Targeting the Unarmed

Strategic Rebel Violence in Civil War

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Abstract
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Rebel attacks on civilians constitute one of the gravest threats to human security in contemporary armed conflicts. But why do rebel groups kill civilians? The dissertation approaches this question from a strategic perspective, trying to understand when and why rebel groups are likely to target civilians as a conflict strategy. It combines quantitative studies using global data on rebel group violence with a case study of the civil war in Mozambique. The overall argument is that rebel groups target civilians as a way of improving their bargaining position in the war relative to the government. The dissertation consists of an introduction, which situates the study in a wider context, and four papers that all deal with different aspects of the overall research question. Paper I introduces new data on one-sided violence against civilians, presenting trends over time and comparing types of actors and conflicts. Paper II argues that democratic governments are particularly vulnerable to rebel attacks on civilians, since they are dependent on the population. Corroborating this claim, statistical evidence shows that rebels indeed kill more civilians when fighting a democratic government. Paper III argues that rebels target civilians more when losing on the battlefield, as a method of raising the costs for the government to continue fighting. A statistical analysis employing monthly data on battle outcomes and rebel violence, supports this argument. Paper IV takes a closer look at the case of Mozambique, arguing that the rebel group Renamo used large-scale violence in areas dominated by government constituents as a means for hurting the government. Taken together, these findings suggest that violence against civilians should be understood as a strategy, rather than a consequence, of war.

Keywords: one-sided violence, violence against civilians, killing, civil war, rebel group, rebel strategy, bargaining, count model, Renamo, Mozambique

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IV. "The Power to Hurt in Civil War: A Case Study of the Military Strategy of Renamo". Unpublished manuscript, previously presented at the Annual International Studies Association Convention, San Francisco, CA, 26-29 March 2008.

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Introduction: Targeting the Unarmed

This dissertation deals with the question why rebel groups – organized non-state actors that challenge the power of the state with military means – target civilians in internal armed conflicts. In recent years, rebel groups have been responsible for much violence directed against the civilian population during war (Human Security Center 2005) and media reports about ruthless massacres of civilians are frequent. This is puzzling, since it means that groups struggling to influence or take over state power oftentimes turn their arms against the population whose support and confidence they are likely to need in the future. Sometimes it is simply hard to make any sense of the violence we observe in contemporary conflicts.

I provide a rationalist argument for why rebel groups resort to violence against civilians. By looking at the broader bargaining context of the war, I explain violence against civilians as a conflict strategy. The understanding of civil wars as a military and political process of strategic interaction between the contenders, suggests that rebel groups may target civilians as a way of improving their bargaining position in the war relative to the government.

This chapter is an introduction to the dissertation as a whole, providing the context for the four papers, as well as summarizing the most important arguments and findings. The first section introduces the topic by specifying the research puzzle, presenting the overall theoretical approach guiding the project, and defining violence as conceptualized in the dissertation. The subsequent section introduces previous research and explains how it relates to the present study. In doing so, it also identifies the two research gaps that the dissertation addresses. The third section presents the four papers by summarizing their theoretical arguments and main findings. The final sec-

tion draws some general conclusions and suggests five paths for future research.

The Puzzle

Violence against civilians is an all too common feature of armed conflicts.[1] Slim (2007: 9-11) tells the story of a merciless, but well organized, massacre of 350 villagers in Liberia by Charles Taylor's rebel forces, where only one of the fighters hesitated and allowed people to flee. Unfortunately, Liberia is not a unique case.

The targeting of civilians is quite puzzling when one considers that rebel groups kill civilians in the very country that they strive to rule or politically influence in the future. It is not clear how violence against civilians helps rebel groups to achieve that aim. The fact that both parties in an internal conflict fight within the same political unit makes rebel violence against civilians different than civilian casualties in interstate wars, where two political units fight each other. While parties in interstate conflicts may target the civilian population of the opposing side with the intention of coercing the opponent to surrender by wearing down its morale and will to fight (see e.g. Downes 2006; Best 1983: 267-8), parties in internal conflicts do not always have a clearly defined "other" to strike against. Instead, civilians are often potential supporters of either side in the conflict (Kalyvas 2006). One expects that rebel groups should strive to reassure the civilian population about their ability to govern the country. At a glance, it appears counterproductive to target the people on whose loyalty these groups will eventually

[1] Two recent conflicts may serve as examples of the severity of the problem. Tabeau & Bijak (2005) estimate that approximately 50 percent of all war-related deaths in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992-1995 were civilian, and a study of the Colombian conflict during the period 1988-2003 shows that about a third of the casualties were civilians (Restrepo & Spagat 2008). There are several claims that the share of civilian casualties is in general even larger. The commonly cited figure for the share of civilian victims in contemporary war lies somewhere between 75 and 90 percent (Cairns 1997: 17; Ahlström & Nordquist 1991: 19; Sivard 1991: 20). In particular, several authors claim that there has been a great shift in the character of war, and that the share of civilian fatalities has risen drastically (Chesterman 2001: 2; Kaldor 2001). However, it has been argued that this "myth of civilian war deaths" has no empirical bearing (Human Security Centre 2005: 75); Melander et al. (2008) also provide the statistical evidence that this is the case. The myth of civilian war deaths notwithstanding, civilians remain the direct and deliberate targets of violence in a large share of contemporary civil wars. There is no need to make up numbers to acknowledge the massive suffering that these wars generate.

have to rely if they succeed in their armed struggle. The overall question that the dissertation deals with is thus why rebel groups target the civilian population when they are involved in an armed conflict with the government.[2]

A Strategic Approach

My main theoretical argument is that targeting civilians can best be explained as a strategy that rebels use to influence government response and improve their bargaining position in the war. What sometimes appear to be mobs lashing out in irrational and indiscriminate attacks on the civilian population, might be better explained as a violent group strategy used in combination with more conventional conflict strategies. Hence, targeting of civilians can be understood as a military strategy, as opposed to merely being one form of tactic or unplanned behavior. More specifically, military strategy can be explained as follows: "Strategy represents the way an organization operates a class of military forces to achieve specific aims against an adversary" (Gartner 1997: 18).[3] In this dissertation, I argue that rebels target civilians as a conflict strategy, meaning that they do so to achieve a specific purpose.

