Rebel Groups, International Humanitarian Law, and Civil War Outcomes in the Post-Cold War Era

Jessica A. Stanton
University of Pennsylvania
jstan@sas.upenn.edu

January 2017

Abstract:

Do rebel group violations of international humanitarian law during civil war – in particular, attacks on noncombatant civilians – affect conflict outcomes? I argue that in the post-Cold War era, rebel groups who do not target civilians have been able to use the framework of international human rights and humanitarian law to appeal for diplomatic support from Western governments and intergovernmental organizations. However, rebel group appeals for international diplomatic support are most likely to be effective when the rebel group can contrast its own respect for civilian immunity with the government’s abuses. Rebel groups that do not target civilians in the face of government abuses, therefore, are likely to be able to translate increased international diplomatic support into more favorable conflict outcomes. Using original cross-national data on rebel group violence against civilians in all civil wars from 1989 to 2010, the findings show that rebel groups that exercise restraint toward civilians in the face of government violence are more likely to secure favorable conflict outcomes. In addition, I probe the causal mechanism linking rebel group behavior to conflict outcomes, showing that when a rebel group behaves well in comparison to its government opponent, Western governments and intergovernmental organizations are more likely to take coercive diplomatic action against the government. The evidence suggests that rebel groups can translate this increased diplomatic support into favorable conflict outcomes.
Civil wars are violent by definition. However, the character of violence varies considerably across conflicts – particularly the extent to which rebel groups carry out violent attacks against civilians. Some groups, like the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, capture attention by murdering, raping, mutilating, and abducting civilians, and destroying civilian homes and property.\textsuperscript{1} Other rebel groups, such as the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in Turkey, deliberately target civilians by exploding bombs in public places.\textsuperscript{2}

Many rebel groups, however, rarely attack civilians and primarily attack the government’s military forces. Fretilin, which fought for decades to gain independence for East Timor, and the Free Aceh Movement, which fought for Acehnese independence, did not attack civilians but regularly attacked Indonesian military targets.\textsuperscript{3} Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy committed some human rights abuses, including forcibly conscripting civilians, but did not deliberately kill civilians.\textsuperscript{4}

A significant body of literature has examined the causes of this variation in rebel group violence against civilians.\textsuperscript{5} Less is known about the consequences of this variation in violence – in particular, the consequences for civil war outcomes. Does the choice between violence and restraint toward civilians affect the rebel group’s prospects for success? Does violence against civilians allow rebel groups to extend their control over territory or to coerce the government into making concessions? Or is violence against civilians counterproductive, prompting domestic and international backlash that makes it more difficult to secure a favorable settlement?

\textsuperscript{1} Human Rights Watch 1998; Amnesty International 2004.
\textsuperscript{2} Marcus 2007.
\textsuperscript{3} Taylor 1999; Aspinall 2009.
\textsuperscript{4} International Crisis Group 2002b.
\textsuperscript{5} See, for example, Kalyvas 2006; Hultman 2007; Weinstein 2007; Balcells 2011; Stanton 2013; Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014; Wood 2014.
I argue that rebel group behavior toward civilians does affect civil war outcomes; understanding why requires attention to the role that international actors play in civil war termination, and how international law shapes this international involvement. International involvement in civil war termination expanded following the Cold War – particularly involvement from Western governments and intergovernmental organizations; international peacekeeping contributed to a sharp rise in negotiated settlements and a decline in military victories. During the Cold War, about 75 percent of civil wars ended with military victory for one side, but since the end of the Cold War, more than 70 percent of civil wars have terminated in a negotiated settlement. Existing studies have examined whether rebel group behavior affects the likelihood of negotiated settlement, but these studies do not differentiate among negotiated settlements. However, the terms of settlements vary considerably. Analyzing the content of negotiated settlements is essential to a complete and accurate assessment of the relationship between belligerent behavior and civil war outcomes. I focus on the political outcome of the conflict: the extent to which the rebel group can achieve its political objectives, either through a military victory or a negotiated settlement.

Within this international context – in which Western international actors are heavily involved in negotiating and implementing civil war settlements – rebel groups can gain considerable leverage by winning diplomatic backing from Western international actors. In the post-Cold War era, rebel groups who do not target civilians use the framework of international humanitarian law as a tool to appeal for diplomatic support from Western governments and intergovernmental organizations, asserting their legitimacy by demonstrating adherence to international norms of wartime conduct.

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6 DeRouen and Sobek 2004; Fortna 2009.
7 DeRouen and Sobek 2004.
8 Wood and Kathman 2014; Fortna 2015.
9 Prorok 2016.
10 Abrahms (2012) and Thomas (2014) take a similar approach by analyzing government political concessions.
prohibiting violence against noncombatants.\textsuperscript{11} Referencing this body of international law formalizes rebel group appeals, offering rebel groups a concrete and detailed set of agreed-upon standards to frame their own behavior and that of their government opponent.

However, rebel groups vary in both their \textit{need} and their \textit{ability} to win diplomatic assistance from Western international constituencies. Winning international support is difficult for rebel groups. The international context favors states, prioritizing state sovereignty and discouraging intervention in the internal affairs of other states.\textsuperscript{12} However, states have increasingly asserted limits to state sovereignty. Under the responsibility to protect doctrine, when a government abuses its own citizens, it is no longer upholding its obligations as a sovereign state, justifying international intervention to protect these citizens.\textsuperscript{13} Thus, rebel group appeals for international diplomatic support are most likely to be effective when the rebel group can contrast its own respect for the immunity of noncombatants with government abuses. Most existing studies overlook the importance of this \textit{interaction} between government and rebel group behavior.\textsuperscript{14} Changes in international diplomatic support for rebel groups can alter significantly the rebel group’s leverage in relation to the government. Rebel groups that do \textit{not} target civilians in the face of government abuses, can translate increased international diplomatic support into more favorable conflict outcomes.

I begin with a discussion of the existing literature on civil war outcomes. I then lay out the theoretical argument: rebel groups that can draw a sharp contrast between their own respect for international humanitarian law and government abuses are more likely to secure diplomatic support from Western international audiences. Rebel groups can use this increased diplomatic support as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood (2014) find that Western governments are less likely to provide \textit{material} aid to rebel groups that target civilians.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Krasner 1999.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Bellamy and Williams 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{14} But see Wood and Kathman (2014).
\end{itemize}
leverage to win more favorable conflict outcomes. I then analyze the argument statistically, relying on cross-national data measuring rebel group violence against civilians in all civil wars from 1989 to 2010. I show that rebel groups that exercise restraint toward civilians in the face of government violence are more likely to secure favorable conflict outcomes. Finally, I probe the causal mechanism linking rebel group behavior to conflict outcomes: when rebel groups refrain from attacking civilians, but their government opponent commits abuses, Western governments and intergovernmental organizations are more likely to impose sanctions or publicly condemn the government, leading to government concessions.

**Determinants of Civil War Outcomes**

Most civil wars end in one of three ways: military victory for the government, military victory for the rebel group, or negotiated settlement.\(^{15}\) In the post-Cold War era outright military victory is rare.\(^{16}\) According to data collected by Toft (2009), 100 percent of civil wars that concluded during the 1980s ended with a government or rebel group military victory, whereas during the 1990s only about 40 percent of civil wars terminated in military victory. Using slightly different data, DeRouen and Sobek (2004) find that military victories ended about 75 percent of civil wars from 1944 to 1989, but in the post-Cold War period, more than 70 percent of conflicts ended in negotiated settlements.

Two of the main factors affecting whether a conflict ends in military victory or negotiated settlement are conflict costs and belligerent capabilities. Studies show that rising conflict costs undermine the government’s base of support and ability to prosecute the war, making possible rebel victory.\(^{17}\) Others argue that as the costs of a conflict rise, war weariness or stalemate sets in.

