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Diplomatic Statements and the Strategic Use of Terrorism in Civil Wars

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Abstract

How does third-party diplomatic and material support affect rebel groups' use of terrorism in civil wars? We argue via a game-theoretic model that diplomatic support prompts prospective shifts in rebel tactics, from civilian to military targets, in anticipation of material support, while material support alters the cost structure of attacks, leading to the same tactical shift. We empirically test the model's implications using an original dataset of UN resolutions about countries in civil wars as well as a case study of South Africa. In support of our theory, we find that both diplomatic resolutions and material interventions in favor of the rebels are associated with rebel tactical shifts, leading to decreased reliance on violence against civilians. These findings demonstrate the value of modeling civilian and military targeting as substitutes rather than examining civilian targeting in isolation.

Keywords

diplomatic statement, civil war, terrorism, civilian targeting

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Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article

Introduction

Third parties frequently provide diplomatic and material support to civil war actors. Between 1975 and 2009, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and Security Council passed 1,388 resolutions concerning countries engulfed in intrastate conflicts. During this period, the UN passed more than 170 resolutions which either opposed the Israeli government's actions or supported the non-state actors fighting Israel. But it also passed resolutions about less geopolitically prominent conflicts in countries ranging from Angola to India. Third parties sometimes follow up this diplomatic support with material intervention. In fact, of all of dyad-conflict-months with active conflicts from 1975 to 2009, a quarter featured material intervention in favor of the rebels, and a quarter featured intervention in favor of the government.

Despite the prevalence of third-party engagement in civil wars, we still know very little about *why* and *how* third-party diplomatic and material support affect rebels' use of violence against civilians. Existing studies suggest that rebels who seek international legitimacy limit their use of civilian targeting (e.g., Fazal 2018; Jo 2015; Polo 2020; Stanton 2016). However, there is also evidence that armed actors who receive external material sponsorship are less reliant on the civilian population and thus engage in increased levels of civilian abuse (Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014; Zhukov 2017). In response to this apparent contradiction, we focus here on the role that both forms of support play in rebels' operational and tactical choices, looking at the strategic use of terrorism—the deliberate targeting of civilians—as a tactic in civil war.[1]

We begin with a formalization of the the strategic interaction between a rebel group and a third party, focusing on how the rebel group allocates attacks across civilian and military targets. We assume, as existing studies do, that the marginal cost to the group of targeting civilians arises primarily from subsequent loss of support and is relatively independent of the capabilities of the group (e.g., Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014; Stanton 2016). The marginal cost of attacking military targets, in contrast, decreases as the capabilities of the group increase. We also assume that the third party in our model is sympathetic to the goals of the rebel group but would prefer not to be associated with a group that attacks civilians; the international community imposes audience costs on third parties who support abusive rebels. Under those assumptions, we show that, all else equal, more reliance on civilian targeting by the rebel group decreases expected material support from the third party. Furthermore, after rebels receive third-party material support, they decrease their reliance on civilian targeting. We thus show that a third party's material support can shift a rebel group's tactics to align with its interests, reducing the commitment problem that arises after the group has received material resources.

We also incorporate the possibility of a prior diplomatic statement of support related to the rebel group in order to assess its downstream effects. We do so by comparing two different model scenarios. In one, an exogenous multinational group of states or an international organization, such as the UN, has issued a diplomatic statement supporting the rebel group. In the other, no such statement has been made. We argue that such a public statement of support focuses attention on the group and, in so doing, couples audience costs

arising from later material support to the group's immediate actions following the diplomatic statement. We show that this coupling can induce the rebel group to decrease its use of civilian targeting following the diplomatic support, even when the statement is costless or made by actors different from the ones providing later material support.

We test the implications of our formal model with a large-N quantitative analysis on an original dataset of UN resolutions concerning countries in intrastate conflicts between 1975 and 2009. Using the United Nations Digital Library, the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP), and the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), we find support for our argument. UN pro-rebel resolutions are negatively correlated with rebel reliance on violence against civilians, measured as the proportion of attacks targeting civilians. Material interventions in favor of the rebels are also generally correlated with decreased rebel reliance on terrorism, although not all kinds of material intervention have the same effects. We illustrate these dynamics with case of the African National Congress (ANC).

Our study makes three contributions to existing literature on civilian targeting in civil wars. First, we examine the interplay between diplomatic and material third-party support, modeling how diplomatic support can reputationally couple rebels and a third party. Second, we model civilian and military targeting as *substitutes* rather than examining civilian targeting in isolation; in doing so, we treat civilian and military targeting as a strategic decision by warring parties. Only a few articles, such as Polo (2020), have taken a similar approach. Third, we demonstrate the unique strength of a multi-method approach in the study of civilian targeting in civil wars. Our game-theoretic model allows us to resolve the contradictory findings in the literature, while our original dataset about the content of UN resolutions concerning countries in civil wars will help researchers examine broader causes and consequences of UN interventions on dynamics of civil wars. We also offer a case study of South Africa that helps illustrate the key logic of our argument. Together, our mixed-method approach sheds new insight into civilian targeting in the context of third-party intervention in civil wars.

Terrorism and Civilian Targeting in Civil Wars

Recent research has explored the causes of rebel and state use of terrorism in conflict (e.g. Balcells 2017; Cohen 2016; Green 2018; Manekin 2020; Maynard 2022) and the ways third-party involvement affects various aspects of intrastate conflict (e.g. Balch-Lindsay, Enterline, and Joyce 2008; Cunningham 2006; Kathman, Benson, and Diehl 2023; Lacina 2006; Regan 2002). Within this literature, we focus on four inter-related explanations for rebel use of terrorism in civil war: the anticipation of other actors' actions, international legitimacy, international intervention, and military weakness.