However, in order to explain *why* rebel groups employ the conflict strategy of targeting civilians, it is necessary to consider the strategic situation in which they operate. Lake and Powell (1999: 8) describe this in a simple way: "A situation is strategic if an actor's ability to further its ends depends on the actions other take. If so, then each actor must try to anticipate what the other actors will do. But what those other actors will do, of course, often depends in part on what they believe the first actor will do." In the conflict situations that are the focus here, the rebels must consider the reaction of the government when they choose to employ violence.

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[2] The main focus of this dissertation is on rebel groups, by which I mean organized non-state actors who challenge the government with military means. It follows the definition employed by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Harbom 2007). This is meant to be a neutral term encompassing all armed groups that might otherwise fall under various categories such as terrorist groups, insurgents, independence movements, or guerrilla groups.

[3] Gartner describes the difference between strategy and tactics: "Whether to use bombers to attack civilian or military targets is a *strategic* decision. How each bomber attempts to avoid enemy anti-aircraft fire is a *tactical* decision" (Gartner 1997: 20, italics in original). Strategy, in a general sense, can be understood as something an actor pursues to achieve its most preferred possible outcome (Frieden 1999: 41).

Violence against civilians can be understood in more general terms as a strategic behavior aimed to affect the balance of the rebels' relative bargaining power. An armed conflict can be seen as a bargaining process in which the parties settle their dispute with violent means: "[War] appears to be, and threatens to be, not so much a contest of military strength as a bargaining process – dirty, extortionate, and often quite reluctant bargaining on one side or both – nevertheless a bargaining process" (Schelling 1966: 7). Most research on war as a bargaining process focuses on interstate wars or stylized situations with symmetric actors (e.g. Wagner 2000; Filson & Werner 2002; Powell 2004). But intrastate wars are different in a fundamental aspect: it is an asymmetric struggle between the stronger legitimate government trying to defend status quo, and the weaker rebel group challenging the same (Zartman 1995: 7). Since the rebels seek concessions from the government, they must convince the state about their strength unless they are to be dismissed (Lichbach 1995: 57). In short, the quintessence of intrastate bargaining is that rebels seek concessions by showing their strength, and governments try to avoid negotiations or concessions since it means recognizing the group as a legitimate actor. Pillar (1983: 186) argues that the most important aspect of designing military strategy to shape the perceptions of the adversary is "the use of military activity to make one's own side appear strong, confident, highly motivated, and unlikely to concede – in short, to demonstrate determination".

Applying these general ideas to the specific puzzle, I propose that rebel groups target civilians when they expect that it might increase their chances of getting concessions from the government. First, rebels target civilians when they believe that the government is dependent on the support of the population; the strategic aim is to turn the population against the government. In democracies, the government depends on the population in general, since the marginal voter may determine whether the government stays in power. Hence, the whole population can be viewed as the government constituency. Violence against civilians is therefore more likely to occur in democracies. Non-democratic governments need to rely on the support from some section of the population. If this constituency can be easily identified – as when it coincides with ethnicity or a geographical region – it also runs the risk of being targeted by a rebel group in the pursuit of hurting the government. Second, rebels mainly target civilians when they are unable to impose enough costs on the government on the battlefield. It is plausible to

assume that rebels in general are quite reluctant to target civilians, since it may be politically costly. Violence against civilians is used as an alternative strategy when military means are not enough to force the government to make concessions.

Government representatives and policy analysts often seem to perceive attacks on civilians as an attack on the state. For example, the US Embassy spokesman Philip Reeker referred to extremist insurgents in Iraq as people "who would like to disrupt the progress in Iraq".[4] Regarding the spread of violence in Thailand, Human Rights Watch concluded that: "Insurgent groups are targeting civilians to show their power and highlight the Thai government's weakness" (Human Rights Watch 2006). In Sri Lanka, the forecast that government military offensives "may induce them [LTTE] to resort increasingly to urban terrorism to increase the political costs to the government" (Perera 2008) also illustrates the perception that violence against civilians is used as an instrument for hurting the government. This dissertation offers a theoretical framework that accounts for these ideas about the strategic use of violence.

Defining Violence

The focus of this dissertation is on a specific form of violence – namely *the deliberate killings of civilians by rebel groups* in the context of internal armed conflicts. Killings are taken to be a particular type of phenomenon that needs to be addressed separately. A look at some recent conflicts reveals a great variation in the magnitude of killings relative to other types of violence. Civil wars in weak states, such as in Sierra Leone, tend to create a state of chaos where groups can roam freely in the rural areas and engage in looting and sexual violence. In stronger states, like in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is harder for the rebels to operate as freely, and violent acts tend to be more focused – often resulting in a type of warfare with more targeted killings but with fewer acts of other forms of abuse. By looking at killings as a separate phenomenon, rather than lumping together all acts of violence, it is possible to identify more precise causal explanations for this specific type of phenomenon.[5]

[4] "Triple Car Bombings Kill 41, Wound 150 in Shiite City in Iraq", Fox News 12 Dec 2007.
[5] For example, while sexual violence might require a theory about leadership and discipline (Wood 2006), the same theory does not necessarily apply to killings. Similarly, while violent

The main consequence of only including deliberate acts of killings, is that civilians killed in crossfire in battle-related actions are excluded. The common conceptualization of battle deaths is that they include all military and civilian deaths generated by combat, compared to non-battle deaths, which encompass one-sided violence, criminal and unorganized violence, and non-violent mortality caused by the ongoing conflict (Lacina & Gleditsch 2005: 149). I only focus on the one-sided killings of civilians that are not battle-related. The main reason for only taking an interest in these deaths, is that they are the most puzzling form of killings. If a civilian dies in crossfire it could have been the result of a deliberate decision that civilian lives should not stand in the way of military progress; it could also be the unwanted consequence of an attack. However, in a deliberate attack against a civilian target the killing of civilians is most likely intentional.