\(^{15}\) Some civil wars end after prolonged periods of low activity.
\(^{16}\) Fortna 2009.
\(^{17}\) Mason, Weingarten, and Fett 1999.
increasing the likelihood of a negotiated settlement.\textsuperscript{18} Belligerent capabilities also affects the prospects for victory: financing from contraband facilitates insurgency;\textsuperscript{19} challenging geography impedes counterinsurgency efforts;\textsuperscript{20} governments with strong bureaucratic institutions or large armies can more rapidly defeat an insurgency;\textsuperscript{21} militarily strong rebel groups are more likely to win;\textsuperscript{22} and belligerents receiving third-party military backing are more likely to win.\textsuperscript{23}

Many posit that the conduct of war also influences civil war outcomes. Scholars and policy makers, for example, argue that government violence against an insurgency’s base of civilian support is counterproductive, encouraging stronger resistance from civilians.\textsuperscript{24} Indeed, this insight underlies the common claim that counterinsurgency operations ought to prioritize winning hearts and minds.\textsuperscript{25} Other studies show, however, that government violence against civilians can be effective, impeding rebel operations in the short term,\textsuperscript{26} deterring civilians from aiding the insurgency if insurgents cannot protect civilians,\textsuperscript{27} or eliminating civilian supporters who are geographically concentrated.\textsuperscript{28}

More recently, scholars have examined the impact of insurgent violence against civilians. Several studies have found insurgent violence against civilians to be ineffective. Fortna, for example, finds that rebel groups that used terrorist tactics in civil wars were less likely to secure an outright military victory or a negotiated settlement than rebel groups that did not.\textsuperscript{29} Abrahms similarly finds that insurgencies that attacked civilian targets were less likely to achieve their political objectives.\textsuperscript{30} Thomas, however, finds that in African conflicts, rebel groups that used terrorist violence were more
likely to participate in negotiations and more likely to win political concessions from the government.\textsuperscript{31} Wood and Kathman show that in African conflicts, civilian victimization – defined to include terrorist bombing and other forms of violence – increases the probability of a negotiated settlement.\textsuperscript{32} However, very high levels of civilian victimization can be counterproductive.

These studies have rightly emphasized the ways in which rebel group violence against civilians can affect the domestic strategic environment and the maintenance of support from domestic constituencies – for example, by deterring civilians from aiding the government or by imposing costs on the government that may elicit political concessions. The existing literature, however, overlooks several key factors affecting the relationship between rebel group behavior and conflict outcomes. First, the existing literature has paid insufficient attention to international involvement in civil war termination, and the role that international law plays in shaping this international involvement.\textsuperscript{33} International law offers rebel groups a powerful tool that they can use to frame civil war violence and to appeal to international actors for support that can significantly impact the outcome of the conflict. International involvement in civil war termination increased dramatically following the Cold War, contributing to a rise in negotiated settlements and a concomitant decline in military victories; international peacekeeping helped belligerents resolve commitment problems, facilitating settlements that would not have been possible otherwise.\textsuperscript{34} International actors can also influence the terms of civil war settlement, shaping political outcomes. Second, recent studies have focused primarily on how rebel group behavior influences conflict outcomes, without examining the interaction between rebel group and government behavior.\textsuperscript{35} Rebel groups compete with

\textsuperscript{31} Thomas 2014.
\textsuperscript{32} Wood and Kathman 2014.
\textsuperscript{33} Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014, for example, argue that Western governments are less likely to support rebel groups that target civilians.
\textsuperscript{34} Fortna 2009.
\textsuperscript{35} Wood and Kathman (2014) are an exception, controlling for government violence in their analysis of rebel group violence and conflict outcomes. However, controlling for government behavior does not fully capture the interaction between governments and rebel groups.
governments for support from international constituencies, and do so, in part, by contrasting their own restraint toward civilians – and respect for international law – with government abuses.

Finally, most existing studies treat negotiated settlements as a single category, and analyze why some conflicts end in settlement rather than military victory. However, the content of negotiated settlements varies considerably across cases; some settlements favor the government, others favor the rebel group, and still others demand considerable concessions by both sides. Examining the content of negotiated settlements allows for an analysis of the extent to which violence affects the ability of rebel groups to achieve their stated political goals.

Understanding civil war outcomes in the post-Cold War period requires an analysis of the factors that influence belligerents’ ability to achieve their objectives through negotiated settlements, with particular attention to the role that international actors play in this bargaining process. Negotiated settlements occur when warring parties reach an agreement that is preferable to continued conflict. Bargaining approaches to war demonstrate that this may occur because fighting reveals information, allowing the warring parties to more accurately estimate one another’s capabilities and resolve. However, the revelation of information may be insufficient to facilitate agreement; commitment problems may make belligerents worry that the other side will break the agreement.36 The involvement of international actors is often essential in helping belligerents to resolve such commitment problems.37 I argue that the involvement of international actors not only facilitates settlement, but also influences the terms of settlement. Rebel groups compete with governments for international support, using international support as a means of increasing their bargaining leverage. Thus, whether belligerents attack civilians deliberately – in violation of international humanitarian law – matters.

37 Walter 2002; DeRouen and Sobek 2004.
Violence and Restraint toward Civilians in Civil Wars

Civilians are intimately involved in civil war. They are political constituents, on whose behalf belligerents fight. They provide essential material support and intelligence to belligerents. Consequently, rebel groups often have strategic incentives to attack civilians to deter them from aiding the government or to cleanse government constituents from disputed territory. Other rebel groups target civilians to increase the costs of the conflict and to coerce the government into making concessions.

According to some scholars, rebel groups that are weak militarily or that face high conflict costs perceive greater benefits to violence. Unable to confront the government militarily, these groups instead attack the government’s constituents. Weak groups may also have difficulty eliciting voluntary civilian cooperation, increasing their incentives to use violence against civilians. Alternatively, territorial contestation incentivizes rebel groups to use violence to deter civilians from aiding the government. Still others contend that the greater the government’s perceived sensitivity to civilian losses, the stronger the rebel group’s incentives to target government constituents in an effort to elicit political concessions.

The Costs of Violence. Although rebel groups often face strong incentives to use violence against civilians, violence is also costly. Violence can lead to greater resistance from the domestic civilian population. Violence can also be costly internationally. Overshadowing rebel group strategic calculations is the corpus of international humanitarian law – particularly the 1949 Geneva

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38 On strategic violence against civilians, see, for example, Valentino 2004; Kalyvas 2006; Stanton 2016. On opportunistic violence committed without the consent of group leadership, see, for example, Weinstein 2007; Manekin 2013.
41 See, for example, Wood 2014.
42 Kalyvas 2006.
43 Hultman 2012; Stanton 2013.
44 Kalyvas 2006.
Conventions, the 1977 First and Second Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions, and the 1998 Rome Statute of the ICC – which outlaws a wide range of violence against noncombatants during interstate and civil war, including murder, mutilation, torture, rape, and forced relocation of civilians. Certain civilian protections constitute customary international law: all combatants must abide by these rules, regardless of whether they have ratified the relevant treaties.

Formal mechanisms for enforcing international humanitarian law were limited, however, prior to the establishment of the ICC. Neither the 1949 Geneva Conventions nor its Protocols legally obligates states parties to take any particular diplomatic or military action in response to violations of international humanitarian law. However, domestic interest groups and NGOs frequently pressure Western governments and Western-led intergovernmental organizations to take action in response to human rights abuses, and as Murdie and Peksen show, such pressure can induce states to use the political tools at their disposal to respond to humanitarian law violations. In many cases, states have interpreted violations of international humanitarian law as threats to international peace and security, authorizing action under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. On this basis, the UN Security Council has imposed economic sanctions and arms embargoes against offending parties, and has established war crimes tribunals in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Cambodia. The Rome Statute further institutionalized the enforcement of international humanitarian law by establishing a permanent court with war crimes jurisdiction. Through the articulation of the responsibility to protect (RtoP), states asserted that if a government fails to uphold these protections, the international community has the right to intervene to protect civilians.

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46 Henckaerts and Doswald-Beck 2005. Customary international law is defined as rules that have become “a general practice accepted as law.” See Statute of the International Court of Justice, Article 38(1)(b), 26 June 1945.
48 Murdie and Peksen 2013; Murdie and Peksen 2014.
49 Bellamy and Williams 2011.
protect its own citizens from war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, or ethnic cleansing, the international community has an obligation to act through the UN Security Council, in conjunction with regional organizations, to prevent these crimes. International actors invoked RtoP as justification for intervention in civil wars in Cote D’Ivoire, Darfur, and Libya. Although enforcement remains inconsistent, belligerents can expect that, at a minimum, civilian targeting will bring criticism from Western international actors, if not other political action.

**Incentives for Restraint.** Not only is violence against civilians costly, but refraining from violence can enhance a group’s ability to appeal for support from Western international audiences. Rebel groups often use restraint deliberately – avoiding direct attacks on civilians and abiding by international humanitarian law in an effort to win support from international audiences.

By arguing that rebel groups can reference their respect for civilians in appeals for support from international constituencies, I am not claiming that all forms of international support are contingent on belligerent behavior. Foreign governments often provide material assistance – financing, weapons, or even military personnel – to governments and rebel groups irrespective of international humanitarian law compliance. External sources of support might even give rebel groups greater license to attack civilians by reducing rebel group reliance on local communities. However, some governments do care about rebel group behavior; democratic governments – especially those with strong human rights lobbies – are less likely to provide material assistance to rebel groups that commit serious human rights abuses. I argue that a similar logic drives diplomatic assistance to rebel groups, creating incentives for rebel groups to use restraint as a means of appealing to international audiences.