Rebel groups anticipate the actions of other actors, attempting to maximize diplomatic and material support when making targeting decisions. Rebels know that civilian targeting could alienate local citizens, so they avoid such abuse when they rely on the local population. Conversely, external material sponsorship increases levels of rebel civilian abuse (Polo 2020; Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014; Zhukov 2017). Rebel groups, however, need not only material support from third parties but also diplomatic support,

which is sometimes conditioned on rebel behavior. Indeed, rebels are more likely to comply with international law when they seek legitimacy from domestic and international audiences who care about human rights (Fazal 2018; Jo 2015; Stanton 2016). Groups which show restraint towards civilians despite government violence are more likely to succeed, in part because the restraint makes Western governments more likely to engage in coercive diplomatic action against the abusive state (Stanton 2020). In other words, rebels reduce terrorism in order to garner diplomatic support but increase such abuse once they have received third-party material support. These findings seem contradictory because diplomatic support is often a prerequisite for material support. Why would rebels would risk losing their material support by engaging in terrorism? Indeed, Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood (2014) find that some third parties effectively limit the terrorism used by the rebels they materially support. We take a novel approach considering both forms of third-party support together.

We also contribute to existing literature by focusing on the proportion of attacks against civilians rather than absolute levels of terrorism. Considering absolute levels of civilian targeting, as do most studies we have discussed, elides the allocation choice that rebels must consistently make between civilian and military targets (Polo 2020).[2] We contend that rebel groups with relatively larger proportions of their attacks targeting civilians will be viewed more negatively by the international community, regardless of the overall level of attacks on civilians. For example, according to the UCDP, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) killed 6,064 civilians in one-sided violence (1989-1996). The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone killed a similar number: 5,986 civilians (1991-2001). However, 87 percent of the NPFL's total casualties were civilians whereas only 51 percent of the RUF's were. Although the RUF and NPFL worked together, only the NPFL's leader, Charles Taylor, has garnered international infamy.[3]

We argue that rebels' repeated choice to target civilians or the military is affected by third-party actions, and we focus on how third-party actions alter the *costs* of attacking each target while holding the benefits of attacks fixed. We assume that attacks against civilians are available to even low-resource groups (e.g. Crenshaw 1981; Pape 2003; Wood 2010; Wood, Kathman, and Gent 2012) whereas attacking state forces requires weaponry more equivalent to that of the state (Fearon and Laitin 2003).[4] Third-party interventions increase the material resources available to rebel groups, aiding their ability to conduct military targeting. That reduces the marginal material cost of attacking military targets, as compared to civilian targets.[5] This shift is unaffected by the existence of domestic or international reputational costs to rebels for committing civilian violence: such costs help determine the baseline proportion of civilian violence employed by the group, but they do not alter the shift in attack portfolio that occurs when attacks on military targets become relatively cheaper to perform.

International reputation affects rebels' targeting choices indirectly, as third parties supporting rebel groups with poor reputations face costs for doing so. For example, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have condemned the United States, Turkey, and other countries for supporting Syrian rebels who abused civilians (Human

Rights Watch 2020; International Amnesty 2016). Even U.S. officials have decried "war crimes" committed by Turkish forces in Syria and Turkish-backed Syrian rebels (Finnegan 2019). Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood (2014) point to how Nicaraguan Contra violence against civilians led to widespread backlash against President Reagan. More broadly, there is evidence that both states (e.g. Terman and Byun 2022; Terman and Voeten 2018) and civil society (e.g. Murdie and Peksen 2014; Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005) name and shame governments which commit violations of human rights and humanitarian law. Voters can also punish states for supporting abusive rebels, and many people consider violence against civilians unethical (ICRC 2016; Levy 2022). Importantly, our argument applies to all states which prefer that the rebels focus on military targets, whether the third parties are committed to human rights or merely seek to avoid backlash. Our argument would not apply when the third party prefers that the rebels attack civilians or is indifferent about the rebels' allocation of targets.[6] This should be relatively uncommon given the backlash against states who sponsor terrorist rebels.

We argue that diplomatic statements focus attention on the rebels and couple the audience costs arising from third-party material support with the rebel group's actions following the diplomatic statement, even before material support is provided. Indeed, rebel groups know that, if they rely on civilian targeting following a diplomatic statement, third parties would suffer additional costs for subsequently providing them with material resources. This is true even if the diplomatic statements are not made by the same actor which later provides material support.

In the following section, we formalize our argument via a game-theoretic model capturing the strategic interactions between a rebel group and a third party that can choose to provide material support. We analyze our model in both the presence and the absence of a prior diplomatic statement calling attention to the group.[7] We will show via this model that both diplomatic and material support can induce rebels to reduce their reliance on civilian targeting.

A Model of Third-Party Support for Rebels in Civil Wars

The primary intent of the model in this section is to answer questions raised by, and verify the internal consistency of, our informal argument. Can a public statement of support induce a group to devote comparatively fewer resources to violence against civilians, even before resources from the third party are provided? Would the third party follow a statement with material support, despite a lack of binding commitment to do so? Would the group, once support had been granted, reduce its focus on civilian targets despite a similar lack of commitment? Our model illustrates that, under some conditions, the answer to those questions is yes.

Actors and Actions

We model a strategic interaction between a rebel group (R) and a sympathetic third party (P), in a setting in which R is continually allocating attacks to military (M) and

civilian (C) targets. The model opens with a decision by R to allocate attacks. That decision is made in one of two contexts. In the first (S), the UN or other international organization or group of states has issued a diplomatic statement of support relating to R. R is aware of that, and knows that its next allocation decision will alter the audience costs P would suffer for later providing material support to R. The reason is that the statement focuses attention on the group and, in so doing, couples R's next action to P's subsequent support decision. In the second context ($\sim S$), no such statement has been made, and R's next allocation has no bearing on P's later audience costs.

In both contexts, after R's allocation decision, P can offer resources to R that would reduce the marginal cost of M, at a cost to P that depends in part on the audience costs it expects to pay for providing material support to a group engaged in violence against civilians. Other nations, the audience in this case, are presumed to view material support of a group with greater disapproval the more the group focuses on attacking civilians. We assume that audience costs to P arising from that disapproval increase in the amount of support P provides.