By civilians I mean non-combatants that are not official representatives of either of the warring parties in the conflict. There is no universally accepted way of defining who is a civilian in an armed conflict – in particular in intrastate conflicts. The "Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War" (1949), stipulates that, in non-international conflicts:

> Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

Thus, this definition of a protected person does not only include non-combatants, but also wounded soldiers. Being a legal text, it includes all those not directly involved in fighting that need protection by law. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, the puzzle relates specifically to the targeting of non-combatants. If a rebel group kills a wounded army soldier it is cruel, and indeed a war crime, but it does not constitute the same type of phenomenon as when a group goes into a village and kills civilians who have never been militarily involved in the conflict.

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forms of looting bring economic gain to the group or the individual (cf. Azam 2002; Azam 2006), killing a group of people does not. Indeed, killing might sometimes be used in combination with looting, but if we separate these phenomena we have a better chance of understanding the interplay between them.

In internal conflicts, particularly in those where the rebels rely on guerrilla warfare, the distinction between fighters and civilians tends to be blurred. Civilians cannot always be distinguished from combatants and the support system of the group, as there is a great overlap in practice (Wickham-Crowley 1990). This poses a serious challenge when examining government violence against civilians in guerrilla wars. Does the government kill civilians when it targets a village in which guerrilla fighters are hiding without uniforms, and where most people provide material and logistical support to the guerrilla movement? Nevertheless, the problem is not as serious when we are concerned with violence by the rebel movement itself against the civilian population. Although it does happen in some conflicts, government soldiers are more seldom blurred with the civilian population. The most straightforward definition of a civilian is therefore to simply talk about non-combatants, i.e. a person who is unarmed, and therefore appears to be a civilian (regardless of where that person has his/her sympathies).[6]

Previous Research

There are two strands of research that are of interest for the purposes of this dissertation: one is the literature on rebel violence against civilians, and the other is the literature on terrorism. Although I have chosen to present them as separate strands of research, the lines are sometimes blurred. Conceptually, the two phenomena are quite different, but not mutually exclusive.[7] Terrorism is usually defined as actions with a political intent, which can also be directed against military targets, whereas rebel violence against

[6] Official representatives of the warring parties are not considered to be civilians, even though they might be unarmed, since they are so apparent targets of the contending warring party. Assassinations of government representatives, for example, are here understood as military attacks against the government, and therefore regarded as battle-related rather than attacks on civilians.

[7] Even if it is possible to conceptually differentiate between the phenomena of terrorism and rebel violence against civilians, it is hard to make the same separation empirically. For example, it is often tempting to define violence by non-state actors in democracies as terrorism, whereas such actions in non-democracies more easily are defined as insurgent violence. By employing a definition that is not dependent upon circumstances, I examine the causes of why non-state actors target civilians – regardless of whether those actions would classify as terrorism or insurgent violence.

civilians is focused on the action regardless of the intention.[8] The fact that rebel groups are defined as non-state groups who challenge the government with military means, consequently limits the concept to apply only to violence that occurs within the context of a civil conflict. This means that pure terrorist actions that occur outside of a conflict setting are excluded. Previous research on rebel violence against civilians is thus the most relevant, since it deals with the same dependent variable. But since terrorism is often defined as a method for affecting government policy, theories about terrorism are relevant for the theoretical modeling of violence as a conflict strategy. The following two sections give a brief overview of previous research on rebel violence against civilians and terrorism, and the last section identifies the two research gaps that the dissertation aims to address.

Rebel Violence against Civilians

The interest in studying rebel (or insurgent) violence against civilians is a growing field of research, which has expanded significantly during the past years. The most relevant research for the purposes of this dissertation is that which explains the strategic use of violence against civilians in conflict. The seminal work by Kalyvas (2006) proposes that warring parties use selective violence as a way of securing compliance from the civilian population by punishing defection.[9] This theory takes into account the interactions with both the opponent and the civilian population: the degree of contestation over a territory, as well as the degree of local information, determines the level of selective violence. While contestation with the government is a crucial factor for determining the likelihood of attaining civilian compliance, violence against civilians is explained as an instrument in the interaction with the civilian population, not with the government. Only indirectly, through the support of the civilian population, is violence used as an instrument for improving the rebels' position in the war.[10]

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[8] Weinberg et al. (2004) present a survey of the definitional elements of terrorism in the academic field. Of the 22 political science oriented articles included, 59% included the element "political", whereas only 23% included the element "civilians".

[9] In a similar argument, Wickham-Crowley (1990) describes what he calls guerrilla terror in Latin America as an instrument of selective violence to elicit compliance from the population.

[10] Kalyvas's theory applies to both governments and rebel groups – here I choose to present the implications for how to interpret rebel violence.

Kalyvas's theory is mainly a theory about selective violence where actors seek territorial control. However, attacks against civilians in the form of massacres are often carried out in areas where rebels are just passing through; bombings of civilian targets often take place in urban areas that the rebels do not strive to control militarily. Kalyvas (2006) refers to these killings as indiscriminate violence, indicating that the perpetrator does not discriminate between individual targets. He suggests that this form of violence is best understood as a second-best alternative for controlling the population, employed when the degree of local information is low. Civilians are then targeted in a 'guilt by association' fashion.

As a comparison, it is interesting to note that studies of government killings have focused on the strategic use of violence against civilians as an instrument in the struggle with the rebels. Valentino et al. (2004) propose that governments are more likely to kill civilians when facing a rebel group relying on guerrilla warfare – the rationale being that these types of situations create strong incentives for the government to target the guerrillas' civilian base of support, as a way of combating groups that are difficult to defeat through conventional warfare. Similarly, Azam & Hoeffler (2002) argue that violence against civilians is used strategically to displace people in areas where rebels have support, since it in turn reduces the rebels' ability to hide and receive support and thereby increases their costs for fighting.