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50 Ibid.
51 Bellamy and Williams 2011.
52 Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood 2014.
54 Salehyan et al. 2014. Prorok and Appel 2014 demonstrate that governments with strong economic or political ties to Western democracies are more likely to comply with international humanitarian law during interstate wars.
Additionally, rebel groups vary in their need for diplomatic assistance from international audiences, and thus in their incentives to exercise restraint to win international support. Rebel groups receiving backing from powerful foreign governments unconcerned with the group’s adherence to international law can rely on their foreign supporters for leverage in negotiations; these rebel groups are less likely to appeal to Western international constituencies for diplomatic assistance. Other rebel groups may calculate that the benefits of violence outweigh the incentives for restraint.

Respect for international humanitarian law may also help rebel groups to broaden their support among domestic constituencies. Increased domestic support may increase the group’s perceived power or legitimacy and strengthen its bargaining position. However, I focus on international responses to rebel group behavior because increased domestic support is unlikely to produce a dramatic shift in leverage at the negotiating table, in comparison to the leverage gained by winning international support.

The Importance of Government Behavior. It is not always the case that rebel restraint will increase a rebel group’s chances of winning international support. Rebel groups make strategic calculations about the use of violence or restraint toward civilians in a context characterized by great uncertainty. Sometimes the chosen strategy does not improve the rebel group’s bargaining position or chances of success in the way the group expected.

Whether these chosen strategies in fact lead to greater political success depends in part on how other belligerents behave – mainly, how the government behaves; rebel groups compete with their government opponents for international support. Securing international support is difficult for rebel groups because strong international norms protect state sovereignty. For example, the UN

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55 In multiparty conflicts, rebel groups may compete with one another, or they may cooperate (Bapat and Bond 2012), contrasting with government abuses their collective compliance with international humanitarian law.

56 Krasner 1999.
Charter prohibits intervention in “matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state.” Civil wars are traditionally considered as within a state’s domestic jurisdiction, and political or military interventions in civil wars interpreted as violations of state sovereignty. Consequently, even a rebel group that respects international humanitarian law by exercising restraint is likely to have difficulty using its behavior as a basis for securing support if the government similarly restrains itself. In such situations, international actors are likely to accept, on sovereignty grounds, that the government has the authority pursue its preferred counterinsurgency strategies and to resist political negotiations.

However, international actors have also asserted limits to state sovereignty – most recently, through the articulation of the responsibility to protect, which stipulates that protections for state sovereignty only apply if a government upholds its obligations to protect its citizens from harm. Political and even military intervention may be justified if a government fails in this responsibility – for example, if a government commits war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide against its own people. Thus, government abuse of its citizens during counterinsurgency operations can create an opportunity for the rebel group to appeal for international support by contrasting its own respect for international humanitarian law with government abuses.

**The International Politics of Civil War Termination**

*Rebel Group Appeals for International Support.* In seeking international support, rebel groups use a variety of strategies, including making public appeals through interviews with international media outlets, making formal statements before the United Nations, lobbying foreign governments directly, and urging sympathetic NGOs to publicize government human rights violations.

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57 Article 2(7) of the Charter of the United Nations.
Rebel groups often make explicit appeals to international law, referencing the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law and framing both their own behavior and the government’s behavior in terms of these formal international legal instruments. Through these activities, rebel groups urge international actors to take a wide range of actions against the government, such as imposing economic sanctions or arms embargoes, withholding aid, pressuring the government diplomatically, offering to mediate peace negotiations, or even threatening military intervention.

Some might question whether international law is essential to this story, arguing that international humanitarian law reflects Western ideals – in particular, Western intolerance for civilian casualties. In this view, even if international humanitarian law did not exist, Western governments and intergovernmental organizations would be reluctant to support governments that commit atrocities, and rebel groups could emphasize their own restraint toward civilians in appeals for international support. However, as research on international human rights law shows, even when international legal agreements reflect state preferences, formal commitment provides domestic and international actors with a tool that they can use to induce changes in the government’s behavior. For example, domestic actors can challenge government violations of international human rights law in domestic courts and can use the government’s international legal commitments to facilitate political mobilization urging greater government respect for human rights. International actors – in particular, international human rights NGOs – often use international human rights law in similar ways, researching allegations of human rights abuses, naming and shaming states that fail to satisfy

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58 Bob 2005; Coggins 2011; Huang 2016; Stanton 2016.
59 Jo 2015.
60 Hathaway 2002; Simmons 2009; Lupu 2013.
human rights obligations, and lobbying states to improve their respect for the rights of their citizens.  

International law serves a similar function during civil wars, providing rebel groups with a tool to solicit international diplomatic support, urging international actors to take coercive action against the abusive regime. International law can thus empower rebel groups to frame violence occurring in the context of civil war, using the standards set out in international agreements to differentiate government atrocities from “normal” wartime violence. Rebel groups can formalize their appeal, framing their own behavior as adhering to international legal (and not only to moral) standards.

For example, during its decades-long fight to gain independence for East Timor, the Fretilin insurgency lobbied foreign governments, international NGOs, and the UN to increase international support for the insurgency. Fretilin accused the Indonesian government of grave human rights abuses in East Timor, even arguing that the government had violated the 1951 Genocide Convention. Fretilin raised these concerns repeatedly with the UN Human Rights Commission, calling on foreign governments to cut aid to Indonesia. José Ramos-Horta, who served as Fretilin’s primary representative abroad explicitly outlined this logic:

Most wars of national liberation end in negotiations. There is almost no precedent of a guerrilla movement defeating an established government by military means alone…East Timor is in fact one case in which the West could play an effective and constructive role…A combined effort by the U.S. and Great Britain, with which Australia could be associated, would certainly persuade the Indonesian generals to seriously negotiate an end to the war...

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62 See, for example, Michael Simmons, “Ten Years of Terror: Interview with Ramos Horta, East Timor’s Representative at the UN,” Guardian, 20 December 1985.
The separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in Indonesia adopted a similar strategy, appealing to international actors for support by contrasting its restraint toward civilians with the human rights abuses of Suharto’s government. In 1993, for example, a GAM representative testified before the UN Commission on Human Rights that Indonesia’s “reign of terror imposed on the Acehnese was akin to the ethnic cleansing practiced in Bosnia and Herzegovina” and called for the UN to investigate. GAM’s military commander made a similar appeal during an interview with The Guardian, asking “Why doesn’t the world open its eyes to the atrocities here? ...If it can intervene in Kosovo, why can’t it do the same here?...Without outside help there will never be peace in Aceh.”

**International Responses to Atrocities.** Western governments face different domestic constraints and pressures and conceptualize their interests differently, leading to variation in policy responses. For example, former colonial powers may face strong domestic pressure to respond to human rights violations occurring in their former colonies, leading to more forceful diplomatic action – as when France facilitated negotiations to end the civil war in Côte D’Ivoire and pressured the abusive Gbagbo government to make major political concessions. Regional powers may confront similar pressure to take action when abuses occur in neighboring countries. For example, As Australians’ calls for action escalated in the 1990s in response to human rights abuses in nearby East Timor, Australia reversed its longstanding support for Indonesia, and pressed Indonesia to negotiate. Despite variation in domestic pressures and constraints, Western governments, as a group, should be more likely than non-Western governments to respond to civil war atrocities.

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66 Schulze 2004; Aspinall 2009.  
69 Guardian, 10 August 1999.  
70 Bovcon 2009.  
Rebel groups can thus use their respect for international humanitarian norms during civil war to appeal to these Western constituencies for diplomatic support.

International actors utilize a variety of tools to exert pressure on governments. Foreign governments, for example, have access to media and public forums that rebel groups have difficulty reaching, and can advocate for the rebel group to shift international public opinion. A foreign government or an intergovernmental organization can also lobby other governments directly. Portugal, for example, urged other European governments to pressure Indonesia to negotiate over the status of East Timor. International actors can also propose sanctions against the abusive government, limiting its ability to obtain weapons or financing; they can also pressure governments to cut off aid to the abusive regime. Foreign governments can push for terms of settlement favorable to the rebel group, urging the government and its backers to accept particular political concessions. In many cases, foreign governments or the UN become directly involved in peace negotiations, as a mediator or in a contact group of concerned states. For example, France facilitated and mediated negotiations to end the conflict in Cote D’Ivoire in which the government was heavily criticized for its human rights abuses. The French president and the UN Secretary General met personally with Ivoirian president Laurent Gbagbo, urging him to agree to the peace deal, although the terms favored the rebel group. They also organized a large diplomatic conference to coincide with the signing of the peace deal, making clear that continued donor support was contingent on the Gbagbo government’s acquiescence to the terms of the deal. The UN played a similar role in East Timor. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed a special

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72 Ibid.
73 Bovecon 2009.
representative to facilitate negotiations between Indonesia and Portugal and formed a contact group of concerned states to help pressure the two sides.\textsuperscript{75}

International support is particularly valuable because most rebel groups are at a distinct military disadvantage in comparison to the governments they are challenging; of the 102 rebel groups that fought in civil wars between 1989 and 2010, only 11 rebel groups had more troops than their government opponent.\textsuperscript{76} Military weakness among rebel groups makes it difficult for rebel groups to have enough leverage during peace negotiations to force significant government concessions and makes rebel group military victory unlikely in most cases. Diplomatic support from international actors can, however, make a significant difference in the ability of rebel groups to exert pressure on the government, thereby securing greater government concessions and leading to more favorable conflict outcomes.