Finally, R again allocates attacks to each type of target, though now the marginal cost of targeting the military may be lower if P had earlier provided material support. Formally, the game proceeds as follows:

1. R chooses a proportion of effort to allocate to violence against military (v_{m1}) and civilian (v_{c1}) targets.
2. P chooses a level of resources ($p \geq 0$) to deliver to R.
3. R again chooses a proportion of effort to allocate to violence against military (v_{m2}) and civilian (v_{c2}) targets.

To keep the focus on the interaction between R and P, we do not model the issuer of the public statement. That statement need not come from P, though it may play a role in P's decisions via the mechanism of audience costs. That said, extending the model so that P can strategically choose to make a public statement is straightforward. Doing so, one finds that the third party would be willing to make a public statement of support in order to better align its interests with the rebel group's as long as the cost of making the statement is not too large.

Utilities

As noted previously, we view the relevant factor driving audience costs to be the relative frequency with which the rebel group attacks civilian targets, rather than the absolute number of attacks against civilians. To accommodate this, we choose to work with proportions of attacks rather than with absolute numbers. Formally, $v_{mi} + v_{ci} = 1$ for $i \in \{1, 2\}$, with $v_{mi}, v_{ci} \in [0, 1]$. That choice has consequences that affect both the actors' utilities and the scope of the model.

The first consequence is that both R's and P's utilities will be functions of proportions of each type of attack target rather than numbers of attacks. As we have argued,

this is natural for P, but it is perhaps less natural for R. To account for that, we assume that R prefers more attacks to fewer, but does not otherwise care about target allocation.[8] That is equivalent in our framework to choosing the allocation that minimizes the overall cost of attack production. We assume a quadratic cost and write R's utility over the two periods as

$$U_R = -\frac{1}{2}(v_{c1})^2 - \frac{m}{2}(v_{m1})^2 - \frac{1}{2}(v_{c2})^2 - \frac{m}{2(1+p)}(v_{m2})^2 \quad (1)$$

Equation (1) specifies that military and civilian targets are substitutes for R, so that R always has an incentive to decrease the frequency of civilian attacks if the marginal cost of military attacks decreases. That introduces a scope condition for our model: it does not apply to cases in which a decrease in the marginal cost of military attacks would induce an increase in the relative frequency of civilian attacks, whether because the two were complements or because there was a limit to how much R wanted to attack military targets.

There are two terms of note in R's utility, m and $\frac{m}{2(1+p)}$. The former scales the marginal cost of violence against military targets, as compared to a factor of 1 for violence against civilians. The latter illustrates the role of P's resources: as they increase, R's marginal cost of v_{m2} decreases. Without third-party support $p = 0$, and both periods' decisions are separate and identical. In that case, the equilibrium allocation of violence maximizes $-\frac{1}{2}(v_{ci})^2 - \frac{m}{2}(v_{mi})^2$, which is $v_{ci} = \frac{m}{1+m}$ in each period. That is the baseline level of allocation of violence against civilians in the absence of a third-party. When each type of violence has the same marginal cost, $m = 1$ and the baseline allocation is 1/2.

P's resources have no further effect on R's utility beyond the decrease in R's marginal cost of military attacks. They cannot, for example, be used for relatively more efficient attacks against civilians; nor can they be used for something other than attacks. Our results are robust to weakening that assumption, as long as third-party support does not reduce the marginal cost of civilian attacks faster than it does military attacks. The latter serves as another scope condition for our model. In practice, though third parties may try to ensure that their support goes only to reducing the marginal cost of military attacks, those resources may be diverted to other uses. Consequently, in our empirical analysis we break down material support into different types over which the third party may have more or less control.

We now move to P's utility. As we have argued, it is in line with the literature to assume that P is supportive of R's goals, but would prefer that R pursue them via attacks on military rather than civilian targets. This is another scope condition for our model: it does not apply to third parties that would prefer civilian attacks, or who are indifferent to R's target allocation.

P's preferences show up in its utility in two ways. First, P gains a benefit from R's allocation to military targets. Since $v_{mi} = 1 - v_{ci}$, this is equivalent to paying more of a cost the higher is R's allocation to civilian targets. Second, we assume that P pays a cost

for providing material support. That cost depends on both the level of support it provides and the audience costs it expects to suffer for providing material support to a rebel group that commits attacks against civilians. P's utility is

$$U_P = \begin{cases} v_{m1} + v_{m2} - \frac{1}{2}(r + v_{c1})p^2 & \text{if } S, \\ v_{m1} + v_{m2} - \frac{1}{2}\left(r + \frac{m}{1+m}\right)p^2 & \text{if } \widetilde{S}. \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

The r in equation (2) captures the component of the marginal cost due to the direct cost of resource provision. The second term in the parentheses with r captures audience costs. It takes two possible values. If the public statement of support has been made, attention is subsequently focused on the group, which couples audience costs to the frequency of civilian targeting that R chose immediately following the statement. If the public statement has not been made, there is not the same attention on the group. The first allocation decision is not special in that case, and audience costs are instead connected to the baseline frequency of civilian attacks.

Equilibrium Behavior

We solve this sequential game of complete information in the usual way, using backward induction to deduce the subgame perfect Nash equilibrium. Solution details are in the Online Appendix. Here we focus on equilibrium behavior at each of the three decision points in the game.

The last decision, in which R must choose an allocation of violence against civilians, v_{c2}, follows simply from the assumptions of the model. The third party's support, if non-zero, reduces the rebels' marginal cost for violence against military targets. That better aligns the incentives of R and P, reducing R's commitment problem. The alignment is reflected in R's partial equilibrium civilian violence level, $v_{c2}^{*} = \frac{m}{1+m+p}$. By inspection, we can see this decreases in the level of support given.