There are several non-strategic explanations for violence to be found in the literature. Mkandawire (2002) criticizes rational explanations for violence and argues that one must understand the nature of the group. Violence in Africa, he contends, can be traced to the fact that most rebel groups have an urban base and are forced to operate like roving bandits in rural areas where they have no support. Zahar (2001) also proposes a theory of rebel-civilian relations, which may in turn account for the degree of violence against civilians during a conflict: the weaker the economic interdependence, and the lower the degree of identification, between the rebels and the civilian population, the more likely that the rebels mistreat civilians.

While also emphasizing the character of the group, some authors have structured it as a principal-agent problem where violence may be rational for the individual fighter, but not for the group. Weinstein (2007) traces the organizational structure and incentives for the rebel fighter to join the movement, predicting that groups that recruit their members with pecuniary rewards are more likely to attract opportunistic fighters, while groups with-

out such resources have to rely on social rewards and consequently gather members more committed to the movement. The type of fighters that constitute the bulk of the movement, in turn, shapes the behavior of the group and the leader's possibility of upholding a disciplined organization. Violence should thus be understood as a consequence of this recruitment process, where the resource-rich groups are more likely to embark on a path of indiscriminate violence against the civilian population.[11] Azam (2002) reaches a similar conclusion about the connection between violence against civilians and indiscipline: there might be a tension between individual incentives for engaging in violent looting and the most optimal group behavior.

Terrorism

The concept of terrorism is much related to the phenomenon of rebel violence against civilians, but it is not equivalent. According to Laqueur (1977: 3-5), there is a great difference between guerrilla warfare and terrorism: "Even in civil war there are certain rules, whereas the characteristic features of terrorism are anonymity and the violation of established norms". Sànchez-Cuenca (2007: 290) claims that the crucial difference is that guerrilla insurgencies control a territory within the state, whereas terrorist groups are militarily weaker and lack a territorial base. Drake (1998: 35) argues that terrorism is one among several methods a group can choose from, and it can be combined with, for example, conventional warfare. This illustrates the disagreement in the literature on how to understand the relation between terrorism and civil war. For a longer discussion about the conceptual disagreement in the literature, see Schmid (1983).

Terrorism is usually defined as politically-motivated violence aimed at spreading fear among a larger audience and influencing a psychological target (e.g. Hoffman 2006; Wilkinson 1974; Drake 1998). Hence, the strategic use of violence for political purposes is not a question for empirical analysis – it is given by the definition of terrorism. As such, terrorism is not only a phenomenon that often occurs in situations other than rebel violence, it is

[11] The idea about violence as a result of indiscipline is also examined in Humphreys & Weinstein (2006). It can be noted that Weinstein conceptualizes indiscriminate violence as all types of "rebel-civilian interaction that involve coercion", including not only killing, but also beating, rape, abduction, forced relocation and labor, looting, and destruction (Weinstein 2007: 199-200).

also a more limited concept. Another difference between terrorism and rebel violence is that many terrorism studies define terrorism by the means of violence used, rather than the target of violence or the type of group. For example, suicide bombing often counts as terrorism regardless of whether the attack is directed against a military base or a civilian restaurant (see e.g. Pape 2005).[12]

Crenshaw (1998) makes a general argument that terrorism is a political strategy used for raising the issue of political change, and several studies specify the strategic explanations for terrorist violence. Butler and Gates (2008) describe terrorism as a cheap form of warfare that rebel groups might choose when the alternative of peace is disadvantageous enough, but conventional or guerrilla warfare is too costly relative to available resources. Even if they talk about terrorism as a form of warfare, they define it as a different phenomenon than rebel violence against civilians. Nonetheless, the theoretical idea, that terrorism is used as a coercive group strategy to enforce political change, should be applicable to rebel violence as a phenomenon that occurs alongside conventional or guerrilla warfare. Sànchez-Cuenca (2007) holds that at least nationalist terrorism which clearly aims at getting territorial concessions from the state, can be understood as a war of attrition in which the terrorists try to break down the will of the state. According to Kydd & Walter (2006), terrorist violence is used as a costly signal for different purposes. For example, attrition can be used to "persuade the enemy that the group is strong enough and resolute enough to inflict serious costs, so that the enemy yields to the terrorists' demands". Similarly, Overgaard (1994) and Lapan & Sandler (1993) model terrorist violence as a signal to the government about their resources. Clutterbuck (1977: 13-14) suggests that terrorists use media for spreading fear by bringing the violence into the homes of people, which strongly affects public opinion and consequently also the response of the government.

Goodwin (2006) introduces the notion of categorical terrorism, defined as indiscriminate attacks against civilians belonging to a group that benefits from the present government. He proposes that insurgents are likely to choose categorical terrorism, rather than conventional or guerrilla warfare, when they feel that they – and their constituents – are the victims of indis-

[12] This is often the case in general terrorism studies as well. Kydd & Walter (2006: 52) define terrorism as "the use of violence against civilians by nonstate actors to attain political goals", but several of their examples are attacks against military targets.

criminate violence by the government. According to Lake (2002), terrorists with extreme goals may actually seek to provoke the government into disproportionate retributive violence: if the government responds to terrorist activity with repressive means it may radicalize moderates and the population consequently shifts its support more in favor of the terrorist group (Lake 2002). Bueno de Mesquita (2005) argues that the opposite government reaction – in the form of concessions – can actually further increase terrorist violence, by drawing moderates from the terrorist organization.

Two Research Gaps

I have identified two gaps in previous research that this dissertation addresses. First, the role of violence against civilians in the military interaction with the government has not been properly explored. In general, most of the studies on rebel violence against civilians tend to view this violence as a phenomenon independent from the armed conflict. Although Kalyvas (2006) is an exception in this regard, he only models the interaction with the government in the form of degree of contestation of a territory as a factor that affects the nature of the interaction with the civilians. Hence, he suggests that rebels target civilians in order to shape the response of the civilian population, not the response of the government. Studies of state killings propose that governments target civilians to affect the ability of the rebels to respond, so why would the rebels target civilians in their attempt to defeat the government? One potential answer lies in the diversity of the relation between the civilian population and the warring parties across conflicts. As suggested by Valentino et al. (2004), government mass killings are more likely in guerrilla wars, since the rebel groups are then more dependent on the civilian population. Hence, it is the possibility of connecting the civilian population to the rebel group that makes it a military target. In a similar way, governments are also likely to be dependent on the civilian population in some wars. Whether rebel groups exploit that connection between the government and the population, and target civilians to weaken the government, has not been explored.

