as binary variables. Hence, if an observation scores 1 on all criteria, it is coded as 1 in the NNIs variable. It should be noted, however, that a small number of groups that are coded as NNIs according to these criteria had links to earlier non-transnational Islamist groups. For instance, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) originated as the Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) in Algeria, which emerged before 2003 and did not pursue transnational goals. Yet, for the purposes of these tests, I treat these organizations separately, insofar as they displayed important ideological differences, fought for different goals, and faced distinct operational contexts.

[84] As Moore (2019, 285) notes, "[t]here are notable limitations to the foreign fighter data", the most important of which is perhaps the fact that data on the overall numbers of foreign fighters relative to local fighters are unavailable. Hence, Malet's data does not allow to account for the fact that "some groups comprise predominantly foreigners, [whereas] foreign recruits are only a minority in others. Despite this variation, […] the cases in Malet's (2016) dataset reflect a certain threshold in terms of size that allows for reasonable comparison".

country by an Islamist group fielding foreign recruits. As will become apparent below, in order to test Hypotheses 2 and 3, I disaggregate these two specifications and use some of their components as independent variables. Figure 3.4. charts the annual number of NNIs involved in civil wars since 2003, based on these two specifications.[85]

Figure 3.4. Annual number of NNIs (2003-2019)



Control Variables

I include a set of group-level and conflict-level control variables across each model to account for alternative explanations of civilian victimization, and for factors that might be correlated with the organizational characteristic of NNIs discussed above. The first group-level control is a *Rebel Strength* index, which is drawn from the Non-State Actors in Civil Wars (NSA) Dataset and which ranges from 1 to 5, depending on the extent of a rebel group's military capabilities relative to their governmental opponent (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013). This control allows me to account for arguments suggesting that weaker rebels face more acute collective action problems and thus "have an incentive to target civilians because they lack the

[85] It should be noted, moreover, that not all rebel groups evolving in Muslim-majority countries after 2003 are NNIs, a consideration which would raise questions about possible country-level variables that may drive the results. In fact, only 114 out of 344 (33%) or 145 out of 344 (42%) – depending on the independent variable used – observations in such countries after 2003 are coded as NNIs. The remaining observations are either non-transnational Islamist groups or non-Islamist organizations.

capacity to provide sufficient benefits to entice loyalty" (Wood, 2010, 601). At the same time, transnational networks may bolster NNIs' capacities, relative to strictly local insurgencies.

Some studies have also shown that external support by foreign state patrons may increase the propensity of rebel groups to victimize noncombatants, insofar as this support decreases insurgents' sense of dependency on civilian populations and, consequently, their incentives for restraint (Weinstein 2007; Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014). In that regard, NNIs are also especially likely to be supported financially or materially by sympathetic state patrons from the Muslim world (Stein and Cantin 2021). I thus include a binary variable – *External Support* – drawn from the UCDP External Support Dataset, which is coded 1 if a group received military, logistical, or financial assistance from a foreign state in a given year, and 0 otherwise.

In terms of conflict-level controls, I account for the annual number of civilians killed by government forces to take into consideration the possibility that incumbent violence may be "successful in deterring civilians from lending support to rebels, causing the latter to increase the intensity of their violent attacks against the population" (Ottmann 2017, 38). Drawn from the UCDP OSV Dataset, *Government OSV* is log-transformed to minimize the impact that a small number of outliers like the Rwandan Genocide may exert on regression results. Given that, from 2003 onwards, the United States began to target Islamist rebels all over the world and to provide support to the governments they were fighting as part of the Global War on Terror, I also control for *Government US Support* – that is, whether or not the state facing a given rebel group receives military support from the United States government. Drawn from the UCDP External Support Dataset (Högbladh, Pettersson, and Themnér 2011), this binary variable allows me to account for the possibility that this important shift in the international landscape may have transformed patterns of violence in post-2003 civil wars, relative to previous conflicts. As shown by Ahmad (2019),

both government violence and US support may also act as "external trigger events" that could bring about important changes in NNIs' norms of violence.

Finally, rebel groups who fund their rebellion with material resources like oil, gemstones, or drugs may be more likely to exhibit predatory behaviors toward civilian populations, and such resources may also attract opportunistic foreigners to theatres in which NNIs fight (Weinstein, 2007). Drawn from Buhaug, Gates, and Lujala (2009), the last conflict-level control – *Loot* – is a binary variable indicating whether at least one of these three types of resources is present in the conflict zone. Table 3.1. provides descriptive data on the dependent, explanatory, and control variables.[86]

Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	*N*	*Median*	*Mean*	*Min*	*Max*	*SD*
Civilian Fatalities	1,545	0	58.96	0	10.31	2836
NNIs	1,545	0	0.07	0	1	0.26
NNIs (Foreign Fighters)	1,512	0	0.10	0	1	0.29
Rebel Strength	1,531	2	1.61	1	5	2.19
External Support	1,502	0	0.28	0	1	0.45
Government OSV (ln)	1,528	0	1.40	0	13.12	2.29
Government US Support	1,545	0	0.37	0	1	0.48
Loot	1,461	1	0.52	0	1	0.50

Results and Discussion

A set of preliminary two-sample t-test indicate a significant difference in the average annual number of civilians killed by NNIs (mean = 255.56) relative to other groups (mean = 62.84; p = 0.05). The ratio between the estimates is largely similar when using the second specification of my

[86] I relied on manual coding for every variable that did not cover the entire 1989-2019 period. I used, whenever possible, the same coding procedures as the respective authors, evaluating a broad range of academic case studies, NGO and government reports, and other relevant documents to reach coding decisions. See Appendix B for more detail on manual coding.

independent variable, with sample means of 206.38 and 44.75, respectively. These thus provide strong initial support for my hypothesis regarding the relationship between NNIs and the incidence of violence against civilians.

To test Hypothesis 1 linking NNIs to increased levels of civilian abuse relative to other types of rebel groups more generally, I estimate a set of two negative binomial models for each specification of my independent variable. Model 1a provides a baseline test of the relationship between *NNIs* and *Civilian Fatalities*, controlling for group-level factors. Model 1b includes all types of controls. Models 1c and 1d are similarly structured in terms of controls, but with *NNIs (Foreign Fighters)* as the independent variable. Table 3.2. presents the results, Figure 3.5 plots the coefficient estimates, and Figure 3.6 plots the marginal effects. Across all specifications, the coefficients for *NNIs* and *NNIs (Foreign Fighters)* are large, positive, and statistically significant, thereby offering strong support for my first hypothesis.

Results from Model 1a show that NNIs have an incidence rate ratio (IRR) of killing civilians that is more than eight times higher than that of other types of rebel groups. The *NNIs* variable retains its sign and strong statistical significance at the $p < .01$ level even when the full set of control variables is included (Model 1b), although the IRR decreases in magnitude to a factor of 3.21.[87] The results are largely similar in Models 2a and 2b, showing a positive and statistically significant correlation between NNIs (as coded with the foreign fighters criteria) and violence against civilians, thereby providing further support for the arguments linking transnational Islamist rebels to increased levels of civilian victimization.

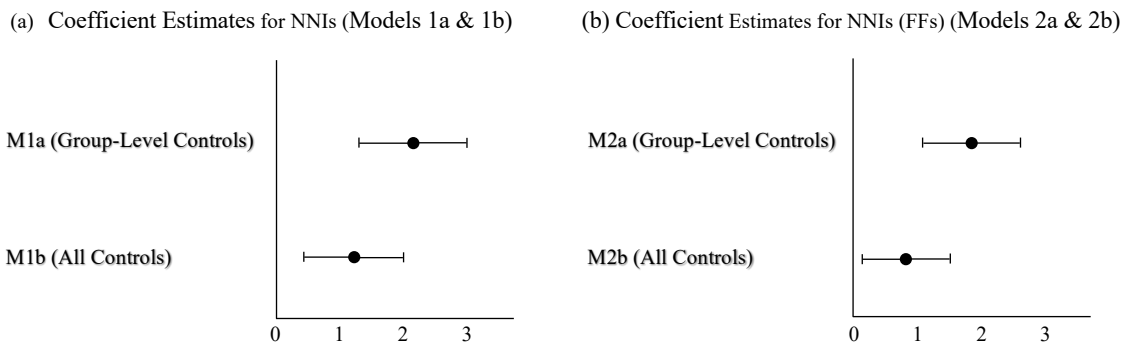
[87] The results are also robust to alternative controls and measurements. See Appendix B for robustness checks.

Table 3.2. NNIs and Civilian Targeting

	Civilian Fatalities			
	M1a	M1b	M1c	M1d
NNIs	2.083***	1.791***		
	(0.494)	(0.467)		
NNIs (FFs)			1.852***	1.549***
			(0.482)	(0.459)
Rebel Strength	0.913***	0.783***	0.895***	0.757***
	(0.189)	(0.195)	(0.188)	(0.192)
External Support	0.183	0.062	0.075	0.053
	(0.304)	(0.054)	(0.313)	(0.298)
Gov. OSV (ln)		0.062		0.068
		(0.054)		(0.053)
Gov. US Support		0.395		0.373
		(0.270)		(0.274)
Loot		0.379		0.378
		(0.355)		(0.353)
Constant	2.055***	1.980***	2.126***	2.001***
	(0.396)	(0.396)	(0.394)	(0.388)
Observations	1,495	1,411	1,464	1,380

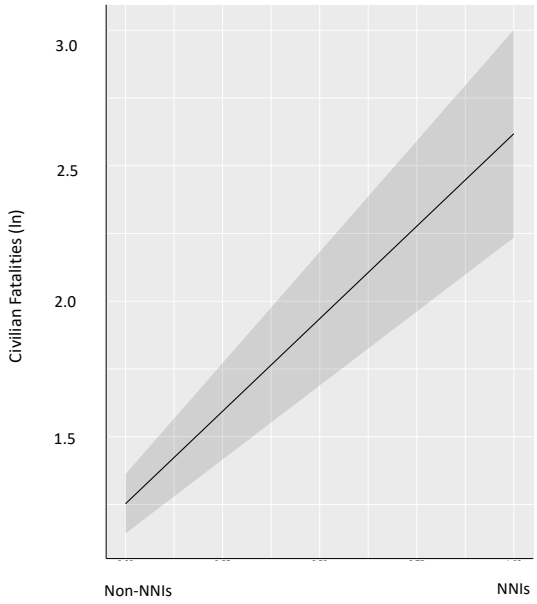
Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses; Unit of analysis = rebel-group-year; NNI's = New New Insurgencies; FFs = Foreign Fighters; OSV = One-Sided Violence.

Figure 3.5. Coefficient Plots



Note: Whiskers represent 95% confidence intervals

Figure 3.6. Marginal Effects



Note: This figure illustrates the marginal effects in M1b (the other models produce similar plots). The dependent variable is logged to improve legibility.

To assess whether the Islamic State may represent an outlier that could potentially drive these results, I run a series of robustness checks, the results of which are shown in Appendix B.

Considering that the Islamic State and its affiliates represent slightly over 40% of the observations coded as NNIs, excluding all of these cases considerably affects the results, sending the coefficients above the significance threshold in some models and reducing the significance in others. Yet, treating this diversified array of groups as a single entity would arguably make little analytical sense, given that the affiliates were active in 22 different countries and were, in most cases, both organizationally distinct and operationally autonomous from the core group in Iraq and Syria.[88] Accordingly, in a second set of tests, I exclude only IS in Iraq and Syria – which was by far the most violent group, relative to its affiliates – and find that the results remain highly significant.

Table 3.3. presents the results of the tests for Hypothesis 2, which expects that the relationship between Islamist ideology and civilian targeting will strengthen over time. Keeping only Islamist insurgencies in the universe of cases, Model 2a evaluates the relationship between the year of conflict onset (before or after 2002) and *Civilian Fatalities*, controlling for group-level factors. Model 2b includes all types of controls. Models 2c and 2d are similarly structured in terms of controls but use a more disaggregated measure of the independent variable – that is, the actual year of observation.

[88] In fact, although these groups are all coded as IS in the UCDP, many had a long organizational history before pledging allegiance to IS and operated in contexts that were far removed from the war in the Levant. This is the case, for instance, with Wilayat Gharb Afriqiyah – the Islamic State's affiliate in West Africa – which emerged from a split in the Boko Haram leadership.