Statement 1 *Any increases in material support given to the rebel group lead to decreases in the proportion of rebel violence that targets civilians.*

The second decision has P choosing a level of material support. That material support comes with a cost, but it also better aligns R's and P's incentives, leading to a more beneficial subsequent target allocation by R. That benefit is sufficient to reduce P's commitment problem and produce an optimal level of material support which is always greater than zero. Since the cost of providing material support is decreasing in the previous period's allocation of civilian violence subsequent to a public statement, the less that allocation is, the more support the third party is willing to provide.

Statement 2 *Following a public statement of support, decreases in the proportion of rebel violence that targets civilians lead to increases in the level of material support*

provided by the third party.

The first decision has R choosing an allocation of violence against civilians, v_{c1}. When there has not been a public statement of support, R's decision only bears on its immediate utility. Its decision is even easier in this case then in its later one, in that there is no third-party material support to consider, and it produces its baseline frequency of civilian violence: $v_{c1}^{*}\left(\widetilde{S}\right) = \frac{m}{1+m}$.

When there has been a public statement, however, R must now also consider the indirect effect of its allocation choice. Reducing civilian violence below its baseline frequency may reduce R's immediate utility, but it also reduces P's marginal cost of material support. Statement 2 indicates that this leads to increased third-party material support, which, in turn, reduces R's subsequent marginal cost of producing violence against military targets. A reduced marginal cost at the last decision node allows R to increase its utility by allocating relatively more attacks to military targets. Thus, holding off somewhat on civilian violence now allows for better outcomes later. In our model, that trade-off resolves in favor of reduced civilian violence following a public statement, leading to our third statement.

Statement 3 *A public statement of support leads to a reduction in the proportion of rebel violence that targets civilians from its baseline level, even before material support is provided.*

Statement 4 describes how the allocation of civilian violence changes with our model's parameters.

Statement 4 *Following a public statement of support, the proportion of rebel violence that targets civilians increases in both m, the relative difficulty of producing violence against military targets, and r, the component of the third-party's marginal cost due to the direct cost of resource provision. Both are true before and after material support. Absent a public statement, the proportion of rebel violence that targets civilians increases in m both before and after material support, and in r only after material support. The reduction, from its baseline, in the proportion of rebel violence that targets civilians following a public statement is greater for smaller values of r.*

Finally, we can compare the two contexts: with and without a public statement of support. Without a public statement, the rebel group allocates its baseline level of violence toward civilian targets and the third party chooses an optimal level of material support given audience costs arising from that baseline. That material support induces a reduced allocation of civilian violence, relative to its baseline level. With a public statement, the rebel group decreases its allocation toward civilian targets immediately following the statement, relative to its baseline level. That induces the third party to increase its material support over what it would have given had no statement been made, which causes a larger subsequent decrease in civilian targeting.

In sum, a single, potentially low cost, statement drives two decreases in the rebel group's allocation toward civilian violence and reduces the third party's marginal cost for providing material support. Apparent cheap talk by international organizations thus has concrete consequences due to its coupling of third party and rebel group.

Thus, our model has answered the questions it set out to answer. A public statement can induce a reduction in a rebel group's allocation of civilian violence even before material resources have been provided. That reduction in the allocation of civilian violence makes it worthwhile for the third party to provide material resources despite a lack of binding commitment to do so. Finally, the provision of material resources aligns the rebel group's and the third party's preferences and thus provides incentives for the rebels to reduce attacks on civilian targets, despite a similar lack of commitment. In the following section, we will test whether Statements 1 and 3 can be supported empirically.

Research Design

Data and Dependent Variable

Our model allows for public statements of support from any source. It is difficult to measure diplomatic statements made by all governments across the world, so we focus on resolutions by the UN Security Council and/or the General Assembly. While both Security Council (e.g. Allen and Yuen 2020; Beardsley and Schmidt 2012; Binder and Golub 2020) and General Assembly (e.g. Seabra and Mesquita 2022; Voeten 2000) actions are shaped by a range of factors, the pro- or anti-rebel content of their resolutions serve as important signals of diplomatic support for or opposition to rebels. Security Council resolutions only pass when the five Permanent Members (P5) with veto power agree, and the General Assembly is the only UN body which includes representatives of all member states.[9]

We rely on an original data set comprised of data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) (LaFree and Dugan 2007), the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP) (Gleditsch et al. 2002), and the United Nations Digital Library.[10] The unit of analysis is *conflict-dyad-month*, and the data set spans all civil conflicts UCDP identified from 1975 to 2009.[11] As many UN resolutions do not specifically identify a rebel group or even a specific conflict within a country, the analysis is a hard test of the theory: it requires that, on average, all rebel groups in a country change their behavior in response to international action which may only concern a subset of those rebels. Independent variables regarding resolutions and interventions are lagged by 2 months as changes in rebel tactics require time for implementation following third-party action.[12]

Our key dependent variable comes from the GTD, which includes information on attacks against both military and civilian targets. The dependent variable is the *proportion* of total attacks that target civilians perpetrated by rebels active in a country in a given month. We expect that groups with relatively larger proportions of their attacks targeting civilians will be viewed more negatively by the international community, regardless of the overall level of attacks. We define military targets as members of the

military, police, terrorist/non-state militia groups, or violent political parties. All other targets are classified as civilian, including infrastructure and government buildings/officials. Our outcome variable, "Proportion of Attacks Against Civilians," ranges from 0 to 1. In robustness checks, we use the number of attacks against civilians as an alternative dependent variable (Figure A3).

More than 60 percent of attacks in our data are against military targets. This may be surprising given that the GTD aims to measure terrorist actions. However, the database includes attacks against combatants so long as the act aims at a political, economic, religious, or social goal and seeks to coerce, intimidate, or convey a message to a larger audience than the immediate victims. In robustness tests, we use alternative data from the UCDP georeferenced event dataset (UCDP GED) (Sundberg and Melander 2013) and from Polo and González (2020) (Figures A4 and A5). We do not use these data in our primary analyses because of their limited temporal coverages.

