

Professionals or Predators: Patterns of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

A Thesis in International Relations

by

Casey Brookes Richardson

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Abstract

War and sexual violence have been connected in the minds of military leaders and the general public since ancient human history, but are they truly inseparable? The first step to solving a problem is understanding what drives its existence. There are three primary schools of thought on the motivations driving predatory conflict actors: feminist, leadership, and ethnic/revenge-based violence and its history. To further the academic understanding of sexual violence in armed conflict, the level of military professionalism across three conflict actors: government actors, pro-government militias, and rebel groups is used as the defining variable driving the prevalence and intensity of sexual violence in armed conflict. The Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict dataset catalogs the prevalence of which conflict actor type from 1989 to 2021. The dataset divides the prevalence of sexual violence into four categories: no incidents, isolated, numerous, and massive. Each defines a spectrum of reports against each actor type from 0 to 1000+ and separates them by adult or minor victims. This thesis hypothesizes that the higher the level of professional military training, the less sexual violence the conflict actor will commit. The results of the data analysis contradict the professionalism hypothesis and show that professionalism has a limited impact on sexual violence prevalence, as government actors are the primary perpetrators of sexual violence against adults, especially within military facilities. However, rebel actors show higher levels of brutality by attacking minors in higher numbers, especially rebel groups that utilize forced conscription of child soldiers, exposure to illicit substances, and exposure to HIV. Further research is necessary to distinguish between the conduct of different types of government actors and the impact that training differences have on sexual behavior patterns. The differences in the motivating factors behind sexual violence against children and adults would be an illuminating avenue for additional research, especially minor-on-minor sexual violence.

Table of Contents

Sections	Page
Introduction	4
Literature Review	6
Feminist Theory	6
Leadership Theory	11
Ethnic Hatred and Retribution Theory	19
Data and Methods	22
Limitations	23
Definitions and Scope	28
Data Analysis	35
Geographical Distribution of the Observations	36
The Prevalence of Sexual Violence	37
Analyzing the Prevalence of Sexual Violence Incidents by Actor Type	40
Conflict Incompatibility and its Impact on the Prevalence of Sexual Violence	47
The Prevalence of Sexual Violence Committed Against Children	53
Conclusion	55
Bibliography	60

Introduction

Sexual violence is an appalling yet all too common occurrence during military conflicts and occupations. Upon surface-level observation, one would think that sexual violence is present in all conflicts as a side effect of war. However, that does not account for the significant variation in sexual violence incidences found in the study of military history through to current events. This conundrum leaves one asking: why is there a higher level of sexual violence in some conflicts and a lower one in others, and why is the violence that exists so much more brutal in some wars than in others? This thesis attempts to answer that question by breaking down the occurrence of sexual violence by the type of conflict actor (i.e., state, rebel, or militia) and attributing a spectrum of military professionalism to each actor type. Professional soldiers lie at one end of the spectrum, while rebels represent the least formalized military entities. The purpose of this thesis is to determine whether there is a relationship between the amount of professional military training a conflict actor receives, and the amount and intensity of the sexual violence said actors commit upon civilians in the conflict region.

The prevailing hypothesis of this thesis is that conflict actors are less likely to deviate from their combat mission and commit sexual violence as they receive more professional military training. That, however, does not account for the cases where committing sexual violence is part of a military strategy of terror or as a means of ethnic cleansing. This thesis will utilize the “Sexual Violence in Conflict Dataset” to identify the actors involved in committing sexual acts, to determine the conflicts where these acts occur, and to examine potential patterns in the violence. It catalogs all the reported cases of sexual violence in all conflict zones between the years 1989 and 2021. The cases are categorized by conflict area, cross-referenced according to six conflict actor types, and documented for the occurrence of each of the seven types of

sexual violence. The ranking of each conflict actor type, based on their level of professional training and structure of accountability, will be compared to the prevalence of incidents and the level of brutality associated with those incidents. Each form of sexual violence will be ranked from most to least brutal. Though any form of sexual violence is reprehensible, some forms are more traumatic for the victim and have longer-lasting consequences, such as attacks involving forced pregnancy or acts committed against children. The methods section of the thesis contains a comprehensive breakdown of the typologies of both perpetrators and victims (Cohen & Nordås 2014).

The thesis will consist of four sections, the first featuring the literature review, covering the three schools of thought that scholars have put forth to explain the patterns of sexual violence in conflict. The literature review will establish the various motivations that prompt armed combatants to engage in gender-based violence. After the literature review, the data and methods section will explain the parameters of the “Sexual Violence In Armed Conflict” dataset. It will also address the limitations of the data and demonstrate its utilization within this thesis. The following section consists of analyzing the data and evaluating the trends identified. Lastly, the conclusion will discuss the implications of the findings from the data analysis section. It will also discuss opportunities for future research.

Literature Review

Aside from professionalism, several other variables contribute to the variation in sexual violence trends in armed conflict. These variables include gender relations, military strategy and leadership, and ethnic tensions. Several schools of thought aim to explain the variation and are vital to understanding the patterns of sexual violence that follow different archetypes (Wood 2006 pg.320-329). When discussing the relationship between the actor types and what types of sexual violence are most prevalent for each type, it is essential to understand the variables that govern the patterns of sexual violence in armed conflict.

This thesis will address the three leading schools of thought that scholars have purported to explain the motivations behind why soldiers commit sexual violence. It will also discuss the way that different motivations alter how perpetrators behave. Each of the three theories attempts to explain why sexual violence happens, in what ways, and what could be done to mitigate said factors.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory argues that wartime sexual violence is a result of what scholars call “hegemonic masculinity” (Alison 2007 pg.75). This often hostile relationship exists between men indoctrinated in the standard military ethos of hypermasculinity, of which sexual violence against women and subordinate men is the natural outcome when men are empowered to commit violence on behalf of their military (Alison 2007 pg.76). While no military would openly admit that dominance over women and other men is explicitly part of the training soldiers receive before going to battle, it is hard not to see the undertones behind the culture of many militaries. These undertones lead soldiers to try to “prove themselves as men” - a notion fueled by powerful ideas of male sexuality as active and aggressive and female sexuality as submissive (Muhlhauser

2017 pg. 370). An example of this from the training given to trainees for the United States Marines follows the lines “This is my weapon, this is my gun. This is for business, this is for fun” (Thanh Nguyen 2012). This song is sung together as a unit, led by a Drill Sergeant, as the soldiers grab their genitals for the line “this is my weapon” and “this is for fun.” This song alone embodies a concerning attitude toward the relationship between sex, violence, and war in the minds of new recruits. The comradery of the unit is built upon an ethos of aggressive sexuality as they prepare to deploy among a civilian population far from the usual social norms that dictate appropriate gender relations. This hypermasculine foundation underpins the culture within many professional militaries and perpetuates sexual violence both outside their ranks and within.

The sentiments portrayed in the song were well-established and known. A similar drill song was featured in the Academy Award-nominated film *Full Metal Jacket*, directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1987. While the song may not be used in drills today, its influence remains undeniable. The inclusion of a gendered aspect of military training seems unnecessary, especially today, as more and more women join their nation’s army. Strategically, it is irrelevant, but its true purpose is to reinforce the roles that each gender traditionally plays in conflict. It is so omnipresent that in the *Encyclopedia of Sex*, edited by Ruth K. Westheimer, in the entry under “Sex Roles,” it states that some roles are nearly universal - such as the mothering role for women and the soldiering role for men (Westheimer 2000 pg.241).

The influence of the masculine-feminine divide within the dynamics of armed conflict extends itself into the body of work on military history to the degree that it cannot be ignored. Not until recently, in the prolonged history of armed conflict, has the narrative on the traditional role of women in warfare been scrutinized. The book *Gender, War, and Conflict* by Laura Sjoberg is framed upon questioning the gender paradigm. Sojberg highlights the importance of

gendered analysis, challenging the reader to think about the narratives surrounding gender in war as a “crucial step to make visible gender hierarchy, gender-based expectations, what happens to “women” and “men” in wars and conflicts... Then it is possible to fully understand gender only in the context of war and conflict, and to fully understand war and conflict only by including their gendered aspects” (Sjoberg 2014 pg.154). Sjoberg discusses the different narratives surrounding women’s traditional “roles” in war by asking: where are women in wars? They are wives, mothers, daughters... victims. They occupy the peripheral role of the innocent “Others” who exist to be an object to which men can apply their desire for heroism, to be protectors, the brave saviors, and the patriotic main characters of the story that is war (Sjoberg 2014 pg. 24). Sjoberg calls the role as incomplete and inaccurate as they are pervasive in the minds of the men (Sjoberg 2014 pg. 24).

Wives, mothers, and daughters are not the only roles women, or, more often, girls, play in conflict. One of the most sought-after roles is “the Virgin,” the motivations behind the specific targeting of virgins as a victim of choice in armed conflict, especially on the African continent. There are parallel epidemics of HIV and sexual violence affecting young women and children, cyclical crises that feed on each other. Sexual violence spreads the disease through unprotected, often violent intercourse, which is more likely to produce blood and other bodily fluids acting as a vector for the virus (Chiang et al. 2015 pg.474). Due to the fear of HIV, perpetrators of sexual violence target younger and younger victims as they are more likely to be virgins and less likely to carry the disease (Chiang et al. 2015 pg.474).

Virginity also holds increased cultural value, traditionally, because virgins were more “valuable” on the marriage market and would fetch higher dowry prices for their families (Lambert 2004 pg.265). Men are the demographic that creates that idea of value through, in

objectifying terms, the economics of sex and women's bodies. The man who takes a woman's virginity traditionally held claim to that woman. Even today, there are cases of girls being married to their attackers to avoid bringing the family the shame of having their daughter violated (Lambert 2004 pg.265). One can only imagine the lifetime of mental and physical anguish a woman would experience being married to her rapist. This cultural value is why they are highly targeted victims, and there are even those who believe their HIV can be cured through intercourse with a virgin in parts of Africa (Lambert 2004 pg.266). Due to the biology of having sex for the first time, the woman is more likely to bleed and transfer bodily fluids, increasing the chances of becoming infected. Since many of these victims are infected so young, they have their entire lifetime to spread the disease among future sexual partners and children. It also inspires men to defend virgins with even more vigor as they are the most valuable subset of "their women" (Akurang-Parry 2004 pg.10).

The role of the defending hero empowers men to fight and die for their country as fiercely as possible. The ethos of the narrative drives the training and battlefield cultures many soldiers live and fight in to emphasize their masculinity to the fullest extent and potential. Exalting a man's power over a woman, comparing his strength to her weakness, is one of the easiest ways to make him feel more masculine and powerful (Henry 2016 pg.45). According to the theory, this hypermasculinity leads to two outcomes: (1) soldiers develop a hyper fixation with sex, and (2) it triggers a deeply held contempt for women, especially those from the enemy side (Henry 2016 pg.49; Goldstein 2001). In Joshua Goldstein's book *War and Gender*, a British soldier from World War I notes that soldiers on the front line have an "almost universal preoccupation with sex... an obsession with sex in a community of men deprived of usual social, emotional, and sexual outlets" (2001). This obsession, coupled with the norm of being in a

predominantly male environment during combat, creates a volatile situation. When one or more of those men come into contact with a woman, especially one from a side they already hold contempt for, tensions escalate significantly. This argument is compelling and certainly contributes to understanding why soldiers rape women during war. However, it fails to explain the variation in both the amount and intensity of sexual violence observed from conflict to conflict, as well as why specific units within an army perpetrate more sexual violence than others. Though most armies and fighting groups seem to have this problem to some extent, this theory only addresses it partially. This thesis hypothesizes that additional extenuating factors are required to elevate certain militaries from sporadic incidents of rape, as observed in civilian populations, to a more systematic, weaponized level of sexual violence.

Dara Kay Cohen's book *Rape During Civil War* reveals a significant aspect of feminism theory: the objectification and commodification of women by fighting groups, particularly rebel factions. In the chapter on the Civil War in Sierra Leone, the author describes how women's bodies function as a tool for creating more cohesive fighting groups (Cohen 2016 pg.118). Cohen interviewed civilians and ex-combatants about their experiences with sexual violence during the war. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel group fighting for control of the country, is the group committing the most sexual violence (Cohen 2016 pg.119). The findings have implications for other rebel groups with similar recruitment strategies that exploit women's bodies as a tool of war. However, it is essential to distinguish that when referring to a tool or strategy of war, it does not mean tactically but serves as a tool of group dynamics, more so than for sexual gratification. Ex-combatants described how RUF rebels abducted them, often at a young age and following the rape and murder of family members. (Cohen 2016 pg.119). The data analysis section of the thesis will further discuss the impact of age on combatant behavior.