\textit{Hypothesis:} Rebel groups that do not target civilians when faced with a government opponent that targets civilians should be more likely than other rebel groups to secure a favorable resolution to the conflict.

Conflicts in Indonesia and Liberia illustrate how belligerent behavior can shape international involvement in civil wars, influencing conflict outcomes. The East Timor conflict highlights the shift that took place at the end of the Cold War, as international actors increasingly became involved in negotiating agreements to end civil wars. In 1975, an extremely harsh Indonesian counterinsurgency campaign killed an estimated 200,000 Timorese – about one-third of East Timor’s population.\textsuperscript{77} During the Cold War, however, international actors eager to maintain Indonesia as a Western ally in the fight against communism did not pressure Suharto on the issue of East Timor. In the 1990s foreign governments began raising more serious questions about

\textsuperscript{75} Marker 2003.
\textsuperscript{76} I describe these data in the section on methodology.
\textsuperscript{77} Amnesty International 1985, 6.
Indonesia’s human rights practices – particularly following the 1991 Dili massacre in which Indonesian forces fired into a crowd of Timorese demonstrators, killing 75 to 200. Fretilin intensified its international lobbying, calling on the UN Security Council to address the Dili massacre and urging foreign governments to impose an arms embargo on Indonesia. In response, the European Parliament passed a resolution recommending that the European Community and the UN ban arms sales to Indonesia. The Netherlands halted official aid to Indonesia, while Canada cut some of its official development assistance. In October 1992, the US ended its military training assistance to Indonesia in response to persistent human rights abuses in East Timor. Australia – one of the few countries that had formally recognized Indonesia’s annexation of East Timor – conceded to a high-level meeting with Timorese representatives, withdrawing its longstanding support of Indonesia. In December 1992, Indonesia agreed to take part in UN-mediated talks with Portugal over the status of East Timor. Talks progressed slowly, but when the Suharto regime fell in 1998, pressure on the new transitional government mounted. The U.S., EU, Australia, and the UN – and Fretilin – all urged Indonesia to alter its policy toward East Timor. Indonesia finally relented, agreeing through the UN-mediated talks to a referendum that led to East Timor’s independence.

International involvement in the termination of the 2000-2003 conflict in Liberia was even more complex. Charles Taylor came to power in Liberia following years of leading the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in a civil war. Shortly after Taylor gained power, Liberians United

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78 Murphy 2010.
83 Mike Seccombe, “PM Attacked over Line on Dili Horror,” Sydney Morning Herald, 4 December 1991.
for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and later, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) formed armed opposition to Taylor’s regime. Human Rights Watch reported that in fighting these insurgencies, Taylor’s forces tortured, raped, and killed groups of civilians believed to be sympathetic to the insurgency, and looted and burned civilian homes. Additionally, Taylor backed the RUF in Sierra Leone – a group responsible for extreme atrocities against civilians – escalating calls for Taylor’s removal from power. According to U.S. war crimes ambassador, David Scheffer, the prosecution of Taylor was a key consideration during UN-mediated negotiations to establish the Special Court for Sierra Leone; the United States and the United Kingdom saw the Special Court’s likely prosecution of Taylor as a means of undermining Taylor’s rule. The UN Security Council imposed economic sanctions, an arms embargo, and a travel ban against the Liberian government in 2001, and the Special Court for Sierra Leone launched investigations into Taylor’s involvement in war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone.

In contrast, LURD largely avoided deliberate attacks against civilians. Although the group was responsible for some human rights abuses – most notably, forcibly conscripting civilians – Human Rights Watch reported that “rebel abuses appear to be less widespread and systematic than those committed by government forces.” Human Rights Watch also pointed out that LURD made efforts to protect civilians from harm – allowing civilians to leave contested areas; instructing their soldiers to avoid violence against civilians; and disciplining soldiers who violated these rules.

LURD sought international support and wanted international actors to perceive the group as legitimate. LURD depicted its rebellion as a popular rebellion, committed to democratization in

87 Bird 2015.
90 International Crisis Group 2002b.
92 Ibid, 8–9.
93 Käihkö 2015.
Liberia and to a restoration of Liberia’s standing internationally. To gain international backing, LURD emphasized the contrast between its own behavior toward civilians and the behavior of Taylor’s forces, appealing for support through press releases and interviews with international media outlets. In an Agence-France Presse interview in May 2002, a LURD spokesman insisted on the group’s commitment to respect human rights, saying that LURD wanted to turn Taylor “over to an international court to have him tried for the crimes he has committed against the people of Liberia, Sierra Leone and the camps in Guinea…This is not a war we are fighting against any group in Liberia…We’ll protect all the civilians, they don’t have to fear.” In interviews, “LURD commanders…highlight the difference between LURD and GoL treatment of civilians. In fact, many LURD fighters identified the government forces’ continued harassment of civilians as the main difference between the factions.” LURD leader Sekou Conneh “claimed LURD did not want to go against the international community, and that LURD was constrained by international opinion.” LURD’s concern for international opinion may have led the group to reign in human rights abuses after June 2001, with some sources citing the group’s efforts to train its troops to minimize civilian casualties and looting.

In early 2003, as LURD and MODEL advanced on the Liberian capital of Monrovia, and under heavy domestic and international pressure to end the war, Taylor agreed to participate in peace negotiations mediated by a regional intergovernmental organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Many were skeptical about the prospects for settlement. LURD’s primary objective was to remove Taylor from power; but Taylor was unwilling

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94 Ibid.
96 Ibid, 260.
97 Hazen 2013, 119.
98 Ibid.
to agree to any settlement that would exclude him from future participation in government. The Special Court for Sierra Leone intervened, unsealing its indictment of Taylor for war crimes and crimes against humanity on the morning that peace talks were to begin in Ghana. The prosecutor admitted his intention to discredit Taylor in advance of the talks; once publicly indicted for war crimes, Taylor might be excluded from the peace process. The prosecutor declared, “The timing of this announcement was carefully considered in light of the important peace process begun this week…It is imperative that the attendees know they are dealing with an indicted war criminal.”

Although the United States had originally advocated for Taylor’s prosecution, U.S. officials opposed the Court’s decision to unseal the indictment, believing that this might undermine the peace negotiations and complicate Taylor’s removal from power. Others involved in the negotiations were similarly critical, but many later admitted that the indictment “helped LURD to delegitimize him [Taylor].” In media interviews, LURD insisted that it would not negotiate with a government “led by an indicted war criminal.” The indictment minimized Taylor’s role in the negotiations, forcing him to concede to a ceasefire and the establishment of a transitional government that ECOWAS, the UN, and the African Union would facilitate. After signing the agreement, however, Taylor reneged. International actors pressed Taylor to abdicate as agreed; U.S. President George Bush publicly called for Taylor’s resignation. The United Kingdom and other foreign governments urged the United States – in light of its historical ties to Liberia – to intervene to enforce the peace agreement. Ultimately, the United States sent troops to back the ECOWAS

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102 Hayner 2007.
105 Bird 2015.
106 Käihkö 2015, 256.
peacekeeping mission, and helped to negotiate a deal for Taylor to receive asylum in Nigeria.109 Without this direct international involvement, it is unlikely that LURD would have been achieved its objectives of ousting Taylor and ushering in a transition to democracy in Liberia.

Methodology

To examine the relationship between belligerent behavior and conflict outcomes, I use an original data set on violence against civilians in all civil wars from 1989 to 2010. The cases are drawn from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, which defines internal armed conflict as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government or territory or both where the use of armed force between two parties results in at least 25 battle-related deaths” and “occurs between the government of a state and internal opposition groups.”110 The unit of analysis is the conflict dyad; if a government fought against multiple rebel groups simultaneously, each group enters the data set as a distinct conflict dyad. Following standard definitions of civil war, I focus on conflict dyads in which fighting led to at least 1,000 battle-related deaths.111 I limit the universe of cases to the 110 post-Cold War civil wars, which began or were ongoing after 1989.