Independent Variables

To capture UN resolutions, we collected data from the United Nations Digital Library on every resolution passed in the General Assembly or Security Council. We filtered the data to include only resolutions that explicitly mentioned countries that were experiencing ongoing civil wars as defined by UCDP (Gleditsch et al. 2002). Next, two coders independently read the contents of the resolutions and identified whether each resolution was in favor of or against the rebels or, alternatively, whether it was in favor of or against the government.[13] For example, a resolution entitled "appeal for clemency in favor of South African freedom fighters" is classified as in favor of the rebels. "On lifting of sanctions against the Sudan" is in favor of the government. Because a resolution in favor of a government at war is implicitly condemning the rebels, we combined resolutions against the government with those in favor of the rebels ("pro-rebel" resolutions). Similarly, we combined resolutions against the rebels and in favor of the state ("pro-government" resolutions). We assume that a resolution concerns all rebel groups active in all conflicts in a country at the same time because, in practice, very few resolutions distinguish between rebel groups. Additionally, rebel groups are likely interdependent in their use of terrorism in the face of international pressures (Dorff, Gallop, and Minhas 2023). "Pro-Rebel Resolution" is a binary indicator for whether there was a resolution in favor of the rebels or against the state 2 months prior. Given that the theory concerns pro-rebel resolutions, we treat the variable concerning pro-government resolutions as a control variable.

We create variables relating to material support from the UCDP's External Support Dataset (Primary Warring Party Version) (Högbladh, Pettersson, and Themnér 2011). "Pro-Rebel Intervention, Troops" is a binary variable indicating whether any country provided troops as a secondary warring party to the rebels 2 months prior. "Pro-Rebel Intervention, Weapons" is a binary variable indicating whether an any country provided weapons to the rebels 2 months prior. "Pro-Rebel Intervention, Economic" is a binary variable indicating whether any country provided economic or financial support to the

rebels 2 months prior. Likewise, the "government" versions of these variables refer to the same kinds of support provided to the government involved in the conflict. While there are other forms of material support, these three most clearly alter the cost structure for the rebel group and thus most accurately test the implications of the above model. Employing different measures of material support helps us to capture variation in the degree to which our model's assumptions hold.

Control Variables

We include the indicator variable, "Pro-Government Resolution", as a control variable. We also control for cumulative pro-rebel and pro-government resolutions up to 3 months prior to address potential concerns over selection effects; conflicts that were the subject of many previous resolutions might have a higher proportion of civilian targeting.[14] We do not necessarily expect cumulative resolutions to have the same effect on civilian targeting as our key independent variable; pro-government support and cumulative resolutions enter our empirical models as control variables and, as such, it is improper to interpret them (Dworschak 2023; Hünermund and Louw 2022).

We include a range of country-level control variables. "Logged GDP per capita" (in constant 2010 US Dollars) and "Logged Population" are from World Bank Group (2019). "Physical Integrity Rights" is a 9-point additive index of government respect for such rights in a given country-year (Cingranelli and Richards 2010).[15] "Rebel Strength" refers to the average strength of the rebels fighting in a given conflict in a given month compared to the government, ranging from "-2 (much weaker)" to "2 (much stronger)" (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2013). We include an indicator variable for the end of the Cold War (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010) to account for changes in the international system. Finally, previous research suggests that intractable and multiparty civil wars have increased civilian targeting (Wood and Kathman 2015), so we control for conflict duration and the number of rebel groups. As our formal model primarily considers single-party civil wars, controlling for multiple rebels will allow us to directly test our theory.

Our main modeling strategy uses linear regression models with a lagged dependent variable to control for potential endogeneity concerns. Because fixed effects and lagged dependent variable models are not nested (Angrist and Pischke 2009, 245), we do not include fixed or random effects in our main models.[16]

Empirical Results

Main Findings

The results from the linear models are summarized in Table 1. Model 1 considers any type of material support provided to rebels or governments, while Models 2-4 disaggregate material support into types of material intervention. All four empirical models provide support for the implications of the formal model.

Table 1. Linear Regression Results for Attacks Against Civilians in Civil Wars.

	Any Material Support	Disaggregated Material Support		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Lagged DV (Prop Attacks Against Civilians)	0.474 (0.009)***	0.475 (0.009)***	0.475 (0.009)***	0.469 (0.009)***
Pro-Rebel Resolution	−0.059 (0.020)***	−0.055 (0.020)***	−0.059 (0.020)***	−0.056 (0.020)***
Pro-Government Resolution	−0.037 (0.045)	−0.038 (0.045)	−0.041 (0.045)	−0.042 (0.045)
Previous Pro Reb Res, Count	0.001 (0.000)***	0.001 (0.000)***	0.001 (0.000)***	0.001 (0.000)***
Previous Pro Gov Res, Count	0.009 (0.002)***	0.005 (0.003)**	0.009 (0.002)***	0.007 (0.002)***
Any Pro-Rebel Support	−0.026 (0.012)**			
Any Pro-Government Support	−0.019 (0.012)			
Pro Reb Intervention, Troops		−0.113 (0.034)***		
Pro Gov Intervention, Troops		0.033 (0.018)*		
Pro Reb Intervention, Weapons			−0.003 (0.012)	
Pro Gov Intervention, Weapons			−0.042 (0.014)***	
Pro Reb Intervention, Economic				−0.093 (0.013)***
Pro Gov Intervention, Economic				0.025 (0.015)*
Physical Integrity Rights	−0.011 (0.002)***	−0.012 (0.002)***	−0.012 (0.002)***	−0.013 (0.002)***
Logged GDP per capita	0.042 (0.003)***	0.046 (0.003)***	0.044 (0.003)***	0.043 (0.003)***
Logged Population	0.033 (0.003)***	0.034 (0.003)***	0.034 (0.003)***	0.033 (0.003)***
Rebel Strength	0.036 (0.008)***	0.031 (0.008)***	0.037 (0.008)***	0.032 (0.008)***
Cold War	−0.015 (0.007)**	−0.019 (0.007)**	−0.013 (0.007)*	−0.014 (0.007)**
Count of Rebel Groups	0.021 (0.005)***	0.020 (0.005)***	0.022 (0.005)***	0.018 (0.005)***
Conflict Duration	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)*	0.000 (0.000)*	0.000 (0.000)***
Intercept	−0.596 (0.056)***	−0.649 (0.055)***	−0.632 (0.056)***	−0.607 (0.055)***
R^2	0.332	0.332	0.332	0.335
Adj. R^2	0.332	0.331	0.331	0.334
Num. obs	10,222	10,222	10,222	10,222