Table 3.3. Islamist Ideology and Civilian Targeting Over Time

	Civilian Fatalities			
	M2a	M2b	M2c	M2d
Post 2002 Onset	1.440***	1.109**		
	(0.535)	(0.502)		
Year			0.064***	0.033
			(0.023)	(0.021)
Rebel Strength	0.155	-0.010	0.303	0.105
	(0.302)	(0.284)	(0.267)	(0.297)
Rebel External Support	-1.052**	-0.888**	-1.160**	-1.016*
	(0.480)	(0.453)	(0.540)	(0.537)
Gov. OSV (ln)		0.142		0.191*
		(0.095)		(0.099)
Gov. US Support		0.351		0.597
		(0.480)		(0.521)
Loot		0.605		0.675**
		(0.400)		(0.342)
Constant	3.409***	3.126***	-123.61***	-63.613
	(0.752)	(0.916)	(45.687)	(42.228)
Observations	469	469	469	469

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses; Unit of analysis = rebel-group-year; OSV = One-Sided Violence.

Results from Models 2a, 2b, and 2c provide strong support for Hypothesis 2, indicating that Islamist insurgencies have on the whole become more violent over the years. The results are especially strong when we compare conflicts that have emerged before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq – a moment that I identified as a key trigger event in the ideological radicalization of Islamist rebels. Interestingly, however, the coefficient of Model 2d is the only one that fails to meet the threshold of statistical significance, for reasons that remain unclear. Yet, the results of the first

three models seem to confirm Maher's (2016) and Ahmad's (2019) intuitions that major events like the 2003 invasion of Iraq can act as catalysts of important doctrinal changes within a broader ideological movement, leading to the adoption of new behavioral patterns.

Table 3.4. presents the results of the tests for Hypothesis 3, which expects transnational Islamist insurgencies to be more violent than Islamist insurgencies without transnational linkages. Model 3a evaluates the relationship between *Transnational Goals* and *Civilian Fatalities*, controlling for group-level factors. Model 3b includes all types of controls. Models 3c and 3d are similarly structured in terms of controls but use the *Foreign Fighters* criterion to measure the independent variable.

Results from all models provide strong support for Hypothesis 3, showing that Islamist rebels with transnational linkages and/or goals commit more violence against civilians than Islamist rebels without those linkages. In many ways, these results thus provide a new test and confirmation of Toft and Zhukov's (2015) seminal argument regarding the role of transnational social bases and support structures in promoting violent behaviors among Islamist insurgents in Russia's North Caucasus.

As a whole, therefore, the findings provide strong evidence in support of the three hypotheses, showing that NNIs have a higher propensity to engage in civilian targeting relative to other types of rebel groups and that they represent a particularly violent subset of Islamist insurgencies. These results thus advance the literatures on the role of ideology in armed conflicts and on the transnational dimensions of civil wars. Yet, at this level of aggregation, the analyses do not allow us to test each of the theorized mechanisms directly and separately. As such, while they provided an opportunity to highlight and confirm macro-level trends, they were insufficient in themselves to elucidate how the organizational factors and socialization dynamics discussed above actually shape NNIs' behaviors on the ground. To address this limitation, the following case study

examines how the fratricidal ideology, divine authority claims, and transnational membership base of al-Shabaab drove processes of violent socialization among its combatants in Somalia.

Table 3.4. Islamist Rebels, Transnationalism, and Violence

	Civilian Fatalities			
	M2a	M2b	M2c	M2d
Transnational Goals	1.213**	0.895*		
	(0.547)	(0.531)		
Foreign Fighters			1.703***	1.437**
			(0.438)	(0.546)
Rebel Strength	0.566**	0.251	0.879***	0.544**
	(0.263)	(0.303)	(0.228)	(0.273)
Rebel External Support	-0.809*	-0.808*	-1.590**	-1.461***
	(0.453)	(0.426)	(0.403)	(0.479)
Gov. OSV (ln)		0.123		0.145
		(0.086)		(0.092)
Gov. US Support		0.517		0.643
		(0.475)		(0.464)
Loot		0.731*		0.596*
		(0.394)		(0.330)
Constant	3.113***	2.873***	2.059***	1.880***
	(0.584)	(0.827)	(0.424)	(0.584)
Observations	469	469	469	469

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses; Unit of analysis = rebel-group-year; OSV = One-Sided Violence.

The Use of Violence Against Civilians by Al-Shabaab in Somalia

The Somalian case provides a valuable opportunity to explore the manner in which ideology, authority, and membership may intersect to shape rebel behavior during civil wars fought by NNIs. Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (The Movement of Mujahidin Youth) is an Al-Qaeda-affiliated rebel group which was formed in the mid-2000's when radical elements of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) merged to wage jihad against the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and its international allies, which the group perceived as enemies of Islam and foreign invaders (Hansen 2013, 19–29).

With nearly 10,000 fighters in its ranks at its peak, al-Shabaab was among the largest Islamist armed groups in Africa and controlled vast swaths of territory in central and southern Somalia, imposing its harsh interpretation of sharia law on the civilian populations it governed (Faber 2017, 3–20). Although a combination of US drone strikes and sustained offensives by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has considerably weakened the group in recent years, al-Shabaab still remains a significant threat to the stability of Somalia and neighboring countries to this day. In fact, despite losing many of its strongholds since 2011, the group has continued to carry out high-profile attacks like those on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi (2013), the Garissa University in eastern Kenya (2015), as well as the massive 2017 truck bombing in Mogadishu, "which killed between 500 and 1,000 people and is one of the worst terror attacks ever to have hit the African continent" (Harper 2019, 16).

More generally, al-Shabaab has, over the years, made "extensive use of suicide attacks in civilian areas, indiscriminate shelling and targeted assassination of politicians, journalists, aid workers, and civil servants" (Marchal 2018, 73–74), declaring all of these types of behavior "as justified under its Islamist code of conduct" (Ahmad 2019, 109). Since its inception, the group has thus been responsible for an average of nearly 130 civilian fatalities per year, making it one of the

most lethal rebel groups of the post-Cold War era (Pettersson and Öberg 2020). How can we explain this propensity? To be sure, there are certainly many factors that may have affected al-Shabaab's relationships with Somali civilians over the years. Moreover, there are several features that characterize this case – such as the importance of clan linkages in Somali society and the acute weakness of the incumbent government – and which should be kept in mind, since they may limit the external validity of the data presented below. Yet, the available evidence suggests that the group's fratricidal ideology, the divine nature of its authority claims, and its heavy reliance on foreign fighters have all significantly shaped the group's behaviors toward noncombatants, mirroring dynamics at work in the broader universe of NNIs.

Al-Shabaab's Ideology and Intra-Muslim Violence

Although Islamism has a long history in Somalia, earlier groups like al-Ittihaad al-Islami (AIAI) embraced a version of militant Islam which was considerably more discriminate in its identification of the enemy (West 2006; Mapping Militant Organizations 2019). When Al-Shabaab emerged in the mid-2000's, the group initially displayed similar ideological proclivities, framing its armed struggle as "a liberation movement" against the Ethiopian occupation of Somalia and as a form of "defensive jihad, a variation on what Western scholars would call a 'just war'" (Menkhaus 2009, 5). Yet, following the Ethiopian invasion and the intensification of counterinsurgency operations, al-Shabaab progressively became "more ideologically extreme" than previous Somali Islamist groups (Hansen 2019, 170), consistent with Maher's (2016) claim about the effects of war and crisis on the radicalization of the globalSalafi-Jihadist movement since 2003.

Over time, al-Shabaab's leadership indeed began to steer the group's ideology in increasingly fratricidal directions, a trend that was reflected in the growing place that the doctrine of *takfir* occupied in its worldview. This theological development unfolded in particular under the leadership of Ahmed Abdi Godane (2008-2014), who focused heavily on the "importance of [Islamic] purity" and sought to marginalize the movement's less ideologically extreme factions (Hansen 2013, 10; 32–52). Once Godane took over the group's leadership after a period of power struggle, he indeed began to considerably reframe al-Shabaab's insurrectional purpose, "leaving the organization to be defined by a takfiri ethos that legitimized the killing of other Muslims, including civilians" (Bryden and Bahra 2019, 5).[89] While earlier leaders of al-Shabaab like Aden Hashi Farah Ayro explicitly opposed intra-Muslim violence, Godane's adoption of the *takfiri* doctrine meant that the group progressively shifted its attention to "internal enemies", beginning "to specifically target apostates" and "everyday Somalis" (Maszka 2017, 223).

As Hansen notes, the "first group exposed to such policies was the Sufis, widely seen by Al-Shabaab leaders as apostates" (2013, 68; see also 2019, 47). Yet, what began as sporadic episodes of violence against religious minorities eventually gave rise to a broader pattern of fratricidal violence where al-Shabaab began to systematically "[purge] ideological enemies", drawing new boundaries within Somalia's clan-based society by demarcating some clans as "more Islamist" than others (Hansen 2013, 68). Over time, and as expected by the theoretical framework, these ideological transformations alienated most segments of Somali society and, more importantly, the very community that was arguably al-Shabaab's natural constituency:

[89] The International Crisis Group (2010, 4) traces this shift to 2009, when hardline elements within al-Shabaab began to "[revive] and [instrumentalise] Takfiri ideas in its ideological war with Sheikh Sharif and his government. They [regarded] these ideas as a 'purifying' progression – as the next theological rung in the Salafi jihadi ideological ladder – and [divided] the world into two simple and neat categories: Dar al-harb (the abode of war) and Dar al-Islam (the abode Islam)".

> Most Somalis—including much of the country's growing Salafi community—have been alienated by the movement's draconian style of governance and its deliberate killing of civilians. By divesting his inner circle of its nationalists and political pragmatists, Godane […] has narrowed the group's appeal even further and alienated many former sympathizers. […] By redefining Al-Shabaab as synonymous with its extremist fringe and the terrorist tactics it embraces, Godane has [indeed even] alienated sympathizers among the broader Somali Salafi community who had aligned their supporters through reference to other aspects of the group's ideology and leadership (Bryden 2014, 2; 6).

By increasingly justifying the wartime behaviors of their group upon the *takfiri* doctrine, al-Shabaab's leaders made it clear that, in its view, "anyone who does not agree with [its] particular interpretation of the faith should be excommunicated and killed" (Maszka 2017, 172).[90] This very broad understanding of the identity of legitimate targets was often instilled into combatants in the very early stages of their socialization to the norms and standards of appropriate behaviors of al-Shabaab, as this combatant explains when describing the nature of his first training sessions: "We were told to kill [and that] the difference between a Muslim and a kafir is that these are people who don't pray. Anyone who doesn't pray, you are permitted to kill" (in Speckhard and Shajkovci 2019, 28). The instillation of this Manichean perspective, moreover, was a key component of the group's training and indoctrination programs: "The shariah teachers told us that if this religion wanted me to be slaughtered, we must give our necks for Islam, to be even ready to even do that. We have to be a bridge upon which Islam can cross. Through a lot of pain, ideology, with the benefits of going to Paradise. They taught us to see the world in black and white, either a friend—inside, and everyone else is your enemy" (ibid, 29).

[90] Marchal (2018, 313) similarly notes that al-Shabaab has come to "claim a monopoly on the religious arena", preaching the idea that "the only correct way to understand and practice religion is Al-Shabaab's way; whoever dissents is not a good Muslim". As the author explains, "[t]his allowed the group to theologically justify the marginalization of its ally, Raas Kambooni, in 2009, and to force Hisbuul Islaam to merge with Al-Shabaab in December 2010. It is based on a Salafi core principle that Salafis must vigorously oppose the classical Islamic principle of al-ikhtilaf, the differing of religious opinion in which several solutions may be valid. [Another consequence of this], which is rooted in many Islamist ideologies, is that the Islamic vanguard first has to discipline society and that excesses are justified by this overall aim".

In some cases, the socialization of al-Shabaab combatants to this fratricidal ideology appears to have resulted in deeply internalized beliefs about the legitimacy of intra-Muslim violence. For instance, when asked to explain how his group could justify the killing of Muslim civilians in Kenya, a combatant remarked:

> The Kenyan government declared war on Al Shabaab when it invaded Somalia in October 2011. It is doing everything it can to destroy us. But who voted in that government? Who is ultimately responsible for its existence? It is the Kenyan people. As they are responsible for choosing that infidel government, it is actually the Kenyan people who declared war on us. Therefore every single one of them is a legitimate target (in Harper 2019, 80).

