Twisting Arms and Sending Messages: Terrorist Tactics in Civil War

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1

Abstract

We examine the strategic rationale for terrorist tactics in civil war. We identify conditions that favor terrorism as a tactic in armed civil conflicts as well as the specific targets as a function of rebel characteristics, goals, and government responses to political demands. Terrorist tactics can be helpful as an instrument to coerce the government in asymmetric conflicts, as rebels are typically weak relative to the government. But terrorism can also help communicate the goals and resolve of a group when there is widespread uncertainty. We consider the strategic importance and rationale for terrorism in terms of the frequency of attacks and specific targets, and analyze our propositions using new data linking actors from the Uppsala/PRIO Armed Conflict Data and the Global Terrorism Database. Consistent with our expectations, we find that terrorism is used more extensively in civil conflicts by weaker groups and when attacks can help the group convey its goals without undermining popular support. Groups with more inclusive audiences are more likely to focus on 'hard' or official targets, while groups with more sectarian audiences are more likely to attack 'soft' targets and civilians.

Introduction

Terrorism and civil war have traditionally been studied in separation, by different scholarly communities and following distinct approaches. Although some scholars search for mutually exclusive definitions to differentiate terrorism and conventional attacks, others point to how terrorism in the sense of indirect violent targeting is common in many armed civil conflicts (e.g., Asal et al., 2012; de la Calle & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2015; Sánchez-Cuenca & de la Calle, 2009). There is a growing interest in the overlap between civil war and terrorist tactics (e.g., Findley & Young, 2012; Fortna, 2015; Stanton, 2013). But since much of the existing research has focused on quantifying the degree of overlap or use of terrorism in a binary fashion, we still lack explanations for variation, or why some armed conflicts see extensive use of terrorist tactics while others have no or only sporadic use. For example, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) made extensive use of terrorism, while the Restoration Council of the Shan State in Myanmar has not conducted any terrorist attacks in a rebellion lasting over a decade. Furthermore, organizations use terrorist violence in different ways in civil wars. For example, about 90% of all terrorist attacks claimed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2013 were against 'soft' civilian targets, while other organizations in the conflict such as the Free Syrian Army primarily carried out attacks against 'hard' official targets and rarely targeted civilians (36%,).[1]

We apply an actor-oriented approach to these puzzles, focusing on the motivations and incentives for rebels to resort to terrorism as a supplement to conventional attacks in

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[1] These proportions are calculated from the Global Terrorism Database, using a typology of 'soft' and 'hard' targets explained later.

conflicts as well as the limiting factors that make terrorism less attractive. We argue that terrorist attacks serve a dual purpose, and help rebels coerce the government and communicate their goals and resolve to the government and their target audiences. We relate the choice of terrorist tactics and specific targets to group resources, government responses, and group ideologies in terms of goals and audiences. We present new data identifying the organizations that carry out terrorist attacks during civil conflicts, and conduct a group-based analysis of the frequency of terrorist attacks and the specific targets, covering all groups in civil conflicts. Contrary to many common arguments that see terrorism simply as a weapon of the militarily weak or as indiscriminate attacks on soft civilian targets (e.g., Crenshaw, 1981; Lane, 2010), we show that motives and audiences generate dramatically different attack patterns, and that groups are more likely to use terrorism when attacks can help raise their profile and groups can justify attacks, even if they may harm non-combatants. Groups with more inclusive audiences tend to focus on terrorist attacks against 'hard' or official targets, while groups with more restricted or sectarian audiences are more likely to attack 'soft' targets and undefended civilians.

Despite the extensive separate literatures on civil wars and terrorism, there has been limited attention to the relationship between the two. The concept of terrorism itself remains contested, but many common definitions highlight terrorism as a specific tactic where non-state actors target opponents indirectly rather than through direct conventional attacks (e.g., Sandler, 2014: 257).[2] Conventional definitions of armed civil conflict

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[2] One survey records over 200 definitions of terrorism (Schmid & Jongman, 2005). Alternative definitions stress elements such as the intention to spread fear or targeting non-combatants. We see the focus on indirect targeting as most appropriate, but also consider sensitivity to alternative definitions in our analysis.

emphasize armed conflict between governments and a non-state group over an incompatibility with battle deaths beyond a threshold (see, e.g., Gleditsch et al., 2002; Sambanis, 2004).[3] Terrorism thus differs from conventional attacks in civil conflicts in that the immediate targets or victims are typically non-combatants, and each individual victim is normally less important than the purpose of conveying a message to the intended audience. However, terrorism and civil war are clearly not mutually exclusive phenomena under these definitions.

Existing research suggests a number of reasons why groups may use terrorist attacks as supplement to conventional attacks in civil war. Terrorism can be helpful to coerce the government, to intimidate or control the non-combatant population, as well as to outbid competing rebel groups.[4] Terrorism can have various tactical advantages and is generally considered a useful weapon of the weak (Crenshaw, 1981).[5] Researchers such as Eck & Hultman (2007) and Wood (2010) show that rebels become more likely to kill civilians as they are losing battles and the government also targets civilians. Bloom (2004) highlights the incentives to use terrorism arising from competition between Palestinian

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[3] Some restrict the term civil war to severe intrastate conflicts with more than 1000 cumulative battledeaths. In line with previous research we use civil war in a less restricted sense, and consider all armed civil conflicts involving more than 25 deaths per year in our empirical analysis.

[4] Spoiling in peace processes is another important motivation (see Findley & Young, 2012), but this is less relevant for ongoing civil wars.

[5] Some question this claim. Fortna (2015) finds that weaker groups in civil war are not more likely to use terrorism, while de la Calle & Sanchez Cuenca (2015) argue that resort to terrorism arises from the inability to control territory.

groups. Other researchers have looked at incentives to use terrorism during civil war in terms of the consequences for outcomes. Thomas (2014) argues that rebel groups who carry out terrorist attacks are more likely to be granted negotiations and concessions by the government. Stanton (2013) focuses on how democratic institutions can encourage terrorism as the government becomes more sensitive to the costs of violence and hence potentially more susceptible to coercion.

Much of the existing research has used countries or conflicts as units of analysis (e.g., Findley & Young, 2012), neglecting organizations. Yet, merely showing an overlap in time and space during conflicts does not tell us whether terrorist attacks are carried out by the main organizations in conflict or unrelated groups. [6] Studies focusing on organizations have been limited to binary measures of terrorism use/non-use, neglected variation over time, or only considered organizations using terrorism without an explicit comparison with rebel groups who do not resort to terrorism (e.g., Fortna, 2015; Stanton, 2010; de la Calle & Sanchez Cuenca, 2015). Binary measures of use/non-use are not well-suited to evaluate the relative importance of terrorism as a strategy, and tell us little about the specific attack patterns groups choose and their relationship with the overall activity of the group. Studies of targeting have been limited to lethal violence against civilians (e.g., Eck & Hultman, 2007; Wood, 2010), and neglected the frequency of attacks against official targets and non-lethal attacks.