Given that the fighting units comprise a mix of ethnicities, tribes, and languages, the group uses the abuse of women to bond, build comradery, and establish a hierarchy. The first man in a gang rape, who has relations with the victim, is perceived as the most dominant in the group, illustrating how men utilize domination over women to reinforce their masculinity and authority over other men in their unit (Cohen 2016 pg.119). Another trend paradoxically demonstrates this relationship between sexual dominance and power and acceptance by the group. Participation in gang rape, where both women and men who cannot perform sexually will take part, utilizing objects as symbolic phalluses with which they can dominate their victims, is seen as a rite of passage regardless of the perpetrator's gender (Cohen 2016 pg.107).

The Leadership Theory

While there is going to be variation between the training methods and individual systems of reprimand from military to military, research by Paul Robinson in the US Army War College argues that the majority of modern militaries source the basis of their ethics training from similar ideals including loyalty, duty, respect, and discipline (Robinson 2007 pg.31). There are also international humanitarian law standards, including the *Geneva Conventions*, which all 196 nations have ratified. The statutes of international humanitarian law concerning civilians include Rule 90, which outlaws torture, cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment; Rule 93, which outlaws rape and other forms of sexual violence; and Rule 94, which outlaws slavery (International Committee of the Red Cross 2023). While there have been numerous cases of official state militaries not following international law, there is still a system in place to hold both individual soldiers and their respective governments accountable for their war crimes.

In conflicts like the Second World War and the war in Bosnia, certain armies perpetrate such widespread sexual violence that it is challenging to believe leaders did not order it. At the least, leaders tolerated and ignored it. It is naive to think that militaries as controlled and disciplined as the German and Japanese armies in World War II did not have the leadership control necessary to stop their troops from committing mass rapes and sexual violence. The only logical conclusion is that the leadership did have the power, and their soldiers acted as ordered or, at least, were not explicitly forbidden from doing so.

Dedicated, loyal soldiers take direction about what is genuinely unacceptable from their leaders, despite what is in the codes of conduct. A report published by the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences found that the influence of leadership soldiers is one of the most potent relationship dynamics of military training and can have powerful effects on the actions of their subordinates (Cullen, Fodles, Schneider, & Wisecarve 2011 pg.25). Nazi leadership certainly influenced the topic of rape and sexual violence that it passed on to rank-and-file troops. Joseph Goebbels, Reich Minister of Propaganda, was quoted as saying, “man should be trained for war and woman for the recreation of the warrior,” the clear insinuation made is that the woman should prepare herself to be raped by soldiers (Brownmiller 1975 pg. 49). An Adolf Hitler quote likened his opponents as feminine and that through his aggressive masculinity, he conquered them, referring to his mental conquest of those that opposed him as a form of “psychic rape” (Brownmiller 1975 pg. 49). The German army’s model for conquest included rape and other forms of sexual violence. As the German army swept through a town, they modeled their conquest after Hitler planned and approved the conquest of Jewish businesses in Munich in 1938 on Kristallnacht (Brownmiller 1975). Rape was essential to the Nazi war machine because it was another means of destruction of the culture of the so-called

“inferior races” by targeting women as the biological bearers of their cultures (Muhlhauser 2017 pg.385). The extensive sexual violence committed by the German army during the Second World War serves as compelling evidence of the influence tolerance or encouragement of sexual violence from military leadership has on the actions of troops in the field.

The treatment of German women by troops from the Red Army of the Soviet Union shows that even when an army’s actions are seen as liberating for some, they can be tormentors to others. In a poignant examination of the experiences of women residing amidst the USSR and Berlin, Miriam Gebhardt’s *Crimes Unspoken: The Rape of German Women at the End of the Second World War* offers a compelling historical analysis. The terror inspired by the approaching Red Army inspired the “great fear” that fell over the German people at the start of 1945 as they not only began to realize the war was lost but also feared what was coming as the Allies approached. She mentions how the German people “knew or at least had an idea of what German troops had done elsewhere and feared retribution’ (Gebhardt 2017 pg.31). The panic was exasperated by both the realities of the demographic of Germans still in Germany, predominantly women, children, and the elderly. Not only did the remaining population have minimal means of protecting themselves, the Allied bombing campaign left many without proper housing or shelter from the onslaught (Gebhardt 2017 pg. 33). However, it was not solely the Allies that were stoking panic within the German population. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels used and stoked fear of the “murderous Bolshevist rabble” and circulated the idea that if the war were lost, the German people would be lost with it, starting with the women (Gebhardt 2017 pg. 33). The sentiment was an attempt to use the shame of having “their women” defiled by enemy forces as motivation for the remaining German forces to fight to the last man (Gebhardt 2017 pg. 33).

Gebhardt attributes the mass assault carried out by the Red Army as a result of the "gender roles of the time that brought about the sexual violence that marked the conquest of Germany by all of the occupying forces" (Gebhardt 2017 pg.114). A German woman who was 15 at the time of her attack recalls a Soviet soldier telling her that he "earned her" and that raping German women was what spurred him to continue fighting (Gebhardt 2017 pg.41). A first-hand account from the Red Army describes the troop's desire to find a woman once battles had ended in a particular area, this account from Moldova, described the women as "trophies" (Merridale 2007 pg.283).

The Nazis and Soviets were not the only army committing atrocities during the Second World War. In the Pacific theater, the Imperial Japanese Army was committing a holocaust of its own. The epicenter of this violence occurred in the capital city of the Republic of China, the nationalist regime that followed the collapse of the Chinese Empire. Nanking, located on the Yangtze River, served as the capital from 1912 to 1949, when the country fell to communist forces under Mao Zedong (Lyu 2019). Over only six weeks, upwards of 80,000 people were subjected to the most despicable acts of sexual torture that one can imagine. No one in Nanking was spared: girls as young as four, elderly women in their eighties, pregnant women, men; anyone was a possible victim of sexual violence at the hands of the Japanese. Such wanton violence makes one wonder what fueled this massacre. They desensitized themselves to the violence they inflicted upon them (Chang 2011 pg.49).

The Rape of Nanking is a perfect example of the distinction between soldiers that commit sexual violence because there is no leadership structure to enforce discipline and those who are in militaries that ban sexual violence but do not enforce it. One would think, given the attack was one of the most severe incidents of sexual violence in human history, that the Japanese army had

no rules against it, but that is not the case. In her book, Iris Chang explains how the Japanese military did have a rule outlawing the rape of enemy women, but because the culture of rape was so deeply ingrained in the culture of the army that it was widely ignored. One soldier quoted explains that if anything, having a ban on sexual violence encouraged the soldiers to kill their victims when they were finished to lower the risk of being disciplined (Chang 2011 pg.49). This example shows the nuance of the social norms surrounding sexual violence when it comes to the role of leadership policies on the number of attacks carried out. It also shows that just having a written law in the code of conduct for a given military does not mean it is followed in practice.

In her groundbreaking research on the massacre, Chang conducts interviews with a veteran, delving into his actions during the event and his emotional responses to it. A Japanese foot soldier describes how he smiled proudly at his accomplishments after murdering a group of innocent civilians (Chang 2011 pg.59). However, the most enlightening quote is as follows:

Few know that soldiers impaled babies on bayonets and tossed them still alive into pots of boiling water... they gang-raped women from the ages of twelve to eighty and then killed them when they could no longer satisfy sexual requirements. I beheaded people, starved them to death, burned them, and buried them alive, over two hundred in all... at the time, we all experienced a complete lack of remorse or sense of wrongdoing, even when torturing helpless civilians (Chang 2011 pg.59).

Chang reminds the reader that such atrocities were not limited to Nanking, and the desensitization and brutality shown there were seen across China during the whole war (Chang 2011 pg.59). Nanking is a poignant example of what can happen when young men with weapons are deployed far from the social norms they know at home. Their inhibitions lower, and their aggression is unleashed onto a population that they do not even consider human to do whatever comes to mind with complete impunity. Unfortunately for the men and women of Nanking and China, as established above, sex and violence are often the first things that come to mind for a

soldier; the Japanese just combined them more than most militaries would allow (Chang 2011 pg.57).

The feeling of permissibility when it comes to sexual violence is not contained in the Japanese or the World War II era. The American military, which is an often overlooked perpetrator of sexual violence in the Second World War, considered committing sexual violence upon a civilian a capital offense in the official rules and regulations. However, American leadership “consistently covered up reported rapes and made it clear to GIs that they had no real need to fear punishment. The US Military Command made rape ‘socially acceptable’; in fact, it was unwritten, but clear, policy.” (Muhlhauser 2017 pg.368) In this understanding, rape becomes part of military conduct because it is a socially accepted and, indeed, expected form of violence. The fact that the military commanders did nothing to stop it means that they approved of this form of violence within their military operations (Muhlhauser 2017 pg.368).

Unfortunately, social acceptance of sexual violence is not a thing of the past for the United States military. In 2004, the sexually humiliating photographs of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison, taken by US servicemen, shocked the world for their barbarity (Brody 2005 pg.145). The photos contained men, unclothed, being walked around on leashes, and having their genitals electrocuted as a form of torture. Detainees reported being forced to commit dehumanizing sex acts in front of US interrogators, in addition to non-sexualized torture methods (Brody 2005 pg.145). When the photos came to light, the White House attempted to argue that it was a case of a “few bad apples,” rather than a result of widespread misconduct. Their behavior as individual service members did not depict the broader trends of what was happening inside the American detention facility (Brody 2005 pg.146). The service members depicted in the photographs were reprimanded for their actions in the hope their punishment would quell further

attention from being drawn to what was happening in the prison. However, it soon became apparent that “this pattern of abuse did not result from the acts of individual soldiers who broke the rules. It resulted from decisions made by the Bush Administration to bend, ignore, or cast aside rules” (Brody 2005 pg.146). The incidents at Abu Ghraib show how quickly arguably the most disciplined military in the world today can push aside the laws of war in the name of a noble cause. It shows how easily leadership can be redirected and how willing soldiers on the ground are to commit the most heinous acts if they know their superiors will not reprimand them.

The attitude of leadership on the permissibility of sexual violence undoubtedly influences the actions of the troops below them. However, it fails to explain the variation, especially in incidence intensity. It does not explain the incidence of sexual violence committed by rebel groups, militias, and armed groups that lack disciplined or organized command structures. This is supported by the fact that some of the most extreme sexual violence comes from conflicts lacking organized or professional armed forces. A study on female victims of sexual violence in the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo showed extreme brutality, even among the abhorrent examples referenced in the article. Seventy two percent of the women surveyed reported that they experienced torture and being sexually assaulted, including machete wounds, genital mutilations, and burns by melted liquid plastic. A further 12% reported having objects other than male genitalia inserted into them, including sticks, bottles, green bananas, rocks, chilis, and rifle barrels, some of which were fired inside the women (Mukwege & Nangini 2009). This trend is also continued in Sierra Leone and other rebel group-based conflicts in Africa, which often include a high level of brutality and a very high incidence frequency. What makes the actors in this context unique is how they perpetuate the violence among small groups of fighters, often transitory with their victims. All three articles referenced in this thesis portray

instances where victims were repeatedly subjected to sexual violence by these small fighting units, often over extended periods, and beginning at a very young age (Mukengere Mukwege & Nangini 2009; Meger 2011 pg.102; Denov 2006 pg.323).

An article written by Dara Cohen and Ragnhil Norhas (2015 pg.877) pertaining to the leadership and discipline of pro-government militias raised an interesting question: do states delegate the most violent actions, including sexual violence, to their militias to avoid direct blame? While that argument appears to have sound logic backing it, the results of their analysis of the SVAC dataset found that when pro-government militias commit sexual violence it is in tandem with their affiliated state actors (Cohen & Nordas 2015 pg.878). The data also showed that government forces commit more more sexual violence on average than their affiliated militias. The article also found a relationship between the amount of military training the militias had and which militaries did the training. Militias that have more government military training are more likely to commit sexual violence than those with less or none at all. It also found that militias associated with militaries that commit higher levels of sexual violence are more likely to commit it themselves. Cohen and Nordhas describe this as the permissibility of sexual violence spreading from the core military to influence the militias on the periphery. (Cohen & Nordas 2015 pg.879) Another finding that aligns with the rebels referenced above is that militias that recruit child soldiers are more likely to commit sexual violence. As for the motivations behind their actions, just as with the rebels, the primary motive is increasing group cohesion (Cohen & Nordas 2015 pg.879).