It thus appears that, for many, the group's ideology progressively "became an effective motivator [for] the brutal killing of fellow Muslims" (Maszka 2017, 172). This fratricidal violence became so common during the group's insurgency that even "the central leadership of Al Qaeda [eventually] scolded the Shabab for slaughtering so many Muslims" (Gettleman 2015).

The increasingly fratricidal nature of al-Shabaab's ideology was also one of the main reasons given by ex-members of the organization to explain why they defected from the group, highlighting how socialization may sometimes fail to achieve its desired results. One former militant, for instance, noted that some individuals within al-Shabaab's ranks came to "[oppose] the leadership's approach and its flawed doctrine", deploring that the group had progressively embraced a "distorted form of the holy *jihad*, which has resulted in countless innocent Somali citizens being killed" (AFP 2015).[91] Another fighter explained his decision to leave in the following terms: "We were told that we would go and spread the true Islam to Muslims in Somalia, but we weren't told that we would be killing any Muslim who didn't support us" (in Amble and

[91] A survey conducted by the Global Strategy Network with former al-Shabaab fighters similarly reveals that nearly half of the group's defectors mentioned the "unnecessary killing of other Muslims […] on the basis of false accusations or for no apparent reason at all" as the main factor which led them to leave the group (Barrett 2018, 324–25).

Meleagrou-Hitchens 2014, 530).[92] As discussed below, however, when combined with the divine authority of its commanders and the radicalizing effects of foreign fighters, al-Shabaab's fratricidal ideology was generally effective in promoting the socialization of combatants to the violent standards of appropriate behavior of the organization.

The Role of Divine Authority and the Socializing Power of Al-Shabaab's Leaders

Several commanders within al-Shabaab seemed to possess the attributes of charismatic leaders – as defined by Weber – and were regarded as such by low-ranking combatants. A former member of the group, for instance, remarked that "Somalis flocked to join the Shabbab, partly because they were impressed by the personal charisma of the group's founder, Adan Hashi Ayro, a father-like figure […]. [He] says he believes Ayro is a true holy warrior" (Ryu 2009). Other reports indicate that Sheikh Muktar Abu Seyla'I, the commander in charge of intelligence, had a "mythical reputation" within the ranks of al-Shabaab, whereas Hassan Dahir Aweys, one of the group's co-founders, carried "considerable symbolic power" among combatants (Hansen 2013, 83; 109) and was often spoken of in "godfatherly" terms (Bryden 2014, 3).

Yet, these traits were perhaps most clearly embodied by Godane, al-Shabaab's most prominent leader. As Anzalone (2014, 19) notes, "Godane was a charismatic and multifaceted leader" who inspired awe and was regarded as a god-like figure by combatants. A former high-ranking commander of al-Shabaab explained that Godane was quite conscious about this and actively sought to feed this image for himself and his deputy leaders. He claims that Godane "coached them [his deputies] on how to cultivate an aura of mystery and leadership" in order to

[92] Likewise, ex-combatants interviewed by Harper (2020) claimed that, while their minds were initially "warped by [al-Shabaab's] indoctrination, they came to realise that the group was not fighting for a purer, better form of Islam, but a twisted, misguided one".

appear “big and important” (in Maruf and Joseph 2018, 40). Relatedly, around half of former combatants who participated in surveys with the Global Strategy Network reported that this transcendent aura was among the main reasons which led them to join al-Shabaab, mentioning that they thought that the group’s leaders were “doing God’s work” (Barrett 2018, 322).

More importantly, the fact that al-Shabaab’s leaders anchored their authority claims in the divine and explicitly invoked this higher power to legitimize their hierarchical positions afforded them considerable socializing power, allowing them to effectively induct combatants to the violent normative and behavioral expectations of the organization. For instance, the legitimacy that Godane enjoyed among low-ranking combatants allowed him to successfully implement a new tactic on the battlefield (i.e. suicide bombings), despite the fact that his group was “the first Somali actor to employ this strategy” and that he had to bring combatants to overcome strong “Somali cultural inhibitions about suicide attacks” (Hansen 2013, 64; see also Faber 2017, 11).

By appealing to a higher power to legitimize their authority, moreover, al-Shabaab’s commanders were able to use selective incentives and disincentives in the form of afterlife rewards and punishments in order to shape combatants’ behaviors. Former combatants, for instance, reported that commanders frequently stressed that “serving the group [would] result in rewards in the afterlife” and that strict obedience to orders would lead fighters to “go straight to jannah [paradise]” (in Speckhard and Shajkovci 2019, 29).

It should be noted that, in some cases, the “failure [of the leadership] to act in accordance with Islamic principles, particularly through arbitrary imprisonment and unjustified brutality, [undermined] the religious legitimacy that might otherwise have preserved the loyalty of its recruits”, leading some individuals to defect (Barrett 2018, 318). Yet, it appears that al-Shabaab leaders generally possessed the symbolic and strategic resources needed to achieve considerable obedience and behavioral conformity among most combatants, even when orders called for the

type of civilian abuse that has all-too often afflicted Somalia in recent years. The divine origins of commanders' authority claims within al-Shabaab – and the recognition of this authority by combatants – have thus played a key role in the translation of the group's fratricidal ideology into fratricidal behaviors on the ground.

The Radicalizing Influence of Foreign Fighters

Like other NNIs, the ranks of al-Shabaab have been swelled by large influxes of foreign fighters from North America, Europe, the Middle East, and East Africa over the years.[93] As numerous reports have shown, these foreign fighters joined al-Shabaab for a variety of psychological, sociological, and ideological reasons (see e.g. Botha and Abdile 2014; Barrett 2018; Marchal 2018; Speckhard and Shajkovci 2019; Harper 2019). Yet, a shared characteristic among many of these individuals seemed to be "the importance of ideology in [their] radicalization process" (Meservey 2018, 431). Indeed, a large proportion of al-Shabaab's foreign fighters were radicalized before leaving their own countries and displayed a degree of commitment and ideological zeal that far surpassed that of most of the group's local recruits (ibid, 426).

For instance, Omar Hammami and Munir Awad – two foreign fighters from the United States and Sweden, respectively – were reported "to have had radical beliefs" as well as a strong dedication to jihad long before departing for Somalia (Hansen 2013, 42). Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert, another American foreign fighter, was also said to have been "radicalized in the United States" prior to joining al-Shabaab (ibid, 41). Similarly, Botha (2016, 40) emphasizes that it is only

[93] As Shinn (2011, 209–10) notes, "[t]here are three kinds of "foreign" fighters [in al-Shabaab]: Somalis who were born across the borders in neighboring countries, primarily Kenya, and have the nationality of those countries; Somalis who were born in Somalia or whose parents were born in Somalia but have grown up in the diaspora and now carry a foreign passport; and foreigners who have no Somali ethnic connection".

"after being radicalized" that prospective recruits "left their respective countries [Kenya and Uganda] to fight in Somalia".

The fact that foreign Al-Shabaab fighters displayed a considerable degree of ideological extremism and dedication makes intuitive sense, given that these individuals had to clear particularly high hurdles – in terms of avoiding law enforcement, sorting out the logistics, gathering the resources, traveling thousands of miles, etc. – just to reach the conflict theatre. This suggests that ideology was often "the driving force behind travellers' radicalization", their decision to leave, and their behaviors on the ground (Meservey 2018, 432). This may explain, moreover, why "many of the foreign recruits became suicide bombers" and often displayed an eagerness to participate in martyrdom operations (Hansen 2013, 97).[94] It appears that the leadership of al-Shabaab rapidly took notice of the radicalism of foreign fighters and sought to instrumentalize it in order to implement the most brutal precepts of the group's ideology. Indeed, as Maszka (2017, 235) remarks, "[foreigners] were useful to Godane as they were willing to do things that most Somalis would not (suicide missions, defy clan politics, murder clan elders, etc.)".

In contrast, many local recruits of al-Shabaab joined to improve their own material situation, to achieve greater economic security, and to find purpose in response to a lack of opportunity and a sense of unfulfilled potential (Hansen 2019, 6; see also Barrett 2018; Yusuf Ali 2018). Neumann (2016, 152–53), for instance, argues that most of the local ex-combatants he met in Somalia were what Kilcullen "calls 'accidental guerrillas': simple people without jobs or education who'd suddenly become part of an army in which they fought for an ideological agenda

[94] For instance, "[i]n October 2007, a Somali from the United Kingdom carried out a suicide bombing against an Ethiopian military position in Baidoa in central Somalia. In October 2008, Shirwa Ahmed from Minneapolis became America's first known suicide bomber when he drove a vehicle laden with explosives in an attack that killed as many as thirty people in Puntland in northern Somalia. In September 2009, a Somali-American from Seattle was one of two suicide bombers who drove vehicles bearing UN logos into the African Union force headquarters in Mogadishu, killing 21 peacekeepers. In December of 2009, a Dane of Somali descent blew himself up at a hotel in Mogadishu during a college graduation ceremony, killing 24 people including three government ministers" (Shinn 2011, 211).

that they neither really knew nor fully understood. What motivated them were the 'two dollars a day' that al-Shabaab paid them".

Yet, although they often joined with a shallower level of ideological commitment, it appears that local recruits were often socialized to radical dispositions and behaviors by their foreign peers. Some reports, for instance, suggest that "the hardliners, led by the foreign jihadis, [wielded] enormous influence" within the ranks of al-Shabaab and possessed the symbolic resources to sway their less radical local peers (International Crisis Group 2010, 9), while others indicate that foreign fighters from East Africa "inspired an aggressive campaign of radicalization" within their units (Bryden and Bahra 2019, 6). This contagion effect seems to have occurred both through quotidian interactions between combatants and through the social influence that certain prominent foreign fighters carried. For instance, Omar Hammami, the American "who self-radicalized in the United States", reportedly played a key role in driving his Somali peers toward extremes (Menkhaus 2013, 314) and was instrumental in the establishment of a theological training camp, which came to be known for having the "strongest ideological indoctrination routines" (Hansen 2013, 93). By importing their radicality into the conflict theatre, foreign fighters thus seem to have exerted an important violence-inducing influence over their local peers, who may not have shared their ideological extremism but were nonetheless swayed into participating in violence through group solidarity, peer pressure, and social learning.

Conclusion

Since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, an increasing number of civil wars have been fought in Muslim-majority countries by Salafi-Jihadist rebels pursuing transnational goals (Walter 2017a). This article has mobilized a mixed methods research design to explore how this emerging trend

bears on patterns of civilian targeting across and within intrastate conflicts. Specifically, the article has highlighted how the fratricidal ideology, the divine authority claims, and the transnational membership base of NNIs can intersect to fuel vertical and horizontal processes of violent socialization, thereby increasing the extent to which these organizations victimize civilians. In that regard, the article showed that NNIs have a higher propensity to engage in civilian targeting than both other types of rebel groups, as well as earlier and non-transnational Islamist insurgencies.

Several research agendas emerge from this study. First, future research should address whether other factors like the presence of competition with other rebel groups, the pressures brought about by counterinsurgency campaigns, or the implementation of systems of rebel governance can amplify or mitigate the effects of the ideology, authority, and membership mechanisms on patterns of violence against civilians, both in Somalia and beyond. In particular, it would be worthwhile to assess how the distinctive contexts in which other NNIs operate in Mali, Nigeria, Syria, and elsewhere have shaped the trajectory of these organizations, thereby allowing us to more clearly demarcate the boundaries of the above arguments. Second, it would be worthwhile to carefully compare NNIs with other rebel groups displaying a strong command and control structure and endorsing a violent ideology, such as the Sendero Luminoso in Peru or the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. By contrasting how ideology, authority, and membership shape combatants' behaviors in both religious and secular organizations, further research could help us to refine our understanding of the distinctive role that Islamism plays in contemporary civil wars. Finally, it would be useful to collect more granular data to assess how socializing influences are lived and experienced by NNIs' combatants at the individual level. Although the security situation in most of these countries currently makes data collection a perilous enterprise, devoting more attention to "socializees" would provide the opportunity to ask important questions, which the existing literature on combatant socialization has yet to satisfactorily address: Under what

circumstances does socialization fail or is resisted? What happens when the leadership and fellow combatants send opposing socialization signals?

