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The principal, the agent, and the conflict: a plausibility probe of pro-government militia conflict typology

How the characteristics of a conflict can determine the implementation of violence against civilians perpetrated by PGMs

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Introduction

Between 1945 and 2004 an estimated 13-26 million civilians lost their lives in civil, extra-systemic and international wars with pro-government groups being held responsible for much of this violence (Koren, 2017). In roughly two-thirds of civil wars since 1989, militias have been used by governments for counterinsurgency (Oppenheim et al., 2015). The addition of pro-government militias (PGMs) to a state's security repertoire occurs worldwide, with these groups being utilised for both defence and offensive means (Carey & Mitchell, 2017). Much of the existing research that focusses on non-state groups originates from Mary Kaldor's "New Wars" thesis, where she states that contemporary warfare has shown an increase of non-state actors (Kaldor, 2012). The proliferation of armed pro-government groups was argued to be a new phenomenon and a significant historical shift in contemporary civil was (Kaldor, 2013).

The emergence of these non-state actors has sparked concern, for their presence could indicate the deterioration of Mark Weber's famous definition of state: "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber, 1991 p.78). It begs the question as to why, if the control of violence lies at the centre of theories of state, one would delegate security tasks and the accompanied implications, such as human rights and public goods, to non-state actors (Carey & Mitchell, 2017). While certain non-state actors emerge in contemporary warfare by their own accord, some groups are aided and at times created by states themselves to fulfil a government desire to extend its security repertoire (Ahram, 2011). The use of PGMs offer states a financially viable alternative to the use of military forces, plausible deniability, and the freedom to employ their official troops to combat alternative internal and external threats (Koren, 2017).

Research into these non-state actors and their use and effectiveness from a military perspective has been recognised, but less focus has been put on civilian lives and safety in this context. Research that has been done concerning pro-government militias, and their effect on civilian safety, utilises the Principal-Agent theory (PA) to analyse and detect variables that can predict what type of state-PGM relationship can be of risk. According to PA theory the principal party hires an agent party, to accomplish a specific task. The relationship can present several possible difficulties, like the loss of control over an agent resulting in uninhibited violence and the pursuit of alternative goals (Rauchhaus, 2009; Miller, 2005). Most academic research has concentrated on who is responsible for the enlistment of non-state actors, and what non-state actor has been used, when assessing PGM

violence perpetrated against civilians. Few studies have considered the influence of the characteristics of the conflict concerning civilian targeted violence. The focus on the characteristics of the principal (the state) and the actor (the pro-government militia), has wielded valuable theories and typologies which are able to identify factors that might give rise to violence. This thesis will aim to introduce a third variable to complement these rival theories, by highlighting the effect of conflict characteristics, including the type of conflict and its geographical nature, to calculate the risk of PGM violence perpetrated against civilians taking place through the introduction of a conflict typology.

By introducing the conflict as a risk assessment tool, we aim to create a more complete picture of the use of pro-government militias in contemporary conflicts. By studying the use of armed non-state actors, insight is provided on former governmental "black boxed" choices, regarding the acceptance of consequence brought on by certain security issues (Carey & Mitchell, 2017). If the control of violence lies at the heart of the nation state, it is important that we understand the logic and risks associated with the delegation of that power.

This article will examine the puzzle of where and why PGMs are active and the conflict characteristics factors that affect the risk of civilian targeted violence. To answer the research question, *'can conflict characteristics predict the risk of PGM violence perpetrated against civilians',* a theoretical framework will first be introduced addressing the Principal-Agent theory and relevant definitions. Then, a literature review presents rival theories to lay the foundation for further analysis and to illustrate the knowledge gap present in current academic research. Additionally, the conflict characteristics typology will be introduced, further explaining the two variables of geography and conflict type, followed by a brief methodology. It is hypothesised that conflicts of a governmental nature will pose a higher risk of violence perpetrated against civilians by PGMs than territorial conflicts. Additionally, the second hypothesis will state that PGMs deployed in conflicts that take place in the periphery will be pose a greater risk than those deployed in the centre.