Within the terrorism literature, the interaction with the government and the attempt to shape government action is seen as fundamental. In fact, the aim to influence state politics is in many cases part of the very definition of terrorist violence. These studies indicate the relevance of studying the inter-

action between the non-state actor and the government – and the possibility that the rebels target the government indirectly by attacking a third party, i.e. the civilian population. However, the logic of terrorism cannot be directly applied to the phenomenon of rebel violence in the context of an ongoing civil war. For example, violence against civilians probably does not function as a signal of capabilities in the same way as terrorism does, since such violence requires fewer resources than combat – which the rebels by definition already are involved in. Terrorism studies tend to neglect the role of the armed conflict, but for the purpose of explaining rebel violence against civilians it is necessary to consider the ongoing armed conflict.[13]

The second gap that the dissertation seeks to address is the lack of quantitative global studies on rebel violence. The only statistical analyses that exist are within-case studies of the civil wars in Greece and Sierra Leone respectively (Kalyvas 2006; Humphreys & Weinstein 2006). These studies have been important to examine the relative impact of certain factors on violence in those specific cases. However, these results are not necessarily applicable to other conflicts. All armed conflicts occur in their specific contexts, with different features and dynamics. Rebel groups are also far from a homogenous group of actors, and the characteristics of the groups certainly affect the violent development of the conflict. Case studies and comparative studies have been an important tool in exploring the logic of violence, and the operation of rebel groups. However, for a more general understanding of violence against civilians it is necessary to examine a wider sample of rebel groups, to identify possible commonalities in the way that these groups behave – despite their different contexts. In that way we can develop more general theories about the use of violence in civil wars.

There are several examples of global quantitative studies of terrorist violence, which are mainly based on data from either ITERATE (Mickolus 2006) or RAND-MIPT.[14] The former only includes transnational terrorism, thereby excluding all incidents of rebel violence against civilians in civil war that might otherwise have been classified as acts of terrorism. The latter includes also domestic terrorism, which sometimes overlaps with rebel vio-

[13] Terrorist violence, as often defined and identified, sometimes includes rebel violence against civilians in low-intensity conflicts, whereas violence that occurs within the frame of a civil war is rarely included.

[14] The RAND-MIPT (Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism) Terrorism Incident Database. Available at http://www.tkb.org.

lence against civilians. However, this data includes both attacks against government targets and non-lethal incidents of terrorism.[15] For the purposes of exploring why rebels – a group involved in an armed conflict with the government – would also choose to kill civilians, there has been no available global data until now.[16]

Presenting the Four Papers

The four papers in the dissertation all aim to address the gaps in previous research identified above. The first gap, regarding the lack of theorizing about the role of violence against civilians in the violent interaction with the government, is addressed in three of the papers. Paper 2 and 4 do so by focusing on the vulnerability of the government to attacks on the civilian population, explaining why the government is indirectly hurt when the rebels target civilians. Paper 3 looks at the dynamics and outcome on the battlefield, suggesting when we can expect rebels to choose to target civilians. The second gap, the paucity in global quantitative studies on rebel violence, is addressed in three of the papers. Paper 1 introduces a new dataset that enables the quantitative evaluation of rebel behavior across conflicts. Paper 2 and 3 both employ these data to evaluate the hypotheses that they set up.

Paper 1: Introducing Data on One-Sided Violence

"One-Sided Violence Against Civilians in War: Insights from New Fatality Data", is a co-authored article with Kristine Eck, which was published in *Journal of Peace Research* 2007. It introduces new data from Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) on one-sided violence against civilians for the period 1989-2004, and presents some descriptive statistics on the patterns of violence. Moreover, it examines how well some factors that have proved powerful at explaining the outbreak of genocide can account for the occur-

[15] In the definition of terrorism, MIPT offers some examples of how events are coded. If a group breaks into a prison and stirs up a riot, this is according to RAND-MIPT an act of terrorism. This is obviously a different phenomenon than rebel killings of civilians during an armed conflict. See code book at http://www.tkb.org/RandSummary.jsp?page=method

[16] The Konstanz One-Sided Violence Event Data Set (KOSVED) is a recent data collection effort on one-sided violence on an event basis that has just begun to take shape, but this dataset will eventually only cover approximately a dozen civil wars (Bussmann et al. 2008).

rence and magnitude of one-sided violence by both governments and rebel groups.

The purpose of the article is to present a time-varying, actor-based dataset of the magnitude of one-sided violence against civilians in armed conflict, which has been collected by the UCDP. Until now, the existing global data on violence against civilians has been limited to cross-sectional data on the occurrence of government mass killings or genocide (Valentino et al. 2004; Harff 2003). Hence, the new dataset contributes in three ways. First, it has data for both governments and rebel groups, thereby opening the possibility of quantitative study of rebel violence, and the comparison across types of actors. Since the dataset is actor-based, it also provides specific information for each rebel group in those conflicts where there are several dyads simultaneously active. Second, the dataset provides annual observations. This enables trend analyses of descriptive statistics, as well as statistical analyses tracing the causal process of violence using time-varying independent variables. Third, the definition of one-sided violence utilizes a threshold of 25 deaths per year, thereby offering data also on incidents of violence of lower intensity than previous datasets. While mass killings fortunately only occur in a few armed conflicts, lower levels of one-sided violence directed at the civilian population are all too common. The new dataset makes the study of such violence possible.

The article gives a thorough presentation of the operational definition of one-sided violence, as well as the data-collection procedures. The initial empirical examination of these data on one-sided violence presented in the article reveals some interesting patterns and correlations. Rebel groups are generally more violent against civilians than government, but governments tend to use more violence when they do engage in one-sided killings. At the least, this implies that rebel groups and governments employ violence against civilians differently, and, quite likely, with different strategic considerations. There is also a difference in the variation of violence in different types of conflict. Rebels are approximately equally violent in territorial and governmental conflicts; governments, however, employ much more violence in governmental compared to territorial conflicts.