As governments across the world face the threat posed by NNIs, policy-makers may also benefit from a finer understanding of the manner in which these organizations interact with civilian populations in conflict zones. As the above suggests, there are important variations in the extent to which the radical ideology of NNIs is internalized or embraced by low-ranking combatants, suggesting that rehabilitation programs may be more effective when tailored to the needs, realities, and profiles of specific individuals. The radicalizing influence that foreign fighters can exert on local recruits, moreover, seems to suggest that more efforts should be dedicated to controlling and monitoring borders and international travels to war zones, a set of measures that may help to prevent conflict escalation. Finally, the disenchantment that some ex-combatants expressed regarding the un-Islamic behaviors of al-Shabaab appears to indicate that the diffusion of religious counter-narratives by respected local figures and the establishment of defector programs may help to reduce the appeal and strength of these organizations, thereby curtailing the recruitment of new fighters (see e.g. Harper 2020; Kilcullen 2009, 15). Together, these measures may thus help to address the onset, escalation, and recurrence of intrastate conflicts in the Muslim world.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

> When I tried to understand it, I had the feeling I was failing to condemn it as it must be condemned. When I condemned it as it must be condemned, there was no room for understanding.
>
> In Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader* (1995, 157)

When studying perpetrators of political violence, scholars may be charged with accusations that investigating this subject matter indirectly contributes to the justification or the rationalization of inexcusable atrocities. Yet, this thesis has been driven by the conviction that there is a fundamental difference between attempting to justify and seeking to understand, between excusing perpetrators and trying to comprehend the determinants of their behaviors. In that sense, we should not confuse social scientific explanation with exculpation, or attempts to analytically fathom with endeavors to morally exonerate. The purpose of this thesis was thus not to negate, downplay, or deny the sufferings of the civilian victims who too often bear the brunt of civil war violence, but to make sense of the complex socio-psychological processes through which low-ranking perpetrators are brought to engage in seemingly incomprehensible wartime behaviors. Therefore, the hope of this thesis has been that, by striving to understand the motives, experiences, and trajectories of low-level rebel perpetrators, we might be better equipped to avert, respond to, and address the consequences of wartime civilian targeting (Williams 2020, 1).

This conclusion proceeds as follows. The first section briefly summarizes the overarching theoretical approach of the thesis, as well as the content and contributions of the three articles. The second section reflects on the external validity of my arguments beyond Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Somalia. The third section then discusses avenues for further research. The fourth section addresses the limitations of this thesis. The fifth section concludes by considering its policy

implications, focusing on the manner in which studies of violence perpetration can inform policies of combatant rehabilitation and post-conflict reconciliation.

Summary and Contributions

The three articles that form this thesis have been guided by a common theoretical perspective, which views participation in wartime violence against civilians as the outcome of a process of combatant socialization. Specifically, this thesis has argued that, at the rank-and-file level, violence perpetration can best be understood as a process through which combatants – responding to potent social influences, needs, incentives, sanctions, and constraints – adjust their attitudinal dispositions and behavioral tendencies to align them with their group's violent norms and expectations. In doing so, the thesis sought to place emphasis on the processual nature of violence perpetration, highlighting the inadequacies of theories depicting combatants' attitudes, dispositions, and preferences as fixed. It also strove to cast the focus on the fundamental complexity of violence perpetration and diversity of violence perpetrators, shedding light on the variations in inclination and participation that we often witness across combatants belonging to the same organization. By investigating the drivers of participation in violence among low-ranking rebel combatants, the thesis has also shown that these powerful social forces can derive from and be shaped by a range of operational, strategic, relational, and ideological determinants.

In the first chapter, I synthesized existing theories of combatant socialization and combined them into an integrated framework, which charted five pathways toward civilian targeting. In doing so, this article specified the key underlying socio-psychological mechanisms through which socializing influences motivate participation in such violence, emphasizing in particular the role of obedience to authority, group solidarity, peer pressures, indoctrination, social learning, and cognitive dissonance. The article also identified a number of unit-level factors that are likely to

make a given pathway particularly prevalent among combatants. Examining the trajectories of RUF combatants to illustrate these dynamics, the article thus showed that rebel perpetrators can be brought to kill through different mechanisms and on the basis of varying degrees of internalized belief about the legitimacy of civilian targeting.

In the second chapter, I explored how the operational context in which rebel combatants wage insurgency can shape the nature of the socializing influences to which they are exposed. Focusing on variations across and within rebel groups waging guerrilla warfare, this article argued that the extent of a group's operational embeddedness within civilian communities can considerably affect its propensity to use violence against noncombatants. In particular, the article contended that operational embeddedness incentivizes rebel leaders to establish governance institutions and encourages the development of trust-based relationships between combatants and noncombatants, thereby reducing the prevalence of civilian targeting. Operational disembeddedness, on the contrary, creates a situation in which vertical incentives and horizontal socialization processes tend to converge to promote such violence. Specifically, the absence of integration within civilian communities will force commanders to rely on coercive resource extraction strategies and will create socialization dynamics that are likely to drive combatants' attitudes and behaviors in increasingly radical directions. Using cross-national analyses of levels of violence against civilians across all guerrillas active between 1989 and 2019, as well as qualitative case study evidence from the Taliban's insurgency in Afghanistan, the article found strong empirical support for these arguments, highlighting the importance of the operational context in shaping socialization dynamics and, consequently, combatants' behaviors.

In the third chapter, I examined whether the organizational characteristics of "new new insurgencies" affect the extent to which these transnational jihadist rebel groups target civilian populations. Specifically, this article argued that the increasingly fratricidal ideology of NNIs, the

fact that their leaders anchor their authority claims in divine sources, and the presence of radicalized foreign fighters in their membership base create potent socialization dynamics that are likely to promote widespread participation in violence against civilians. Accordingly, I argued that ideology operates both as "doctrine" and as "practice" in driving NNIs toward violence, shaping the content of socialization in both vertical and horizontal ways. On this basis, I formulated the hypothesis that these three key organizational features would make NNIs behaviorally distinct from both other types of rebel groups, as well as earlier and non-transnational Islamist insurgencies. Leveraging cross-national statistical tests and case study evidence from al-Shabaab's insurgency in Somalia, the article showed that this new – and increasingly prevalent – breed of rebel group indeed tends to impose a particularly heavy toll on civilian populations. In doing so, the article advanced research agendas on combatant socialization, the role of ideology in armed conflicts, and the transnational dimensions of civil wars.

As detailed in the introduction, these three articles made several theoretical and ontological contributions to the literatures on intrastate conflicts, rebel groups, combatant socialization, civilian targeting, and violence perpetration. For one thing, this thesis strove to push perpetrator studies forward by examining a category of perpetrator and a type of political violence that remained under-theorized in this body of research: rebel combatants waging civil wars. It also extended the scholarship on combatant socialization by focusing more intently on lethal violence, by call attention to the experiences of "socializees", and by considering a host of theoretical areas that deserved to be charted more extensively in this literature. Specifically, the thesis demonstrated that, to fully make sense of how socializing influences can bring combatants to kill civilians, we need to pay close attention to the operational and ideological contexts in which low-ranking rebels evolve, to the strategic incentives that shape vertical socialization, and to the nature of interpersonal relations between combatants and a range of other actors (i.e. peers, commanders, and civilians).

Moreover, by mobilizing a microfoundational approach – that is, "an analytic strategy where one explains outcomes at the aggregate level via dynamics at a lower level" – to study violence perpetration in civil wars, this thesis endeavored to put debates over the determinants of rebel behavior on a more solid conceptual and theoretical footing (Kertzer 2017, 83). In particular, this thesis' focus on the micro-level motives driving combatants' actions and on the intervening mechanisms linking individual perpetrators to collective violence has provided an opportunity to challenge some of the unfounded or homogenizing assumptions that often guide academic, journalistic, and popular accounts on rebel violence. It has also called attention to the "fundamental attribution errors" and other inference problems that loom in the background when we fail to attend to the motives, experiences, and trajectories of low-ranking perpetrators. Making our micro-level assumptions about perpetrators more explicit thus leads to theories of civilian targeting that are more transparent, thereby facilitating the evaluation of the consistency and plausibility of the underlying postulates on which we base our explanations.

Finally, the thesis illustrated the added value of considering both *violence origination* and *violence perpetration* when striving to understand wartime civilian targeting. By casting the focus on the interplay between vertical and horizontal socialization dynamics, the three articles indeed showed that a fuller picture of patterns of violence against civilians can be painted when we conjointly account for the processes leading commanders to adopt this strategy and those driving combatants to produce such violence. As this thesis argued, a key benefit of this approach is that it allows us to uncover when the strategic calculations of the leadership and the behaviors of the rank-and-file overlap and when they diverge, when violence is produced through the chain of command and when it occurs independently of it.

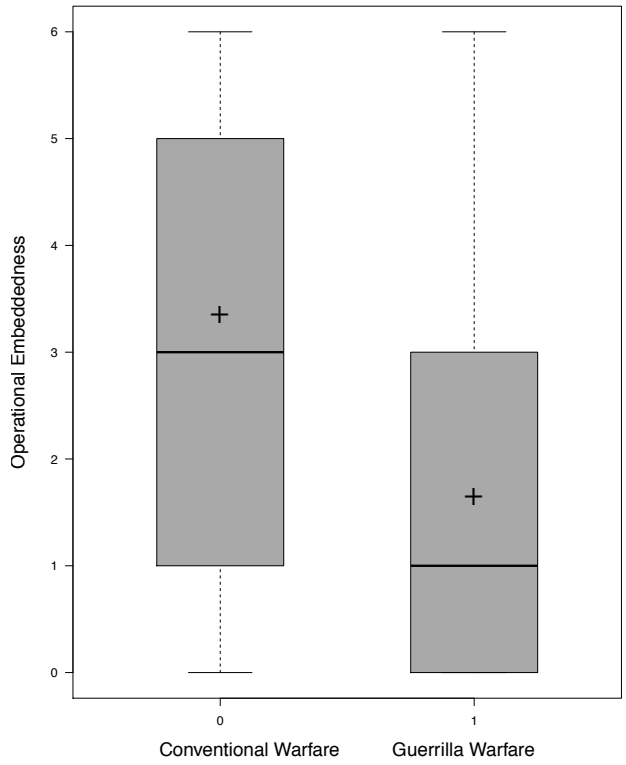
External Validity

The three case studies included in this thesis (i.e. the RUF, the Taliban, and al-Shabaab) were deliberately selected to cover a diversified range of civil wars and to illustrate that combatant socialization is a fundamental process that fuels participation in violence across a heterogenous set of rebel groups. Accordingly, the thesis has sought to demonstrate that the social influences, needs, incentives, sanctions, and constraints that are at the heart of my theoretical approach can play a decisive role in bringing perpetrators to kill civilians across a host of groups with different organizational profiles. Whether in West Africa, Central Asia, or the Horn of Africa, the analyzed evidence indeed showed that individual participation in such violence was often driven by potent wartime social forces, which motivated combatants to seek alignment with their group's violent norms and expectations. Yet, this thesis primarily examined cases of irregular warfare and only explored the effects of one kind of ideology (i.e. Salafi-Jihadism) on combatant socialization processes, thereby raising questions about the broader applicability of the arguments developed in the three articles. In what follows, therefore, I reflect on how my theoretical approach may apply to different technologies of rebellion and to other types of ideologies.

The second article showed that rebel groups waging guerrilla warfare display considerable variation – both within and across them – in the operational context in which they evolve and argued that this variation affects that socializing influences to which combatants are exposed. As Figure 4.1. illustrates, extending the scope of this argument to rebel groups fighting conventionally reveals that the latter exhibit significantly higher average levels of operational embeddedness, although they vary to a considerable extent as well. A plausible explanation for this difference is that, given the structure of territorial control and the relative strength of rebels in conventional civil wars, insurgents are likely to face fewer integration obstacles and to have the capacity to establish a substantial operational presence in the populated regions under their control. As noted in the

second chapter, rebel groups waging conventional conflicts indeed tend to hold relatively stable zones of territorial control in the regions behind frontlines. This characteristic of conventional wars may thus incentivize rebels to settle within the populated rear areas on which they exert overwhelming control, as establishing operational bases therein facilitates the procurement of key resources like food, shelter, and information.[95]

Figure 4.1. Operational Embeddedness Across Technologies of Rebellion



Note: This box plot is based on our operational embeddedness index, matched with the Technology of Rebellion Dataset (Kalyvas and Balcells). For the purposes of this figure, SNC conflicts are coded as guerrillas. The thick lines represent the medians and the crosses represent the means.