The Ethnic Hatred and Retribution Theory

While this theory can be seen in many military conflicts, including the ones analyzed above, it is essential to show that this kind of heinous sexual violence is not just a past phenomenon. The war in Bosnia began in 1991 after the dissolution of Yugoslavia along the lines of the ethnic groups that held claim to the territory, which now includes Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Snyder, Gabbard, & Zulcic 2006 pg.189). Though there were atrocities on all sides, most of the sexual violence was perpetrated by the Bosnian Serbs against the Bosnian Muslims. An estimate of 10,000 to 60,000 women and girls were raped over the course of the war, most of which occurred in detention centers designed for this purpose (Sharlach 2000 pg.96; Wood 2006 pg.311). As the designing of designated facilities to detain women and girls for rape suggests, many Bosnian Serb soldiers would tell their victims that not only were they told to rape Bosnian Muslim women systematically by their commanders, but also that it was to impregnate them as a form of ethnic cleansing via the dilution of the races and the creation of more Serbs to continue the fight to wipe out the race of their mothers in the future. Many women and girls were detained until abortion of the unwanted children produced by rape was no longer an option, and they would be forced to carry the children to term (Sharlach 2000 pg.97; Wood 2006 pg.312).

Another motive for systematically using rape as a weapon against Bosnian Muslim women is because due to the patriarchal culture of the region, where a woman's honor and that of her family were reflected in her chastity. Thus, a man can dishonor the whole lineage by dishonoring a woman's body, which symbolizes her family's honor. On a larger scale, within the context of war, lineage extends to the entire ethnic group or culture. Thus, sexual violence against women became a tool of genocide for destroying the enemy's honor, family, culture, and

nationhood (Snyder, Gabbard, & Zulcic 2006). The conflict in Bosnia combines an intense ethnic hatred with leadership that not only fails to punish rampant sexual violence but also wields it as an explicit weapon of war. This resulted in the rape of up to 60,000 women and the birth of thousands of unwanted children (Sharlach 2000 pg.98).

The presentation of how systematic sexual violence appears to occur in several ethnic conflicts, including the conflict in Bosnia and the conflict in Bangladesh in 1971, shows a tendency towards the long-term captivity of women for sexual and reproductive purposes (Benard 1994 pg.33). In both conflicts, women were held in camps for the designated purpose of repeated sexual violence and forced procreation with the women of the victim ethnicity by the combatants of the rival ethnicity. This suggests sexual violence being used as a means of ethnic eradication through forced interbreeding, a characteristic not found in any other instance of sexual (Wood 2006 pg.313).

There is a second sub-theory within the ethnic hatred hypothesis, which may explain why some ethnic conflicts have mass rape and others do not. In *Rape During Civil War*, Cohen hypothesizes that this distinction comes from a few crucial nuances between different ethnic conflicts. The first is determined by the cultural mores surrounding sexual relations with individuals outside the perpetrator's ethnic or religious demographic (Cohen 2016 pg.52). Cohen argues that sexual violence is more likely in racially based societies where there is little concern for racial purity. Suppose perpetrators see the enemy women from before the war as potential sexual or marriage partners. In that case, there is more likely to be widespread rape (Cohen 2016 pg.52). Cohen uses the example of the Nazi's rape of Jewish women during World War II. While there were laws forbidding sexual relations between a Jewish woman and a Nazi soldier, it was commonplace to see rape and forced prostitution (Cohen 2016 pg.52). The hypothesis is that

when the two rival ethnic groups are well integrated socially before the start of the conflict, it is more likely they will commit mass rape as they had formerly seen those same women as potential partners before the war. Before the Second World War, German society was progressive and relatively ethnically tolerant under the Weimar Republic. Hence, it makes sense that German soldiers would target Jewish women despite the law banning the practice (Cohen 2016 pg.52).

This pattern was also seen in the Rwandan genocide which pitted the two primary ethnic groups: the Hutus, who constituted the majority, and the Tutsis, the ruling minority. Before the war, while tensions existed, the two ethnic groups lived amongst each other and intermarried (Nowrojee 1996). The evidence supports the argument that ethnic hatred was used as a guise and motivation to commit indiscriminate sexual violence. Human Rights Watch's report on the Rwanda genocide explains how the Interahamwe, the name claimed by Hutu rebels, would focus their violence on young, beautiful women and come up with a tenuous connection between their victims and the enemy (Nowrojee 1996). They also utilized several forms of sexual violence coded into the dataset, including holding women in camps for prolonged sexual slavery, gang rape, sexual torture, and mutilation of women's genitalia with guns and machetes (Nowrojee 1996).

Drawing from this literature review, research on sexual violence in conflict posits that as the professionalism of the armed group increases, the reported incidences are likely to be less severe in magnitude due to stricter oversight within the leadership structure. Government forces will have the highest reported incidences, but most of the reports will be categorized in the SVAC dataset's "isolated" and "numerous" categories. There will still be bad actors, but systemic sexual violence, categorized in the dataset as "massive," will only be seen in extreme examples motivated by ethnic or religious conflict. The rebel forces will show fewer reports numerically,

but the reported incidents are more likely to fall in either “numerous” or “massive” categories because of limited oversight. The lack of group cohesion among rebel groups, stemming from forced conscription, may instigate elevated levels of sexual violence, as it can be utilized as a mechanism to forge bonds among the fighters.

Before subjecting these assumptions to empirical testing, the subsequent section of the thesis delves into a comprehensive exploration of the SVAC dataset, elucidating its scope, strengths, and inherent limitations. Through this detailed examination, the thesis aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the dataset’s applicability and the potential constraints it imposes on the ensuing analysis.

Data and Methods

The SVAC dataset is at the forefront of the study of sexual violence in conflict available in academia today. Harvard University jointly developed the dataset and the Peace Research Institute Oslo, led by Dara Kay Cohen, Ragnhild Nordås, and Robert Ulrich Nagel. Sexual violence, whether in conflict or peacetime, is difficult to quantify into accurate statistics due to the personal nature of sexual assault, which makes victims reluctant to report their attack. Due to that fact, reliable datasets are challenging to develop. It is essential to keep these challenges in mind while reviewing the dataset’s methodology.

This section first reviews the SVAC’s dataset main limitations. It then explains how the dataset’s observations are structured and how these are used to test these thesis’s main assumptions.

Limitations

There are several limitations to both the SVAC dataset and the study of conflicted-related sexual violence as a field. Starting with the limitations of the SVAC dataset, the first limitation is the sources the dataset uses to compile its statistics. Its observations of sexual violence in armed conflicts is based on three annual human rights reports, produced independently by the United States Department of State, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International.

The main limitation is the database's reliance on the United States Department of State's annual country report on human rights. As a government agency, it will have an inherent bias to show the conduct of the United States military in a positive light. This is especially apparent because the State Department does not provide statistics on the conduct of American troops (Cohen, Nordås & Nagel 2021). The United States military's data being withheld implies that the data would reflect poorly upon the United States. It is a deliberate choice on the department's behalf to exclude the world's most powerful military, with operations worldwide, from the annual report. Whether or not it was a decision made because the statistics contain data that would hurt the United States' image abroad is unknown, but it warrants further research. This is a similar double standard to the United States pushing other countries to join the International Criminal Court without being a member itself (Gallagher 2019 pg.237).

The academic study of conflict-related sexual violence accepts all three data sources despite their inherent biases. These biases stem from the fact that these organizations' primary goals are not exclusively data recording institutions. Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are NGOs that rely on public funding. While they are both highly esteemed organizations, it is possible their results could be skewed to a degree through confirmation bias that fits the narrative of the organization's mission.

One significant limitation affecting not only the SVAC dataset but all data collection concerning sexual violence is the underreporting of the majority of incidents due to fear or shame. This is a challenge even during peacetime. In the United States, only three of every ten incidents of sexual violence are reported to the police. Only around one percent of those reports result in a conviction of the perpetrator, according to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (“The Criminal Justice System: Statistics” RAINN 2024). These statistics are the number of incidents of sexual violence that go unreported in a developed country that is not at war and has the technology and infrastructure to investigate the evidence of an attack forensically. Considering 70% of sexual assaults go unreported in the United States. One can imagine the massive amount of sexual violence that goes unreported in an underdeveloped, war-torn country with limited rule of law.

Another problem with obtaining accurate statistics on sexual violence in conflict is the psychological and social impact such attacks have on the victims. Victims of sexual violence are often left traumatized and in a heightened state of fear, which can make them reluctant to speak out against their attackers, especially if their attackers are the ones in control of the area where they were attacked. They fear the stigma of being a victim of sexual violence, as well as the possible retribution of their attackers (“The Criminal Justice System: Statistics” RAINN 2024).

The stigma surrounding sexual violence in certain conservative cultures makes those victims even more likely to hide their attack, but unfortunately, they are often left with undeniable evidence: a child. The conflict between Pakistan and Bangladesh is an example of the dire social consequences surrounding using sexual violence as a weapon of war. The actors who commit these attacks are aware of the effect their actions will have on their victims and use them intentionally. In *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller describes the impact that wartime rape had on

Bangladeshi women. She describes how in traditional Bengali society, women lead cloistered lives, and rape victims are ostracized. Thousands of rape victims became pregnant from their attacks, and traditionally no Muslim husband would take a wife back who had been touched by another man, even if she had been subdued by force (Brownmiller 1975 pg.79). Cultures with these types of values can result in victims being revictimized by the social consequences of what happened to them, creating a generation of women and children who exist unsupported and forced out of the only society they have ever known. This pattern of victimization is also often seen in conflicts where sexual violence is used as a means of ethnic cleansing because it can destroy a culture from the inside out, killing the future of a woman without even having to take her life.

Another limitation to obtaining accurate data on conflict-related sexual violence is the difficulty that victims have in reporting their attacks. In the best circumstances, they must report their attack to the military police or higher military authorities to whom their attacker belongs. Rebels will often steal military uniforms or dress in the style of other groups to limit their victim's ability to identify their attacker (Cohen 2016 pg.109). That said, even if they know what military they are from, they may have no information on which soldier or soldiers were the ones that attacked them, and leaving that kind of investigation to the military they belong to can easily result in a cover-up or no real investigation at all. It is often in the military's best interest to stall the investigation of such incidents to preserve their military reputation.

During the Second World War, the United States Military created an air of permissibility towards sexual violence committed by their troops. This trend is often seen in militaries with higher rates of sexual violence (Muhlhauser 2017 pg.368). The above scenario is conditional on the victim identifying what military their attacker belongs to, having the means and knowledge

to travel to, and identifying who to report the attack to. Poor women in the countryside are unlikely to contact the proper authorities to report it. They are also putting themselves at risk of future attacks or other forms of retaliation. This challenge increases exponentially when concerning less organized conflict actors. In a conflict that involves multiple militias or rebel groups vying for power, how would the victim even know which group their attacker belongs to when they are not in recognizable uniforms? Even if they know what rebel group their attacker belongs to, who will they report it to? If they try to report it to members of the same rebel group, they are likely to be victimized again or even killed. It is also unlikely that functioning authorities still maintain the rule of law in the conflict zone, so reporting it to the local police is not an option. Due to the difficulty in reporting their attacks, many incidences of sexual violence remain unknown. This affects the dataset because the data only reflects a fraction of the number of attacks in each conflict.

Another constraint is the disproportionate number of conflict actors in professional militaries versus any other armed group. Due to this inequity, the data is skewed to show a much higher prevalence rate for professional soldiers than other types of armed groups. Governmental actors are also much easier to track as there are employment and governmental records of who is a member of what military. Conversely, there are no formal records of who is a member of an informal rebel group or a private militia.

Another weakness that needs to be considered is the underreporting of attacks that end with death. If a victim is killed after their attack, it is less likely to be reported due to the lack of surviving witnesses. In some attacks, there will not be any visible marks or evidence on the body if it is found to show that it was both a death and a case of sexual violence.