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[6] For example, India sees many attacks by groups such as the Tamil Liberation Army not related to a civil war, and attacks can also be carried out by groups opposing rebels, such as death squads in El Salvador. A narrow focus on geographic overlap excludes all actions by rebel organizations outside the conflict zone, such as Chechen attacks in Moscow.

Our study differs from existing research on terrorism and civil war by the actor-oriented focus on how group characteristics account for variation in the potential benefits and costs of terrorist tactics relative to conventional attacks. Using time-varying data on terrorist attack frequency and relative rebel strength we show that weaker groups employ terrorist tactics more frequently in civil conflicts. We also focus on how the nature of support for the groups determines targeting strategies and the choice between soft vs. hard and official targets, through influencing the legitimacy or costs of attacking soft civilian targets. Hence, we consider both the quantity and quality of terrorist violence in civil conflicts (see Conrad & Greene, 2015).

Terrorism as a tactic in civil war

We use a simple formal representation to motivate our propositions about group characteristics and the choice of specific strategies in conflict. Following Fearon (1995), the panels in Figure 1 provide a conventional spatial representation of an incompatibility between a government j and a non-state actor i. A division or outcome x closer to 1 (where the non-state actor i receives 1-x) is more favorable to the government j. A more favorable relative power p implies that an actor is more likely to do well in a conflict. Relative strength p can be considered in terms of contest success functions, or the expected outcome of a confrontation or the likely shift from the status quo q given p and the costs of conflict to the parties c (e.g., Hirshleifer, 1988).[7] We represent the costs of conflict c

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[7] Contests can also be conceptualized as lottery where side j wins or loses the entire prize with a probability p, minus the cost of war (e.g., Fearon, 1995). The relative power p and costs of conflict c delimit a range of outcomes that should be preferable to a confrontation

subscripted for each actor around the expected outcome p, subtracting the costs for the government from the expected outcome $p-c_j$ and adding the costs of the non-state actor with the expected outcome $1-p+c_j$.

Figure 1 in here

Figure 1: Bargaining, weak vs strong rebels and conventional military strategy m vs. terrorist strategy t

This simple framework helps illustrate situations where a terrorist strategy t may be more or less helpful for a rebel group compared to a conventional military strategy m in terms of how p and c plausibly differ by tactics. We present four cases in Figure 1, distinguishing between a rebel group that is militarily relatively strong compared to the government (left column) and one that is relatively weak (right column), and use of conventional military tactics m (upper row) and terrorist tactic t (lower row). In general, actors will choose the strategies that maximize their chances of doing well in a contest, extract some form of concession from the opponent, or impose more significant costs on the opponent. Hence, terrorism may be a useful tactic in civil war if it can yield a higher p

as a costly exit option. We focus on cases where the actors are already involved in a civil war or direct confrontation, and do not seek to explain why the parties failed to reach an agreement in advance.

or increase the costs to the opponent c_j, compared to direct conventional attacks. All else equal, one can think of p_m for conventional tactics as a function of the expected military impact, defined by the ratio of government troops to all troops (i.e., rebels + governments), ignoring for simplicity relative efficacy. By contrast, p_t for terrorist attacks is a function of planning and execution, less directly tied to group personnel and resources. Even small groups can carry out spectacular attacks, and there is no direct relationship between group size and attack severity, although larger groups carry out more attacks over their lifetime (see Clauset & Gleditsch, 2012).

In Figure 1 there is a dramatic difference in p_m for the stronger and the weaker group in the upper row, but no difference in p_t for the stronger group. For the stronger group, $p_m < p_t$ (i.e., more favorable to the non-state actor), and there are no obvious incentives to rely on terrorism. However, $p_m > p_t$ for the weaker actor, since a non-state actor with limited resources to do well in a conventional battle against the government can successfully carry out covert operations or hit-and-run attacks against government forces, or terrorist attacks that draw attention. Terrorism can be also beneficial if covert operations can help minimize c or the costs of conflict to the non-state actor, by making it easier to evade government detection and retaliation, or if terrorist strategies inflict larger costs on the government than conventional attacks, for example by demonstrating the lack of control and undermining political support. In the lower right panel in Figure 1, the weaker non-state actor faces smaller costs under a terrorist strategy than a conventional military strategy, and terrorism imposes relatively higher costs on the government.[8]

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[8] In addition to the direct political costs to the government, terrorism can also impose significant economic costs and damages (see the survey by Enders & Sandler, 2008).

Beyond coercion of the government by threatening to inflict future harm, terrorist attacks as 'deeds' can also help a non-state actor communicate its goals and resolve to both the government and target audiences more effectively than 'words' or declarations. Civil wars are often asymmetric beyond military capabilities. Bargaining approaches highlight the role of private information and uncertainty in conflict (e.g., Fearon, 1995; Gartzke, 1999), and there is an important asymmetry in the information available to parties in civil war. In particular, the government typically knows less than the rebels about the opponent's capabilities and resolve, and rebels can use terrorist tactics to demonstrate their ability and willingness to inflict harm.

Although some accounts highlight the perceived indiscriminate nature of terrorism (Lane, 2010), groups tend to be highly selective and attack targets with a clear political rationale for the group and its audience, (e.g., Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008; Kalyvas, 2004). Most rebel groups need some degree of popular support or external financing to sustain their activities (Beardsley et al., 2015; Weinstein, 2007). Their goals and audience characteristics shape targeting decisions, as groups must avoid counterproductive effects arising from attacks that undermine potential support and legitimacy. Thus, the perceived costs and benefits of terrorism also depend on the specific targeting strategies.

Terrorism frequency

We proceed from the above conceptual framework on incentives and strategic advantages of terrorism in civil war to testable propositions on factors affecting the frequency of attacks by year. Our first proposition relates the incentives for attacks to the military strength of non-state actors. The relative strength p for conventional tactics clearly determines the likely advantage or disadvantage of terrorist tactics. Stronger rebel groups

are unlikely to use terrorist tactics intensively, as they can fight the government effectively using conventional military tactics (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2009). Moreover, as groups get stronger, their incentives change, and they are likely to be more concerned about suffering potentially counterproductive effects of terrorism. The costs of terrorist strategies, in particular the implications for popular support and in turn subsequent recruitment, may exceed the costs of conventional attacks. Groups that have an aspiration to garner support from a large audience and govern a territory must be more sensitive to the risk of alienating their own constituency (e.g., Beardsley et al., 2015; Stanton, 2013). This makes terrorism less attractive relative to conventional tactics, even if it can provide short-term advantages.