[95] It should be noted, however, that combatants in conventional wars can be periodically fairly isolated from civilians, especially during times of conquest or when major battles are fought along remote frontlines. Empirical studies of conventional wars show that these situations are quite rare and are interspersed with long periods of positional warfare, during which combatants are typically stationed in populated areas in the rear (see e.g. Balcells 2017).

We may thus expect that rebel combatants fighting in conventional wars will tend to be exposed to similar socialization experiences as those evolving in highly embedded guerrillas. As such, the patterns of rebel governance and interactive socialization that I discussed in the second article are likely to be especially prevalent in conventional civil wars, given the high average levels of operational embeddedness that rebel groups display in these conflicts. In Appendix C, I use mediation analyses to evaluate whether the relationship between technologies of rebellion and the incidence of violence against civilians is indeed mediated by the different average levels of operational embeddedness that guerrillas and conventional rebels exhibit. The results offer strong preliminary support for this intuition, indicating that these arguments seem to extend beyond irregular conflicts.

In the third article, I highlighted how the fratricidal ideology of Jihadist rebels affects the nature of the socializing influences to which combatants are exposed. Yet, existing research suggests that ideology may play a broader role in shaping combatant socialization processes (see e.g. Sanín and Wood 2014, 218–19). As Hoover Green (2018) shows, for instance, rebel groups adhering to Marxist ideologies like the FMLN in El Salvador are especially likely to establish institutions of political education to socialize combatants to norms of civilian immunity (see also Balcells and Kalyvas 2010). Thaler (2012) similarly highlights that commitment to Marxist–Leninist principles lead commanders of the Mozambique Liberation Front (Frelimo) and the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) to devote considerable resources to instill norms of restraint in their combatants.

It appears plausible, moreover, that the leaders of rebel groups embracing secessionist ideologies may promote similar norms of non-violence among their rank-and-file, in order to project a positive image on the international stage (see e.g. Stewart 2018; Fazal 2013). For these groups, “the initial decision to abide by international humanitarian norms may be instrumental,

[but] socialization processes [among combatants] can lead to greater internalization of international human rights norms over time" (Stanton 2016, 12). Relatedly, subnational analyzes have shown that rebel groups adhering to nationalist doctrines tend to exert more restraint toward civilians than those embracing Islamist ideologies, as the former have deeper roots and are more dependent on local populations (Toft and Zhukov 2015). More research would be needed, however, to determine why some Marxist groups (e.g. the Shining Path in Peru, the Maoists in Nepal) and some groups fighting for national liberation (e.g. the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka) used violence against civilians extensively, despite sharing the same ideological worldviews as those discussed above. Nonetheless, even though this thesis has only examined the effects of Jihadism on combatant socialization processes, existing research suggests that other types of ideologies may also play an important role in shaping the nature and outcome of socializing influences within rebel groups.

Limitations of the Thesis

As noted in the introduction, the main limitation of this thesis is that it does not offer original individual-level empirical evidence, insofar as the data collection phase of my doctoral research program was supposed to be carried out in 2020 and 2021, precisely when a global pandemic shut down international travels. The sort of immersive, protracted, and face-to-face field research that I had initially planned for this thesis was indeed impracticable for much of these two years, given departmental regulations and the "complex ethical and logistical challenges" created by the international sanitary situation (Wood et al. 2020). In fact, this type of research is "likely [to] be among the last areas of academic research to resume something resembling its prepandemic rhythms" (ibid).

This is mainly because such projects depend heavily on the ability of researchers to "[build] strong working relationships through sustained in-person interaction" and to gain the trust of

respondents, especially when tackling subjects as sensitive as the ones I address in this thesis (ibid). Moreover, given the asymmetries in access to vaccines between myself (a privileged researcher working in a developed country) and the populations that I wanted to visit (located mainly in impoverished communities), I reached the conclusion that these issues of positionality and ethics were too great to warrant field research, even when the peak of the pandemic passed and vaccines became more broadly available (see e.g. Shaw et al. 2020).

Accordingly, the empirical evidence that supports this thesis is not as granular as I had initially wished, affording only a limited space to the testimonies and perspectives of low-ranking rebel combatants. While I strove to include as many of these testimonies as possible in the three case studies, the existing literature provides relatively little data about the motivations, wartime experiences, and life histories of rank-and-file rebels. This has thus created a certain degree of incongruity between my theoretical approach and my empirical evidence. It has also led me, in some cases, to rely on inferences from more aggregated data and to repurpose available evidence, a method that is admittedly less than ideal. Yet, by mobilizing different types of data and sources (e.g. commission transcripts, judicial proceedings, press coverage, event narratives, witness testimonies, reports from IGOs, NGOs and state agencies, survey data, academic case studies), I believe that this thesis has managed to minimize the impact of these issues.

Given these data limitations, another important shortcoming of this thesis is that it paid only limited attention to the factors explaining variations in participation in violence against civilians and in combatants' ability to exert agency at the individual level. Evidently, a multitude of socio-psychological determinants may lie at the root of such variation, shaping how socializing influences are lived and experienced by different combatants. Yet, it appears that the manner in which motivations and needs are hierarchized and perceived at the individual level may be of central importance here. As Reinermann and Williams (2020, 146) put it

> motivations are structured hierarchically and […] due to changes in the situation or changing needs of the individual, the hierarchy can experience changes: new motivations can emerge to serve new needs, motivations can disappear if needs are fulfilled or no longer relevant, or motivations within the hierarchy can change their salience, shifting up or down. Through the internal and external influences on the individual these processes of motivational change can launch, sustain, transform or end action within a violent context. […] [This] also means that within the same situation different individuals will have different hierarchies of motivations and these will change in very personal ways according to how individual prioritization and perception of the situation are.

To be sure, an evaluation of how these hierarchies form and why they differ across combatants would require highly granular individual data, to which I did not have access. This sort of data is indeed likely to be gatherable only through direct encounters with perpetrators and through methods that allow scholars to capture the elements of individuality and diachronicity that are inherent in the process of perpetration. Life histories would be particularly suitable here, as they provide the opportunity to trace the trajectory of an individual over time and to ask questions that are chronologically organized around key moments in perpetrators' individual journeys. This could entail, for instance, probing a combatant's prewar life and social networks, the nature of his recruitment and training, the manner in which his first military operations occurred, and so on. While triangulation with other types of data would certainly be necessary to alleviate the risks of relying only on perpetrator accounts – especially in terms of social desirability, faulty memory, or "self-fashioning" biases – it makes no doubt that using this type of data in a micro-comparative framework would help us to better understand variations in participation across combatants (Straus 2017).

To respond to the unavailability of such data, the thesis thus opted to cast the focus on the unit and organizational levels, striving to elucidate the key mechanisms that are likely to shape perpetration processes and to increase the incidence of violence against civilians. Yet, this thesis is merely a starting point for a more ambitious book-length project, which will grapple with the above

issues. Indeed, as soon as it is possible to safely and ethically resume fieldwork, I plan to travel abroad in order to collect the type of first-hand and fine-grained that is data necessary to address individual-level variations in a more satisfactory fashion.

Avenues for Further Research

Although each of the articles included in this thesis contained a section delineating the specific academic implications deriving from them, there are also several broader research agendas that emerge from the thesis as a whole. First, this thesis has restricted its focus to rebel combatants, striving to address the under-representation of this category of actor in perpetrator studies and to shed light on the specificities of violence perpetration in the context of rebel groups. In doing so, the thesis has only tangentially examined the overlaps in the processes and mechanisms leading rebel combatants to participate in violence against civilians and those driving other types of perpetrators to kill. Going forward, perpetrator studies may thus benefit from breaking down academic silos and from addressing broader questions about the ontology of perpetration across different kinds of political violence. This could entail, for instance, examining which drivers and motives appear to recur in international conflicts, civil wars, terrorism, mass atrocities, intercommunal violence, and so on. A promising forthcoming book by Stathis Kalyvas will apparently provide a synthetic framework to tackle such questions, a contribution that could potentially lay the foundations of an important program of research on this topic. In the specific context of civil wars, it may also prove rewarding to pull together incumbents and insurgents into an integrated theoretical framework of violence perpetration, asking how differences in operational context, organizational structure, or membership profile, for instance, affect the processes through which rebel combatants and governmental soldiers are brought to kill civilians.

Second, this thesis has placed emphasis on the interplay between the strategic calculations of the leadership and the socio-psychological microfoundations underlying combatants' behaviors, shedding light on the interactions between processes of violence origination and dynamics of violence perpetration. Yet, as Balcells and Stanton (2021) note, the literature on violence against civilians is still in need of more research that integrate different levels of analysis. In particular, scholars should strive to incorporate conflict-level, organizational-level, and combatant-level factors when analyzing the drivers of civilian targeting. Doing so could facilitate the development of theories that combine both strategic and non-strategic determinants to make sense of why and how rebel combatants come to kill civilians.

More work is also needed on the conditions under which socialization fails and on the factors explaining why vertical and horizontal socializing forces sometimes reinforce, and sometimes contradict, one another. An insightful new book by Devorah Manekin (2020) has begun to address these issues in the context of counterinsurgency operations, investigating the factors that promote the emergence of what she labels strategic, entrepreneurial, and opportunistic violence. Yet, we still have a limited understanding – especially as it concerns rebel groups – of what happens when vertical and horizontal influences go in opposite directions, when leaders and peers send opposing socialization signals. Evidently, to understand how combatants resolve this contradiction, scholars will have to collect highly granular data, examining both organizational policies and unit-level interactions within the rank-and-file.

Third, as noted above, several questions about the outcome of combatant socialization remain in need of further investigation. In particular, cross-national comparative studies would be useful to determine why rebel groups embracing similar ideologies or displaying comparable organizational profiles sometimes differ considerably in the type of normative and behavioral inclinations that they seek to promote among their combatants. Why does Marxism, for instance,

sometimes "shape organizational processes, norms, and ultimately, behavior" in ways that encourage restraint, and sometimes in ways that contribute to widespread atrocities (Balcells and Stanton 2021, 11)? Why do strong and centralized control and command structures in some cases lead to the limitation of civilian targeting, while in others it is leveraged to enforce brutal campaigns of violence? What is the role of individual commanders in determining these outcomes? Conducting more comparative research on vertical socializing influences would certainly help to answer these questions.

Fourth, a fruitful area for further work would be to build more bridge between the burgeoning literature on social ties, recruitment, and mobilization on the one hand, and the thriving scholarship on combatant socialization on the other hand. Although scholars should remain mindful of the fact that "the logic of violence is separate from the logic of recruitment", this type of cross-fertilization could help us to better understand how pre-existing social ties and interpersonal networks underlying recruitment procedures may shape the nature and outcome of horizontal socializing influences after individuals join rebel groups (ibid, 13). As I discussed in the first chapter, it is plausible that pressures for behavioral conformity and socio-psychological incentives to act in accordance with peer expectations may be especially strong among combatants who are linked by a dense network of pre-war social ties and interpersonal relationships (see e.g. Lazar 2013; Parkinson 2013; McDoom 2014). It may be rewarding, for instance, to conduct comparative studies using Staniland's (2014) typology of rebel groups, evaluating how socialization dynamics unfold in "integrated", "vanguard", "parochial", and "fragmented" organizations.

Fifth, several questions remain unanswered regarding the role of combatant socialization in shaping the nature of *violence repertoires*. Indeed, it would be worthwhile to assess why socializing influences produce sexual violence in some cases, while in others they may motivate homicide or even generate performative acts of "extra-lethal" violence such as torture or mutilation (Fujii 2013).

A promising avenue for further research here would be to use the framework provided by Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood (2017) to evaluate how combatant socialization dynamics influence the repertoire of forms of violence – and, for each of these forms, the targeting, frequency, and technique – used by rebel groups across different cases. Although ambitious, this work could allow us to "leverage the full range of observed variation in patterns of violence", considerably refining our understanding of processes of violence perpetration (Balcells 2012).