Another significant shortcoming to the dataset's accuracy is the massive underreporting of male sexual violence victims. In many cultures, male sexual violence victims face an even more significant social stigma than female victims. There is also much more awareness of the cause of sexual violence against women by NGOs and international organizations. Militaries often have an intense culture of hypermasculinity, and any involvement in sexual behavior with another man on both the side of the perpetrator and the attacker would carry a lot of shame. That shame on both sides of the attack, as well as possible legal repercussions as homosexuality, is illegal in many countries, all contribute to the vast underreporting of sexual violence involving men. In the dataset, less than 1% of the incidents reported involve a sexual attack on a man (Cohen, Nordås & Nagel 2021).

The last major limitation of the SVAC dataset is its reliance on descriptive adjectives to decide the magnitude of the prevalence statistics. Words like massive, numerous, or isolated are subjective and can vary from article to article, skew the classification of the magnitude of different conflicts. There will always be room for error in any statistical study that relies on descriptive adjectives instead of numerical evidence. That said, due to the limitations of recording sexual violence, there is no better dataset than the SVAC dataset available in the field of study. This is a limitation that could be improved with further research.

All the limitations highlighted above, particularly those related to the dataset's variables concerning the prevalence of sexual violence, underscore the significance of employing the dual variable of brutality. This approach proves invaluable in extracting deeper insights from the available data. The significant disparity in the number of professional soldiers versus the other types of conflict actors makes the possible conclusion that they commit more sexual violence less statistically significant. The brutality scale is a means to counter that limitation because it

removes frequency and focuses on the level of violence. There is a standard amount of sexual violence committed during peacetime as a category of criminality, so a distinction must be made between the average rate of sexual violence among any given population and sexual violence that is committed in a strictly military context.

Definitions and Scope

The SVAC dataset bases its seven forms of sexual violence on both the types defined by the International Criminal Court as well as the definitions used in the research by Elizabeth Jean Wood from Yale University. The seven types include (1) Rape; (2) Sexual Slavery; (3) Forced Prostitution; (4) Forced Pregnancy; (5) Forced Sterilization or Abortion; (6) Sexual Mutilation, including male castration; and (7) Sexual Torture. The dataset does not specify the gender of the victim or the perpetrator and does not exclude male victims or female perpetrators. The dataset does, however, exclude acts such as sexual humiliation, sexual insults or harassment, and forced undressing despite other researchers including these acts in their definitions of sexual violence (Cohen & Nordås 2014).

While all forms of sexual violence addressed in the dataset are considered war crimes by the International Criminal Court (International Criminal Court 2013 pg.19). Its definition includes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity (Gallagher 2020). This thesis will focus solely on the prevalence metrics of brutality relating to the intensity of the observed incidents. Due to this focus, the metric of sexual violence against children is the barometer of brutality. The more attacks on children, the more heinous the magnitude of sexual violence in that conflict. Due

to this distinction, the statistics pertaining to sexual violence against children will be considered as a separate category of sexual violence.

The reason why child sexual violence prevalence is considered more severe than attacks upon adults is multifaceted, from emotional, physical, and developmental consequences for the child that last a lifetime. A long-term clinical study on the medical effects of childhood sexual violence can have linked the violence to increased cases of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and schizophrenia. Physically, childhood sexual abuse can result in self-harm, bodily injury from the attack, infertility later in life, and sexually transmitted diseases (Hailes, Yu, Danese, & Fazel 2019 pg. 831). HIV and AIDS are a massive problem in the African continent, where infection rates are much higher and treatment is less available. Due to the prevalence of the disease, perpetrators will specifically target young victims in the hope of avoiding infection by assaulting a virgin. This creates higher instances of sexual violence against children when the attacker may have otherwise chosen an adult victim (Muula 2008). This trend also links back to rebel actors as, due to their transient nature and the use of gang rape as a form of social bonding, they also spread HIV further than it would have spread naturally (Cohen 2016 pg.106-108).

The dataset's scope includes all the conflicts between 1989 and 2021 reported by three different sources. The first is the United States State Department's statistics on sexual violence in conflict, which are published each year in a report called *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. The following source is data from two sets of reports by Amnesty International called *Annual Report: The State of the World's Human Rights Practices*, as topical reports on specific conflicts. Amnesty International also reports the prevalence of sexual violence involving children, which is considered its fourth data source (Cohen, Nordås & Nagel 2021). The other two sources do not specify whether the victim is an adult or a minor. The last source is produced

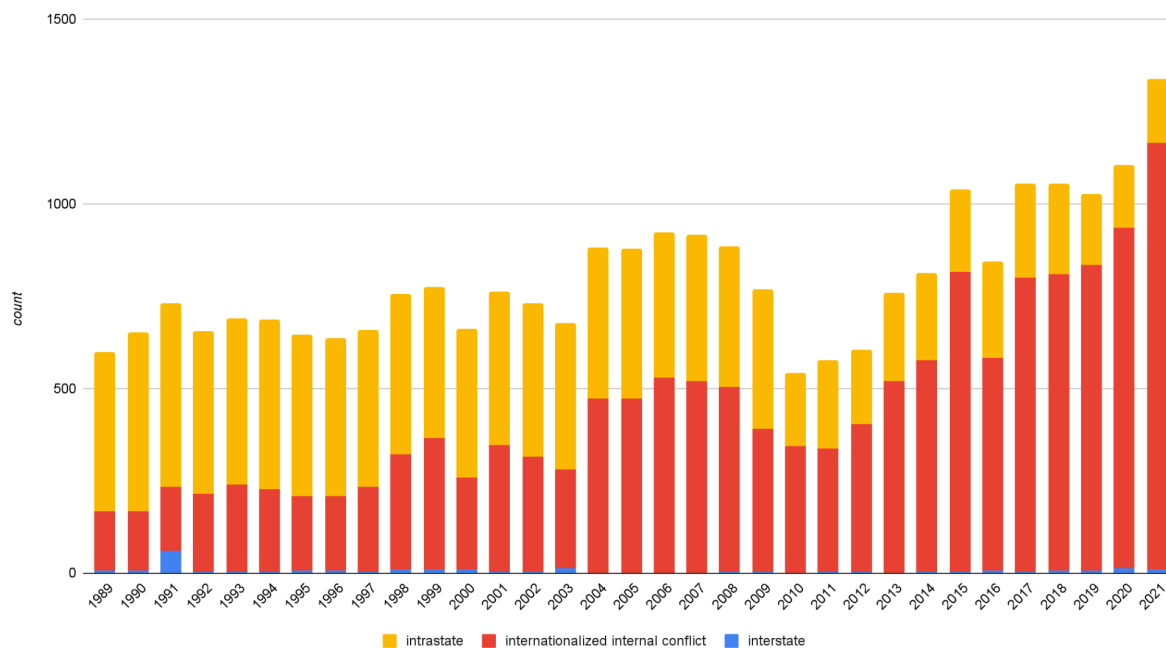
by Human Rights Watch, which also publishes an annual report called *World Reports* and region-specific reports. (Cohen, Nordås & Nagel 2021).

The armed conflicts featured in the dataset from 1989 to 2021 are taken from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, which is a collaborative data-gathering project created by the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University and the Centre for the Study of Civil War at Peace Research Institute in Oslo. Each conflict is given a conflict identification number consisting of three types.

- *Intrastate Armed Conflict*: a conflict between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) without intervention from other states.
- *Internationalized Internal Armed Conflict*: a conflict between the government of a state and one or more internal opposition group(s) with intervention from other states (secondary parties) on one or both sides.
- *Interstate Conflict*: a conflict between the governments of two states.

Each conflict is then broken down by the actors involved, each given their identification number (Cohen, Nordås & Nagel 2021). Figure 1 graphically illustrates the type of conflicts featured in the dataset.

Figure 1. Type of Conflicts in the SVAC Dataset



Due to the small number of interstate conflicts in the dataset, this thesis will filter them out to focus on intrastate and internationalized internal conflicts.

The dataset also charts sexual violence rates during the post-conflict period after warring parties settled their conflicts. These observations are also being filtered out because this thesis does not cover the topic of sexual violence during peacebuilding and reconciliation periods.

The dataset breaks down six different types of conflict actors, each conflict type having two sides to the conflict, thus six conflict actor types. The conflict actor types are the following:

State government forces, coded as actor type 1, includes professional soldiers, other security forces, military interrogators and law enforcement agents, including border policy. In an intrastate conflict, for example, the government forces oppose the internal opposition groups. The dataset refers to them as “Side A.”

Government allies, coded as actor type 2, are professional soldiers which are deployed to support “Side A” government forces. The dataset refers to them as “State A2.” These are also professional soldiers.

Rebels, coded as actor type 3, consists of non-government forces that are opposing the government forces, their allies or their pro-government militias.

Rebel allies, coded as actor type 4, refers to an outside states’ government troops, supporting rebels against their counterparts.

State enemies, coded as actor type 5, are professional soldiers fighting rival military forces in an interstate conflict.

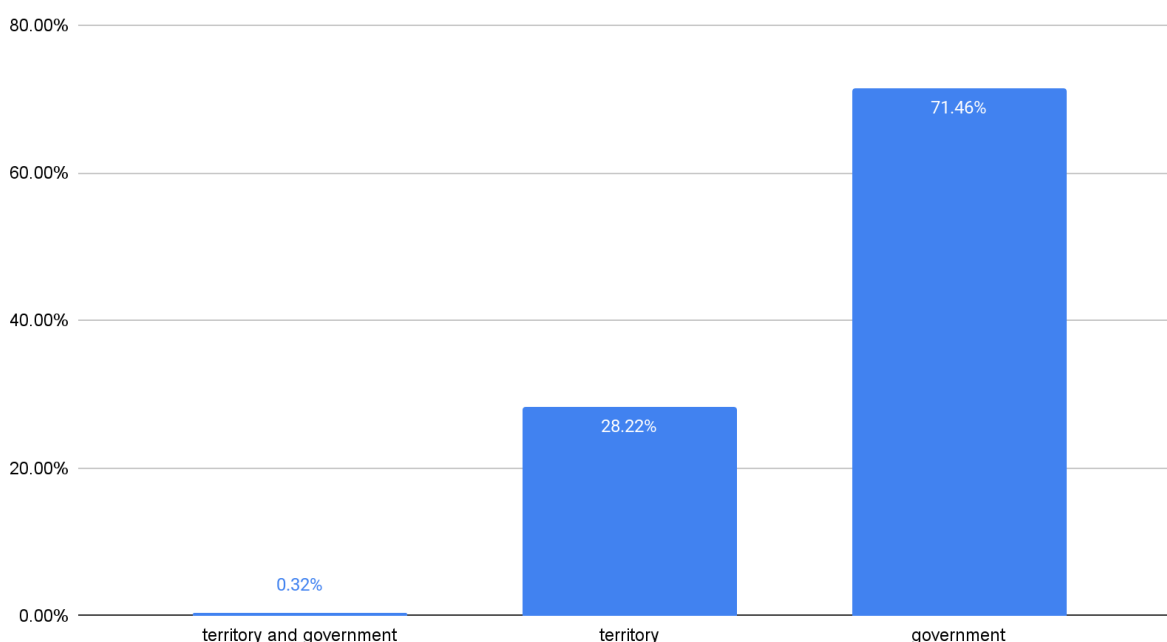
Pro-Government Militias, coded as actor type 6, are forces organized by the government, but are outside the state’s chain of command and are not publicly recognized as part of the government’s armed forces.

This thesis will focus on three types of actors: state government forces, rebels and pro-government militias. The other actors play a small role in the conflicts analyzed. Thus, their exclusion should not affect the analysis. This thesis ranks these three actors on a nominal scale of military professionalism and oversight: from most to least professional. Thus, governmental forces have the highest degree of professionalism. Pro-government militias’ professionalism is

ranked between governmental forces and rebels. While they are not members of a state government, these militias are trained by government forces and they work in concert with professional militaries. Rebel fighters have the least former military training and little oversight from any governing or state actor. (Cohen, Nordås & Nagel 2021).