Civil war termination changed dramatically at the end of the Cold War; international involvement in peace negotiations and peacekeeping facilitated negotiated settlements.112 Additionally, Cold War-era superpower backing created a different incentive structure: ideology heavily influenced the dynamics of international diplomatic support. Consequently, my argument – government and rebel group behavior influences international political intervention in civil wars, influencing conflict outcomes – is unlikely to apply during the Cold War.

111 Doyle and Sambanis 2006; Fearon and Laitin 2003.
112 DeRouen and Sobek 2004; Fortna 2009.
The incentive structure facing belligerents has continued shifting. With the adoption of the Rome Statute in 1998, and the articulation of the responsibility to protect in 2005, international actors formalized enforcement of international humanitarian law, creating greater opportunities for rebel groups to use the framework of international humanitarian law to appeal to Western international constituencies for support. Western international actors may more willingly intervene in response to civil war atrocities, giving rebel groups greater leverage to win political concessions. I return to this issue below.

**Conflict Outcomes.** To code conflict outcomes, I begin with the Non-State Actor Data compiled by Cunningham et al. 2009, which distinguish between conflicts that end in government victory, rebel group victory, formal agreement (either ceasefire or peace agreement), or subside after periods of low activity. However, this categorization of conflict outcomes is not as useful for evaluating my main hypothesis. I argue that when a rebel group can contrast its own respect for civilian immunity with government abuses, the rebel group is more likely to win international diplomatic support, which it can leverage to secure more favorable terms of political settlement. Assessing this argument requires a coding of conflict outcomes that differentiates between negotiated settlements based on their content – whether the terms of the settlement favor the government or the rebel group.

For cases coded in Cunningham et al. as ending in formal agreement or periods of low activity, I code whether this conclusion to the conflict favored the government, the rebel group, or neither side. For example, the civil war in Algeria began in 1992, following the military’s refusal to honor 1991 parliamentary election results favorable to the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The FIS formed an armed wing, the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) to challenge the government militarily. The conflict ended in 1997 when the AIS announced a unilateral ceasefire and disbanded; in later

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113 Cunningham et al. 2009.
negotiations, the government granted an amnesty to former AIS members, but banned the group’s political wing, the FIS, from participating in government. This conflict is coded in Cunningham et al. as ending with a formal agreement. I code this as an outcome favorable to the government, since the FIS/AIS group members received none of their initial political objectives, only amnesty, and the government made no political concessions.

The separatist conflict in East Timor provides an example of a settlement favoring the rebel group. East Timorese insurgents won independence from Indonesia. Following negotiations between Portugal and Indonesia, which agreed to hold a referendum on East Timor’s independence in 1999, the UN supervised the transition to independence.

The separatist conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian government provides an example of negotiated settlements involving significant concessions by both sides. GAM signed a peace agreement with the Indonesian government in 2005, granting Aceh regional autonomy and permitting former GAM members to participate in elections for Aceh’s regional government. But GAM did not win Aceh’s full independence from Indonesia, as it had demanded throughout the conflict.

Using this coding scheme, I construct a categorical dependent variable, **Conflict Outcome**, with three categories: a) outcomes favorable to the government – government military victories and negotiated settlements favorable to the government (coded as 0); b) outcomes favorable to the rebel group – rebel group military victories and negotiated settlements favorable to the rebel group (coded as 2); and c) outcomes involving significant concessions from each side (coded as 1). I code ongoing conflicts as missing, leaving 77 civil wars that terminated between 1989 and 2010. Of these 77 civil wars, 33 (42.9 percent) ended with an outcome favorable to the rebel group; 25 (32.5

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114 See the online appendix for additional information on coding procedures.
percent) ended with an outcome involving concessions from both sides; and 19 (24.7 percent) ended with an outcome favorable to the government.

In her research on leader responsibility and civil war outcomes, Prorok (2016) similarly differentiates among negotiated settlements based on whether their terms are more favorable to the government or the rebel group. Prorok’s measure of civil war outcomes nevertheless differs in two important ways from the measure of conflict outcomes used here. First, Prorok codes conflict outcomes separately for each side in the conflict; I code a single outcome for each conflict dyad, based on a comparison of the war aims of the two sides. Second, Prorok is particularly interested in extreme victory or defeat; she accounts for the military outcome of the conflict in her coding. I focus on the political outcome of the conflict. In robustness tests, I replicate the analyses using Prorok’s data; the results of these analyses are similar to the results below, and are reported in full in the online Appendix.

**Civilian Targeting.** Existing work on wartime violence against civilians has used measures of the number of civilians killed to identify cases of civilian targeting. Obtaining reliable data on civilian deaths in civil war is difficult, however; the quality and depth of reporting varies widely across countries and across time, raising questions about the feasibility of using count data as a basis for cross-country comparison. This data set focuses on forms of violence, measuring whether each government and each rebel group used the four most severe forms of violence against civilians – massacres; scorched earth campaigns; cleansing of a particular ethnic or religious group; or deliberate bombing and shelling of populated civilian targets.

The main hypothesis emphasizes the interaction between government and rebel group behavior: rebel groups that exercise restraint in the face of government violence are more likely than

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115 For a more detailed comparison with Prorok’s data on conflict outcomes, see the online appendix.
117 Kalyvas 2006.
other rebel groups to achieve a favorable conflict outcome. To test this argument, I begin by measuring Rebel Group Civilian Targeting and Government Civilian Targeting. These are dichotomous variables, measuring whether each rebel group and each government used any of the four forms of severe violence against civilians. Rebel Group Restraint is the inverse of Rebel Group Civilian Targeting, representing cases in which the rebel group did not use any of the four forms of severe violence against civilians. Using these measures of Rebel Group Restraint and Government Civilian Targeting, I construct an interaction term, Rebel Group Restraint * Government Civilian Targeting, which allows for a direct test of the hypothesis regarding the interaction between rebel group and government behavior.

I define massacres as the killing of five or more civilians in the same place and at the same time, through the direct contact of armed forces with civilians – for example, by shooting or beating to death. I code only those groups responsible for more than five massacres as using this form of violence. Scorched earth strategies involve the intentional burning or demolishing of villages and/or agricultural land. Cleansing is the forced, permanent removal of a particular civilian population from territory. Coding deliberate bombing and shelling of civilian areas is challenging; governments and rebel groups often claim that aerial bombardment or artillery shelling is aimed at military targets, only mistakenly hitting nearby civilian targets. Consequently, I only include sustained bombing or shelling directed intentionally at civilian targets such as residential areas, and small-scale bombing of populated civilian targets such as buses, restaurants, or public markets.

In coding these four forms of violence, I focus on intentional violence against civilians, and do not code as civilian targeting incidents of collateral damage – civilian deaths and property destruction during a military engagements. I am interested in capturing patterns of behavior, and thus only code as civilian targeting repeated use of the four forms of severe violence. For each conflict, I consulted the following sources: U.S. Department of State annual Country Reports on
Human Rights Practices for every year that the conflict was ongoing, as well as every annual report and in-depth report published by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, and the United Nations relevant to the conflict. I supplemented this with secondary historical sources and newspaper reports where necessary.

The four most severe forms of violence against civilians—massacres, scorched earth policies, forced expulsion, and the deliberate bombing and shelling of populated civilian targets—are common during civil war. Slightly more than half of all governments and about 58 percent of rebel groups used at least one of these four forms of violence against civilians.

Endogeneity Concerns. Some scholars have argued that rebel groups at a military disadvantage relative to the government are more likely to target civilians. If true, this could complicate assessing the relationship between violence and conflict outcomes. Rebel groups that target civilians might be less likely to secure favorable conflict outcomes because they are weaker in comparison to their government opponents, not because they attacked civilians. However, recent research differentiating among types of rebel group violence against civilians shows that although weak rebel groups are more likely to use terrorism in particular, they are not any more likely to use violence against civilians overall.\(^{118}\) Still, to address this issue, I use a variety of different measures to control for the relative strength of the belligerents as well as to control for the scale of military losses.

Control Variables. To capture the rebel group’s military strength relative to the government, I use several different measures. First, Relative Strength is a ratio of average government troop strength to average rebel group troop strength, constructed using annual data from The Military Balance and the SIPRI Yearbooks.\(^{119}\) The median government in the data set has 14.9 times

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\(^{118}\) Stanton 2016.

\(^{119}\) For conflicts that began before 1989, I use data from 1989 on. Government troop estimates are for active armed forces, excluding paramilitary forces.
the troop strength of its rebel opponent. Substituting an alternate measure of relative military
capacity from the Non-State Actor Data compiled by Cunningham et al. (2009) does not alter
significantly the statistical results (see the online Appendix).