In addition to military capabilities and the ability to carry out conventional attacks, government responses also shape the incentives of groups to use terrorism and the potential costs of terrorist tactics (e.g., Daxecker & Hess, 2013). Governments often respond harshly to perceived threats and use repression to increase the costs and deter dissent. However, repressive measures can increase the relative attractiveness of terrorism if conventional attacks become relatively more difficult compared to terrorist attacks (see Sandler et al., 1983). In terms of the parameters of the bargaining model, terrorism becomes more attractive for non-state actors as the relative costs of terrorist activities to conventional attacks decrease. Targeted repression against terrorist threats is difficult, given the covert nature of attacks, and indiscriminate repression can decrease popular support for the government and increase support for attacks on the government (see Kalyvas, 2004; Lichbach, 1987; Thomas, 2014). We thus expect that a history of government repression lowers the costs of terrorism for weaker rebel groups through providing greater popular support for selective terrorist attacks.

Jenkins' (1975:15) famous quote that 'terrorists want a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead' highlights how the publicity generated by spectacular attacks is often as important as the physical damage. Greater attention to the group increases the costs of conflict to the government, and can allow the group to recruit and improve its power. Although greater freedom and inclusion should decrease the motivation for violence (see Polo, 2015), a freer press also makes attacks more likely to be reported and increase the opportunities for non-state actors to spread fear and advertise their presence to the intended audience. Thus, we expect that greater press freedom makes terrorism a more effective strategy. Some people have noted that democracy can have a facilitating effect on the opportunities to organize terrorist attacks (e.g., Eubanks & Weinberg, 1994; Li, 2005). However, press freedom is not synonymous with democratic institutions, and many states without fully competitive elections such as Egypt or restrictions on parties such as Turkey still have a relatively independent press (see Van Belle, 1997).

Ideology and attack targets

Beyond their effects on the advantages and costs of terrorist attacks relative to conventional military attacks, group characteristics also influence the likely specific targeting strategies. From a purely military point of view, 'soft' civilian targets with less protection and lower risk of confrontation with government forces may be easier than 'hard' official targets. However, attacking civilians as a primary strategy can be counterproductive if rebels risk alienating potential supporters. As such, civilian targets would be less attractive than relatively harder targets with some direct symbolic association with government, even if the latter is more difficult to attack in a logistical sense.

The specific targets selected by groups are likely to reflect a tradeoff between relative ease of targets and their political logic. In the words of Gutierrez & Wood (2014: 213), ideology entails 'a set of more or less systematic ideas that identify a constituency, the objectives pursued on behalf of that group, and a program of action'. Ideology shapes what constitutes meaningful and more counterproductive possible targets. Buhaug (2006) and Sobek and Payne (2010) show how civil wars with different incompatibilities and constituencies are driven by different risk factors and display different characteristics and dynamics. We argue that terrorist targeting follows a similar political logic, based on whether the goals and characteristics of the constituency provide rebels with a stronger or weaker rationale for hard-official and soft targets.

The correspondence between the ideology of a group and its actions are related to both its potential strength p as well as the specific costs c of different types of actions or targets. In order to be viable, or preserve sufficient relative strength, rebels in a civil war must be able to recruit active participants (e.g., Clauset & Gleditsch, 2012). With regards to costs, ideology shapes the degree to which indirect targeting and indiscriminate violence can be seen as acceptable or illegitimate. One key mechanism is how the ideology and audience of a group shapes its 'othering', or to what degree civilian targets are deemed to be outside the constituency and therefore legitimate targets (e.g., Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008).

Table IA relates the goals of groups in civil war (left column) to target audiences or constituencies (right column). We highlight a typology of incompatibilities similar to the Uppsala/PRIO Armed Conflict Data distinction between challenges over the government or secessionist or autonomy claims for a territory (Gleditsch et al., 2002). In addition to goals, ideologies are also delineated by the constituency the group tries to reach out to or claims to act on behalf of (see Beardsley et al., 2015; Wucherpfenning et

al., 2012). Constituencies may be more or less inclusive, often defined by ethnic or religious markers. Given that some groups such as the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) have elusive goals and unclear audiences we also allow for residual categories.

Table IA in here

Table IB presents a typology of common types identified in existing work on terrorism, based on the classification in the Terrorist Organizations' Profiles (TOPs)[9], explicitly identifying the goals and audiences in Table IA. In general, we expect stronger othering for groups with sharper boundaries between their constituency and out-groups. This lowers the costs of terrorist attacks against civilians outside the audience as there is less risk of alienating potential supporters and undermining future recruitment. Groups with weaker othering or fluid boundaries have higher costs for violence against civilians, and indirect targeting is more likely against hard targets more closely associated with the government. From this general argument we can derive a number of more specific implications of the likely targets for different group profiles using terrorist tactics.

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[9] See http://www.start.umd.edu/tops/.

Table IB in here

Groups with a non-sectarian ideology that seek to take over the government normally have a large potential constituency. Inclusive claims entail weak othering, since there is no clear 'out-group', and it will be more difficult to justify attacks against civilians. We expect such groups to be more likely to attack official and harder target such as the government, police, and infrastructure to maximize material damage, but be careful in trying to avoid large casualties.[10] Examples here include many leftist organizations such as the Salvadorean Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front and the Communist Party of India-Maoist.

By contrast, secessionist and ethno-nationalist groups (including ethno-religious groups) focus specifically on advancing the interests of a specific communal group. This yields a much stronger othering against individuals associated with the government or its constituency. There is still a clear rationale for attacking hard-official targets, but rebels have more room to pursue coercion through soft targets as long as they can avoid victimizing the core constituency, and may thus prefer to select easier soft targets. Relevant examples here include the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkey and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka (LTTE).

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[10] Miller (2007) examines how terrorist group objectives influence the effectiveness of countermeasures, and finds that government concessions tend to work better against separatists groups with limited demands.

Groups without a clear ideology and goals should be more likely to attack prevalently soft civilian targets. The absence of a specific constituency reduces notably the cost of civilian targeting in terms of undermining support. Groups in this category often receive support from foreign governments, as in the case of RENAMO, which make them beholden to the objectives of the foreign patron and more detached from domestic audiences (Salehyan et al., 2011), or rebels motivated by private benefits such as looting, such as the Revolutionary United Front (cf. Weinstein, 2007), and thus have fewer inhibitions against attacking civilians.

Moreover, certain sectarian ideologies can be more permissive to soft targets. Religious ideology can provide strong othering against non-believers and displace guilt for actions justified by God (Bandura, 1990:164). Examples here include the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in Algeria and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

The above discussion suggests a number of testable propositions on ideological profiles and the choice of hard and soft targets:

- Rebel groups with a universalist political ideology and a large potential constituency – such as leftist, rightist, or groups seeking regime change – are more likely to predominantly attack hard and official targets.

- Ethno-nationalist and ethno-religious rebel groups representing a specific community are less likely to attack predominantly hard and official targets than groups with a universalist ideology and audience.

- Groups without a clear ideology and goals are more likely to attack prevalently soft civilian targets.

- Religious groups are more likely to attack prevalently soft civilian targets.