Finally, more research is needed on the agency of low-ranking combatants during civil wars. As I argued throughout this thesis, many of the prominent works on civil war violence rely on homogenizing, unstated, or even unfounded assumptions about the motives and preferences of the rank-and-file, often leading scholars to simply gloss over the processes and mechanisms through which combatants come to kill. Yet, accumulating evidence indicates that combatants often manage to exert considerably autonomy and agency on the battlefield, that they are not mere "[cogs] in the machine" (Austin 2020, 542; see also Manekin 2020). Accordingly, future research may strive to uncover the operational, organizational, interpersonal, or individual factors that may increase or decrease combatants' ability to exercise such agency.

Policy Implications: Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation

Evidently, in the wake of civil wars, a key policy priority should be to cater to the needs of victimized communities and to provide closure to the latter by setting up transitional justice bodies, thereby ensuring accountability for the most egregious wartime abuses. Recent research on the legacies of civil war violence, for instance, has shown that experiences of wartime violence can lead to the polarization of local identities (Wood 2008; Hadzic, Carlson, and Tavits 2020), to a sense of victimization traveling across generations (Balcells 2012), and to a deterioration of political tolerance (Rapp, Kijewski, and Freitag 2019) among conflict-riven communities. More

generally, victimized communities in post-conflict settings are often "faced with enormous economic problems, which, for the majority of its inhabitants, translate into a daily struggle to meet basic needs" (Maedl et al. 2010, 178). These issues, undoubtedly, must figure at the top of local and international stakeholders' agendas.

Yet, when examining current international peacebuilding efforts and post-conflict interventions, it appears that "the focus on the rehabilitation of [ex-combatants] is still weak, compared to the societal, macro-economic, and political perspective of stabilizing a country or region" (ibid). While these broader macro-challenges certainly deserve the attention that they receive in academic and policy circles, the findings of this thesis suggest that researchers and stakeholders should recognize that the socio-psychological aftermaths of *violence perpetration* among former rebel combatants also have important implications for post-conflict stability and reconciliation.

Indeed, perpetration does not end with killing; in fact, its consequences may be felt by perpetrators long after violence has abated, hindering their reintegration in their local communities and their rehabilitation to civilian life. While involvement in political violence can sometimes generate positive outcomes like an increase in post-war political participation, local cooperation, and civic engagement (see e.g. Blattman 2009; Bauer et al. 2016), it appears that the main consequences of perpetration are more commonly *trauma* and *stigmatization*.

As Anderson (2018, 226) remarks, "[there] is little research or academic literature on […] perpetrator trauma", in part because the "act of perpetration is itself morally repugnant, and thus it seems dissonant to consider the trauma suffered by some perpetrators, as being worthy of concern". Indeed, most existing studies on the relationship between political violence and trauma

> [focus] on victims of abuses rather than on perpetrators, with scholars only rarely suggesting that those who commit horrific crimes may experience trauma as a result. The choice to

> highlight the traumatic experience of victims and to downplay – or even deny – that of perpetrators may intuitively feel appropriate. Why should we devote any sympathetic attention to the individuals responsible for unjustifiable bloodshed, and what right do they have for their pain and their wounds to be recognized and respected? Alternatively, to the extent that perpetrator trauma might not be denied, it might be dismissed as a comeuppance. If individuals who have committed horrific crimes now suffer as a result, then the nightmares, the flashbacks, the isolation - these are merely a whit of what they deserve (Mohamed 2015, 1164).

Yet, accumulating evidence indicates that perpetrator trauma is an empirically prevalent phenomenon in the wake of armed conflicts. As Grossman ([1995] 2009, 31) remarks, "[looking] another human being in the eye, making an independent decision to kill him, and watching as he dies due to your action combine to form one of the most basic, important, primal, and potentially traumatic occurrences of war".[96] As this quote suggests, the sort of close-range violence that is most commonly used in civil wars is likely "to be especially traumatizing to the perpetrator" (Cohen 2016, 35).[97] Indeed, a range of psychological studies have shown that, while soldiers who have killed in combat display significantly higher average levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than those who have not, the most psychologically afflicted combatants tend to be those who have perpetrated lethal violence in a direct, face-to-face fashion (see e.g. MacNair 2002; Maguen et al. 2009; 2010; 2011; Grossman [1995] 2009, 114–39).[98]

This statement by a former combatant of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda illustrates that these psychological impacts may be especially prevalent among abductees:

[96] Anderson (2018, 228) similarly suggests that, "for many perpetrators of violence, the most traumatic memories relate to the moment when the meaning of the events changes: for example, the point at which a victim stops moving and breathing. In this moment, the perpetrator has fully transitioned to becoming a murderer" and must face "the reality of ending the life of another human being".

[97] Relatedly, "historians argue that the gas chambers during the Holocaust were developed in response to the trauma endured by the armed units charged with the horrific task of mass shootings in Russia" (Cohen 2016, 35; referencing Marrus 1987).

[98] As Maedl et al. (2010, 181–82) note, "PTSD involves three clusters of symptoms: (1) unwanted memories in the form of intrusions, like flashbacks and nightmares; (2) avoidance of reminders of the traumatic event, which includes feeling of numbness (avoidance of bodily reminders); and (3) permanent readiness to initiate an alarm response, resulting in sleeping difficulties, alertness, and hyper-reactivity".

"[participating in violence] affects a lot of people; [some] come back completely traumatized because they were forced to kill innocent people. And now those people are being affected by the innocent blood that they shed in the bush" (in Anderson 2018, 227). Interestingly, however, evidence suggests that even perpetrators who "had full control over" their behaviors and killed out of their own volition can also experience trauma as a result of their actions (Mohamed 2015, 1167).

Yet, as this thesis has highlighted, a large proportion of low-ranking rebel combatants do not engage in civilian targeting to realize their individual preferences but do so in response to the potent social forces to which they are subjected. Given the manner in which they were brought to kill, it is thus likely that these combatants may suffer from significant psychological injuries long after their demobilization, hindering their reintegration into civilian life and their rehabilitation to non-military roles. Without properly addressing such trauma, countries emerging out of civil conflicts may thus end up with large numbers of individuals who – struggling with the physical, social, and emotional consequences of their behaviors – remain stranded at the margins of society. This is, in large measure, because ex-combatants experiencing such psychological ailments are often "unable to take care of themselves and/or provide for their families, to establish and sustain social relationships, or to contribute to income generation" (Maedl et al. 2010, 184). Indeed, ex-combatants suffering from trauma and PTSD tend to be

> heavily impaired in their daily functioning. It is often difficult for them to reintegrate into civilian society, and they are less able to support the process of reconciliation and peacebuilding within their communities and postwar areas at large. Others, who as child combatants adapted to a culture of violence and aggression, have never been taught the moral attitudes and the behavioral repertoire that are required in peaceful settings. These failures to adjust fuel cycles of violence that might reach across generations (ibid, 177).

As Mohamed explains, ex-combatants experiencing trauma can indeed negatively affect prospects for reconciliation: "Reconciliation need not mean deep trust and true forgiveness, but it

does require, at its most basic level, coexistence without violence. And the traumatized perpetrator can pose a threat to even this minimal version of reconciliation. Those who are traumatized are less likely to have empathy for others, and more likely to continue to 'devalue and blame' victims" (2015, 1204; see also Pham, Weinstein, and Longman 2004; Bayer, Klasen, and Adam 2007). As such, when perpetrators of wartime civilian targeting "return from prison terms (or when they return home unpunished after the conflict or violence has ended) and remain haunted by their acts, trauma is no longer simply the private experience of a single person. It becomes, rather, a destructive obstacle to the larger community's process of reconciliation and restoration" (Mohamed 2015, 1164).

The impacts of perpetrator trauma, moreover, are often compounded by the post-war social stigmatization that ex-combatants often experience as a result of being labelled as perpetrators, a categorization that can impede their attempts at reintegration. In Sri Lanka, for instance, "persistent stigma against ex-combatants" is still a significant obstacle to overcome for former LTTE fighters attempting to return to civilian life, even though more than a decade has passed since the group's defeat (The New Humanitarian 2014). In fact, many ex-combatants who belonged to groups that perpetrated widespread wartime atrocities like "the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) or RENAMO in Mozambique, choose not to return to their home communities because of real, experienced, perceived, or anticipated stigmatization" (Nagel 2020, 4; see also McMullin 2013). As Betancourt et al. (2010, 17) have shown, moreover, post-war stigmatization and discrimination can negatively affect "the relationship between war-related experiences and psychosocial adjustment (depression, anxiety, hostility and adaptive behaviors)", preventing ex-combatants from fully healing the psychological injuries that they carry as a result of their involvement in violence. They found, in particular, that lower levels of family and community acceptance among former RUF combatants represented a

key mediating mechanism linking "past involvement in […] killing others" and "poor psychosocial adjustment" (ibid, 17-18). Over time, trauma and stigmatization can thus become mutually reinforcing, further undermining prospects for rehabilitation and reconciliation:

> In some cases, because of assumed or actual abusive violence that combatants have perpetrated against civilians during war times, the attitudes of host communities toward former combatants are negative. Psychiatric distress and malfunctioning, especially when expressed as outward aggression, irritation, or acting out of intrusions (e.g., flashbacks, dissociation), further exacerbate ex-combatants' difficulties in reintegrating into communities and the wider society. Ex-combatants, who are suffering from psychiatric distress, might face double stigmatization for having engaged in combat and for being noticeably psychologically affected (Maedl et al. 2010, 185).

Despite the challenges posed by perpetrator trauma and societal stigmatization to peacebuilding efforts, many disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs do not address the psychological state of former combatants in any meaningful way. Often, the topic of combatant rehabilitation does not even figure in the reintegration segment of DDR programs, "except for unique populations like child soldiers" (Mohamed 2015, 1205). When it does, the "[psychological] components of DDR programs are frequently neither sufficiently specific nor professional enough to address reintegration failure and the threat of continuing […] violence" (Maedl et al. 2010, 177).

Another important issue here is that, in the few programs in which trauma counseling and psychological support are provided (e.g. in Angola or Sierra Leone), there is generally a lack of coordination between bodies in charge of DDR and other local stakeholders: "Existing psychosocial care is often unspecific, badly defined, ill coordinated, and typically not sufficiently harmonized between different providers, such as NGOs, religious-based initiatives, public health structures, DDR programs" (ibid, 199). The efficacy of psychosocial initiatives with ex-combatants, moreover, is seldom systematically evaluated, preventing relevant actors from

identifying best practices within and across cases. As a whole, therefore, it appears that DDR programs have "insufficient awareness on the psychological consequences of organized violence and limited capacities to address them and their effects on different levels", leaving many ex-combatants isolated and not fully "integrated into a societal process of peace-building" (ibid, 199).

These considerations thus indicate that "perpetrator trauma and [social] rehabilitation must be considered in any transitional justice framework, as part of rebuilding societies […] and preventing future violence" (Anderson 2018, 226). In particular, rehabilitative efforts should, at a minimum, be based upon the recognition that perpetrator trauma and stigmatization have important implications for war-to-peace transitions and that some individuals may require sustained psychological rehabilitation and treatment after perpetrating violence in order to meaningfully reintegrate into society (Mohamed 2015, 1168).

Yet, a more ambitious way forward would be to tackle the lack of time and resources that is devoted to combatants' psychological rehabilitation in most DDR programs, while also establishing mechanisms and channels of communication to improve coordination among international and local stakeholders involved in facilitating combatant-to-civilian transitions. Indeed, whether they are done prior to reintegration or within local communities upon the return of ex-combatants, individual assessments and treatments for psychological ailments like PTSD, depression, suicidal ideation or chronic anxiety should constitute a key task in international peacebuilding efforts and post-conflict interventions. This sort of individualized evaluation is necessary because, as this thesis has shown, perpetrators vary considerably in the extent to which they believe in the legitimacy of their wartime behaviors, suggesting that some ex-combatants may be considerably more traumatized and psychologically impaired than others in the post-conflict period.

The provision of such care and support could not only facilitate the psychosocial rehabilitation of former rebel combatants and improve their ability to successfully reintegrate civil life but could also promote societal reconciliation. Without such rehabilitation, reintegration, and reconciliation, ex-combatants are likely to face protracted isolation and a lack of socio-economic opportunities, a situation that could increase the risk of re-mobilization. Considering that former combatants often maintain close ties to one another, a failure to build links with local communities during the reintegration phase is indeed likely to leave former rebels vulnerable to re-recruitment, lacking the social capital to escape the so-called "conflict trap" (Nagel 2020, 3). Accordingly, rehabilitative policies should be designed in a way that offers both ownership to local communities and concrete tools to ex-combatants for them to reintegrate civilian networks. In that regard, community-based vocational and educational training, spiritual and religious workshops, and recreational activities represent some of the initiatives that have been shown to facilitate rehabilitation, reintegration, and reconciliation (Malkanthi 2013).