Second, I control for material assistance from foreign governments, which may also
contribute to belligerent capacity.120 Variables measuring Intervention on the Government Side and
Intervention on the Rebel Group Side are dichotomous variables indicating whether any foreign
government provided military troops to either side; these variables rely on data from the
UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset and the UCDP/PRIO External Support Dataset.121 Foreign
governments intervened militarily to aid insurgencies in 13 of the 103 civil wars in the data set, and
to aid governments in 24 civil wars.

Third, to account for government capacity more broadly, I control for Per Capita GDP,122
and in robustness checks, include alternate measures of state capacity.123 Finally, although data on
battlefield losses are not available for all conflicts, I capture Conflict Intensity by examining the overall
military intensity of the conflict as measured by average annual battle-related deaths; this variable is
logged.124

I include several additional control variables. Separatist Rebel Group measures whether the
rebel group was fighting to gain autonomy or independence for a particular region of the country.125
Governments often resist granting concessions to separatist groups – particularly if they believe that

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120 Rebel group behavior may lead to increased diplomatic assistance. In some cases, diplomatic assistance may translate
to material aid, complicating attempts to distinguish between these forms of support. In many cases, however,
diplomatic aid – primarily support during negotiations – is not tied to material assistance.
121 Gleditsch et al. 2002; Hogbladh, Pettersson, and Themner 2011.
122 Data are from Gleditsch 2002. Because civil war onset often leads to a decline in GDP, I measure per capita GDP in
the year prior to conflict onset. For conflicts that began prior to 1989, I use data from 1988.
123 Hendrix 2010.
124 Data are from the PRIO Battle Deaths Dataset, 1946-2005 and Duration Data v1-2006. See Gates and Strand 2006;
Gleditsch et al. 2002; Lacina and Gleditsch 2005.
125 Coding of rebel group war aims is from Fearon and Laitin 2003.
this will encourage other groups to demand autonomy.\textsuperscript{126} However, the issues at stake may be more easily divisible in separatist conflicts than in revolutionary conflicts.\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Multiparty Conflict} is a dichotomous variable measuring whether the conflict involved multiple rebel groups fighting against the government simultaneously.\textsuperscript{128} Multiparty conflicts tend to last longer than two-party conflicts,\textsuperscript{129} are less likely to end in negotiated settlement or government victory, and more likely to end in rebel victory.\textsuperscript{130} It is possible that the number of belligerents also influences the terms of settlement – for example, rebel groups may have greater leverage to press for government concessions in these conflicts.\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Conflict Duration} measures the duration of the conflict in months.\textsuperscript{132} Some have found evidence that certain conflict outcomes – most notably, government victories – become less likely as a conflict wears on.\textsuperscript{133} Finally, \textit{Material Aid to Rebel Group} measures whether the rebel group received financing, weapons, or troops from a non-Western government in the first year of the conflict.\textsuperscript{134} As noted above, rebel groups receiving aid from non-Western governments are less likely to seek diplomatic support from Western international constituencies.

\section*{Data Analysis}

\textit{Descriptive Statistics.} Figure 1 shows the distribution of cases, by belligerent behavior and conflict outcome. Consistent with the main hypothesis, political outcomes favoring the rebel group are most common in conflicts in which the rebel group can contrast its restraint toward civilians with the government’s abuses (left-most column in Figure 1). Nearly 65 percent of conflicts in

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Walter 2009.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Mason and Fett 1996; Mason, Weingarten, and Fett 1999.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Coding of multiparty conflicts is from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Cunningham 2011a.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Cunningham (2011b), for example, shows that governments are more likely to make concessions when facing internally-divided self-determination movements than when facing unified movements; however, these concessions are less likely to end violence.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Data are from the PRIO Duration Data v1-2006. See Gates and Strand 2006; Gleditsch et al. 2002.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009.
  \item \textsuperscript{134} From the UCDP External Support Dataset (Hogbladh, Pettersson, and Themner 2011).
\end{itemize}
which the rebel group exercised restraint while the government abused civilians ended with a political outcome favoring the rebel group. In East Timor, for example, the Indonesian government used aerial and naval bombardment to destroy vegetation, crops, and villages and used ground forces to forcibly transport the civilian population to resettlement areas. Fretilin rebels largely avoided attacks on civilians, winning independence for East Timor following many years of international lobbying. Slightly more than half of conflicts in which both sides exercised restraint toward civilians ended in an outcome favoring the rebel group. During the civil war in Cambodia, for example, both the government and the two major rebel groups – FUNCINPEC and the KPNLF – exercised restraint, primarily attacking one another’s military forces and not civilians. The political settlement ending the war favored FUNCINPEC and the KPNLF – a more democratic form of government, in which they were permitted representation as political parties. Outcomes favoring the rebel group are much less common where rebel groups targeted civilians. The LRA in Uganda, for example, deliberately targeted civilians in Northern Uganda, while the Ugandan government largely did not; the LRA was marginalized internationally, and never had enough leverage to win significant concessions from the Ugandan government.

Note: the numbers shown in the bar graph indicate the number of cases in each category of conflict outcome.

**Statistical Analyses.** Table 1 reports the results of ordered logit analyses, which treat the dependent variable – *Conflict Outcome* – as an ordered variable. The ordered logit model assumes that the effects of the coefficients are the same across outcomes; likelihood-ratio and Wald tests confirm that the models do not violate this proportional odds assumption.\textsuperscript{136} I report robust standard errors for all of the statistical analyses, clustering cases by country.

\textsuperscript{136} Although tests confirm that the proportional odds assumption holds, in robustness checks, I estimate a multinomial logit model, which treats the main dependent variable, *Conflict Outcome*, as a categorical variable, as well as a generalized ordered logit, which relaxes the proportional odds assumption. The results of these alternate model specifications are consistent with the results in Table 2 (see online appendix for full results).
Table 1: Ordered Logit Analyses – Conflict Outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MODEL 1 Basic Model</th>
<th>MODEL 2 Interaction Term</th>
<th>MODEL 3 Additional Controls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Restraint</td>
<td>1.043**</td>
<td>−0.043</td>
<td>−0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.431)</td>
<td>(0.675)</td>
<td>(0.693)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Civilian Targeting</td>
<td>0.275</td>
<td>−0.571</td>
<td>−1.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.459)</td>
<td>(0.668)</td>
<td>(0.755)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Restraint *</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>2.212**</td>
<td>2.993**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Civilian Targeting</td>
<td>(1.096)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.308)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Intensity –</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>0.255</td>
<td>0.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Annual Battle Deaths</td>
<td>(0.176)</td>
<td>(0.188)</td>
<td>(0.186)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Strength –</td>
<td>−0.276**</td>
<td>−0.390***</td>
<td>−0.572***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of Government to Rebel Group Troops</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
<td>(0.138)</td>
<td>(0.183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Intervention on Rebel Group Side</td>
<td>0.664</td>
<td>0.660</td>
<td>1.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.845)</td>
<td>(0.824)</td>
<td>(1.103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Intervention on Government Side</td>
<td>−0.110</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>−0.184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.582)</td>
<td>(0.554)</td>
<td>(0.620)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Per Capita GDP, logged</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.063</td>
<td>−0.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.267)</td>
<td>(0.301)</td>
<td>(0.273)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separatist Conflict</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>−0.341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.836)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiparty Conflict</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>−0.778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.718)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Duration</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>0.007**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Aid to Rebel Group, from Non-Western Government</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>−0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.597)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wald Chi²: 19.28***, 23.22***, 31.06***  
Pseudo R²: 0.1388, 0.1665, 0.2100  
N: 76, 76, 76

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10.
The results provide strong support for the primary hypothesis, which posits an interactive effect between rebel group and government behavior: rebel groups should be more likely to secure a favorable conflict outcome when they can contrast their own restraint toward civilians with the abuses of their government opponent. To assess this hypothesis, I include an interaction term, \( \text{Rebel Group Restraint} \times \text{Government Civilian Targeting} \), in Models 2 and 3. Consistent with the expectations of the hypothesis, the interaction term is positive in Model 2 and remains so following the inclusion of a number of additional control variables in Model 3. These results indicate an increased likelihood of an outcome favoring the rebel group in conflicts in which the government targets civilians, but the rebel group does not. Importantly, given concerns regarding endogeneity, the results for \( \text{Rebel Group Restraint} \times \text{Government Civilian Targeting} \) hold after including several direct and indirect measures of the military strength of the belligerents.