Data and research design

We construct a new actor-based dataset on terrorism in civil wars, relating organizations in the Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD) and the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), which we call ACD2GTD, which allow us to consider the characteristics and actions of individual groups and overcome the attributions problems that plague aggregated analyses of terrorism and civil war.[11] We match all rebel groups involved in intrastate armed conflicts with any relevant terrorist organizations in GTD on a case-by-case basis. The matching only considers the specific years when groups are involved in a civil conflict that reaches the 25 battle-related deaths from the start of the GTD in 1970, and we disregard cases where groups perpetrate terrorist attacks in years outside civil conflict. Most group matches are straightforward, but some required additional research to establish actor correspondence. For example, the ACD sometimes uses generic names such as Kashmir Insurgents, while the GTD indicates specific organizations. In these cases we match all the terrorist events associated with these organizations to the ACD actor. Our approach is conservative in that we explicitly disregard cases where the GTD uses generic

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[11] Just as the concept itself, data on terrorism remain contested. The GTD data is considered by many the best available and most extensive data on domestic terrorism (see Enders et al., 2011). The main alternative, the RAND-MIPT data, only include domestic events after 1997. Some have expressed concerns about underreporting of events in GTD (see Sheehan, 2011), but this seems less problematic for attacks by actors in civil war. Others express concerns about divergent coding practices during phases (see http://tinyurl.com/z29pnzk). We conduct robustness test across phases, and our analyses do not include the period where over-reporting is considered most problematic (after November 2011).

names (e.g., Kurdish rebels or Muslim separatists) and the ACD identifies specific organizations. Moreover, we do not assume that unclaimed terrorist attacks are related to the rebels in a civil war, which risks inflating the number of related terrorist attacks.

The final dataset encompass all non-state actors in the UCDP dataset for the years 1970-2011 and comprise 394 unique rebel organizations and 1979 rebel group-years. We count both total attacks by year as well as the specific individual targets to distinguish 'hard-official' and 'soft' targets. Almost 54% of groups do not have any recorded attacks over their lifetime. However, many groups are short-lived, and the proportion that do not carry out any terrorist attacks fall to less than 38% when we exclude groups active only in a single year. 50% of group-years include at least one terrorist attack.[12] The distribution of attacks by year varies considerably, with some groups such as the Shining Path in Peru have hundreds of attacks, while other have no record of terrorism.

Since definitions of terrorism are disputed, we use two operationalizations with different event inclusion criteria. The most inclusive is the GTD definition covering all events that satisfy at least two of the criteria in the GDT codebook - i.e., 1) the act must be aimed at attaining a political, religious, or social goal; 2) there must be evidence of an intention to coerce, intimidate, or convey some other message to a larger audience (or audiences) than the immediate victims; 3) the action must be outside the context of legitimate warfare activities (pp. 8-9). A more restrictive version requires that events satisfy all three criteria, and excludes all attacks against military targets, even if classified by the GTD as falling outside guerrilla warfare.

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[12] This is similar to the proportions found by Findley & Young (2012) for the geographical overlap of individual terrorist attacks and conflict zones.

We derive rebel-to-government troop-ratios data from Wood (2010) for 1989 to 2009 and for the remaining years we use the Non-State Actor dataset (Cunningham et al. 2009) and government military personnel from the Correlates of War National Material Capabilities Data. For government violence we use the categorical Political Terror Scale (PTS) ranging from 1 to 5 (Wood & Gibney 2010).[13] We lag this by one year to guard against repression possibly responding to terrorism. We use data on media freedom from the Freedom House's Freedom of the Press data (2013) and Van Belle's (1995) media freedom index to generate a categorical variable ranging from 1 to 3, where higher numbers indicate less media freedom.

To code the ideology of rebel organizations we use information from the ACD2EPR dataset, mapping conflict actors in ACD to ethnic groups in the Ethnic Power Relations data (Wucherpfenning et al. 2012), TOPs, and the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia. We see a fundamental distinction between ethno-nationalist groups with a specific ethnic claim and organizations seeking regime change without an ethnic affiliation. Other more specific categories identified include ethno-religious, religious, Marxist-socialist (leftist), right-wing, coups, and groups without a specific ideology and clearly stated goals. We include an ethno-religious category for groups where ethnic and religious claims coexist, such as Hamas. We code the ethnic/separatist claims as dominant in establishing a strong othering against rival communities for organizations combining ethnic or separatist claims with a particular political orientation, as in the case of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) espousing a Marxist orientation, since leftist ideology mainly pertains to the type of government to be established after independence. In some conflicts we

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[13] We see the PTS as more appropriate than CIRI, since it also includes general repression against the population at large, including individuals not directly involved in dissent.

observe an evolution of rebel aims and ideology, for example in the Chechen conflict where religious motives have gradually achieved greater prominence. However, changes in aims or ideologies tend to be reflected in new rebel organizations rather than developments in existing groups, as when the secular Armed Forces of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria gave way to the ethno-religious Gardens of the Righteous and the Caucasus Emirate.

Typology of hard and soft targets

In Table II we proceed from the informal discussion of soft and hard targets to an explicit operational definition based on the GTD target categories. We classify as hard-official all targets associated with the government and underpinning state control, including police and core infrastructure. By contrast, soft targets include all organizations and individuals with no official role in the state apparatus.

Table II in here

Figure 2 displays the proportion of hard-official targets as a rate of all targets (i.e., soft and hard) for all group years with at least one attack. Many groups attack exclusively hard or soft targets. Despite the emphasis on soft targets in popular commentary on terrorism, there is a slightly higher proportion of groups in civil war that exclusively attack

hard and official targets than only soft targets.[14] However, many observations involve varying mixes of hard-official and soft targets. Looking only at counts of hard and soft targets separately is problematic as one cannot distinguish cases where counts are low because a group does not use terrorism at all and cases where groups only carry out attacks of the other type.

Figure 2 in here

Figure 2: Distribution of proportion of hard targets

Empirical results and discussion

Table III summarizes the propositions and expectations developed above that we examine in the empirical analyses and the specific measures.[15] To examine our propositions on terrorist attacks by specific non-state organizations we estimate a negative binomial on the number of terrorist attacks attributed to the group, with robust standard errors clustered on organizations. Table IV reports the results for the two inclusion criteria. The significant overdispersion parameter α indicates clustering. We focus on model 1 using the most inclusive definitions, as the results with the more restrictive definition are similar.

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[14] Groups that exclusively attack one type tend to have a relatively low number of attacks, and most groups with significant terrorist activity fall somewhere between the two extremes.

[15] In the empirical analysis we consider hard-official proportions with and without attacks against military targets.

Table III in here

Table IV in here

Stronger groups with a higher troop-ratio relative to the government are less likely to carry out terrorist attacks, consistent with our expectation that groups better equipped to rely on conventional attacks have fewer incentives use terrorist attacks intensively. Fighting a civil war against the government requires substantial resources and organization, our data on groups using in civil war already exclude many of the weakest terrorist organization who cannot muster resources to fight a civil war. Still, within this sample, the weakest groups in civil war are more likely to use terrorist tactics extensively, consistent with low capacity to carry out conventional attacks promoting terrorism and greater sensitivity by stronger groups to the potentially counterproductive effects of terrorism.