The conflicts documented in the dataset are rooted in three distinct sources of incompatibility (Cohen, Nordås, and Nagel 2021), as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Figure 2. Classifying Conflicts Based on Incompatibility Factors

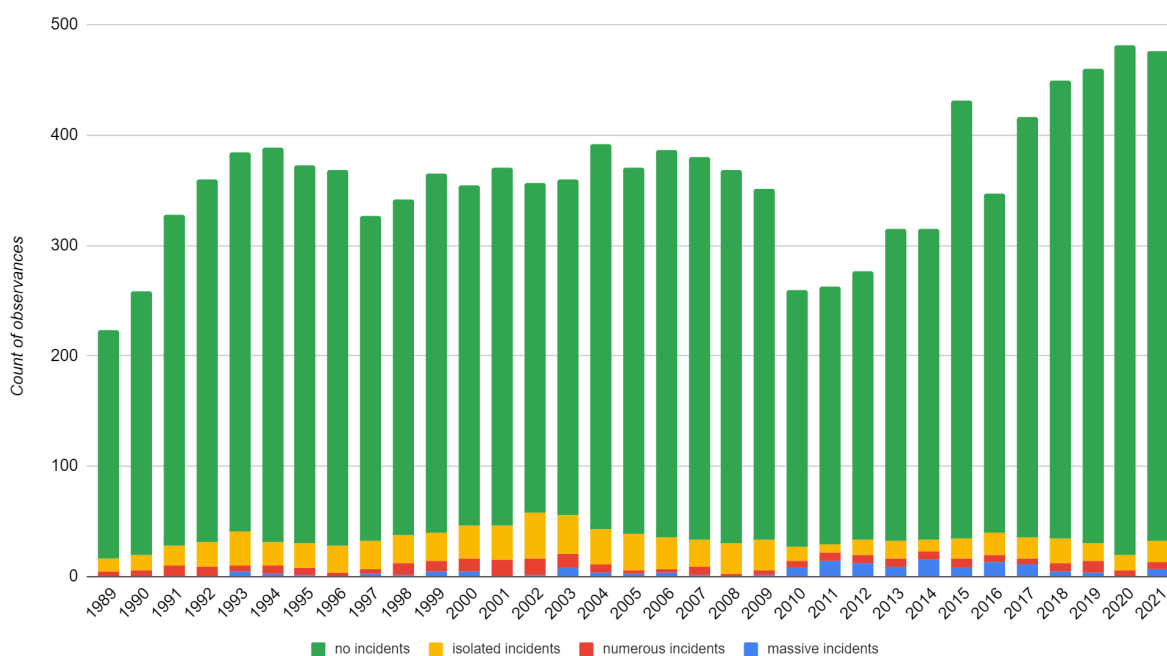


The majority of these conflicts stem from rebel forces' aspirations to seize control of the state's institutions. Alternatively, some conflicts arise from secessionist claims or rebel forces' pursuit of territorial autonomy. These conflicts are often driven by ethno-national and sectarian interests, making them suitable for investigating the relationship between ethnic animosity and the prevalence and severity of sexual violence. The third source of incompatibility combines

elements from the other two conflict types. However, since this classification only includes one reported conflict, it will be excluded from the analysis.

The last important variable is the prevalence of sexual violence observed in each conflict, each year. The scale of prevalence ranges from no incidents to massive reports of sexual violence, as graphically depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Timeline of Sexual Violence Prevalence in SVAC Dataset



If researchers did not observe any incidents of sexual violence in a conflict during a specific year, they coded it as “0”. As illustrated in Figure 3, the majority of observations indicate the absence of sexual violence incidents.

The initial prevalence score, coded as “1” in the dataset, represents isolated incidents. Specifically, each observation comprises fewer than 25 reported incidents of sexual violence within a particular conflict per year. The subsequent prevalence score, coded as “2”, signifies numerous incidents, encompassing between 25 and 999 reported incidents of sexual violence.

Finally, the score coded as “3” denotes widespread occurrences of sexual violence, indicating that researchers estimate more than 1,000 incidents have transpired within a specific conflict per year.

Having considered the SVAC dataset’s limitations and explained how researchers recorded their observations, the next section uses these data to test whether there is a relationship between the amount of professional military training a conflict actor receives and the amount and intensity of the sexual violence said actors commit upon civilians in intrastate and internationalized internal conflicts.

Data Analysis

Drawing from this literature review, research on sexual violence in conflict suggests that as the professionalism of armed groups increases, reported incidents are likely to be less severe in magnitude due to stricter oversight within the leadership structure. Government forces are expected to have the highest reported incidences, with most reports falling into the “isolated” and “numerous” categories in the SVAC dataset. While there may still be bad actors, systemic sexual violence, categorized in the dataset as “massive,” is typically observed only in extreme cases motivated by ethnic or religious conflict.

Rebel forces are likely to exhibit fewer numerical reports, but the incidents reported are more likely to fall into either the “numerous” or “massive” categories due to limited oversight. The lack of group cohesion among rebel groups, often stemming from forced conscription, may

contribute to heightened levels of sexual violence, as it can be utilized as a mechanism to forge bonds among fighters.

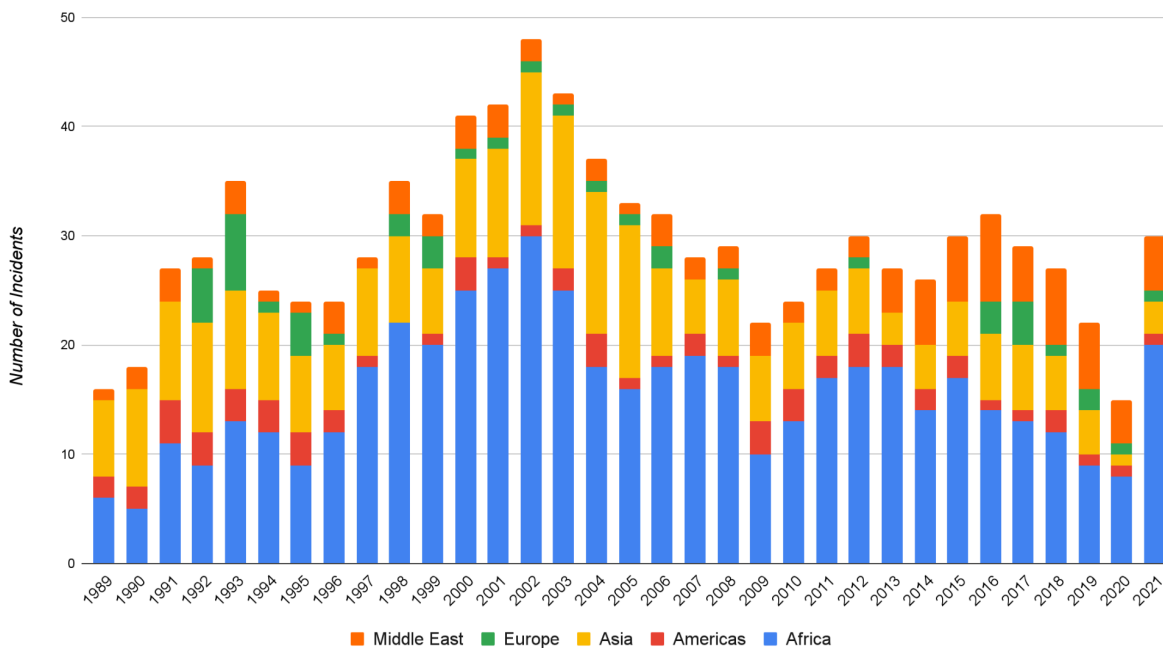
This section utilizes the SVAC database to empirically examine these assumptions. It is structured into five subsections. The first investigates the geographical distribution of the data, followed by an exploration of the frequency of each prevalence score of sexual violence in armed conflicts. The third subsection analyzes the relationship between different actors and the prevalence of sexual violence, while the fourth subsection focuses on how the causes of conflict incompatibility could impact the number of observed incidents of sexual violence. The final one delves into the prevalence of sexual violence committed against children.

Geographical Distribution of the Observations

There is no part of the populated world that is free from some instances of sexual violence stemming from armed conflict. The issue's magnitude is much greater in some areas than in others. Africa has nearly four times the incidents of sexual violence in conflict with the next closest region, Asia. In *Rape During Civil War*, Cohen lists all the civil wars active during the data source period. Of the 91 conflicts, 35 of them are located in the African continent (Cohen 2016 pg.63). In the article *The Military, Militarization, and Democratization in Africa*, Luckham argues in the Nigerian case that the [Nigerian] military's bureaucratic and professional attributes accelerated its fracture into ethnic and regional cliques (Luckham 1994 pg.15). This cycle can be applied across the continent to explain the outsized number of regional warlords and rebel groups in this part of the world and the increased military activity from national militaries and outside military interventions in these conflicts.

Figure 4 breaks down the dataset into five coded regions of the world.

Figure 4. Timeline of Sexual Violence Documented in the SVAC Dataset Across Regions



While this thesis is not explicitly focused on the regional distribution of sexual violence in conflict. The differing conflict dynamics significantly impact the motivations behind the violence patterns and the perpetrators' identities. It is also insightful to see the change in regional conflict patterns over time. Though Africa is the clear majority, the Middle East and Asia have significant conflicts.

The Prevalence of Sexual Violence

Figure 3 illustrates that the majority of conflicts in the SVAC dataset did not report any incidents of sexual violence. Specifically, 83% of observations are classified as “no incidents.” In comparison, “isolated incidents” represent 11.3%, “numerous incidents” account for 3.6%, and “massive incidents” constitute the remaining 2.5%. Figure 5 filters out the “no incidents”

category to provide a clearer understanding of the proportion of the other prevalence scores in the dataset

Figure 5. Frequency of Observed Incidents in the SVAC Dataset

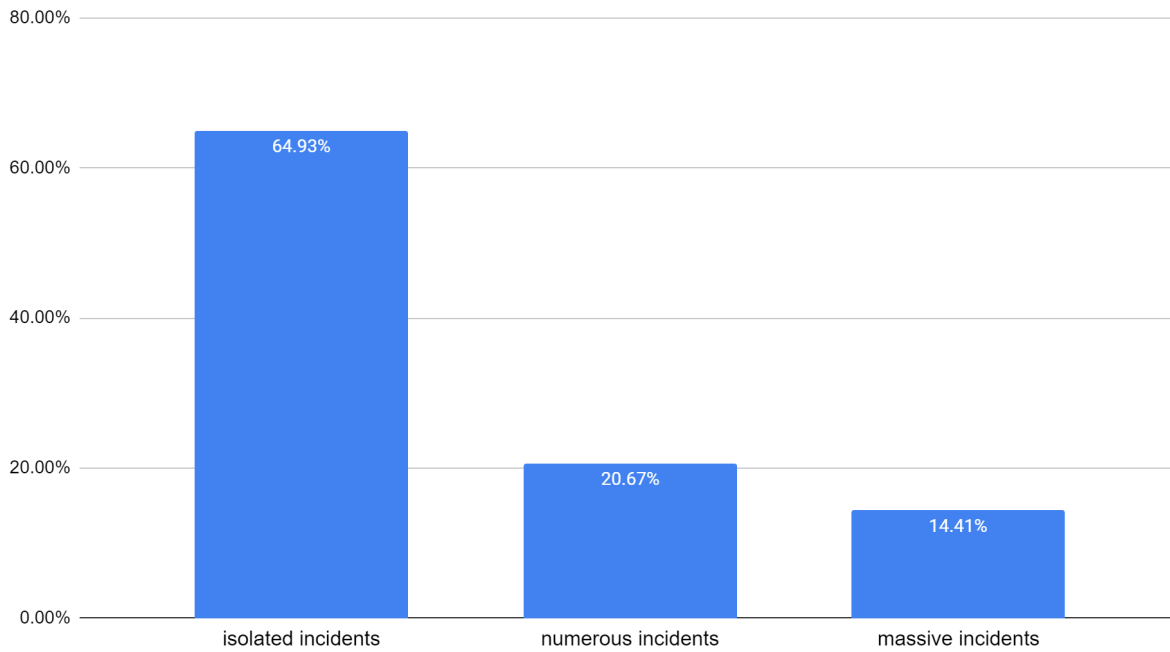
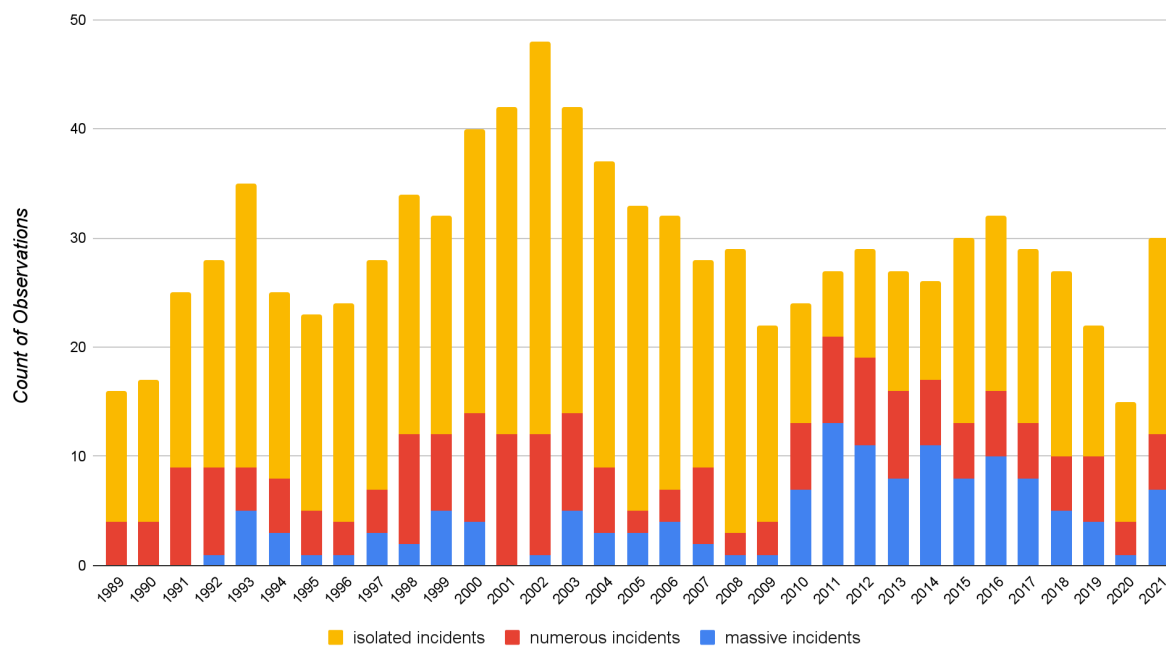


Figure 6 presents a time series of sexual violence incidents spanning from 1989 to 2021, categorized by each of the prevalence scores.