The article also statistically examines whether the determinants of genocide identified by Harff (2003) can account for the incidence and magnitude of one-sided violence. We look at previous upheaval/war, autocracy, and trade. These factors are generally not significant; instead, the annual inten-

sity of conflict – whether the conflict reaches more than 1,000 battle deaths or not – turns out to be a better predictor for one-sided violence. The interesting finding is that this only applies to rebel groups; governments are not significantly more violent towards the civilian population when the intensity of conflict is high. Another interesting comparison between rebel groups and governments is that while autocracies are the most violent of governments, rebel groups are instead more violent when fighting a democratic government. While this analysis only provides some initial preliminary findings, it demonstrates the importance of disaggregating the study of conflict into different types of violence, as well as different actors.

Paper 2: Democracy as an Incentive for Violence

In "Rebel Attacks on Civilians: Targeting the Achilles Heel of Democracies", I develop one of the preliminary findings in the first paper, namely that rebel groups fighting a democratic state in fact seem to be more violent towards the civilian population than groups in non-democratic states. It also links up with the terrorism literature, within which several studies have identified a positive correlation between democracy and terrorism (e.g. Eubank and Weinberg 1994, 2001; Li 2005; Pape 2005). The paper argues that rebels are more likely to target civilians when fighting a democratic state, since the rebels exploit the fact that governments are the guarantors of protection for the population. Democratic governments are particularly vulnerable to rebel attacks on the population, since the civilian population can hold the government accountable for failures to provide security. Under such circumstances, rebels who seek to coerce the government have an incentive to target civilians. However, if democratic governments are provoked into targeting civilians, and thereby disregard their dependence on the population, the incentives for rebels to target civilians are reduced. A statistical evaluation of the severity of rebel violence against civilians in armed conflict, 1989-2004, supports these claims.

This paper highlights the crucial difference between governments and rebel groups – regarding their positions in the conflict and in relation to the civilian population. First, while the government is always the defender, the rebel group is the challenger that seeks to overthrow the government or gain some form of concessions. Second, the government has the ultimate responsibility for the security of the population. In democratic states, the

government is strongly dependent on the civilian population for continued support to stay in power. The civilian population can punish the government for failures to provide for its security. Rebels thereby have an incentive to target civilians as a way of indirectly striking against the government.

The paper also highlights the special role of democracy in internal conflicts. Democracies are in general conflict reducing, and there is some evidence that they are less likely to experience armed conflict or political violence (e.g. Hegre et al. 2001; Benson & Kugler 1998).[17] However, once a group has chosen to challenge the government with military means, the strength of democracy can actually be turned into a weakness. Rebel groups can exploit the fact that the government is held accountable by the population, and force the population to put pressure on the government. While it is a militarily cheap strategy for the rebels to target civilians, it is difficult and costly for the government to protect the population from such attacks. Interestingly though, we are less likely to observe retributive violence directed against the civilian population in democracies. This implies that rebel groups are driven by the expected coercive effect of violence, and a successful management of rebel violence must therefore consider alternative ways of changing the incentives for violence in democracies into disincentives.

Paper 3: A Weapon of the Weak?

"Battle Losses and Rebel Violence: Raising the Costs for Fighting", is a published article that appeared in *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2007. It examines whether violence against civilians is related to the performance of the rebels on the battlefield. While the statistical results in the first article indicated that rebels kill more civilians the more intense the conflict is, this article disaggregates that intensity variable into a measure of the size of losses in combat for each actor. It is proposed that rebel groups who lose in combat, target civilians in order to impose costs on the government. When the rebels attack civilians, the government may suffer both political and military costs. Violence against civilians is thus used as an alternative conflict strategy aimed at pressuring the government into concessions. The

[17] This correlation has nevertheless been contested in several recent studies. For example, Vreeland (2008) shows that it is a result of the coding of the Polity index, which takes political violence into account, and Collier & Hoeffler (2004) show that democracy does not reduce the risk of civil war when controlling for economic variables.

argument is evaluated using monthly data on all rebel groups involved in an armed conflict from January 2002 to December 2004.

Like the previous paper, the argument in this paper takes its starting point in the asymmetric relation between the government and the rebel group. But rather than looking at the political incentive for violence, it focuses on the military incentives for targeting civilians by examining how well the rebels are doing in combat. According to Clausewitz (1976:77) the power of the enemy consists of "*the total means at his disposal* and *the strength of his will*" (italics in original). Combat can, apart from aiming at defeat and military victory, help reduce uncertainty about capabilities and resolve (Reiter 2003:30). This is essential if we believe that a common reason conflicts erupt is that parties end up in an information failure due to incentives to misrepresent private information (e.g. Fearon 1995; Powell 1999; Reed 2003; Öberg 2002). Once parties end up in a war they rely on the display of capabilities and resolve to converge their beliefs about the relative power; parties learn from each other's behavior and adjust their expectations about the outcome, and this in turn affects the actual outcome of the war (Powell 2004; Filson & Werner 2002; Slantchev 2003; Reiter 2003).

While the negotiation table offers possibilities for cheap talk, the battlefield outcome is hard to manipulate (Slantchev 2003; Wagner 2000: 478). Losses in combat are not entirely a result of an unsuccessful strategy – they could be affected by other factors such as the weather or luck – but actors must use the information available to assess the success of a strategy (Gartner 1997). Thus, when there is uncertainty about distribution of power and the costs of fighting, combat conveys important information about what type one is facing (Powell 2004: 352). These beliefs about relative power and costs for fighting, affect whether a party is willing to make concessions rather than fighting (Fearon 1994: 22). Lichbach (1995:58) proposes that violence improves an opposition party's bargaining leverage in three ways: by establishing a group's irrationality; by creating a reputation for toughness; and by posing a credible threat and thereby enforcing government concessions. The government is more likely to make concessions when it believes it is facing a rebel group with a high rather than a low resolve, since it means that the conflict will be a long and costly pursuit.