When the interaction term is included in the model, the coefficient for \( \text{Rebel Group Restraint} \) represents the likelihood of an outcome favoring the rebel group when the government also exercises restraint (\( \text{Government Civilian Targeting} = 0 \)); the coefficient for \( \text{Government Civilian Targeting} \) represents the likelihood of an outcome favoring the rebel group when both sides target civilians (\( \text{Rebel Group Restraint} = 0 \)).\(^{137}\) Neither of these coefficients reaches statistical significance in Model 2 or 3. The results for \( \text{Rebel Group Restraint} \) indicate that conflicts involving restraint by both sides are not associated with a greater likelihood of rebel group success, consistent with the theoretical argument’s emphasis on differentiation between rebel group and government behavior. When both sides exercise restraint, international actors are likely to defer to the principle of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states, limiting the rebel group’s ability to use diplomatic support as leverage to secure a more favorable outcome.

\(^{137}\) Braumoeller 2004.
Although the results show that the relationship between belligerent behavior and civil war outcomes holds for all post-Cold War conflicts, this relationship should be even stronger for conflicts that began after the negotiation of the Rome Statute in 1998. Testing this statistically is difficult; among conflicts that began in 1998 or later, only 11 have ended. However, an overview of these cases provides some support for the claim that rebel group ability to use international law to seek international diplomatic support has increased over time. In the two conflicts where the rebel group exercised restraint in the face of government abuses, the rebel group secured a favorable conflict outcome. In the other nine conflicts, 44.4 percent of the rebel groups obtained a favorable conflict outcome.

The results are consistent with several key findings in the literature on civil war outcomes. First, several studies find that stronger rebel groups are more likely to win outright military victories. The results here show that stronger rebel groups are also more likely to secure favorable outcomes through negotiated settlements. The negative and statistically significant coefficients for Relative Strength – a ratio of government to rebel group troop strength – indicate that rebel groups that are weak in comparison to their government opponents are less likely than strong rebel groups to secure a favorable conflict outcome. Second, research has found that longer conflicts are associated with a decline in the likelihood of a government victory. The positive and statistically significant coefficient for Conflict Duration in Model 3 indicates that longer conflicts are also associated with an increased likelihood of a political outcome favoring the rebel group.

However, the findings also point to several important refinements of hypotheses on civil war outcomes. Studies have shown that as the costs of a conflict increase, the likelihood of negotiated settlement increases. However, the results here indicate that conflict costs may not have as strong an impact on the terms of settlement. The coefficient for Conflict Intensity is positive, but falls short of statistical significance. Studies have found a strong positive relationship between biased military
intervention and the likelihood of military victory. However, the lack of a strong relationship between military intervention and outcomes favorable to the rebel group indicates that military intervention does not necessarily aid rebel groups in winning favorable terms of settlement. Additionally, separatist rebel groups and rebel groups fighting in multiparty conflicts are no more (or less) likely than other groups to secure favorable terms of settlement.

Table 2 shows the calculated probability of an outcome favoring the rebel group (Conflict Outcome = 2) for all combinations of government and rebel group civilian targeting. To calculate the probabilities, I use Table 1, Model 2, holding the other independent variables at their mean value (for continuous variables) or their modal value (for dichotomous variables). These probabilities estimate the likelihood of an outcome favoring the rebel group for a conflict without foreign military intervention on behalf of the government or the rebel group, with mean levels of belligerent troop strength, conflict intensity, and per capita GDP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Percent Likelihood of Outcome Favoring Rebel Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Government Behavior:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Does Not Target Civilians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Behavior:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Does Not Target Civilians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Targets Civilians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 95% confidence interval shown in parentheses.

I used Clarify to generate the probabilities throughout this section. See King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000.
These probability estimates show that government and rebel group behavior have a substantively large impact on conflict outcomes. The likelihood of an outcome favorable to the rebel group is highest when rebel groups exercise restraint while the government opponent targets civilians. In such cases, the likelihood of an outcome favoring the rebel group is extremely high – 72.2 percent. In all other cases, the likelihood of a favorable outcome is dramatically lower. A rebel group that targets civilians, for example, when facing a government that also targets civilians has only a 24.3 percent likelihood of achieving a favorable conflict outcome – a difference of nearly 48 percentage points.

**Robustness Tests.** I conduct three sets of robustness tests (results shown in online Appendix). The first set estimates alternate model specifications: a generalized ordered logit and a multinomial logit. The second set tests two alternate measures of conflict outcomes – a dichotomous measure and an alternate categorical measure, constructed using data from Prorok (2015). The third set analyzes alternate measures of key independent variables: 1) government and rebel group violence against civilians (constructed using data from the UCDP One-Sided Violence Dataset); 139 2) relative strength (from the Non-State Actor Data); 140 and 3) state capacity (from Hendrix (2010)). These tests demonstrate that the findings regarding belligerent behavior and conflict outcomes are remarkably robust.

**Analyzing the Causal Mechanism**

The above analysis demonstrates that rebel groups who exercise restraint in civil war and can contrast their behavior with government abuses are more likely to secure favorable conflict outcomes. I have argued that the causal mechanism driving this relationship is the ability of rebel

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139 Eck and Hultman 2007.
140 Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009.
groups to use their respect for civilian immunity to win diplomatic support from Western international constituencies, and leverage that support to obtain more favorable conflict outcomes. Directly measuring diplomatic support for an insurgency is challenging, but it is possible to measure international diplomatic actions against governments. Most of the diplomatic tools available to international actors are tools aimed at influencing government behavior – mainly, various means of restricting full government participation in the international community. International support for rebel groups should be evident in sanctioning of the rebel group’s government opponent.

I measure international diplomatic action against the government in two ways. First, Sanctions measures whether Western governments or Western-dominated intergovernmental organizations imposed economic sanctions or arms embargoes on the government, in response to government military actions and human rights abuses in the ongoing civil war, but does not include trade-related economic sanctions. Western governments or intergovernmental organizations imposed sanctions or arms embargoes in 41 of the 103 civil wars (39.8 percent) that took place between 1989 and 2010. Often international actors exert diplomatic pressure in ways that do not involve economic or military sanctions – for example, publicly shaming belligerents in an effort to influence their behavior. The second measure of international diplomatic sanctioning captures this by examining the content of all UN Security Council resolutions passed from 1989 to 2010. UN Condemnation measures whether the UN Security Council passed any resolutions explicitly condemning government violence against civilians while the civil war was ongoing.

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141 The following Western-dominated intergovernmental organizations imposed sanctions in civil wars: the European Economic Community, the European Union, NATO, and the United Nations.
144 In some cases, the UN Security Council condemned violations by both sides.
Descriptive Statistics on International Diplomatic Action. Figures 2 and 3 show the percent of conflicts in which international actors took formal diplomatic action against the government in response to civil war violence. As the two figures show, international diplomatic action against the government is most common when the contrast between government and rebel group behavior is stark. Not surprisingly, Western international actors are most likely to impose economic sanctions or arms embargoes against the government in cases involving severe government atrocities. But as Figure 2 shows, among conflicts involving government atrocities, sanctions are far more common when the rebel group exercises restraint toward civilians. International actors imposed sanctions on the government in more than 80 percent of conflicts involving government violence and rebel group restraint (left-most column of Figure 2), but only about 40 percent of conflicts in which both sides committed atrocities (third column from the left). As Figure 3 shows, UN Security Council condemnations of the government follow a similar pattern. In more than 50 percent of conflicts involving government atrocities and rebel group restraint, the UN Security Council formally condemned government abuses; however, the UN formally condemned government behavior in 39 percent of conflicts in which both sides attacked civilians.
Figure 2:
Percent of Conflicts involving Sanctions against the Government,
by Belligerent Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanctions against Government</th>
<th>No Sanctions against Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Does Not Target Civilians, Government Targets Civilians</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Does Not Target Civilians, Government Does Not Target Civilians</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Sides Target Civilians</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Targets Civilians, Government Does Not Target Civilians</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the numbers shown in the bar graph indicate the number of cases in each category.

