Violence and Restraint in Civil War

Media coverage of civil wars often focuses on the most gruesome atrocities and the most extreme conflicts, which might lead one to think that all civil wars involve massive violence against civilians. In truth, many governments and rebel groups exercise restraint in their fighting, largely avoiding violence against civilians in compliance with international law. Governments and rebel groups make strategic calculations about whether to target civilians by evaluating how domestic and international audiences are likely to respond to violence. Restraint is also a deliberate strategic choice: governments and rebel groups often avoid targeting civilians and abide by international legal standards to appeal to domestic and international audiences for diplomatic support. This book presents a wide range of evidence of the strategic use of violence and restraint, using original data on violence against civilians in civil wars from 1989 to 2010 as well as in-depth analyses of conflicts in Azerbaijan, El Salvador, Indonesia, Sudan, Turkey, and Uganda.

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Civilian Targeting in the Shadow of International Law

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For Emery and Teodor
Contents

List of Figures page ix
List of Tables xi
Acknowledgments xiii
List of Abbreviations xvii

Introduction 1
1 Strategies of Violence and Restraint 25
2 A New Data Set on Violence against Civilians in Civil War 63
3 Quantitative Analysis of Government and Rebel Group Violence and Restraint 89
4 Government Restraint in Indonesia 121
5 Rebel Group Restraint in Aceh and East Timor 149
6 Variation in Government Violence against Civilians: Turkey and Sudan 181
7 Variation in Rebel Group Violence against Civilians: Turkey, El Salvador, and Azerbaijan 213
8 Extreme Rebel Group Violence against Civilians: The Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda 245
9 Conclusion 270

References 289
Index 311
Figures

1. Spectrum of Violence in Civil War
   - Types of Violence Against Civilians: page 21
   - Distribution of Government and Rebel Group Strategies of Violence: page 82
   - Percent of Governments Exercising Restraint: page 96
   - Likelihood of Government Restraint: page 97
   - Percent of Rebel Groups Exercising Restraint: page 99
   - Likelihood of Rebel Group Restraint: page 101
   - Percent of Governments using High-Casualty Terrorism: page 109
   - Likelihood of Rebel Group Terrorism, Exclusionary Rebel Group: page 114
   - LRA Attacks on Military and Civilian Targets: page 257
   - LRA Deadly Attacks on Civilians: page 259
   - LRA Attacks on Civilians and the Timing of Peace Negotiations: page 261
# Tables

1.1 Summary of Hypotheses  
2.1 Measures of Government and Rebel Group Strategies of Violence  
2.2 Summary of Independent Variable Measures  
2.3 Strategies of Violence and Restraint in Civil War, 1989–2010  
3.1 Summary of Hypotheses and Independent Variable Measures  
3.2 Binary Logit Results: Government Strategies of Violence and Restraint  
3.3 Binary Logit Results: Rebel Group Strategies of Violence and Restraint  
3.4 Binary Logit Results: Rebel Group Lobbying  
3.5 Likelihood of Rebel Group Lobbying  
3.6 Likelihood of Government High-Casualty Cleansing  
3.7 Likelihood of Rebel Group High-Casualty Cleansing  
3.8 Likelihood of Government High-Casualty Terrorism, Unstable Regime  
3.9 Likelihood of Government High-Casualty Terrorism, Stable Regime  
3.10 Rebel Group Use of Terrorism  
3.11 Rebel Group Use of High- and Low-Casualty Terrorism  
3.12 Likelihood of Rebel Group High-Casualty Terrorism
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This book began as two seminar papers, written in 2002 during my first year of graduate school at Columbia University. In those papers, I set out to explore whether and how international law influences the behavior of belligerents during wartime—particularly, during civil wars. Most research on international law had focused on its role in international economic relations, but I was interested in whether international law could have any impact on the behavior of actors whose security was threatened during wartime, and, if so, why some actors might be more susceptible to the influence of international law than others. The project changed considerably over the years—becoming a broader exploration of the dynamics of civil war violence—as it morphed from seminar papers into dissertation research, and ultimately into this book. But driving the project has always been a curiosity about the impact of international legal standards on wartime behavior and the conditions under which actors are willing and able to limit their use of violence.

More than a decade has passed since I wrote those first seminar papers, and in that time, many people and institutions have provided valuable guidance and support. My advisors at Columbia, Jack Snyder and Page Fortna, were incredibly generous with their time and advice. Jack’s enthusiasm for the project from its first incarnation as a seminar paper through to its conclusion was an important source of encouragement, especially at moments when I was most unsure about how to proceed with the project. His probing questions and seemingly encyclopedic knowledge of cases of civil war challenged me to develop a more compelling argument, backed by more extensive evidence. Page offered detailed feedback at every stage of the process. I am particularly grateful for her patient willingness to help me work through problems as they arose in the course of research and writing—offering suggestions for how to refine the logic of an argument, reorganize a chapter, and conduct field interviews. Her mentorship while I was in graduate school and in the years since not only has...
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Acknowledgments
Abbreviations

AGAM Forces of the Free Aceh Movement (Angkatan Gerakan Aceh Merdeka)
CNRM National Council of Maubere Resistance (Conselho Nacional da Resistência Maubere)
COHA Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
DEP Democratic Party (Demokrasi Partisi)
FMLN Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional)
Fretilin Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Frente Revolucionária do Timor Leste Independente)
GAM Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka)
HEP People's Labor Party (Halkın Emek Partisi)
HSM Holy Spirit Movement
ICC International Criminal Court
IGAD Intergovernmental Authority on Development
JEM Justice and Equality Movement
LRA Lord's Resistance Army
NIF National Islamic Front
NRM/A National Resistance Movement/Army
NTC National Transitional Council
PKK Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan)
SIRA Aceh Referendum Information Centre (Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh)
SLA Sudan Liberation Army
SPLA Sudan People's Liberation Army
List of Abbreviations

UDT Timorese Democratic Union (União Democrática Timorense)
UNAMET UN Mission in East Timor
UNPO Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
UPDA Uganda People’s Democratic Army