Figure 6. Timeline of Sexual Violence Prevalence in Conflicts



In line with Figure 5, this graph reveals that the majority of observations are classified as “isolated incidents.” A general downward trend is evident throughout the time series, except for 2021. Figure 4 indicates that the African continent primarily contributes to this increase. Despite the overall decrease in total reported cases over the past decade, massive incidents constitute a more significant percentage of the total reports. This suggests that although sexual violence may be decreasing overall, when it does occur, it tends to be more frequent and brutal.

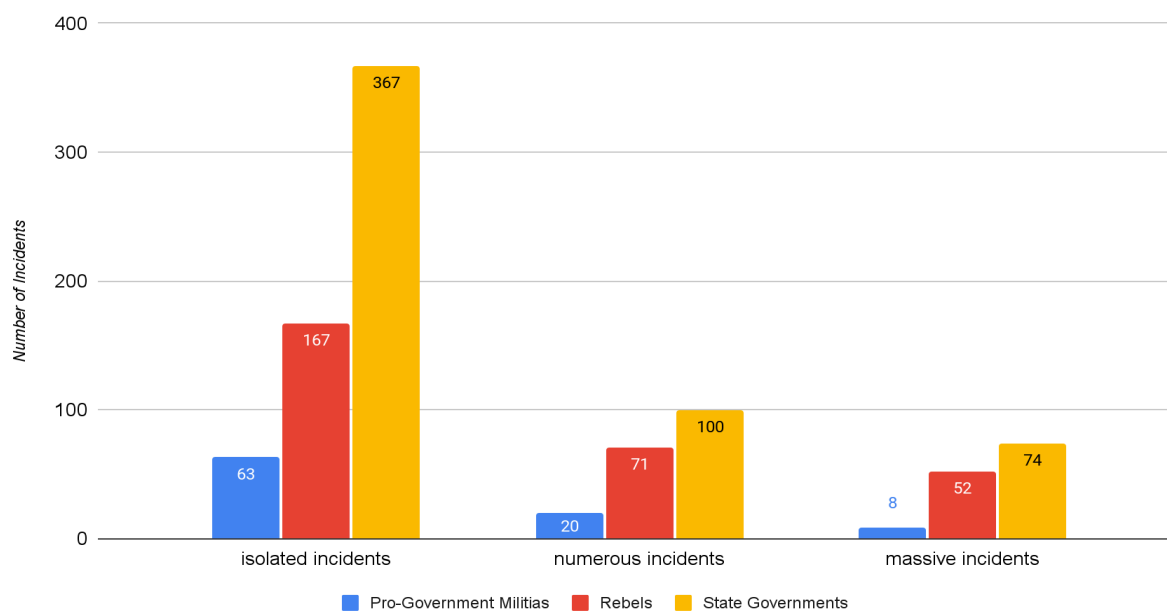
This trend prompts the question of what is less abhorrent: more generalized violence that is less intense and more sporadic, or less violence overall, but when it does happen, it is more intense. While the ideal goal is to eliminate sexual violence entirely, a pragmatic approach to combating the issue requires grappling with such questions.

A closer examination of these figures reveals that in many years, more than a third of the cases fall into the two highest categories. This is concerning, as these observations, while representing a lower number of incidents individually, collectively amount to thousands of sexual violence incidents each year (Cohen, Nordås, & Nagel, 2021).

Analyzing the Prevalence of Sexual Violence Incidents by Type of Actor

Which actor commits the most instances of sexual violence in armed conflicts? Figure 7 breakdown the SVAC's dataset prevalence of sexual violence by actor type.

Figure 7. Incidents of Sexual Violence by Actor Types in All Conflicts



As indicated in the graph, there is a significant number of isolated reports of sexual violence attributed to governmental forces. It is crucial to acknowledge that governmental forces encompass various types of entities, such as soldiers, border guards, law enforcement personnel,

and interrogators, among others. Consequently, the data supports the hypothesis that governmental actors are more numerous, resulting in a higher volume of low-intensity cases.

Adding all of these military adjacent actors under the governmental forces categories increases the circumstances surrounding possible instances of sexual violence astronomically. It also explains how the dataset contains cases in nations that are not at war domestically as long as the case happened during *conflict-related* security activities. There is a significant distinction to be made between sexual violence committed by armed forces during combat and the way that sexual violence is used as a tool by security forces, police, and interrogators. Though the same patterns can be seen, sexual violence is used as a form of intimidation terror, to strengthen group cohesion, or as a crime of opportunity due to the imbalance of power between civilians and any form of government operative.

The victim-perpetrator dynamic in instances of sexual violence, whether perpetrated by a soldier, a police officer, or any other individual vested with authority through governmental association, shares similarities in their use of physical force to harm and intimidate their victims. The position of authority they hold in society also adds another level of exploitation to an attack by a government-backed conflict actor. Police officers wield authority over citizens through their legal right to use physical force, making sexual interactions, even if seemingly consensual, while on duty inherently coercive and undermining the validity of consent due to the power imbalance. Victims are also faced with the dilemma of how and to whom they can report their attack and be believed by the colleagues of their attacker or attackers.

Female perpetrators of sexual violence are not unheard of and can often be even more brutal than those committed by men. The attack is often done as a means for the female soldier to prove their physical dominance and right to fight alongside the men in their unit. It is just another

instance when sexual violence is used as a tool in conflict without the direct goal of obtaining sexual gratification on behalf of the perpetrator (Sjoberg 2014 pg.73). In Dara Kay Cohen's *Rape During Civil War*, based on the data in the SVAC dataset, sexual violence committed by female combatants is also referenced in the case study section on Sierra Leone. Cohen describes the use of sexual violence via object penetration as a means for female combatants to participate in the gang rapes committed by their rebel unit. In this context, sexual violence is used as a tool to increase group cohesion among an armed force of combatants who were recruited by forceful abduction (Cohen 2016 pg.107).

Continuing on the patterns of sexual violence committed by non-military state actors, Cohen analyzes the actions of state forces in El Salvador. Cohen identifies two patterns of non-battlefield sexual violence committed by state security forces. The first of which is the use of sexual violence as a means of torture within prisons to elicit confessions during interrogations, while this was used on both genders. However, female detainees were subjected to this type of torture in higher numbers. The other distinct pattern was the kidnapping of daughters and wives of men in leadership positions of groups opposing the current regime, including human rights advocates, religious volunteers, critics of the governments, suspected insurgents, and their family members. One case of this cited was the kidnapping of the daughters of the founders of a prominent opposition group. One of the parents recounts their daughter being taken by the National Guard only to be found weeks later with no teeth, no fingernails, and pregnant. These examples demonstrate the fact that sexual violence in armed conflict prevails well beyond the battlefield itself (Cohen 2016 pg. 179).

The broader net of actors within group one partly explains the outsized proportion of the attacks in the category. That said, one must remember that the number of national security forces

from countries worldwide dwarfs the number of rebels or pro-government militia groups, which accounts for part of the vastly different incident numbers. However, it is noteworthy that the discrepancy is minimal when considering the number of attacks in the highest prevalence category, defined as 1000 or more reports per case listed in that category. This indicates that despite the substantial number of actors in the first governmental category compared to the number of rebel forces, both groups are responsible for a similar amount of systematic sexual violence. This trend adds credence to the theory that while there are fewer rebels active in the world, they are committing an outsized proportion of severe sexual violence. That finding does add some evidentiary support to the professionalism hypothesis being correct, to an extent.

The fact that government and rebel actor cases are close is a significant finding, considering there will be more than 27 million active governmental and military personnel in 2020, according to data from the World Bank. The dataset includes the following definition for active military personnel: armed forces personnel are active duty military personnel, including paramilitary forces, if the training, organization, equipment, and control suggest they may be used to support or replace regular military forces (The World Bank 2020). The fact that rebel actors have a close level of reported incidents is shocking (The World Bank Databank 2020; Cohen, Nordås & Nagel 2021). It would be a compelling area for further research to ascertain more concrete data on the number of armed rebels active worldwide. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, at least 50 conflicts are active today, with non-government actors participating (Raleigh 2024). For future research, it would be a meaningful metric to determine the percentage of each actor type committing each magnitude of sexual violence, which would add perspective to the ratio of actors who are choosing to commit war crimes versus the number that are punished for said crimes. Until that research has been

pursued, it is crucial to understand the limitations of the dataset only showing a rough estimate of the actual rate of sexual violence in conflict. The disparity of the number of government actors and rebel actors in active conflict limits the accuracy of the data even further. That does not mean there are not impactful analytical insight to be gleaned through the dataset.

It is noteworthy that Figure 3 underscores how the SVAC dataset's researchers did not observe instances of sexual violence in many armed conflicts spanning from 1989 to 2021. While the absence of observation may seem trivial in the analysis of sexual violence in conflict, the lack of reported cases is a pivotal discovery. Omitting negative statistics distorts the overall understanding of sexual behavior in armed conflict. The graph reveals consistent distribution percentages of different conflict actors across all prevalence categories. The "no incidents" category stands out as a significant finding, prompting inquiries into what motivates combatants to abstain from committing sexual violence. Even in peacetime, some level of sexual violence occurs within the general population, making the absence of incidents a deliberate choice that restrains those with the propensity for the purposeful use of this tactic.

Scholars propose various factors that could contribute to "no incidents" being the predominant metric. Cohen's examination of the civil war in El Salvador provides valuable insights into this phenomenon. Despite one side of the conflict perpetrating very little to no sexual violence, they employed other violent tactics such as disappearances, torture, and assassinations. Cohen suggests that in conflicts with limited sexual violence, forces may strategically focus on alternative, potentially more effective means of violence to achieve their objectives (Cohen 2016 pg. 176-177). She does qualify this argument by noting that a small percentage of detainees reported incidents where their torture involved sexual violence,

constituting only 1% of the interviewees. Additionally, the threat of sexual violence and humiliation was employed (Cohen, 2016, p. 177). However, it is crucial to acknowledge that even in cases with minimal rates of sexual violence, armed forces are not categorically good or bad. They exist within shades of gray, reflecting the complexities of human nature.

Figure 3 indicates that the overwhelming majority of conflict actors refrain from engaging in sexual violence. This trend corroborates the hypothesis that increased professionalism correlates with decreased sexual violence. The predominance of government actors globally, coupled with the increasing proportion of conflicts reporting “no incidents”, suggests that a significant portion of this actor class abstains from sexual violence. Throughout this thesis, while various arguments have been analyzed regarding why sexual violence occurs, it is equally important to consider why it does not. Elizabeth Jean Wood’s seminal work, “Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When is Wartime Rape Rare?,” offers several potential explanations. Wood suggests that wartime rape is rare when: top-down leadership effectively enforces a ban on sexual violence; armed groups depend on civilians for support and resources; the armed group aims to establish a new social order without alienating potential supporters; and if they seek to recruit female combatants (Wood, 2006, p. 141).

