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## Research Statement

My research investigates the causes, conduct, and consequences of political conflict and violence. By contributing to the understanding of conflict processes through scientific inquiry, my objective is to reveal the venues and opportunities for intervention to reduce human suffering related to political violence. I am currently working on three related research streams, investigating both inter- and intra-state conflict, which explain: 1) belligerents' territorial control and civilian agency during armed conflict; 2) the causes and consequences of terrorism; and 3) "gray zone" interstate conflicts short of full-scale war. This research agenda contributes to understanding state-formation and its failures, the nature of extra-institutional political competition between and within states, and the strengths and limitations of state-centric models of the international system.

### Belligerent Territorial Control, Statebuilding, and Civilian Agency

Under what conditions do rebel organizations successfully control territory, and provide governance, during civil war? If the distribution of territorial control is as crucial to explaining the conduct and outcomes of civil war as the literature suggests,<sup>1</sup> it is equally important to understand its origins. The process by which insurgency expands or contracts represents the crucial first stage that determines the context in which subsequent conflict processes occur; a necessary first step for rebel organizations to establish quasi-states, secede to establish new states, or capture the government of an existing state. Therefore, explaining the expansion of rebel territorial control is essential to understanding state-formation, the population of states in the international system, and their characteristics.

The article "[Rebel Territorial Control and Civilian Collective Action in Civil War](#) (R&R, *JCR*), and my larger book project, argue that communities' *collective action capacity* (CAC) influences local-level variation in rebel territorial control and governance during civil war. Community CAC has countervailing effects on belligerents' incentives to control territory. Higher CAC communities mobilize resources and control the flow of information more efficiently, which makes territory more valuable. However, CAC also empowers communities to demand belligerents invest in costly governance, reducing the returns to territorial control. Drawing upon a political accountability mechanism, I argue that CAC increases rebel control in areas the state has neglected, but deters rebel control in areas where the state represents a viable outside option for protection from violence and access to goods and services. The article tests the theory's local-level implications in uniquely fine-grained evidence from the communist insurgency in the Philippines, collected during fieldwork in 2014-2015. Quantitative analysis investigates the relationship between communist insurgent control, measured using Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) military intelligence assessments from 2011-2014, and village collective action capacity, measured from its micro-foundations in kinship networks using household head family names from a government census conducted during 2008-2010. Qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with village elders in 75 villages within 3 conflict-affected provinces in Mindanao investigates the theory's mechanisms.

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<sup>1</sup>See Kalyvas (2006) and related work by Stathis Kalyvas, Ana Arjona, Laia Balcells, and others.

The book extends the project by conceptualizing territory and territorial control in armed conflict, surprisingly inconsistently defined in the literature, and expands the empirical research with case comparisons to conflicts in Nepal and India, with additional shadow cases including Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.

In a related project with Daniel Arnon and Rick McAlexander, we explain variation in civilian resistance to statebuilding campaigns. Under what conditions do civilian communities resist state-building efforts to consolidate control over the territory in which they reside? How do communities influence state-builders' decisions where and how to expand their empirical sovereignty? Scholars have renewed attention to understanding statebuilding, motivated in part by U.S. interventions as external statebuilders in weak states around the globe. But the governments of weak states are involved in constant "internal statebuilding" projects to fill the gaps in their control over sovereign territory. Furthermore, non-state actors engage in statebuilding to challenge the incumbent state's de facto, if not de jure, sovereignty; as in Kurdish self-determination movements in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. Statebuilding implies a bid for exclusive control over the means of coercion and jurisdictional authority. The (potentially) monumental change in political order has substantial implications for the civilians living in contested territory. We emphasize civilian agency in shaping statebuilding campaigns, and draw attention to the local-level political dynamics.

In our first paper, "Explaining Civilian Resistance to Statebuilding Campaigns: Evidence from Israel's War for Independence," we adapt the civilian agency theory developed in my article and book project, and augment it with Hirschman's (1970) *exit, voice, and loyalty* framework, to explain variation in civilian responses to statebuilders. We argue that social cohesion plays an important role in explaining the variation in community responses to statebuilders' encroachment by empowering civilians to collectively resist their territorial expansion, under certain conditions. We draw upon new data extracted from a village-level survey of Arab communities, conducted by the Jewish forces in the early 1940s, assessing the social, political, and economic conditions in each community before the war. We translated the documents, provided by the Haganah Archives, from the original Hebrew and developed a coding scheme to operationalize the information in each village assessment, yielding a dataset of community-level characteristics for each Arab-majority village. We see this paper as a first stage in a much larger project with the simultaneous objectives to contribute to the statebuilding and state-formation literature and to provide new insights into the critical case of Israel and the Israel-Palestinian conflict by systematizing historical and archival resources for use in quantitative analysis.