The coefficient for Political Terror Scale is significant and positive. This is consistent with our claim that groups are more likely to use terrorism in civil wars where the government is more repressive and has a history of violence, since they face lower risks of losing support as their audience will be more permissive of terrorism. The proposition that greater media freedom can encourage organizations to use terrorist tactics in civil war is also supported, as we find a significant negative association between media freedom and the number terrorist attacks (note that the measure focuses on restrictions so that lower values indicate greater media freedom).

To ensure that our results do not simply reflect the impact of other covariates potentially correlated both terrorism and with the main variables of interest we include a number of country and conflict-level controls. We include income and population size using data from Gleditsch (2002). Some argue that democracy can encourage terrorism (e.g., Li, 2005), and we include a dummy indicating whether a country has a Polity value

of seven or above 7, as media freedom is plausibly correlated with democracy (Jaggers & Gurr, 1995). We include the number or rebels in a civil war, as group competition may encourage terrorism (Bloom, 2004). We also include a measure of whether rebels have territorial control from the NSA data, as this could be associated with both group strength and incentives for terrorism. Finally, we include a measure of time since previous attack as well as its square and cube to control for possible non-linear time dependence.

Figure 3 displays the implied marginal effects on the number of attacks for our key covariates of interest, holding other covariates at the median. The top panel shows that the predicted number of attacks falls by over 50% % - i.e., from over 8 to less than 4 - as the military strength of the rebels increase from the lowest troop ratio to a 2:1 rebels advantage. The superimposed density indicates that the median rebel troop ratio is very low (0.04). Consistent with our predictions, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland in India (<0.001 for most years) carries out a large number of attacks, while a strong group such as the National Islamic Movement in Afghanistan with a ratio well above 1 in 1990 does not carry out any attacks.

Figure 3 in here

Figure 3: Marginal effects on predicted attacks by troop ratio (top), PTS (middle), and media freedom (bottom)

Since we hold the troop ratio at the low median value, the marginal effects for changes in repression or media freedom are relative to a high expected baseline number of

attacks. However, the middle panel in Figure 3 shows that predicted number of attacks increases by a factor of over 3 when we go from the lowest to the most repressive state on the Political Terror scale. For media freedom in the bottom panel of Figure 3, the predicted number attacks falls to less than 1/4 of the original number (e.g., from 20+ to about 5) as we go from the most free to the least free press.

We now proceed to consider specific targets in terms of the proportion of hard targets for organizations with at least one attack as a function of ideology. Table V reports results using the regression for proportions estimator proposed by Papke & Wooldridge (1996) with four different definitions of targets, with robust standard errors. We also include the other covariates from our model of terrorist attacks to ensure that the findings for specific ideologies do not reflect other systematic features that go together with a higher proportion of hard-official targets.

We focus on the first model 3 in Table V with the most inclusive definition, and note that the core results do not seem particularly sensitive to the specific definition of terrorism or model specification. The coefficients for the dummy variables for the distinct ideological profiles indicate the estimated differences compared to Marxist-socialist organizations as the reference category.[16] The results indicate clear differences between ideologies. All the ideology terms have negative estimated coefficients, indicating a lower predicted proportion of hard-official targets than Marxist-socialist rebel groups, consistent with our claims based on the implications of differences in audiences and othering. Nationalist-separatist groups are notably less likely to attack hard-official targets, and ethno-religious and religious groups even less so. Groups with unclear ideology and

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[16] We do not include right wing groups as we have no cases in our data where such groups use terrorism and fight the government in a civil war.

groups that seek regime change not linked to a specific ethnic group also have large negative coefficients, but the estimates here are not significant. These categories include low numbers and more heterogeneous mixes. In practice, some non-leftist rebels seeking regime change recruit from marginalized ethnic groups, such as the Free Syrian Army in the Alawite-dominated Assad regime in Syria. Thus, is not surprising that their targeting strategy is less consistently selective than Marxist-socialist groups. Save for the positive effect of population we find less consistent results for the predictors from the attack models, although democracy and repression have a marginally significant negative effects on the proportion of hard targets in some models while territorial control is a positive with the restrictive definition of terrorism.

Table V in here

Figure 4 plots the implied predicted proportions of hard-official targets by ideology profiles based on Model 3 in Table IV, holding other features at the median. The groups are listed in decreasing order by the predicted proportions. For leftists groups we expect that over 2/3s of the attacks will be against hard-official targets. Organizations become increasingly less likely to attack hard targets as the audience becomes more exclusive and group boundaries are stronger. As expected, religious organizations are the most likely to attack soft targets, and have a predicted proportion hard targets less than 50%. Although models with more restrictive measures of hard-official targets and different control

variables can change the absolute proportions, they do not significantly change the relative group rankings.

Figure 4 in here

Figure 4: Predicted proportion of hard targets by group ideology

We have considered a number of potential challenges to our results. We show in a supplementary appendix that the main results for attacks and targeting remain consistent across different terrorism operationalizations and specifications, including controls for ideology, external support, number of ongoing conflicts, and fixed effects in the count model, and number of groups in the proportions model.

Skeptics may wonder if our findings on repression reflect that high terrorist activity generates repressive state responses rather than helping to justify terrorism. If so, then we should see a stronger relationship between terrorism and leading values of repression than lagged values. We find no evidence that that is the case, and government repression does not systematically increase following terrorist activity during a civil war.[17]

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[17] In most civil wars, government repression clearly pre-dates the introduction of terrorist campaigns. In the Guatemalan civil war, for example, we only see systematic terrorist activity by the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) from 1987, 5 years after the UCDP start date, after government repression was already present. We do not observe notable changes in repression during or after terrorist campaigns.

Group-level analyses of terrorism help capture organizational characteristics, but can be sensitive to problems arising from unclaimed attacks and unknown perpetrators. We consider a number of additional tests to examine the robustness of our findings to unclaimed attacks. We overlay the geo-coded location for GTD attacks with the civil war polygons from the Conflict Site data (Hallberg 2012) to compare the number of attacks claimed by rebel groups in civil war and attacks with an unknown perpetrator for each conflict-polygon-year.[18] In general, most conflicts have more claimed than unclaimed attacks. For the majority of conflict years in our sample the number of claimed attacks by actors in civil war exceeds, or is similar to, the number of unclaimed attacks. This is all the more telling since we do not consider all claimed attacks, in particular those by actors not currently involved in civil war. The median proportions of hard and official targets are also strikingly similar for claimed and unclaimed attacks. Balance tests indicate almost identical distributions for the number of attacks against soft and hard-official targets for claimed and unclaimed events, and it seems unlikely that groups strategically claim certain types of attacks. The proportion of hard and official targets for claimed and unclaimed attacks turns out to be almost identical for conflicts where we observe a large number of unclaimed attacks, reinforcing our main results.[19]

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[18] The supplementary appendix demonstrates the overlay approach for Guatemala and Northern Ireland. The Conflict Sites Data limit the analysis to events over the period 1989-2011, and we cannot include some GTD attacks without geo-coded location.