With the SVAC dataset in mind, these hypotheses will be examined against the analysis results to ascertain which ideas are supported. The first argument regarding leadership theory, as referenced in the literature review, reveals a discernible relationship between government forces committing lower intensity attacks and their predominance in the “no incidents” category across all data sources. Conversely, when assessing whether the inverse holds true, the data indicates that rebels, despite being the least professional entity investigated, exhibit higher reports in the

higher magnitude categories of prevalence, despite their smaller numbers compared to government actors.

Wood's second hypothesis proposes that groups reliant on civilians for food and other supplies will commit less sexual violence does not align with the data in most cases (Wood 2006 pg.141). In the Sierra Leone case, looting of food from civilians often coincided with gang rapes of the villagers (Cohen 2016 pg. 113). Even in the El Salvador example, which both Wood and Cohen cite, notes that "there was a fine line between voluntary and coerced support of guerillas... 'You might feel yourself robbed if twenty-five armed people showed up at your door asking for food'" (Cohen 2016 pg.177). The rebels also used other forms of violence to enforce and encourage the cooperation of civilians, including detention, torture, and execution for being suspected informants for the state's forces (Cohen 2016 pg.177).

Her third hypothesis posits that actors engaged in revolutionary struggles and vying for future control of the conflicted territory will refrain from committing sexual violence to avoid alienating support for their prospective regime (Wood, 2006, p. 141). However, the data refutes this assertion. The largest category of actors depicted across all graphs comprises government forces involved in intrastate conflicts, wherein their victims are their own populace. While it may seem strategically advantageous for these forces to abstain from sexual violence to garner support and cast rebel forces in a more negative light, the data contradicts this notion (Wood, 2006, p. 141).

Wood's final argument is that rebel groups seeking to recruit female fighters will engage in less sexual violence in fear of deterring said recruits (Wood 2006 pg.141). The answer to this hypothesis is nuanced because it depends on the recruitment strategy. Wood uses the example of the civil war in Sri Lanka. The LTTE insurgent group opposing the state committed minimal

sexual violence against civilians because women were part of their fighting force. That said, just like El Salvador, the group compensated with other forms of violence, just not of a sexual nature (Wood 2006 pg.143; Cohen 2016 pg.177). The distinction that needs to be made is evident in the Sierra Leone case. Most of the fighters for the RUF were abducted into the armed group, including female fighters. The difference in the Sierra Leone case was that female fighters often took part in the gang rapes willingly, not for sexual gratification, but to assert their place in the hierarchy of the fighting unit (Cohen 2016 pg.107). There are two qualifiers necessary to make Wood's hypothesis accurate to the data - that the rebel group is recruiting female fighters of their own free will rather than abduction and that the group cohesion is strong enough that female fighters do not have to fight for their place in the patriarchal hierarchy of their unit.

Despite all the above arguments and the vast majority of cases showing no reported incidents, government actors and rebel actors are still committing tens of thousands of incidents in their respective countries. This contradicts the argument that social norms prevent government forces from committing sexual violence against their population. When discussing the motivations behind sexual violence in conflict, one of the primary theories suggests that the majority of the attacks target women from the opposing side. The next section aims to delve deeper into this topic by examining the sources of conflict incompatibility.

Conflict Incompatibility and its Impact on the Prevalence of Sexual Violence

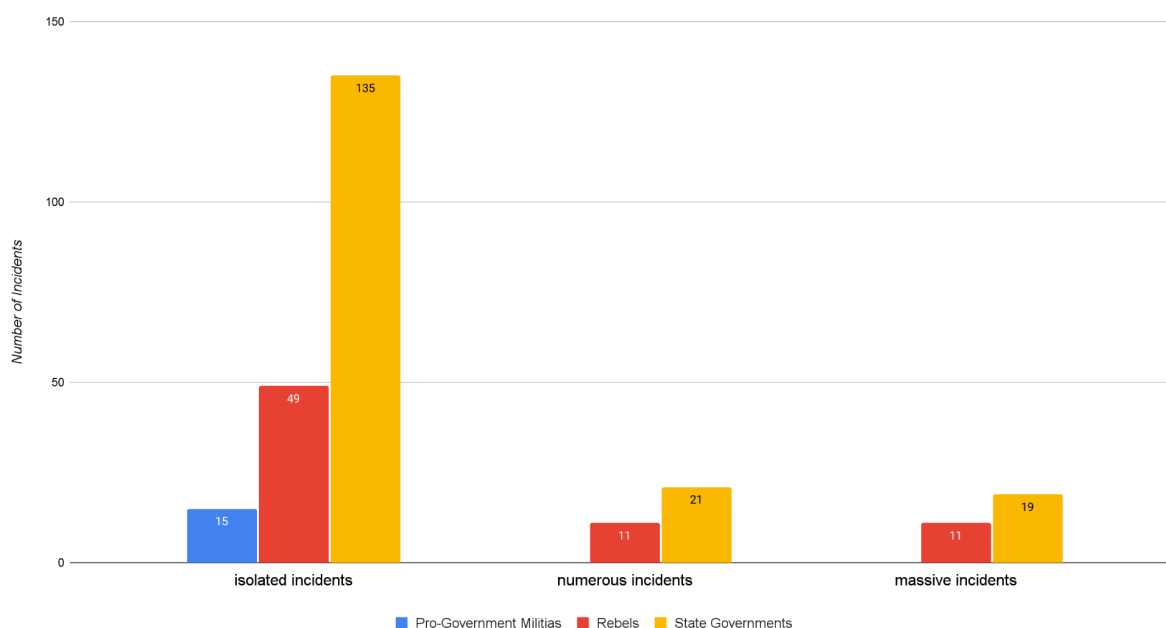
In investigating conflict incompatibility and its relationship with the prevalence of sexual violence, various factors come into play. As noted, when exploring the motives behind sexual violence in conflict, particularly in the context of professional soldiers, a prevailing theory suggests that the majority of assaults target women from the opposing side. However, this hypothesis conflicts with the findings presented in the preceding analysis. Thus, the explanations

of weak or permissive leadership with negligible repercussions and the feminist argument asserting that men in positions of power tend to exploit the women within their reach, regardless of nationality, remain as viable alternatives.

As discussed in the Data and Methods section, the conflicts analyzed in this thesis are primarily driven by two sources of incompatibility. The majority of these conflicts stem from rebel forces' aspirations to seize control of the state's institutions. Alternatively, some conflicts arise from secessionist claims or rebel forces' pursuit of territorial autonomy. These conflicts are often driven by ethno-national and sectarian interests, making them suitable for investigating the relationship between ethnic animosity and the prevalence and severity of sexual violence.

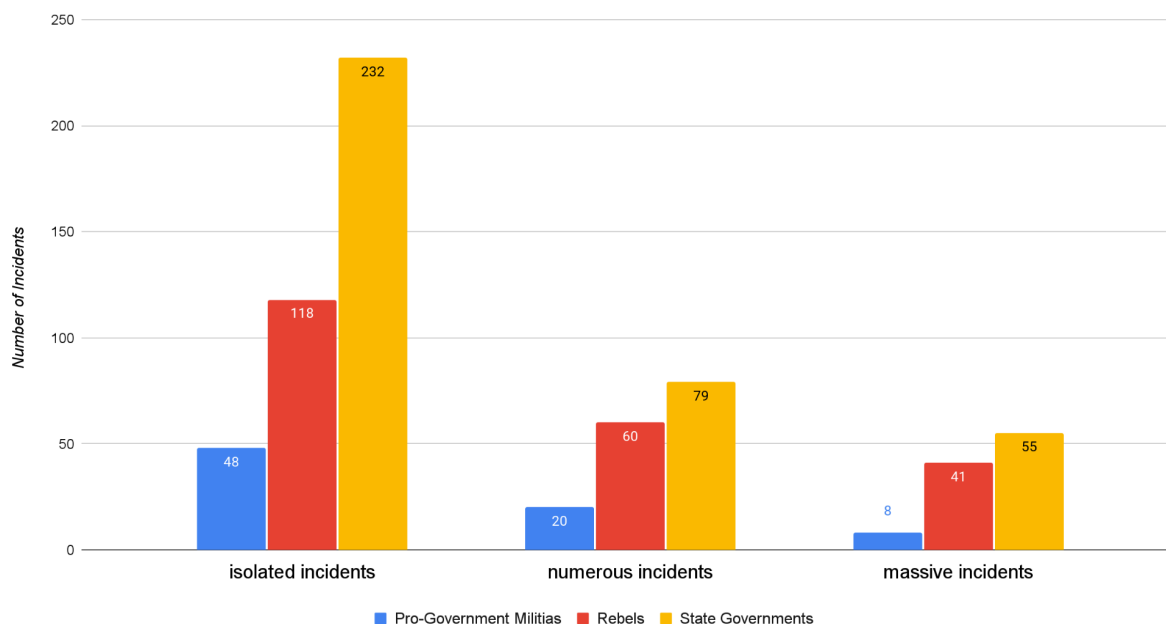
Figure 8 depicts the prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated by different actors in conflicts driven by ethnic or sectarian factors.

Figure 8. The Prevalence of Sexual Violence Perpetrated by Different Actors in Conflicts Potentially Motivated by Ethnic-Based Factors



In contrast, Figure 9 illustrates the prevalence of sexual violence in conflicts motivated by rebel forces aspiring to oust the government from power and seize control over the state's institutions.

Figure 9. Prevalence of Sexual Violence by Different Actors in Conflicts Driven by the Seizure State's Institutions



Compared to Figure 9, Figure 8 has fewer total incidents reported. That said, only 28.22% of conflicts cataloged in the dataset fall within the secessionist conflict type. In Cohen's book, the civil war in Timor-Leste is used as an example of a state military and rebel forces fighting for the independence of the island territory. The ethnic component in this conflict is through the religious divisions between the native Timor-Leste population, which is majority Roman Catholic, opposing the majority Muslim forces from Indonesia. The island was originally a Portuguese colony that was given its independence in 1974 after the Carnation Revolution in Portugal brought its colonial empire to an end. This power vacuum lasted nine days before the Indonesian military invaded to turn Timor-Leste into an Indonesian province. On the side of

Timor-Leste's independence were the rebel group Fretilin and other smaller armed militia groups opposing the Indonesian invasion via guerrilla warfare (Cohen 2016 pg.129-130).

The patterns of violence in the conflict correspond with the trends seen in the graph, with the majority of the violence carried out by the Indonesian military. The most significant observation gleaned through analyzing Cohen's work is the immense brutality of the violence they committed, described as genocidal and leading to the death of 10% of the Timor-Leste population (Cohen 2016 pg.132). This brutality extends to sexual violence, which is described as a "tool of state terrorism" and "indiscriminate" (Cohen 2016 pg.144-145). The behavior of the Indonesian military concerning detainees suspected of being members of the insurgency is similar to what happened at Abu Ghraib. Interviewees describe sexual torture used on both genders, including electrocution of genitalia, gang rape, forced intercourse with police dogs, and forced castration/genital mutilation (Cohen 2016 pg.146-147). A distinct pattern that is forming when it comes to extreme sexual violence used by state actors appears to take place in military detention. This suggests that government actors feel most free to act with impunity behind the closed doors of detention facilities, away from the prying eyes of the rest of the population. This pattern affirms the leadership theory because there is no way sexual torture could be carried out within a military-run facility without leadership knowing about it, tolerating it, or even encouraging it. Witnesses reported their torturers calling a dedicated part of the detention facilities "rape houses" (Cohen 2016 pg.146). It is nearly impossible for leadership to be oblivious to such overt and blatant discussions of sexual violence occurring in military facilities. If, by contrast, the worst of these acts were committed out in the field with only a soldier's direct unit present, one could argue that leadership is not aware of the actions, but that is not shown to be the case according to the data. It would be a fruitful avenue of further research to conduct the

same research but separate state forces into more specific categories to see whether state actors like interrogators and prison guards commit higher levels of sexual violence than fighting units do. It is also interesting to note that there is minimal involvement by pro-government militias in this type of conflict, much less than in governmental conflicts.