***$p < .01$; **$p < .05$; *$p < .1$.

First, in all four models, we find that pro-rebel resolutions are associated with decreased rebel reliance on civilian targeting. The effect of a single pro-rebel resolution is in the expected direction based on *Statement 3*. Panel (a) of Figure 1 illustrates its substantive effect. In this figure, we use a simulation via observed value approach to obtain the average marginal effects of *pro-rebel resolution* based on the posterior distribution of our models' parameters in Table 1. Specifically, for each simulation, we vary the values of our recent resolution variables from 0 to 1 while allowing all other covariates to take their observed values in the data. In doing so, we calculate the average marginal effect through the observed values of all cases rather than through "an average case." We repeat this procedure 1000 times, resulting a distribution of the average marginal effects (Hanmer and Ozan Kalkan 2013). The resulting density distributions indicate strong substantive support for our hypothesis about the negative impact of pro-rebel resolutions on rebel reliance on violence against civilians.

What about pro-rebel material support? As shown in Table 1 and panel (b) of Figure 1, pro-rebel interventions involving troops and economic support are correlated with decreased rebel use of civilian targeting, which is in line with our theory. Specifically, we find that providing troops to the rebel group appears to reduce the rebels' reliance on civilian targeting by 11 percentage points. Similarly, providing economic aid to rebels is correlated with a 9 percentage-point decrease in the proportion of rebel attacks that target civilians. Both of these results support *Statement 1* of the formal model: when the rebel group is given material support, they make the tactical decision to select away from terrorism.

However, the provision of weapons to the rebel group by a third party has no statistically significant effect on the proportion of rebel attacks against civilians (Model 3 in Table 1). We suggest that this difference has to do with the degree to which each type of support matches our model's assumptions, though this argument is

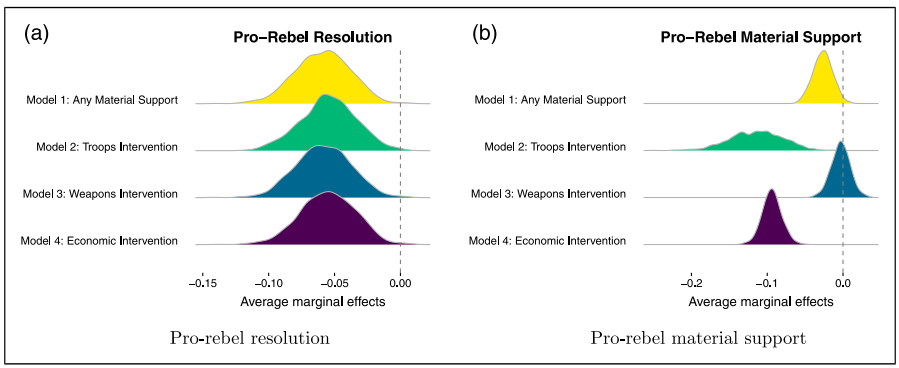

Figure 1. Marginal effects of pro-rebel support.
Note. Figure 1 displays the distributions of estimated marginal effects of *pro-rebel support* on the proportion of civilian attacks based on the posterior distribution of Table 1's model parameters, using 1000 simulations via observed value. Densities that are far from the $X = 0$ vertical line indicate statistical significance.

comparatively speculative. It is possible that weapons do not sufficiently alter the rebel's marginal cost of attacks on military targets. Alternatively, it may be the case that the provision of weapons does not entail the same level of continued third-party oversight as troops or financial support.[17] In other words, rebels may have to continue limiting civilian targeting to keep benefiting from additional infusions of money or the continued presence of troops, but not weapons which were previously provided.[18]

These results regarding the constraining effects of military interventions differ from prior analyses suggesting that third-party interventions increase civilian targeting (e.g. Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014; Zhukov 2017). However, our findings align with Stein (2022), who finds that overtly supported rebels are less likely to target civilians than covertly supported rebels. There are two plausible ways to reconcile these two sets of results. First, it is possible that third-party intervention leads to an increase in attacks against both civilian and military targets, but that the increase in attacks against military targets is larger than the increase attack in civilian targets. Alternatively, it could be the case that controlling for previous diplomatic support alters the correlation between military intervention in favor of the rebels and the absolute level of civilian targeting. Robustness tests (Figure A3) demonstrate that pro-rebel resolutions have a negative effect on the count of rebel attacks against civilians and against military targets.[19]

Robustness Checks

We run a set of robustness checks to show that our findings are generally robust to a range of alternative specifications; results are included in the Online Appendix.

First, to account for the unobserved characteristics of civil war counties and common shocks that could induce omitted variable bias, we use two-way fixed-effects and two-level mixed effects models in which we exclude the lagged dependent variables as a covariate (Angrist and Pischke 2009; Gelman and Hill 2006). Our findings are robust (Table A1).