[19] The only cases with larger differences in targeting patterns between claimed and unclaimed attacks tend to be conflicts with few unclaimed attacks (e.g. El Salvador and Northern Ireland) or conflicts where we would expect to see greater restraint and in line

To examine whether reporting biases could influence the results for media freedom we compare the distribution of claimed and unclaimed terrorist attacks across varying media freedom. The distribution of reported unclaimed attacks is remarkably similar across levels of media freedom, whereas claimed attacks increase with free media. Moreover, the highest frequencies of unclaimed attacks per year are observed in countries with completely controlled media. If inflated reporting were driving our results we should see higher records for all attacks, including unclaimed with media freedom. The increase in claimed attacks is consistent with our argument about how media freedom influences incentives for attacks.

Finally, it may be contended that the effect of ideology on target selection should be conditional on military strength. In particular, the greater permissiveness for terrorist attacks on civilians may apply primarily to militarily weaker ethno-nationalist groups as stronger groups have generally fewer incentives to use terrorism over conventional attacks. We do not find strong evidence for conditional effects in looking at proportions or even a general effect of troop ratios, but this may arise in part from the difficulties in distinguishing relative target preferences and incentives to use terrorist tactics since the analysis leaves out all groups that do not use terrorism. Testing the overall allocation of efforts to indirect and direct targets will require more detailed cross-national data on individual conventional attacks within ongoing civil war not available in existing sources.

Conclusions

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with our expectation have a higher proportion of hard and official targets for unclaimed than claimed attacks.

The fact that some actors in civil wars use terrorism intensively while others do not calls for explanations grounded in the rationale or incentives of actors to use terrorist tactics as well as the most helpful targets. We provide the first actor-focused and group-specific analysis of terrorist frequency and targeting in civil war. The results are consistent with our claim that terrorist tactics in civil war are chosen when they can help rebel groups improve their effectiveness relative to conventional warfare, lower the costs of fighting for the rebels, and increase the costs imposed on the government. In sum, although many highlight the differences between terrorist attacks and conventional warfare, terrorism is a tactic with a clear political logic in civil wars. Terrorist attacks can also deny the government the control of violence and be important for the evolution of conflicts and decisive for their final outcomes. Wood (2003), for example, argues that it was the broader economic consequences of the conflict in El Salvador, arising in part due from terrorism and irregular warfare, rather than the rebels conventional fighting, that eventually led elites to pressure the government for a settlement.

Beyond the quantity of terrorism or number of attacks, our approach also speaks to the quality or specific targeting strategy. Rebel groups differ considerably in terrorist targeting strategies. We argue that these differences rest on the political logic of group ideologies and audiences in terms of the implied benefits and costs of specific targets and their relationship with rebels' need for popular support. Group ideology, goals, and civilian constituencies can either constrain rebels to use terrorism selectively or widen the range of legitimate targets to entire populations.

More generally, our findings underscore the utility of an actor-centered perspective on tactic choice in political violence, and the central role of combatant ideologies, identity, and motivation in influencing wartime behavior, responses to government counterterrorism, and patterns of civilian support (see Lyall et al., 2013; Miller, 2007; Toft

& Zhukov, 2014). Paradoxically, we currently have more comprehensive data on individual terrorist events or indirect targeting than conventional attacks in civil war. However, future global and systematic analyses will be facilitated by the expansion of data on events in civil war, including the Uppsala Georeferenced Event Data (GED, currently available only for Africa and Southeast Asia) and developments in automated event data (see Kearing, 2013; Sundberg et al., 2013).

Our research suggests a number of potentially promising extensions and topics for future research. Our framework here looks only at instantaneous tactical choice, but in practice there can be important differences and trade-offs in the short and long-term consequences of terrorist attacks. For example, terrorism can help promote a small group and facilitate recruitment in the short-run, but may become relative less attractive in the long-run as groups grow and become more concerned over the potential negative consequences. The organization of smaller cells for terrorist attacks may also make organizations more vulnerable to splinter groups and concerns over the ability of rebels to control violence in peace processes. More can also be done to examine interactions with governments and how their countermeasures influences targeting as well as force-allocation potential dilemmas of force allocation. An actor oriented perspective can also help understand other tactics outside violent coercion and prospects for settlements. Indeed, most contentious organizations engage in a wide range of political strategies other than terrorism and conventional warfare, including political wings (if feasible), and possibly direct negotiations with governments. Although these issues are not easy to investigate with the available data, our core theoretical perspective provides a useful way to consider predictions about the type of group profiles and actor interactions where non-violent strategies and feasible settlements should be more or less likely.

Replication data

The dataset and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article can be found at

http://www.prio.no/jpr/datasets.

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Table IA: Group goals and implied audience

A. Goals	B. Audience
i) *Government*: group seeks to change the government ii) *Secession*: group seeks secession for a territory or autonomy/concessions for a specific ethnic group iii) *Other*: groups with unclear goals, e.g., foreign supported groups, rent-seeking	i) *Inclusive*: group seeks to reach out to all individuals, without significant communal differences ii) *Exclusive-Ethnic*: group seeks to reach out only to a specific ethnic group iii) *Exclusive-Religious*: group seeks to reach out to true believers iv) *Undefined*: group does not specify domestic constituency (e.g., mainly driven by foreign support or looting)

Table IB: Terrorist group ideologies by goals (A) and audience (B), ordered alphabetically

a) *Ethno-nationalist*: advocate secession or autonomy/concessions for particular groups (A.ii), and have an exclusive-ethnic audience (B.ii). Ethnic identification creates strong othering against government and associated individuals, which makes it easier to justify attacks on soft targets outside the constituency.
b) *Ethno-religious*: advocate secession or autonomy/concessions for particular groups (A.ii), and have an exclusive ethnic (B.iii) and exclusive religious (B.iii) audience. They differ from ethno-nationalism in the emphasis on religion and true believers. This induces strong othering against government and non-believers, and wide scope to justify attacks.
c) *Marxist/Socialist*: aims to take over the government (A.i), and have an inclusive audience (B.i). Government targets have high symbolic value. Weak othering, since no fascriptive identities.
d) *No ideology*: terrorist groups with unclear motives (A.iii) and undefined audiences (B.iv). The symbolic value of government targets is low without a clear motivating ideology and the counterproductive effects of civilian targeting are also minimal in the absence of a constituency. Thus, such groups are more likely to attack soft targets.
e) *Regime change*: aims to take over the government, not clearly leftist or rightist (A.i). The audience is typically inclusive (B.i). Government targets have high symbolic value. Weak othering, since no ascriptive identities.
f) *Religious*: seeks to seize and reorganize the state along religious lines (A.i), sometimes in larger supranational states. The audience is exclusive-religious (B.iii), leading to stronger othering and permissiveness in attacking soft targets.
g) *Right-wing/Coups*: aims to take over the government or keep the status quo (A.i), and inclusive audience (B.i). Government targets have high symbolic value. Weak othering, since no ascriptive identities.