Figure 9 discusses the second conflict type featured in the dataset, which involves parties fighting over the right to govern. This conflict type is significantly more common in the dataset and makes up 71.46% of the conflicts cataloged. In *Rape During Civil War*, Cohen cites the example of Sierra Leone, a conflict previously discussed above. The civil war in Sierra Leone involved the three actors studied in this thesis, adding enlightening insights to the patterns shown in this graph. In the two most intense categories of violence, the number of reports for government forces and rebels is much closer than illustrated in Figure 8. This trend implies that government forces commit sexual violence in significantly higher numbers in the least intense category compared to rebels. That gap begins to close in the more intense categories. When recalling how many more state actors there are compared to rebel actors, the fact that they are close shows that when rebel actors do commit sexual violence, it tends to be more intense and widespread.

Cohen offers a compelling perspective on the widespread sexual violence perpetrated by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the predominant rebel group in Sierra Leone. She articulates a nuanced interpretation of the feminist argument of women as “bounty” (Cohen 2016 pg 113). The RUF controlled a majority of Sierra Leone’s diamond mines, meaning they did not need to rely on the civilian population for support or supplies. Cohen argues that this dynamic removed the motivation to refrain from sexual violence, a concept she terms the “opportunity argument” (Cohen 2016 pg.113). In the analysis, this argument is coupled with the “greed

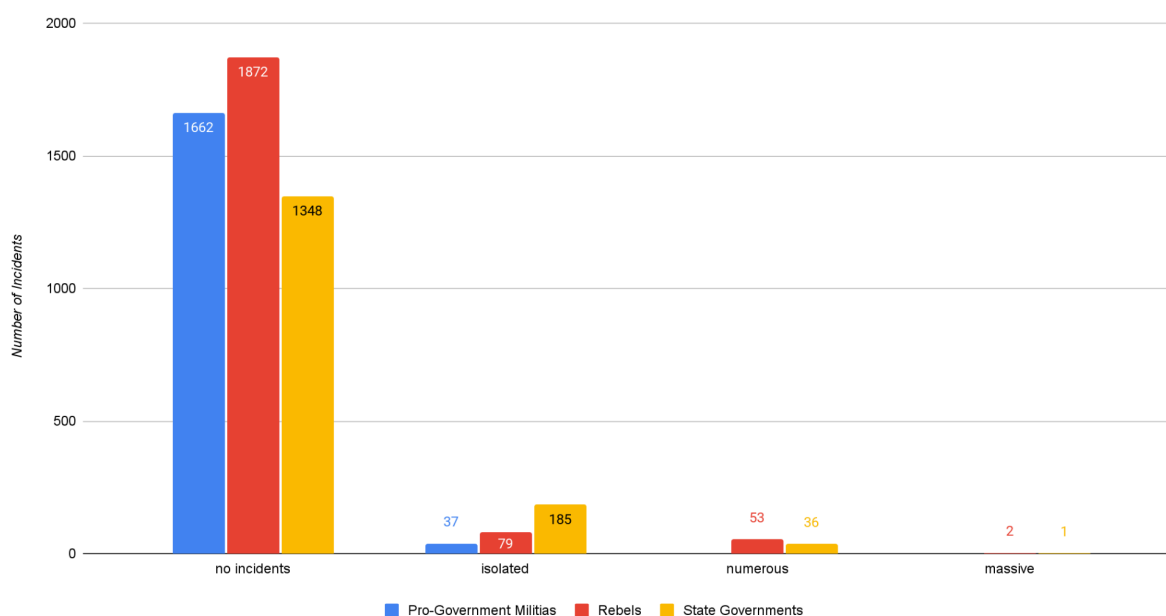
argument”, which is an extension of the “opportunity argument” that lumps sexual violence in with other crimes of opportunity to obtain goods, such as looting the diamond mines and seizing operations. Cohen charts the incidents of looting and finds a relationship between looting and sexual violence (Cohen 2016 pg.114). Essentially, if the rebels are already stealing resources, they will also rape the women available to them at the same time because there is no rule of law or threat of prosecution stopping them.

Interviews of ex-combatants also cite the need for entertainment, citing sexual violence as a means of “blowing off steam” (Cohen 2016 pg.122). It would suggest that sexual violence is just one aspect of a pattern of criminal behavior that arises along with the disintegration of the rule of law that comes with war. Another aspect of this pattern of relaxation of social norms that took place during Sierra Leone’s civil war is the pervasive use of drugs among the force of child soldiers as a means of control and motivation. In Sierra Leone, they used a combination of cane sugar alcohol and gunpowder, mixed with amphetamines to keep the child soldiers awake and energized to fight. In addition to extensive exposure to extreme violence, the objective of their leaders is to desensitize them to such acts, and it follows logically that this desensitization would also apply to sexual violence (Hoyos 1999).

The Prevalence of Sexual Violence Committed Against Children

The prevalence of sexual violence against children is being used as the barometer of brutality for this thesis, as it is a universal taboo around the world. Figure 9 summarizes all of the SVAC dataset's observations of the prevalence of sexual violence committed by different actors against children.

Figure 9. All Observations of Sexual Violence Prevalence Committed Against Children By Different Actors



The graph demonstrates sexual violence against children in armed conflicts is rare. It also shows that when sexual violence against children are committed rebels tend to cause more “numerous” and “massive” incidents than other actors. This is a significant finding. It implies a difference in the patterns of sexual violence perpetrated against children compared to that against adults. Millions more government actors operate in the world than rebels, yet rebels still have more victims, which means that the rebels’ culture is much more pervasive (World Bank's Armed Forces Personnel 2020).

When considering the high number of “no incidents” of observed sexual violence in Figure 9, the primary explanation for this phenomenon lies in the specific circumstances conducive to childhood sexual violence. Rebel groups, frequently employing child soldiers, are the predominant perpetrators of such acts (Haer & Bohmelt, 2016, p. 154). Perpetrators of sexual violence often target victims within their own age group, particularly during adolescence, reflecting demographic preferences (South & Felson, 1990, p. 73). Additionally, rebel groups, characterized by weak cohesion due to forced recruitment, often resort to gang rape as a means of bonding, thereby establishing a hierarchy within the group (Cohen, 2016, p. 106). Younger soldiers, seeking acceptance, may emulate the behavior of their superiors, exacerbating the cycle of violence (Cohen, 2016, p. 106). This tragic dynamic results in double the victimization for children subjected to sexual violence by their peers. The fact that, in this category, rebel actors commit more sexual violence against children. Additionally the violence that is committed against children by rebel actors outranks government actors numerically in the more intense ranges of the spectrum. It cannot be understated how significant a finding it is that the sexual violence perpetrated by less than a quarter million individuals without formal military training is both more prevalent and more intense than the violence perpetrated by more than 27 million individuals with advanced military training and equipment. This particular dynamic urgently requires more research and resources dedicated to understanding sexual violence against children during war.

Conclusion

Before delving into the specific findings of the SVAC dataset analysis, it is crucial to acknowledge that behind these figures lie real individuals whose lives have been irrevocably impacted by their trauma. While academic research is vital for comprehending the patterns of warfare and the underlying political dynamics, the ultimate objective is to utilize these insights to reduce the number of victims in the future. It is essential to recognize that their suffering is not inevitable, and sexual violence should not be a byproduct of armed conflict. The assumption that sexual violence is inherent in every conflict is a misrepresentation of reality, just as a cursory examination of the data can skew our understanding of the facts. While government forces may account for a higher numerical incidence of sexual violence, their overwhelming presence in the dataset distorts the proportions. The predominance of isolated incidents attributed to these forces suggests that such violence often stems from individual misconduct rather than systematic or strategic planning. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that militaries have become more cognizant of the detrimental impact of sexual violence on recruitment and its ineffectiveness as a weapon of war, leading to a decline in its frequency (Cohen and Nordås 2014).

However, the data and case studies highlight a troubling pattern of government forces employing sexual violence as a coercive tactic in detention facilities. This pattern suggests that specific segments of a government's forces, such as military police and interrogators, utilize sexual violence behind closed doors to suppress dissent and undermine an insurgency's strengths. Unlike rebel fighters who often perpetrate intense sexual violence openly, government forces confine such acts to environments where they exert total control, such as military prisons or camps established for purposes of sexual violence and ethnic cleansing. This pattern appears particularly pronounced in secessionist conflicts like those in Timor-Leste or Bosnia.

Addressing the specific hypothesis of this thesis: the higher the level of professional military training an actor receives, the less likely they are to perpetrate prevalent or intense sexual violence. The analysis of the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict dataset does not show a significant relationship between the level of professionalism and sexual violence. Government actors are the primary perpetrators of sexual violence across time, region, and conflict motivation. However, it also does not show sexual violence by government actors being used as a deliberate weapon of terror, as it appears sporadic and lacks systematic organization. Military leadership explicitly ordering widespread sexual violence as part of strategic planning is not supported by the data. Instead, the data analysis shows that sexual violence by government actors is driven by the failure of leadership to enforce rules banning the practice effectively. This failure is compounded by the undercurrent of hypermasculine sexual aggression instilled in the military training process of many nations. In the rare instances when sexual violence is explicitly allowed, it is contained within military detention centers and other private military facilities away from the eyes of the public and official observers. Further research could provide valuable insights by disaggregating different types of government forces to understand how sexual violence trends vary between frontline troops and support forces to explore the pattern of sexual violence within military installations. The inclusion of different sub-sects of government actors within one actor type also serves to potentially skew the results of the data analysis on government actors in a way that obscures the more nuanced patterns of sexual violence taking place. Each government actor included within actor type one receives different training, has different regulations and codes of conduct, and interacts with civilians uniquely. All of those differences limit the conclusions that the analysis of the behavior of government actors in type one can draw.

The lower prevalence and intensity of sexual violence perpetrated by rebel actors against adult victims further contradicts the professionalism hypothesis. If military professionalism is the defining variable driving sexually violent behavior in armed conflict, rebel actors would be the worst offenders of the three actor types. That said, the dynamic is not entirely reversed either. The actor type with the highest level of sexual violence is government actors, followed by rebel actors, then pro-government militias. This unexpected hierarchy of prevalence and intensity shows that further research is necessary to look into the variables that are driving sexual violence in armed conflict. This future research also needs to consider the ratio disparity between the three actor groups, as government actors dwarf all other actor types numerically.

There was one pattern of violence that does support the professionalism hypothesis specifically pertaining to sexual violence against children. Despite having so few fighters when compared to government actors, rebel actors commit sexual violence against children in higher numbers. The question of why rebel fighters target younger victims at higher rates is another area where future research is needed. The lower median age of rebel fighters, the HIV epidemic, and the pervasiveness of illicit substance use seem to be credible explanations for this pattern, but more research is needed. The lack of data on the demographic makeup of rebel armies makes conducting the type of behavior pattern analysis more difficult. It is challenging to obtain this data due to many rebel groups' transient, unofficial nature. That said, it could show patterns that could help lessen the most damaging types of sexual violence if this data could be analyzed. It is also important to remember that child soldiers are victims, too. Many of them were forced to fight and addicted to drugs against their will. Just as more support is needed for their victims, they also need support.

This thesis also contends that actors engaged in conflicts within their home territory, striving for control over leadership, are likely to perpetrate less sexual violence compared to those in foreign battlefields. This assertion is based on Cohen's "bounty argument" (2016 pg 113), which posits that combatants are less incentivized to commit sexual violence against their own populace, as well as the diminished influence of social norms in such contexts. Despite the existence of a breadth of literature arguing in favor of that hypothesis, the data show that the vast majority of sexual violence committed happens within intrastate conflicts against the population actors are fighting to govern. Further research is necessary to determine what factors are influencing behavior that deviates from the consensus of much of the literature on sexual violence in armed conflict. The most compelling motivations shown by this dataset to explain this pattern of violence are increasing group cohesion and actors taking advantage of the power given to them by their position to achieve greater sexual gratification.

Another crucial observation gleaned from the data analysis was that the significant majority of conflicts having no reported cases of sexual violence. While the sexual violence that still exists must be stopped, progress is being made to eliminate sexual violence from modern warfare. It would be fruitful for future research to do a similar styled analysis of the three least offending conflict actors. Such research may glean the motivations behind soldiers who do not commit sexual violence. These insights could be applied to the actor types still perpetrating the majority of the violence in hopes of eliminating mass sexual violence. The case of Syria would also be a worthwhile case study in the future as the only conflict in the data set to fall into the category of government and terrain motivation. One significant takeaway that could also use further investigation is why only government forces fighting intrastate wars commit sexual

violence on a large scale despite the literature suggesting they would have the most motivation *not* to victimize their people.

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