On the whole, therefore, the socio-psychological rehabilitation of former combatants "is not simply a matter of the perpetrator; it is a matter of peace. Ignoring trauma [and stigmatization] may imperil efforts at reconciliation and thus may undermine the consolidation of a stable peace. Without healing on the part of all affected individuals, reconciliation will necessarily suffer" (Mohamed 2015, 1204–5; see also Martin 2017). When devising policies to rebuild countries riven by war, stakeholders should thus remain mindful of the important connections that exist between combatant rehabilitation, societal reconciliation, and post-conflict stability.

Final Remarks

To be sure, recognizing the potential trauma and rehabilitative needs of perpetrators is not necessarily tantamount to offering them victimhood status or absolving them of any responsibility. Indeed, while, throughout this thesis, I have placed emphasis on the social forces that often drive violence perpetration in civil wars – thereby challenging accounts pointing to individual preferences or predispositions – it is essential not to "[lose] sight of the role of the individual as a decision-maker, as one who is responsible for the consequences of his or her actions regardless of situational forces, as one who can and must make choices even in the most constraining circumstances" (Miller 1990, 196).

Yet, as this thesis has demonstrated, rebel combatants differ considerably in the extent to which they embrace anti-civilian norms and attitudes, as well as in the factors that motivate them to participate in violence against civilians. The first chapter, in particular, highlighted that some low-ranking rebels come to kill civilians for instrumental reasons or through processes of role learning, while others do so on the basis of internalized beliefs about the legitimacy of civilian targeting. It is also highly plausible that some segments of the rank-and-file may be responsible for a disproportionate share of such violence. Some combatants, moreover, join rebel groups through forced recruitment, while others travel thousands of miles to fight in distant conflicts. By casting the focus on the fundamental diversity of rebel perpetrators, this thesis thus suggests that the attribution of guilt and responsibility for wartime behaviors is a task fraught with problems and ambiguity. Undoubtedly, this variation and complexity pose important challenges for local and international tribunals attempting to prosecute involvement in civilian targeting in the wake of intrastate conflicts.

The diversity of perpetrators and the complexity of perpetration processes indeed create a legal conundrum for prosecutors, who must "[individualize] guilt for collective acts" and

"[attribute] motive and intent to confused and inconsistent perpetrators" (Anderson 2018, 249). In seeking clarity on events shrouded by the fog of war, transitional justice processes tend to "reduce the complexity of perpetration, and instead create a perpetrator fiction to suit judicial requirements" (ibid). This often leads to prosecutorial programs that are overly monolithic and that fail to reflect the varied wartime experiences of low-ranking combatants. Instead, when attempting to turn the page on civil war violence, judicial bodies should strive to adopt a more disaggregated approach, which would not only draw a distinction between the leadership and foot soldiers, but which would also account for differences in the depth and duration of involvement, in the method of recruitment, and in the risk of recidivism among the rank-and-file (see e.g. Malkanthi 2013, 109). This approach, while more time-consuming and resource-intensive than blanket judicial schemes, would help to more accurately determine the type of prosecution that is most appropriate for each combatant and, perhaps, whether such prosecution is even necessary in some cases.

Evidently, no single approach is likely to be suitable for transitional justice processes across all post-conflict settings. Conflict-riven countries all have their own historical legacies, social divides, and political realities, which will inevitably color the nature of peacebuilding efforts. Yet, regardless of these differences, local and international stakeholders should not lose sight of the fundamental diversity of combatants' trajectory toward violence, of the inherent complexity of the perpetration process, and of the basic humanity of perpetrators of political violence.

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Appendix A
(Chapter II)

The dataset, codebook, and manual coding sources for this article are available on the *Harvard Dataverse* at the following address: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/MGQE9U.

Coding Procedures

We first selected all insurgent organizations active in civil conflicts from 1989 to 2018 in the UCDP Dyadic Dataset (Pettersson, Högbladh, and Öberg 2019a). Falling outside the scope of the study, we excluded rebel organizations involved in conventional warfare, using the Technologies of Rebellion (TR) Dataset (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). In ambiguous cases, we cross-referenced with data by Valentino et al. (2004) and Krcmaric (2018). Missing data were coded manually.[99]

We then matched these rebel organizations with data on one-sided violence (both the number of events and the number of fatalities) from the UCDP Georeferenced Dataset (GED) (Pettersson, Högbladh, and Öberg 2019). Finally, we matched the resulting observations with a host of variables drawn from different datasets, which we used to construct our operational embeddedness index and to serve as controls. For more information, see the Supplementary File using the link above.

[99] See the Supplementary File on the Harvard Dataverse.

Control Variables

In terms of group-level controls, we introduce a *Rebel Strength* index (1 to 5) drawn from the NSA Dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013) to account for the claim that civilian targeting may be a function of rebel groups' capabilities relative to their governmental opponent (Wood 2010). Drawing from the UCDP External Support Dataset, we include a dummy – *State Sponsorship* – specifying whether a rebel group received support from an external state in a given calendar year (Högbladh, Pettersson, and Themnér 2011). This allows us to account for the claim that civilian victimization may increase when insurgents obtain foreign backing because this support reduces incentives for rebel groups to "foster collaborative ties with civilians" (Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014, 633; see also Weinstein 2007). This support may also reduce the extent to which guerrillas need to achieve operational embeddedness to further their wartime goals.[100] To take into consideration the possibility that *Communist* (Thaler 2012; Green 2018), *Religious* (Isaacs 2016; Walter 2017b) or *Ethnic* (Kaufman 2006) groups may behave differently from other insurgencies, we also include three binary controls to account for these characteristics, all of which come from the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (*FORGE*) *Dataset* (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020).

In terms of conflict-level controls, we include an *Intensity* variable drawn from the UCDP GED. This inclusion is motivated by the fact that, in high-intensity wars, rebels may be more likely to forcibly extract resources from civilians to compensate for the strains caused by heavy military pressures (Downes 2008) or may wish to signal their resolve to the incumbent by targeting noncombatants (Hultman 2007). To address the argument that the prevalence of civilian targeting may increase in relation with the number of rival insurgent factions against which rebel groups

[100] For an opposing view, see Huang and Sullivan (2020).

compete (Wood and Kathman 2015), we also introduce a *Rebel Number* variable drawn from the UCDP Dyadic Dataset, which indicates the number of active rebel groups in a conflict in a given calendar year (Pettersson et al. 2019). Our last conflict-level control – *Government OSV* – is a count variable of civilians killed annually by incumbents, drawn from the UCDP GED. We include this control to account for the possibility that governmental violence may be "successful in deterring civilians from lending support to rebels, causing the latter to increase the intensity of their violent attacks against the population" (Ottmann 2017, 38).[101]

Finally, at the state-level, we include a *Material Endowments* index, which accounts for the presence of three valuable lootable resources (oil, gemstones, and drugs) in the conflict theatre (Buhaug and Lujala 2005; Gilmore et al. 2005; Lujala 2009).[102] This control allows us to take into consideration the claim that groups who fund their rebellion with such endowments may cause more civilian casualties than those relying primarily on social endowments – and may thus face fewer incentives to embed themselves in civilian communities to forge cooperative relationships with the latter (Weinstein 2007).

[101] *Government OSV* is log-transformed to minimize the possibility that a small number of outliers (e.g. the Rwandan Genocide) may skew our results.
[102] The index takes the value of 0 if no such resources are found in the country; 1 if one resource is present; 2 if two resources are present; and 3 if three resources are present.

Alternative Models & Robustness Checks

Exclusion of SNC Conflicts

In these models, we excluded Symmetric Non-Conventional (SNC) conflicts, keeping only the cases which are coded as "irregular" in the Technologies of Rebellion dataset.

	Dependent variables			
	M1 Civilian Fat.	**M2** OSV Events	**M3** Civilian Fat.	**M4** OSV Events
Op. Embeddedness	-0.359***	-0.351***		
	(0.051)	(0.072)		
Op. Embeddedness 2			-0.562***	-0.566***
			(0.083)	(0.109)
Rebel Strength	0.676***	0.761***	0.683***	0.842***
	(0.112)	(0.120)	(0.113)	(0.129)
State Sponsorship	0.264	0.327	0.071	0.209
	(0.189)	(0.219)	(0.194)	(0.217)
Communist	1.297***	0.634**	1.145***	0.562*
	(0.170)	(0.268)	(0.173)	(0.289)
Religious	0.036	0.023	0.134	0.144
	(0.193)	(0.217)	(0.192)	(0.222)
Ethnic	-0.323*	-0.613***	-0.273	-0.529**
	(0.177)	(0.221)	(0.177)	(0.222)
Intensity	1.675***	2.159***	1.720***	2.236***
	(0.167)	(0.212)	(0.169)	(0.216)
Rebel Number	-0.184*	-0.020	-0.235**	-0.089
	(0.098)	(0.101)	(0.100)	(0.098)
Government OSV (ln)	-0.040	0.066	-0.021	0.092*
	(0.038)	(0.048)	(0.038)	(0.054)
Material Endowments	-0.343***	-0.140	-0.377***	-0.144
	(0.088)	(0.092)	(0.089)	(0.088)
Observations	906	906	906	906

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; OSV= One-sided violence; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses.

Alternative Controls

In these models, we controlled for alternative group-level and conflict-level variables. Instead of *Rebel Strength*, we control for *Rebel Size*. Instead of *Intensity*, we include a variable *Battle Fatalities*.

	Dependent variables			
	M1 Civilian Fat.	**M2** OSV Events	**M3** Civilian Fat.	**M4** OSV Events
Op. Embeddedness 1	-0.296***	-0.318***		
	(0.052)	(0.088)		
Op. Embeddedness 2			-0.519***	-0.521***
			(0.086)	(0.129)
Rebel Size (ln)	-0.079	0.061	-0.040	0.094*
	(0.056)	(0.058)	(0.053)	(0.054)
State Sponsorship	-0.064	0.136	-0.203	0.048
	(0.156)	(0.239)	(0.156)	(0.246)
Communist	0.809***	0.399	0.775***	0.396
	(0.161)	(0.424)	(0.171)	(0.474)
Religious	-0.305*	-0.185	-0.225	-0.026
	(0.182)	(0.231)	(0.181)	(0.259)
Ethnic	-0.368**	-0.510**	-0.314**	-0.377
	(0.151)	(0.234)	(0.145)	(0.240)
Battle Fatalities (ln)	0.773***	0.794***	0.775***	0.796***
	(0.048)	(0.064)	(0.048)	(0.068)
Rebel Number	-0.230***	-0.062	-0.271***	-0.152
	(0.089)	(0.099)	(0.088)	(0.099)
Government OSV (ln)	-0.054	0.131	-0.032	0.166*
	(0.035)	(0.083)	(0.034)	(0.095)
Material Endowments	-0.326***	-0.259***	-0.359***	-0.252***
	(0.076)	(0.085)	(0.081)	(0.089)
Observations	973	973	973	973

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; OSV= One-sided violence; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses.

Alternative Independent Variable

In these models, we adjusted the second specification of our independent variable (*Operational Embeddedness 2*) to give equal weight to each indicator (i.e. territorial control and justice provision). To do so, we divide the territorial control variable by 3, making both indicators binary. The result is a 0-2 index.

	Dependent variables	
	M1 Civilian Fat.	**M2** OSV Events
Op. Embeddedness (0-2)	-0.791***	-0.875***
	(0.126)	(0.157)
Rebel Strength	0.536***	0.796***
	(0.098)	(0.108)
State Sponsorship	0.283*	0.398**
	(0.165)	(0.166)
Communist	0.756***	0.197
	(0.166)	(0.266)
Religious	-0.146	-0.053
	(0.177)	(0.193)
Ethnic	-0.513***	-0.832***
	(0.159)	(0.203)
Intensity	1.669***	2.070***
	(0.148)	(0.180)
Rebel Number	-0.271***	-0.103
	(0.104)	(0.106)
Government OSV (ln)	-0.059*	0.077*
	(0.035)	(0.045)
Material Endowments	-0.282***	-0.160**
	(0.081)	(0.077)
Observations	999	999

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; OSV= One-sided violence; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses.