Table II: Typology of hard and soft targets

Hard and Official Targets	Soft Civilian Targets
Government (general and diplomatic)	Business
Police	Educational institutions
Transportation	Journalists and Media
Telecommunications	NGOs
Utilities	Private Citizens and Property
Food and water supply	Religious Figures/Institutions
Maritime	Tourists
Airports/ aircrafts (excluding hijacking)	Other (e.g., ambulances, refugee camps)
(Military)	

Table III: Summary of propositions, measures, and expectations

Proposition	Measure	Expectation
Attack frequency		
Militarily weaker rebels carry out a larger number of attacks	Rebel/(rebel + government) troops	-
Higher government repression increases terrorist attacks	Political Terror Scale	+
Higher media freedom increases terrorist attacks	Media freedom index (inverse scale)	-
Proportion hard targets		
Universal ideologies with large audiences more likely to attack hard/official targets	Group ideologies: Marxist-socialist (MS), nationalist-separatists (NS), ethno-religious (ER), religious (R), regime change (RC), no ideology (NI)	MS|RC> NS>(ER)>(R|NI)
Nationalist-separatist and ethno-religious ideologies with narrow audiences less likely to attack hard/official targets than universalist		
Religious groups more likely to attack soft targets		

Table IV: Negative Binomial Regression. Terrorist attacks

	(1) Inclusive definition	(2) Most restrictive definition
Troop ratio	-0.406*	-0.437*
	(0.186)	(0.183)
Repression t-1	0.690***	0.659***
	(0.146)	(0.145)
Media freedom	-0.805***	-0.791***
	(0.191)	(0.189)
Territorial control	-0.172	-0.130
	(0.157)	(0.145)
Number of rebel groups	-0.759***	-0.697***
	(0.102)	(0.102)
Ln GDP pc	0.214	0.188
	(0.160)	(0.150)
Ln population	-0.273**	-0.249*
	(0.105)	(0.103)
Democracy	0.640*	0.556*
	(0.262)	(0.262)
Time since last attack	-1.134***	-1.040***
	(0.123)	(0.134)
Time^2	0.109***	0.0915***
	(0.0238)	(0.0264)
Time^3	-0.00285*	-0.00213$^+$
	(0.00111)	(0.00125)
Constant	4.409*	3.987*
	(2.014)	(1.934)
Log α	1.394***	1.417***
	(0.111)	(0.112)
Observations	1571	1571

Robust standard errors in parentheses
$^+ p < 0.10$, $^* p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

Table V: Regression for proportions, hard and soft targets

	(3) Inclusive def.	(4) Inclusive def.	(5) Restrictive def.	(6) Restrictive def.
Nationalist-separatist	-0.387[*]	-0.362[*]	-0.447[**]	-0.416[*]
	(0.170)	(0.182)	(0.171)	(0.179)
Ethno-religious	-0.553[**]	-0.529[**]	-0.561[**]	-0.462[*]
	(0.193)	(0.200)	(0.208)	(0.216)
Religious	-0.838[*]	-0.745[*]	-0.985[**]	-0.795[*]
	(0.333)	(0.352)	(0.330)	(0.349)
No ideology	-0.624[+]	-0.581	-0.359	-0.256
	(0.347)	(0.358)	(0.337)	(0.340)
Regime change	-0.450	-0.387	0.206	0.229
	(0.493)	(0.520)	(0.562)	(0.662)
Democracy	-0.385	-0.368	-0.503[*]	-0.468[+]
	(0.236)	(0.229)	(0.244)	(0.244)
Repression	-0.143[+]	-0.138[+]	-0.0201	-0.0357
	(0.0743)	(0.0780)	(0.0837)	(0.0882)
Media freedom	-0.0234	-0.0448	-0.0284	-0.0530
	(0.119)	(0.118)	(0.109)	(0.110)
Troop ratio	-0.00347	-0.0305	-0.0884	-0.118
	(0.151)	(0.156)	(0.149)	(0.155)
Ln GDP pc	0.0569	0.0755	0.0153	0.0332
	(0.0915)	(0.0885)	(0.0945)	(0.0931)
Ln population	0.0949[+]	0.0951[+]	0.185[**]	0.191[**]
	(0.0541)	(0.0525)	(0.0594)	(0.0587)
Rebel ext. support		0.110		0.0418
		(0.151)		(0.152)
Territorial control		0.0547		0.145[+]
		(0.0797)		(0.0775)
Constant	-0.0296	-0.285	-1.443	-1.747
	(1.179)	(1.134)	(1.248)	(1.193)
Observations	821	810	765	754