Figure 3:
Percent of Conflicts involving UN Condemnation of the Government,
by Belligerent Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UN Condemnation of Government</th>
<th>No UN Condemnation of Government</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Does Not Target Civilians, Government Targets Civilians</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Does Not Target Civilians, Government Does Not Target Civilians</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Sides Target Civilians</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Targets Civilians, Government Does Not Target Civilians</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the numbers shown in the bar graph indicate the number of cases in each category.
**Statistical Analyses.** Table 3 shows the results of binary logit analyses; robust standard errors are shown in parentheses, with cases clustered by country. *Sanctions* is the dependent variable in Models 1 and 2; while *UN Condemnation* is the dependent variable in Models 3 and 4. The measures of *Rebel Group Restraint*, *Government Civilian Targeting*, as well as the interaction term, *Rebel Group Restraint* * Government Civilian Targeting, are the same as described earlier. The analyses also control for variables that scholars have found to be associated with the likelihood that international actors will impose sanctions or other forms of diplomatic pressure. International actors may be less likely to exert diplomatic pressure against countries that are of strategic or geopolitical importance.\(^\text{145}\)

*Per Capita GDP* thus controls for the size of the target country’s economy,\(^\text{146}\) while *P5 Ally* captures whether any of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council had an alliance with the target government at any point during the civil war.\(^\text{147}\) International actors may be more likely to exert diplomatic pressure when they believe such pressure will have an impact – for example, against democratic governments or against governments that have explicitly agreed to international humanitarian principles by ratifying major instruments of international humanitarian law.\(^\text{148}\)

*Level of Democracy* relies on Polity IV data, as described above, while *Protocol II Ratification* is a dichotomous variable, measuring whether the target country ratified the 1977 Second Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions prior to the conflict.\(^\text{149}\) Characteristics of the conflict, too, may influence the likelihood of sanctions. International actors may be more likely to take action when a conflict is particularly intense, or when the government is facing a powerful insurgency. As described above,

\(^{145}\) Drezner 1999; Lebovic and Voeten 2006; Donno 2010.

\(^{146}\) Measured in the year prior to conflict onset, using data from Gleditsch 2002.

\(^{147}\) Data are from the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) data set, Version 3.0 (Leeds et al. 2002) and the Correlates of War Formal Alliances data set, Version 4.1 (Gibler 2009).

\(^{148}\) Lebovic and Voeten 2006; Hafner-Burton 2008.

\(^{149}\) Three major international treaties prohibit civilian targeting in civil war: the 1949 Geneva Conventions, the 1977 Second Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions, and the Rome Statute of the ICC. Examining ratification of the 1949 Geneva Conventions does not offer a means of differentiating among countries, as nearly all countries in the data set ratified the 1949 Geneva Conventions prior to the onset of civil war. Because the Rome Statute was opened for ratification in July 1998, a measure of the ratification of this treaty would exclude many of the civil wars in the data set.
Conflict Intensity measures average annual battle-related deaths in the conflict, while Relative Strength measures the strength of the government relative to the rebel group.

Table 3: Binary Logit Analyses – International Diplomatic Actions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character of Violence:</th>
<th>SANCTIONS AGAINST GOVERNMENT</th>
<th>UN CONDEMNATION OF GOVERNMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MODEL 1</td>
<td>MODEL 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Restraint</td>
<td>0.870 (0.562)</td>
<td>−0.602 (0.806)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Civilian Targeting</td>
<td>2.274*** (0.676)</td>
<td>1.233* (0.740)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Group Restraint *</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>2.534** (1.242)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Civilian Targeting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conflict Characteristics:

| Conflict Intensity – Average Annual Battle Deaths, Logged | 0.179 (0.216) | 0.197 (0.267) | 0.100 (0.241) | 0.089 (0.283) |
| Relative Strength – Ratio of Govt to Rebel Troops | −0.281 (0.172) | −0.369* (0.195) | −0.472** (0.200) | −0.588*** (0.213) |

Government Characteristics:

| P5 Ally                  | −0.817 (0.779) | −0.978 (0.834) | −1.605*** (0.561) | −1.866*** (0.588) |
| Per Capita GDP, Logged   | 0.924*** (0.408) | 1.043** (0.416) | 0.993** (0.395) | 1.136*** (0.430) |
| Level of Democracy       | −0.090 (0.069) | −0.088 (0.070) | −0.006 (0.067) | 0.007 (0.069) |
| Protocol II Ratification | −1.539* (0.853) | −1.544* (0.904) | 0.789 (0.685) | 0.982 (0.726) |
| Constant                 | −8.344** (3.627) | −9.914** (4.030) | −9.069** (4.057) | −10.669** (4.503) |

\[ Wald \text{ Chi}^2 \] 22.28*** 24.93*** 29.32*** 33.79***

\[ Pseudo R^2 \] 0.3382 0.3736 0.2892 0.3160

\[ N \] 102 102 102 102

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses; *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10.
Not surprisingly, in the models that do not include the interaction term (Models 1 and 3), the results indicate a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between government violence and the likelihood that international actors will impose sanctions against the government (Model 1) or will pass a UN Security Council resolution condemning the government's behavior (Model 3). These results are consistent with existing research, which has found that following the end of the Cold War, more repressive governments were more likely to be publicly shamed by the UN Commission on Human Rights\textsuperscript{150} as well as more likely to be the subject of reporting by international NGOs like Amnesty International.\textsuperscript{151} In Models 1 and 3, the relationship between rebel group violence and the likelihood of sanctions or UN condemnation is negative, but falls just short of statistical significance.

When the interaction term, Rebel Group Restraint \(*\) Government Civilian Targeting, is included in the model, however, a more nuanced picture emerges regarding the relationship between rebel group behavior, government behavior, and the likelihood of diplomatic action against the government. The interaction term is positive and statistically significant in both models, indicating that conflicts in which the government targets civilians, but the rebel group does not, are associated with a higher likelihood of international diplomatic action against the government. With the interaction term included in the model, the coefficient for Government Civilian Targeting shows the relationship between government violence and the likelihood of sanctions or UN condemnation when the rebel group targets civilians (Rebel Group Restraint = 0). The coefficient for Government Civilian Targeting remains positive in these models, but is substantively smaller and drops below conventional levels of statistical significance in the analysis of UN condemnation.

\textsuperscript{150} Lebovic and Voeten 2006.
\textsuperscript{151} Ron, Ramos, and Rodgers 2005.
These findings provide strong evidence that rebel group behavior matters in influencing the likelihood of international diplomatic action against governments. Government violence, indeed, is associated with an increased likelihood of international diplomatic action, but this relationship is strongest when the rebel group exercises restraint. When both sides in the civil war target civilians, the calculated probability that Western actors will impose sanctions on the government is 57.0 percent, while the probability that the UN Security Council will publicly condemn the government is 35.3 percent.\textsuperscript{152} The likelihood of international diplomatic action against the government increases dramatically, however, when the rebel group exercises restraint. When the government targets civilians, but the rebel group does not, the probability of sanctions increases by more than 30 percentage points to 87.9 percent; while the probability of UN condemnation increases by more than 37 percentage points to 72.6 percent. Consistent with the posited causal mechanism put forth here, the evidence suggests that rebel groups who abide by international humanitarian norms and avoid targeting civilians may be able to use this to their advantage when faced with an abusive government opponent. In such cases, international actors are more likely to get take action against the abusive government – by imposing economic sanctions or arms embargoes on the government, or by publicly condemning the government’s behavior in the UN Security Council. Rebel groups can use this increased diplomatic leverage to secure more favorable conflict outcomes.

Conclusion

Differences in the ways in which civil wars are fought – and in particular, differences in the extent of violence directed at civilians – have important implications for conflict outcomes. Rebel groups that exercise restraint toward civilians can use the framework of international humanitarian

\textsuperscript{152} I use \textit{ Clarify} to calculate these probabilities, holding all other variables at their mean (for continuous variables) or their mode (for dichotomous variables) (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg 2000).
law to appeal for diplomatic support from Western international actors. However, rebel group appeals are most effective in winning support when the rebel group can contrast its own restraint toward civilians with government abuses.

Statistical results, using original data on government and rebel group violence against civilians and conflict outcomes in civil wars from 1989 to 2010, support this argument. Rebel groups who exercise restraint while their government opponent commits atrocities are more than three times more likely to secure a favorable political resolution to the conflict than other rebel groups. I hypothesize that the causal mechanism linking rebel group behavior to favorable conflict outcomes is the ability of rebel groups to use restraint toward civilians to win diplomatic support from Western international constituencies. Diplomatic support gives rebel groups greater bargaining leverage, helping them to win more favorable terms of settlement. Consistent with this posited causal mechanism, an analysis of international diplomatic action in civil wars from 1989 to 2010 shows that in conflicts involving a government that targets civilians pitted against a rebel group that exercises restraint, Western international actors are 54 percent more likely to impose sanctions against the government and twice as likely to issue public condemnations of the government.

These findings may also have important implications for understanding the prospects for peace following civil war. Research on the duration of peace after civil war has found that victories are more stable than other types of conflict outcomes. And while these studies have looked at outright military victories, it is possible that victories achieved through negotiated settlements may also lead to greater stability. If this is true, then belligerent behavior may have consequences not only for conflict outcomes, but also for the stability of peace. If rebel groups that abide by international humanitarian law are more likely to achieve a favorable conflict outcome, then the duration of peace may be longer following these civil wars. Future research, therefore, might consider a broad range of questions regarding the relationship between the character of civil war
violence and civil war outcomes, looking at the impact of civil war violence on the establishment of stable political institutions, the reconciliation of the warring sides, and long-term prospects for peace.

References