## **Terrorism in Armed Conflict**

Under what conditions do rebel groups resort to terrorism? Why are some conflict settings exposed to terrorism but not others? To explain organization-level variation in terrorism, Page Fortna, Nick Lotito, and I constructed the Terrorism in Armed Conflict (TAC) dataset. TAC assigns rebel groups in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Database to terrorism incidents in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), filling a crucial gap in the empirical research examining the use of terrorism in civil wars. With a few exceptions, previous datasets include *only* groups that have used terrorism without including similar groups that *may* use

terrorism. TAC categorizes UCDP-GTD links to provide a flexible system for researchers to adjust data collection to fit their research purposes and check the robustness of analysis. In “Don’t Bite the Hand that Feeds,” *ISQ* (2018), we argue that because popular discontent associated with targeting civilians does not curtail their access to resources (lower *legitimacy costs*), rebel groups with alternative funding sources beyond civilian support are more likely to use terrorism. Empirical analysis using TAC supports the argument.

“[Terrorism and the Varieties of Civil Liberties](#),” (under review) with Rick Morgan (V-Dem Institute), explains how countries’ exposure to terrorism varies with distinct government actions on separable civil liberties dimensions. We argue that distinct dimensions civil liberties—political and private civil liberties and physical integrity rights—have countervailing effects on states’ vulnerability to terrorism, and find robust empirical support using TAC and the Varieties of Democracy dataset. The findings help to explain persistent debate in the literature regarding the role of government protections and violations against civil liberties in generating domestic terrorism, with broader implications for understanding the security consequences of liberalization and political reforms.

A series of papers in the pipeline leverage TAC to continue contributing to understanding the use of terrorism in armed conflict. The next paper seeks to answer the question: does rebel service provision enable terrorism? It tests the group-level empirical implications of explanations for the observed correlation between terrorism and service provision. Future work will investigate the conditions under which rebel groups respond to political reforms and government repression, respectively, by resorting to or escalating terrorism tactics. The group-level implications of related arguments hinted at in the existing literature have been difficult to test prior to TAC’s release.

## Gray Zone Conflict and State Sponsorship of Rebel Groups

With the decline of interstate war, states have increasingly adopted subversive “gray zone” strategies short of militarization in order to prosecute international disputes while minimizing the risk of conflict escalation. Though less headline-grabbing than direct interstate war, these gray zone conflicts have critical international security implications, can be just as or more violent, and are far less well understood. The first stage of the project focuses on explaining the causes and consequences of one particular “gray zone” conflict strategy: state sponsorship of (violent and nonviolent) resistance organizations in an adversary’s territory (proxy war).

Under what conditions do states support resistance organizations, and when does proxy war escalate to interstate war? What are the consequences for the outbreak and duration of civil wars? In “Interstate Conflict Interdependence and State Sponsorship of Rebel Groups,” I argue that a state’s incentives to support dissidents operating against its adversary is shaped by the risk that other international actors may sponsor them instead. If multiple, non-aligned states are in conflict with a common adversary (conflict interdependence), there exists a competitive market for the adversary’s political concessions, and by extension for dissidents’ services as proxy agents, thereby increasing the likelihood of state sponsorship. I test the theory using existing datasets that record state support for dissident organizations,<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>UCDP External Support Data and San-Akca’s (2016) data measure support for rebel groups and

and develop new latent variable measures of interstate (low- to high-intensity) disputes in order to measure the structure of interstate competition for target concessions.

Extensions will investigate the role of state sponsorship in shaping dissident organizations' use of nonviolent vs. violent strategies in intra-state conflict and the conditions under which escalation control fails (sponsorship leads to militarized interstate disputes). I hypothesize that interstate conflict interdependence, through sponsorship, increases the risk of violent conflict by "crowding out" non-violent organizations/strategies, as states align with violent groups to enhance bargaining leverage. The sponsorship market may increase the likelihood of multiparty civil war and conflict duration. Future work will expand investigation to additional gray zone conflict strategies. States possess a variety of coercive bargaining tools, from diplomacy to full-scale war with multiple gray zone strategies in the middle. States may adopt multiple strategies simultaneously as strategic complements, but face substitutability constraints given finite resources. I aim to advance the interstate conflict literature by integrating the largely under-exploited substitutable foreign policy theoretical framework with recent network theory and analysis advances that take seriously the dependencies across actors' multiple disputes and across conflict involving common adversaries.

## **Additional Research Projects**

The "Named Entities for Social Sciences" (NESS) project at the Center for Peace and Security Studies (CPASS), UC San Diego fills gaps in actor- and outcomes-based datasets commonly used in political science. We use machine learning tools to extract information from the world's largest open source repository of named entities, Wikidata, to sort entities into categories relevant to social scientists. I lead the project's focus on non-state political organizations, which aims to construct a global sample of organizations engaged in both institutionalized (e.g. political parties) and (violent and nonviolent) "extra-institutional" politics (e.g. rebel groups, pro-government militias, civil resistance groups, etc.).

The Welfare Non-State Working Group is a collaborative effort to develop a framework bringing together insights across as-yet isolated literatures on governance by NGOs, International Institutions, Multi-national Corporations, rebel organizations, militias, and other non-state actors. The project will yield insights for scholars interested in governance, conflict, state-building and state failure, and the role of non-state actors in governance and development. My specific contribution applies insights from the general framework to understanding rebel organizations' governance.

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Berkowitz's (2018) Delegating Terror data measures support for terror groups.