Robust standard errors in parentheses
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
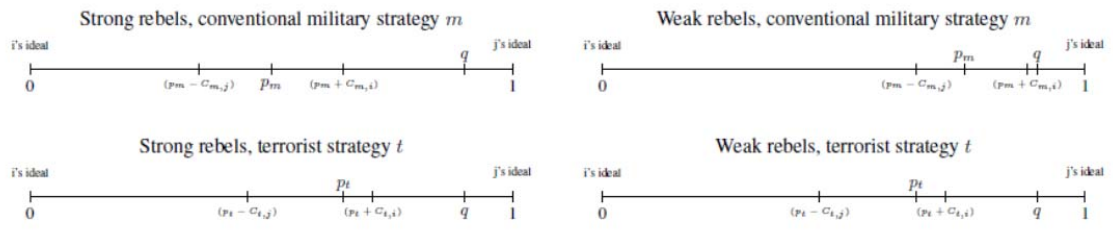
Figure 1: Bargaining, weak vs strong rebels and conventional military strategy m vs. terrorist strategy t
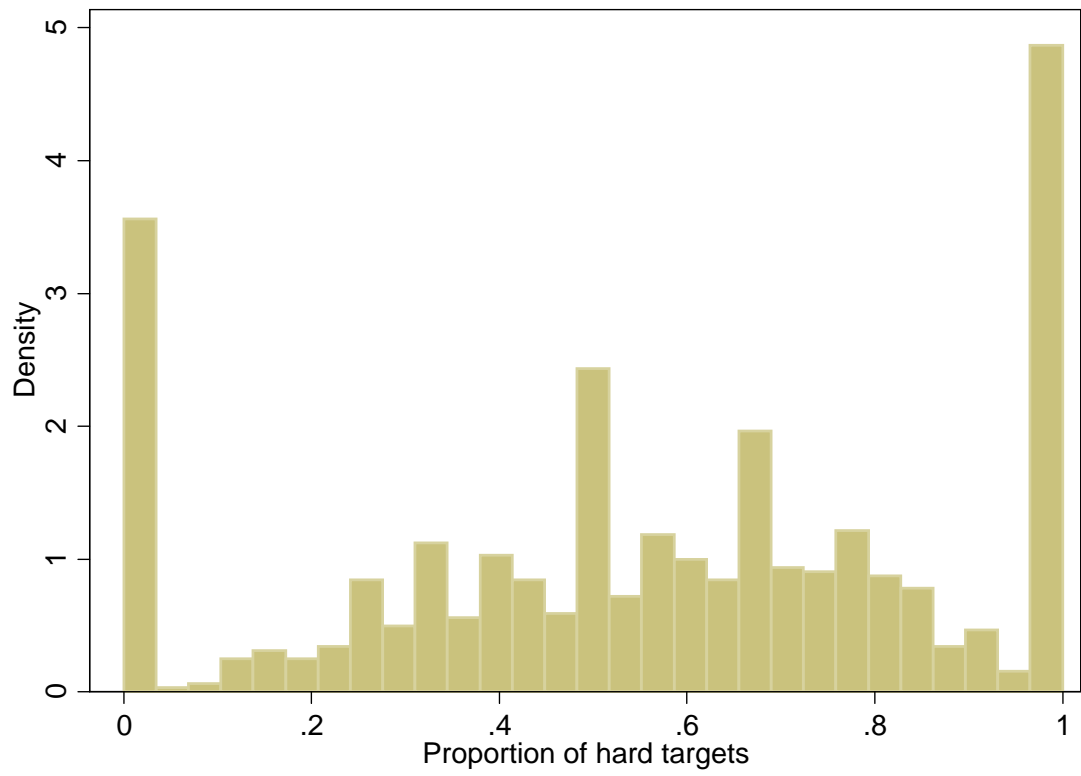
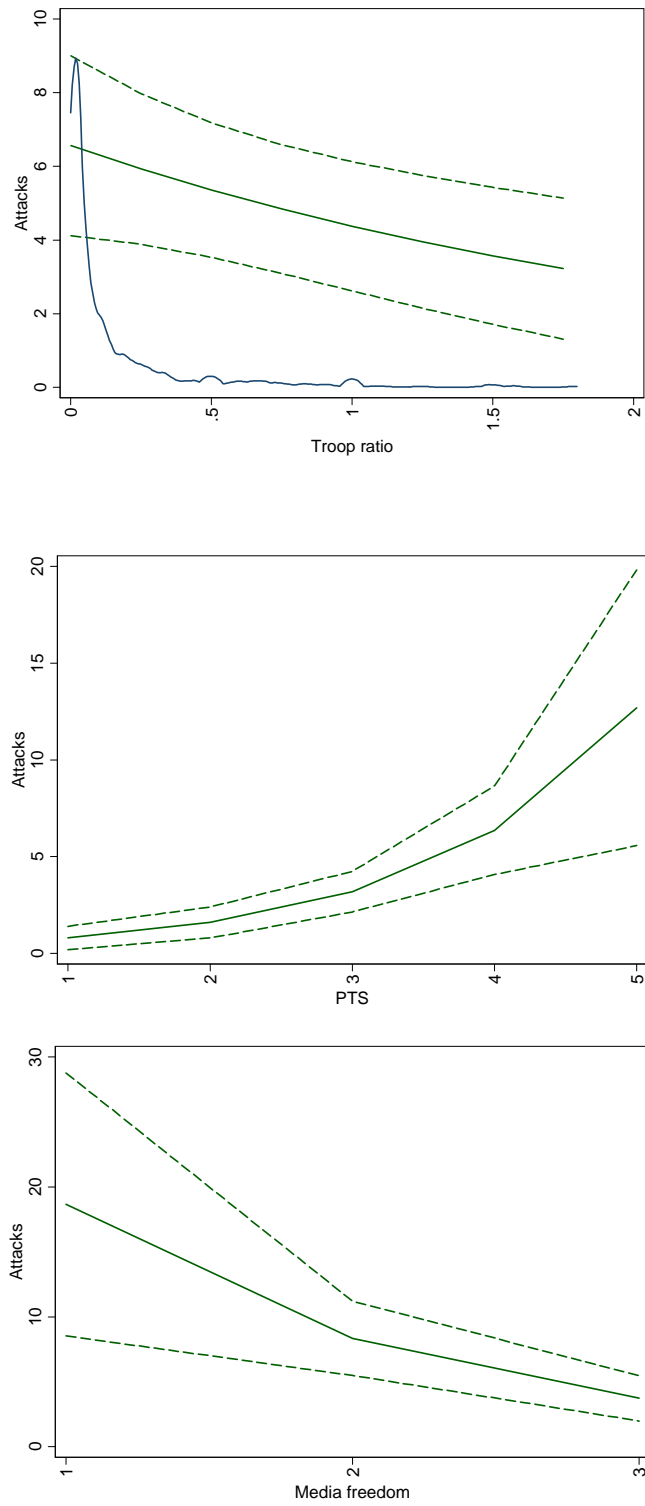Figure 2: Distribution of proportion of hard targets

Figure 3: Marginal effects on predicted attacks by troop ratio (top), PTS (middle), and media freedom (bottom)
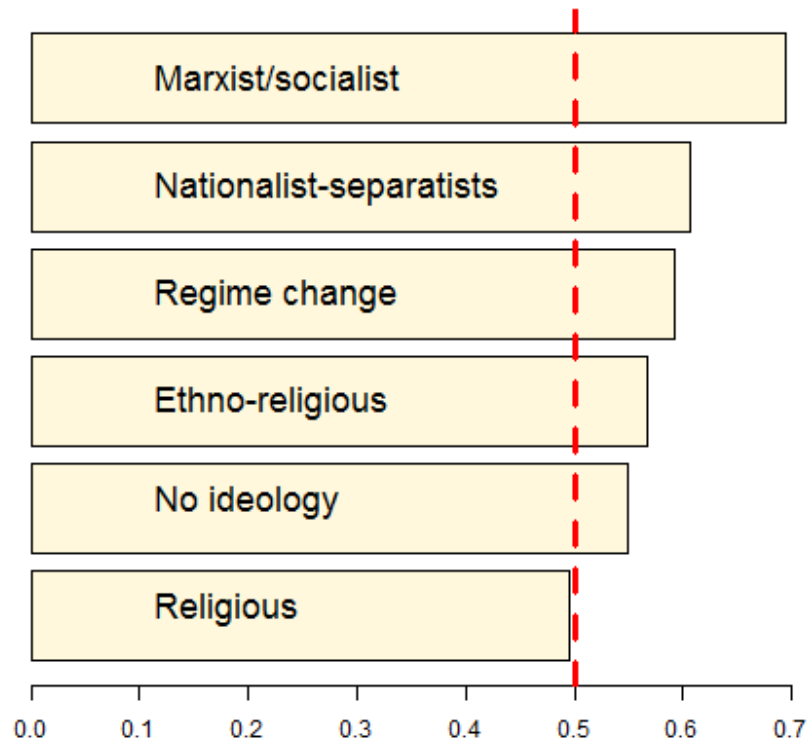
Figure 4: Predicted proportion of hard targets by group ideology