By employing extremist violence, the rebels signal a strong resolve and a willingness to continue fighting although militarily weaker. Just like terrorist groups who choose to carry out spectacular acts of violence in order to

communicate their message instead of engaging in combat, rebel groups that are not large enough or who lack the means to fight a large-scale civil war may still have a high stake in the conflict and be willing to fight a dirty war to attain their goals (cf. Lake 2002). It works as a signal to the government about the future costs of the war. A less resolved group would never target civilians, because once a rebel group has openly killed civilians it will be viewed as a terrorist organization. If the group then gives up, because of low capabilities and resolve, it is most likely left with no concessions and harsh repercussions. Hence, only the rebels that are resolved enough to continue fighting a protracted war would target civilians. Extremist violence against civilians thus helps to separate out those rebels that are willing to engage in a war of attrition from less resolute types, forcing the government to update its beliefs about the future costs of conflict.

Paper 4: A Closer Look at Large-Scale Violence

In "The Power to Hurt in Civil Wars: A Case Study of the Military Strategy of Renamo" I explain the logic of the seemingly indiscriminate violence used by Renamo during the war in Mozambique. The analysis builds on interviews with the Renamo leadership and academics, carried out in Mozambique in September and October 2007, as well as secondary sources on the patterns of violence. This case study illustrates the general argument about strategic violence put forth in the dissertation and shows how it can be employed to analyze even such a violent group as Renamo.[18] The theoretical argument follows the same logic as that in paper 2, i.e. that the government is vulnerable to attacks against civilians when it is dependent on the population, but here applied to a non-democracy. The parts of the population that were most severely targeted by Renamo were also the most important government constituents, and so a similar type of logic was at place.

Renamo has been accused of being one of the most brutal rebel organizations in recent decades (e.g. Africa Watch 1992; Vines 1996; Hanlon 1991). Its brutal use of violence has been described as being "beyond any

[18] Renamo has been put forth as an example of a competing explanation: it did not manage to recruit people committed to the cause for fighting and thereby attracted opportunistic fighters, which according to Weinstein (2007) is the reason for indiscriminate violence against the civilian population. However, this paper employs a narrower conceptualization of indiscriminate violence than Weinstein does in his work, focusing on killings, as opposed to a broader concept including all forms of coercive interaction with the civilian population.

rational military logic" (Young 1990: 506). I argue that since these large-scale killings were mainly used in areas where the population was perceived as government supporters, the purpose was to weaken the support for the government and create war fatigue among the population. Killing civilians was thus a way of demonstrating what Schelling (1966) calls 'the power to hurt'. The strategy aimed at getting concessions rather than defeating the government. The analysis supports the idea that Renamo's main military objective was to destabilize the government and force it to make concessions. This agenda was a heritage from the early days of the war when Rhodesia and South Africa supported and trained Renamo. I suggest that throughout the war, this objective led to a more general strategy of hurting and weakening the government through warfare against the civilian population. Renamo also had a disciplined military organization, with a strict chain of command. Hence, it seems more plausible to talk about strategic violence than acts of indiscipline.

The study of Renamo complements the quantitative studies by illustrating how the theory plays out in a specific conflict in a non-democratic country. Case studies have specific advantages, and these are the aspects where quantitative methods are generally weak: they are superior for 1) achieving conceptual validity, 2) deriving new hypotheses, 3) exploring causal mechanisms, and 4) assessing complex causal relations (George & Bennett 2004: 19-22). Regarding the ways the present case study complements the quantitative studies in the dissertation, the first three points mentioned by George and Bennett are specifically relevant.

First, one main advantage is the opportunity to focus on the concept of one-sided violence, and evaluate the plausibility of treating killings as a distinct form of violence, rather than as the most extreme form of violence on a larger spectrum. The study reveals a variation in the types of violence that dominated the different regions in Mozambique, varying from non-lethal threats to massacres. The non-lethal violence seems to have filled a different purpose than large-scale killings, indicating the need to differentiate between different forms of violence when developing theories about violence against civilians.

Second, it identifies the importance of zones of support within the country in conflict, a variable that has been omitted in the quantitative studies. These zones are quite subtle in that they are based more on historical factors than on ethnicity, and therefore a case study is required to identify the

link between these zones and the pattern of violence. Moreover, the impact of the regional context and historical factors could be taken into account and, interestingly, these factors strengthened the theoretical explanation suggested in the paper.

Third, the case of Renamo has helped to further examine the causal mechanism by exploring the role of military objectives and organization. While the theory proposes that rebel groups target civilians to impose costs on the government, the case shows that Renamo indeed had the intentions of weakening the government. Moreover, it shows that Renamo had the military organization to implement centrally planned strategies. Thereby, the case study enables a critical evaluation of one assumption that underlies the quantitative studies, namely that rebel groups are unitary actors and that they are disciplined enough to implement strategies. For the theory about strategic violence to make sense, it is important that the rebels actually have an intention of hurting the enemy and the capacity to act as a unified actor. The case of Renamo shows that even a group that has been accused of senseless atrocities may act with military discipline and use indiscriminate violence purposefully for political and military gains.

Conclusions and Paths for Future Research

The theoretical approach in the dissertation is based on the idea that violence against civilians may be used as a conflict strategy – hence, as a means for achieving political or military gains. In doing so, I propose that the civilian population – a group that is usually thought of solely as a provider of support – is used as a means in the power struggle of the violent bargaining process between the rebels and the government. Civilians are targeted when it may serve to impose costs on the government. I have identified two situations when the government is dependent on the civilian population, which provides the rebels with incentives to target civilians. The first is in democratic states. Democratic governments depend on the population for re-election, and since every adult civilian is a potential voter, the population at large can be viewed as the constituents of the government. The second situation is non-democratic states where the government constituents can be identified through ethnic identity or geographic belonging. The government is then vulnerable to dissatisfaction among that particular group of

civilians. In both these instances, the rebels have incentives for targeting civilians as a way of hurting the government and compel it into concessions. When rebels lose on the battlefield, and fail to impose enough costs on the government through military efforts, they are more likely to choose a strategy of targeting civilians. Their need for an alternative conflict strategy is increased in such situations.