Second, we use alternative measures of our dependent variable. We consider a broader definition of civilian targets which excludes only police and military (Figure A1). We then replace our dependent variable with the proportion of fatalities from attacks against civilians (Figure A2). We also use the absolute number of attacks against military and civilian targets as alternative dependent variables (Figure A3). The results are still consistent with our main findings. Next, we use data from Polo and González (2020) which treats the dependent variable as a count of terrorist attacks. The results in Figure A4 generally replicate and confirm our main findings. Additionally, we use one-sided violence events from the UCDP georeferenced event dataset (UCDP GED) (Sundberg and Melander 2013) as another alternative dependent variable. Our results are not robust to using this data (Figure A5), perhaps because UCDP and GTD data have different conceptualizations of violence against civilian and different levels of temporal precision.[20]

Third, we disaggregate UN resolutions into Security Council (SC) and General Assembly (GA) resolutions. As shown in Table A2, while the estimated effects of GA

resolutions are in the expected direction, only SC resolutions have a statistically significant impact on decreased rebel reliance on civilian targeting. The coefficients on the material support variables are consistent with the main findings.

Fourth, we consider other forms of external intervention. Pro-rebel resolutions are still negatively correlated with rebel reliance on civilian targeting when controlling for these other forms of intervention (Figure A6). Consistent with our theoretical expectations, however, these other forms of interventions do not affect rebel use of civilian targeting; they likely do not sufficiently alter the relative military balance.

Fifth, our findings are robust to excluding countries which are outliers in terms of the number of pro-rebel resolutions: Israel, Afghanistan, and South Africa (Figure A7). We also include alternative covariates, including a count rather than a dichotomous indicator of previous material interventions (Figure A8) and the regime type of the third party (Table A3 and Figure A9).[21] When controlling for the regime type of third-party states, our main results remain consistent.

Finally, we address potential temporality and endogeneity concerns. First, the effects of pro-rebel and pro-government resolutions are not robust to alternative lags, although the effects regarding material support are generally consistent with our main findings (Figure A10). We also consider the possibility that the first resolution has a different effect than subsequent ones, running models which drop conflicts after the first resolution. While "Pro-Rebel Resolution" is no longer statistically significant, it remains negative. Coefficients on troop and economic pro-rebel interventions are still negative and statistically significant (Table A4). Additionally, we use coarsened exact matching (CEM) (Iacus, King, and Porro 2012) to address the endogeneity concern that a higher proportion of civilian targeting may motivate pro-rebel resolutions. Using the matched data, the effects of pro-rebel resolutions and material support remain the same (Table A5).[22]

Case Illustration: The ANC in South Africa

As an illustration of our argument, we consider the African National Congress (ANC) in apartheid South Africa. The UCDP classifies South Africa as in an intrastate conflict with the ANC from 1981 to 1988. There were 65 months between 1975 and 1988 in which the UN passed at least one pro-rebel resolution favoring the ANC but only 2 months in which it passed at least one pro-government resolution favoring the South African state. According to the UCDP, the ANC received material support from countries including East Germany, the Soviet Union, Tanzania, and Angola.[23] The case study demonstrates that the UN passed resolutions in support of the ANC, which then limited its use of civilian targeting to gain international credibility; the international community subsequently provided greater material support.

The General Assembly passed its first resolution about apartheid in 1946. Then, in 1963, the Security Council called for a voluntary arms embargo against South Africa. In 1973, the General Assembly resolved that the South African state did not have the right to represent the people of the country, instead recognizing the ANC and the PAC (Pan Africanist Congress of Azania) as authentic and legitimate representatives of South

Africans. In 1977, the Security Council followed suit, inviting representatives of the ANC to participate in debates (Department of Public Information 1994; Stultz 1991). In other words, the UN gradually arrived at diplomatic opposition to the apartheid regime and support of the ANC.

The ANC had been engaged in armed struggle since 1961, but it began to limit its troops' use of civilian targeting only in the wake of this newfound diplomatic support. For example, in 1980, the ANC declared that it would uphold the Geneva Conventions (ANC and Sizwe 1980). Then, in 1985, the ANC instituted a code of conduct which prohibited assault, rape, cruelty, and more (ANC 1985).[24] This code of behavior helped prevent the rebels from engaging in the high level of civilian targeting committed by the South African state (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa 1999).

The ANC made these changes so that it, and not the apartheid state, would be fully perceived as the legitimate representative of the South African people (Goodwin 2007; Greene 2014; Klug 2000). For example, upon declaring the group's adherence to the Geneva Conventions in 1980, the ANC contrasted their organization's compliance with the South African government's disregard for international law. The President of the ANC noted in a speech that international law "itself recognises that 'practices of apartheid'…constitute grave breaches of the Conventions and must therefore join the list of crimes identified at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal" (ANC and Sizwe 1980). He thus emphasized that the ANC was a part of the liberal world order and should be recognized as such, unlike the South African state. Similarly, the 1985 code of conduct explicitly states that the the new rules will help the group gain diplomatic support: "All combatants shall act in such a manner that the people will put their trust in the army, recognise it as their protector, and accept the liberation movement as their legitimate and authentic representative." (ANC 1985) These efforts helped the world see the ANC as legitimate.

Although the Soviet Union, East Germany, and South Africa's neighbors had long materially supported the ANC (Ellis 2013; Thomas 1999), the rest of the world began to do so as well. In 1977, the Security Council imposed a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa (Department of Public Information 1994; Stultz 1991). Many individual nations went further. The Nordic States instituted a trade embargo on South Africa in 1987, and Sweden's direct financial contributions to the ANC eventually surpassed those from the Soviet Union. The United States Congress passed a sanctions law in 1986 which restricted the capacity of US companies to invest new resources in South Africa (Black 1999; Crawford and Klotz 1999; Ellis 2013; Sellström 1999). As one scholar notes, "it is difficult to imagine that this kind of aid and solidarity would have flowed to the ANC had it begun a terrorist campaign against white South Africans." (Goodwin 2007, p. 200) Indeed, this brief case study demonstrates that diplomatic support, material support, and violence against civilians were intertwined in the fight against apartheid.