Generalized Linear Models

Here, we rerun our main models using generalized linear models (GLMs) (with logged values of the DV to account for extreme observations) instead of negative binomial ones.

	Dependent variables			
	M1 Civilian Fat. (ln)	**M2** OSV Events (ln)	**M3** Civilian Fat. (ln)	**M4** OSV Events (ln)
Op. Embeddedness 1	-0.147***	-0.269***		
	(0.027)	(0.041)		
Op. Embeddedness 2			-0.255***	-0.450***
			(0.044)	(0.065)
Rebel Strength	0.146**	0.300***	0.180**	0.357***
	(0.071)	(0.110)	(0.072)	(0.110)
State Sponsorship	-0.044	0.018	-0.089	-0.063
	(0.103)	(0.157)	(0.103)	(0.158)
Communist	0.536***	0.615***	0.530***	0.598***
	(0.122)	(0.189)	(0.121)	(0.186)
Religious	0.196*	0.191	0.225**	0.252
	(0.104)	(0.160)	(0.103)	(0.158)
Ethnic	-0.004	-0.166	0.022	-0.120
	(0.095)	(0.149)	(0.095)	(0.148)
Intensity	1.327***	2.077***	1.356***	2.127***
	(0.127)	(0.183)	(0.125)	(0.181)
Rebel Number	-0.157***	-0.185**	-0.164***	-0.197***
	(0.045)	(0.073)	(0.045)	(0.072)
Government OSV (ln)	-0.005	0.027	0.002	0.038
	(0.021)	(0.034)	(0.022)	(0.036)
Material Endowments	0.002	0.068	-0.004	0.052
	(0.051)	(0.071)	(0.051)	(0.071)
Observations	999	999	999	999

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; OSV= One-sided violence; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses.

Appendix B
(Chapter III)

The dataset, list of variables, and manual coding sources for this article are available on the *Harvard Dataverse* at the following address: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/EZDPBU.

Coding Procedures

To establish the universe of cases, I relied on the UCDP Dyadic Dataset, adapting the structure to use the rebel-group-year as the unit of analysis. I then merged the resulting dataframe with data from the UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset, allowing me to code the main dependent variable. Next, I matched these observations with data on Muslim population, Islamist rebels and transnational claims/membership, thereby providing me with the main elements of my composite independent variable. As detailed below, I also used various sources to create a number of control variables, relying on manual coding whenever necessary.

Alternative Models & Robustness Checks

Islamic State Exclusion

In the first two models, IS and all of its affiliates are excluded. In the last two models, only IS-core is excluded. The independent variable is NNIs (FFs).

Table B.1. Negative Binomial Regressions

	Civilian Fatalities			
	M1a	M1b	M2a	M2b
NNIs (FFs)	0.744*	0.559	1.251***	0.983***
	(0.449)	(0.479)	(0.386)	(0.379)
Rebel Strength	0.969***	0.881***	0.912***	0.815***
	(0.201)	(0.204)	(0.193)	(0.198)
Rebel External Support	0.097	0.052	0.086	0.041
	(0.311)	(0.292)	(0.310)	(0.291)
Gov. OSV (ln)		0.047		0.061
		(0.055)		(0.053)
Gov. US Support		0.201		0.198
		(0.293)		(0.280)
Loot		0.378		0.419
		(0.369)		(0.359)
Constant	1.989***	1.867***	2.096***	1.943***
	(0.432)	(0.415)	(0.403)	(0.392)
Observations	1,385	1,301	1,384	1,300

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses; Unit of analysis = rebel-group-year; NNI's = New New Insurgencies; FFs = Foreign Fighters; OSV = One-Sided Violence.

In the first two models, IS and all of its affiliates are excluded. In the last two models, only IS-core is excluded. The independent variable is NNIs.

Table B.2. Negative Binomial Regressions

	Civilian Fatalities			
	M1a	M1b	M2a	M2b
NNIs	0.876	0.737	1.466***	1.196***
	(0.590)	(0.592)	(0.426)	(0.405)
Rebel Strength	0.976***	0.885***	0.927***	0.830***
	(0.200)	(0.206)	(0.193)	(0.201)
Rebel External Support	0.168	0.117	0.178	0.127
	(0.304)	(0.290)	(0.303)	(0.290)
Gov. OSV (ln)		0.045		0.058
		(0.056)		(0.054)
Gov. US Support		0.239		0.249
		(0.287)		(0.277)
Loot		0.376		0.413
		(0.372)		(0.361)
Constant	1.950***	1.815***	2.033***	1.867***
	(0.427)	(0.419)	(0.403)	(0.399)
Observations	1,415	1,331	1,414	1,330

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses; Unit of analysis = rebel-group-year; NNI's = New New Insurgencies; FFs = Foreign Fighters; OSV = One-Sided Violence.

Lagged DV (to account for potential temporal dependence issues)

Table B.3. Negative Binomial Regressions

	Civilian Fatalities (lag)			
	M1a	M1b	M2a	M2b
NNIs	2.103***	1.944***		
	(0.458)	(0.439)		
NNIs (FFs)			1.865***	1.691***
			(0.451)	(0.446)
Rebel Strength	0.963***	0.906***	0.938***	0.881***
	(0.190)	(0.185)	(0.189)	(0.183)
Rebel External Support	0.166	0.151	0.052	0.046
	(0.294)	(0.287)	(0.302)	(0.294)
Gov. OSV (ln)		-0.017		-0.011
		(0.049)		(0.048)
Gov. US Support		0.353		0.318
		(0.339)		(0.347)
Loot		0.264		0.260
		(0.337)		(0.336)
Constant	1.951***	1.862***	2.038***	1.964***
	(0.323)	(0.397)	(0.396)	(0.388)
Observations	1,494	1,410	1,463	1,379

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses; Unit of analysis = rebel-group-year; NNI's = New New Insurgencies; FFs = Foreign Fighters; OSV = One-Sided Violence.

Generalized Linear Model (logged DV)

Table B.4. Generalized Linear Model

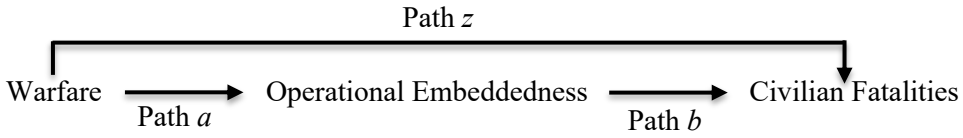
	Civilian Fatalities (ln)			
	M1a	M1b	M2a	M2b
NNIs	2.014***	1.834***		
	(0.618)	(0.582)		
NNIs (FFs)			1.918***	1.683***
			(0.541)	(0.500)
Rebel Strength	0.556***	0.536***	0.560***	0.529***
	(0.176)	(0.171)	(0.177)	(0.171)
Rebel External Support	0.092	0.078	-0.010	-0.026
	(0.269)	(0.265)	(0.263)	(0.262)
Gov. OSV (ln)		0.028		0.031
		(0.043)		(0.044)
Gov. US Support		0.659**		0.602**
		(0.276)		(0.259)
Loot		0.452*		0.467*
		(0.257)		(0.256)
Constant	0.260	-0.137	0.270	-0.091
	(0.271)	(0.309)	(0.279)	(0.308)
Observations	1,495	1,411	1,464	1,380

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; Robust standard errors clustered on dyads in parentheses; Unit of analysis = rebel-group-year; NNI's = New New Insurgencies; FFs = Foreign Fighters; OSV = One-Sided Violence

Appendix C
(Conclusion)

To evaluate whether the arguments of the second article extend beyond irregular conflicts, I use Baron and Kenny's mediation tests, which provide a way to assess if the relationship between technologies of rebellion and the incidence of violence against civilians is mediated by the different average levels of operational embeddedness that guerrillas and conventional rebels display. Mediation tests measure the statistical effects of the "generative mechanism through which the focal independent variable is able to influence the dependent variable of interest" (Baron and Kenny 1986, 1173). As the authors note, "a variable functions as a mediator when it meets the following conditions: (a) variations in levels of the independent variable significantly account for variations in the presumed mediator (i.e., Path *a*), (b) variations in the mediator significantly account for variations in the dependent variable (i.e., Path *b*), and (c) when Paths *a* and *b* are controlled, a previously significant relation between the independent and dependent variables is no longer significant" (ibid, 1176). Following these procedures, I estimate four main models, corresponding to the different causal pathways identified in Figure C.1. I use conventional linear regressions – instead of negative binomial models – to simplify mediation analyses and coefficient interpretations, but the variables and sources remain the same.

Figure C.1. Causal Pathways of Mediational Analysis



Model 1 provides a baseline test of the relationship between *Warfare* and *Civilian Fatalities* (Path *z*).[103] Model 2 then tests for Path *a,* while Model 3 tests for Path *b.* Then, in Model 4, I run a multivariate regression to evaluate the mediating effects of *Operational Embeddedness.* In all models, I include the same group, conflict, and state controls as in the second article. Table C.1. presents the results. Estimates in Model 1 indicate a positive and statistically significant correlation between the type of warfare that an insurgent organization wages and the extent to which it targets civilians. The substantively smaller coefficient of our independent variable in Model 4 in comparison to Model 1 indicates that *Operational Embeddedness* strongly – although not fully – mediates the relationship between *Warfare* and *Civilian Fatalities* (Baron and Kenny, 1986).[104]

To further assess the statistical significance of this mediation effect, I followed Tingley et al. (2014) and ran bootstrap tests, which lend additional support to the claim that operational embeddeness exerts significant mediational influence on Path *z.* These results – which are significant at the $p<0.01$ level across all paths – thus indicate that operational embeddedness constitutes a key mediator shaping the effects that warfare exerts on the propensity of insurgents to victimize civilians. As such, although micro-level case studies would be necessary to fully evaluate the underlying mechanisms, it appears plausible that the patterns of rebel governance and interactive socialization that we documented among embedded guerrillas in the second article may be especially prevalent among rebel groups fighting conventionally.

[103] *Warfare* is coded 1 if a rebel group used guerrilla tactics in a given year, and 0 if it fought conventionally.
[104] Finding full mediation would entail that the statistical significance in Model 4 completely disappears. Yet, full mediation seldom happens in practice.

Table C.1. Mediation Tests

	M1 (Y = Civ. Fat.)	M2 (Y = Op. Emb.)	M3 (Y = Civ. Fat.)	M4 (Y = Civ. Fat.)
Warfare	1.075***	-1.059***		0.965***
	(0.151)	(0.143)		(0.162)
Op. Embeddedness			-0.238***	-0.216***
			(0.031)	(0.032)
Rebel Strength	0.434***	0.152*	0.289***	0.344***
	(0.085)	(0.080)	(0.087)	(0.089)
State Sponsorship	-0.081	0.035	-0.301**	-0.109
	(0.120)	(0.115)	(0.124)	(0.128)
Communist	0.269*	0.859***	0.753***	0.462***
	(0.145)	(0.142)	(0.156)	(0.160)
Religious	0.620***	-1.155***	0.527***	0.287**
	(0.129)	(0.125)	(0.140)	(0.144)
Ethnic	-0.011	-0.023	0.091	-0.017
	(0.112)	(0.108)	(0.120)	(0.121)
Intensity	1.954***	0.599***	1.976***	2.033***
	(0.139)	(0.127)	(0.144)	(0.143)
Rebel Number	-0.257***	-0.009	-0.235***	-0.241***
	(0.057)	(0.058)	(0.064)	(0.064)
Government OSV (ln)	0.024	0.074***	0.041	0.034
	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Material Endowments	0.012	0.395***	0.081	0.053
	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.063)	(0.063)
Constant	-1.941***	1.688***	-0.443*	-1.198***
	(0.258)	(0.271)	(0.261)	(0.306)
Observations	1,400	1,237	1,266	1,237

Notes: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01; OSV= One-sided violence; Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Nonparametric Bootstrap Confidence Intervals with the Percentile Method

	Estimate 95%	CI Lower 95%	CI Upper	p-value	
ACME	0.3659	0.2600	0.48	<2e-16	***
ADE	0.4359	0.0491	0.78	0.016	*
Total Effect	0.8018	0.4278	1.15	<2e-16	***
Prop. Mediated	0.4564	0.2900	0.88	<2e-16	***

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1; Sample Size Used: 1191; Simulations: 500