Kalyvas (2006) criticizes studies of violence that are limited to studying only the interaction between the warring parties, since the assumption of unitary actors is misleading. Nevertheless, I maintain that viewing rebels as unitary actors is fruitful for approaching the question of violence against civilians and understanding their behavior in civil war. Even though there is of course variation across rebel groups, the case of Renamo bears witness of a clearly unitary rebel group that managed to uphold control and discipline despite being large and operating over a vast geographic area. The focus on rebel-government interaction also helped to develop an understanding of violence against civilians. Just as the bargaining theory has proven fruitful for explaining the outbreak of conflict, it can be applied to the behavior of armed groups during an ongoing conflict.

Taken together, the findings in this dissertation suggest that rebel groups use violence against civilians as a conflict strategy, based on an assessment of the vulnerability of the government and the probability of success in combat. While the dissertation has aimed to provide new answers as to why rebel groups target civilians, the findings also generate new questions. I have identified five paths for future research to deal with.

One question that the dissertation has not been able to deal with thoroughly, relates to the costs of targeting civilians. The theoretical argument in paper 3 builds on the assumption that, even though violence against civilians is a militarily cheap strategy, it is often politically costly for the rebel group. Rebels risk losing support, during the conflict and in a post-conflict situation, but they also risk sanctions from the international community. Because it is costly, it signals resolve and informs the government about the future costs of conflict. This is similar to Kydd & Walter (2006) who portray terrorism, defined as violence against civilian targets to obtain political goals, as a costly signal. However, they predict that when the costs of targeting civilians are low, non-state actors are more likely to do so. The calculation of costs of violence versus the expected effects of the same violence needs to be further explored. The decision calculus to target civilians is

probably different the first time, compared to subsequent decisions. But how the crossing of this threshold affects the decision, is not clear. It is possible that since the costs of targeting civilians are the highest for a group the first time, the expected effect on the response of the government is in fact also highest the first time.

A second, and closely related, path is to more closely examine the dynamics of violence over time and whether parties adapt their behavior as a consequence of learning. Although this issue has not been the focus of any of the papers in the dissertation, results in both paper 2 and 3 indicate that rebels are less violent over time; when conflict duration is included as a control variable it usually has a negative and statistically significant effect on rebel violence against civilians. However, in the case of Renamo, as shown in paper 4, large-scale violence actually increased over time and peaked the years before the peace agreement was signed.[19] A more dynamic approach to the study of violence and the interaction between the parties would help to sort out this puzzle. The government is likely to update its responses to rebel violence, and a change in behavior of the government is likely to inform the rebels of the likely effect of violence as a conflict strategy. If the government is provoked into using equally dirty means of fighting, and also resort to warfare against the people, the rebels need to adapt to that. As paper 2 shows, this is actually likely to decrease the intensity of rebel violence in democratic government. But how rebels react to government violence in non-democratic countries could be very different and should be further examined.

A third path identified here is to further explore the role of identity and divided societies. Related to the issue discussed above, violence may for example be less costly when the two warring parties represent clearly divided groups in society. In such situations, when there are "natural constituencies", for example in the form of ethnic groups, it is easier to identify the supporters of the other warring party. As paper 4 shows, violence can be targeted against government constituents as a way of further weakening the government. But in divided societies, the question of retaliation might also be important. I have argued in the dissertation that retaliation in the form of targeting civilians does not work in internal conflicts, since both the rebels

[19] The tension between the general findings about time and the specific case of Renamo indicates that the path dependency that Weinstein (2007) observes among his cases (of which Renamo is one) is not generally applicable to civil wars.

and the government struggle for the same population. Even if the rebels claim to represent one group in society, the government wants to defend status quo, and thereby also to defend that group from influence from the rebels. However, as we know, there are conflicts in which the society is so divided that this reasoning does not apply. When the government targets the rebels' natural constituents, such attacks increase the insecurity and might push the moderates within a group to support the extremists to defend them, and thereby lower the costs for the extremists of using retributive violence (cf. Kydd & Walter 2002; de Figueiredo & Weingast 1999). One way to develop these thoughts is to take a closer look at the role of identity, and how it matters for the use of violence as an instrument of war.

A fourth path for future research is to take a wider look at different types of warfare. Violence against civilians, as conceptualized here, has the advantage of being a clearly defined phenomenon that can easily be compared across cases. It has been important for the understanding of why groups choose to resort to such a strategy. I have argued that killing is a particular *kind* of violence, rather than the most extreme on a spectrum of violence. If so, it would be interesting to further examine how one-sided violence is used in combination with other forms of violence. How rebels combine different forms of violence determines the type of warfare that is produced. While some conflicts resemble conventional war, with high battlefield intensity and low levels of violence against civilians, others take the form of irregular wars with much terrorist-like violence or cleansing operations against the civilian population. The latter has been suggested as the common feature of so-called 'new wars' (Kaldor 2001). Kalyvas (2005) disaggregates this category and distinguishes between irregular wars and symmetric non-conventional wars. By taking this research one step further in thinking about different types of warfare, one could examine what factors determine how violence against civilians is used relative to combat and other types of violent behavior.

The last, and perhaps the most pertinent, question that comes to mind is how to manage violence against civilians, and in a longer perspective how to prevent rebels from targeting civilians during armed conflicts. How can the international community intervene in the most efficient way? International laws are difficult to apply to non-state actors. However, with the recently accepted norm of "responsibility to protect" within the United Nations, a greater responsibility is demanded from the international community to act

upon crimes against humanity – even in internal wars. New research is needed to examine which tools are the most efficient in managing rebel violence. One potential problem is that only focusing on the legal aspect and pursuing legal processes against rebel leaders who are guilty of attacking civilians may sometimes prolong and intensify the conflict, since leaders will be reluctant to give in if they know that prosecution awaits them. Therefore, it is highly important to analyze the impact of different measures that the international community can take. Based on the insights from this dissertation – that violence is often used as a conflict strategy – it is necessary to take the question one step further and ask how the incentives for rebel groups to target civilians can be altered by outside actors.

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