Conclusion

In this article, we examine the effect of third-party support for rebel groups on the rebels' strategic use of terrorism in civil wars. Overall, the results of the formal model

and empirical tests illustrate the importance of diplomatic and material support in rebel groups' cost evaluations of attacks against civilian and military targets. The findings suggest that, when both forms of third-party support (diplomatic and material) and both kinds of attacks (against civilian and military targets) are empirically analyzed together, the story is not as simple as previous research suggests. In contrast to existing work finding a positive correlation between intervention and rebel volume of violence against civilians, once we control for diplomatic support, material interventions are negatively correlated with rebel reliance on terrorist tactics.

The model implies that rebels do not reduce their reliance on civilian targeting just to gain international diplomatic support but rather because they know that a rebel group with international legitimacy will be more likely to receive material support. Thus, research demonstrating that rebel groups reduce their use of terrorism when they seek legitimacy may be missing a link between legitimacy and material resources (Fazal 2018; Jo 2015; Stanton 2016). Our results also suggest that the provision of material support may help shield civilians in the same way that peacekeeper presence does (e.g. Carnegie and Mikulaschek 2020).

Further research requires more complex models which incorporate the three-way interaction between rebel groups, the state, and third parties. It could also consider formalization of multiparty civil wars in more depth (e.g. Dorff, Gallop, and Minhas 2023). Additional work should more closely focus on the differences between an initial statement of diplomatic support and repeated statements that may serve as implicit signals of approval of civilian targeting. Methodologically, it would be helpful to disaggregate between international support for different rebel groups fighting in the same country at the same time. We will be better positioned to understand and reduce rebel terrorism in civil wars as we more precisely explore these relationship between governments, rebel groups, and third parties; trade-offs between civilian and military targeting; and interplay between diplomatic and material support.

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Data Availability Statement

The data and replication materials are available at Harvard Dataverse (https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/8WGNVN).

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online at the JCR website. https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/8WGNVN

Notes

1. We use the terms *civilian targeting*, *violence against civilians*, and *terrorism* interchangeably (Balcells and Stanton 2021).
2. Similarly, Morgan and Palmer (2000) and Most and Starr (1984) model substitutable foreign policies for states.
3. Taylor was tried in the Special Court for Sierra Leone despite never entering the country. The 2012 verdict has a chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to International Criminal Law* (Schabas 2016), alongside only the trials of Adolf Eichman and Slodoban Milošević. The leader of the RUF, Foday Sankoh, was also found guilty, but his abuses did not garner as much condemnation. For example, the Obama White House put out 20 statements which mentioned Taylor, but none which mentioned Sankoh (National Archives 2017). Taylor was President of Liberia 1997-2003 but has never been prosecuted for crimes committed in Liberia, where "he is alleged to be responsible for crimes even worse than those" in Sierra Leone (Schabas 2016, 312).
4. Fortna (2023) has challenged the argument that terrorism is a "weapon of the weak."
5. Wood (2014) finds that rebels who do not rely on local citizens engage in more civilian targeting when they have more resources; we focus on how third-party funding shapes the resources available to rebels.
6. For examples of when this may be the case, see Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood (2014).
7. Our model considers single-party civil wars; multi-party civil wars often involve civilian targeting as a strategy of territorial competition and outbidding (Kydd and Walter 2006; Oswald et al. 2020; Wood and Kathman 2015). In our empirical tests, we control for the number of rebel groups fighting the same government.
8. Prioritizing one type of attack over the other would only serve to shift the equilibrium target allocation without altering the role of third-party support.
9. Although research has examined United Nations peacekeeping and civilian targeting (e.g. Bove and Ruggeri 2016; Carnegie and Mikulaschek 2020; Kathman, Benson, and Diehl

2023), principles such as the consent of the warring parties and impartiality suggest that UN peacekeeping follows a different logic.
10. See https://digitallibrary.un.org.
11. The data is temporally bound by UCDP intervention data.
12. We had no prior theoretical reason to prefer one lag over another. Comparisons of model fit suggest that the 2-month lag most closely maps onto our theoretical expectations (Figure A10).
13. To make decisions, coders looked at the titles of the resolutions and the summary "Agenda Information." Where that was not sufficient, they read the full text of the resolution. When the two coders disagreed, they discussed the case and decided together how the resolution should be classified.
14. We address this with coarsened exact matching (CEM) (Iacus, King, and Porro 2012) in Table A5.
15. Where the government is abusive, rebels may be able to engage in terrorism while still garnering third-party support. It is also possible that repressive governments are less sensitive to civilian losses.
16. See Table A1 for alternative model specifications incorporating fixed and random effects.
17. The international community struggles with weapons diversion (e.g. Disarmament, 2021; Jackson, 2010), so third parties have difficulty controlling who uses their donated arms. For example, some weapons purchased by the U.S. for Syrian rebels were in ISIS' arsenal within 2 months (Joselow 2017), and others were sold on the black market (Mazzetti and Younes 2016). While weapons can be used for decades by a range of armed actors, third-party financing used for operations or immediate-use supplies is rapidly spent (e.g. Cancian 2022; Wright 2015). Third parties have refused to authorize additional funds when armed actors target civilians (e.g. Becker, 2022; HRW, 2022).
18. See results for other forms of intervention in Figure A6.
19. This finding holds when using alternative data sources; see Figure A4.
20. Data used in Figures A4-A5 are limited to 1989-2009. The correlations between the dependent variables from GTD, UCDP, and Polo and González (2020) are summarized in Figure A11. The correlation coefficient between Polo and González (2020) and our main DV is 0.17.
21. Only states can have regime types, so we focus on third-party states. Where there are multiple third parties, we take the average of third parties' polity2 scores (Marshall and Jaggers 2002). The results suggest that interactions between interventions and regime type affect rebel terrorism in complex and unpredictable ways.
22. We match using variables that affect resolutions and targeting: physical integrity rights, GDP per capita, population, and number of rebel groups.
23. We consider sanctions against South Africa material support for the ANC, though UCDP does not include sanctions in its external support dataset.
24. For a more detailed discussion, see Cherry (2012); Ellis (2013); Greene (2014).

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