To test the proposed conflict typology, and both hypotheses, a plausibility probe will be carried out, utilizing three case studies selected from the Pro-Government Militia Database (PGMD) Project (Carey et al., 2013). The extremely high-risk category will be explored through the Colombia case study of the Auto Defensas Unidas (AUC), the Zambian ZANU-PF youth militia will be analysed as part of the very high-risk category and the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions will be investigated for the high-risk category. Lastly a discussion will be provided which will state that the characteristics of the different conflicts coincide with the

levels of risk attributed to them, through the assessment of case studies. The promising result of this plausibility probe will be further discussed as will implications for further research in the conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Defining militias

While paramilitaries are organised under the government banner to either replace or support regular military forces, pro-government militias are armed groups who do not belong to any official state armed forces but are aligned with the incumbent government (Abbs, Clayton, & Thomson, 2019; Böhmelt & Clayton, 2017). This thesis follows the definition provided by Carey, Mitchell and Lowe (2012) who state that a PGM is a group that is pro-government or government sponsored, detached from regular security forces, armed and subject to some extent of organisation. Due to the informal link PGMs have with a state, their level of autonomy is higher than that of paramilitary forces. The broad definition renders pro-government militias a heterogeneous collection of non-state actors with alternate compositions, activities, targets, and recruitment bases (Abbs, Clayton, & Thomson, 2019). While civilian defence forces, political youth groups and volunteer battalions have differing links to a state, semi-official or informal, and a different style of operations, nationally or locally, they can be grouped together under the term pro-government militia. The primary goal of a militia can be seen as population control, specifically establishing local rule in a given territory (Jones, 2012).

Principal Agent Theory

The Principal-Agent Theory (PA) explains a wide range of situations where one party (the principal) commissions authority to another (the agent) in order to accomplish a task on its behalf (Rauchhaus, 2009). Principal-agent relationships are easily applicable to state sponsored militias, since states will delegate tasks to PGMs to fulfil their policy objectives (Berkowitz, 2017). Cost-saving strategies are central to PA theory; by delegating authority to an agent, principals are able to complete a task at a lesser cost than if it would have done so itself. The key problem in PA relationships centres around differing preferences and asymmetric information (Biddle, MacDonald & Baker, 2018). In general, an agent will possess more information about their circumstances and efforts, which is referred to as information asymmetry. When a principal is unable to monitor or control its agent's action, there is a possibility an agent will act under the assumption a principal will sustain the cost of unnecessary risky behaviour or will go as far to act solely in his own interest (Rauchhaus, 2009).

While both interest and information asymmetry might be minimised by working with agents possessing both proficiency and integrity, the agents accepting the task often prove to be the ones having trouble finding employment elsewhere, leading to adverse selection. While agents are normally screened and carefully selected, in order to minimise cost these mechanisms are either implemented with less care, or are completely absent (Mitchell, Carey, & Butler, 2014). Therefore, it can be expected that the agent will hire from a pool of extremists, rebels or those motivated by private gain or a desire to commit violence. The problems a principal can experience in a PA relationship can create an agency loss, which can be explained as the difference between the principal desired outcome and the principal obtained outcome. In short, while a state can commission the responsibility of conflict resolution to a pro-government militia, in order to reduce the cost, it more often results in a flawed and more violent outcome (Berkowitz, 2017).

Literature review

While non-state actors have existed throughout history, the phenomenon of substate or extra state pro-regime actors actively engaging in civil wars against anti-government rebels emerged fairly recently (Aliyev, 2016). Since then, these informal groups have been recorded partaking in vast amounts of protracted armed conflict since the beginning of the Cold War. According to Oppenheim et al., (2015), in two-thirds of irregular wars since 1989, PGMs have been used for counterinsurgency by states. When looking at a state-PGM relationship, and the perpetration of violence towards civilians, academic research initially focussed on explaining the existence of the PA relationship. Since states often have access to official military forces, the employment of unofficial armed groups seems unexpected and counter intuitive. Why would a government willingly give up their monopoly of legitimate use of physical force to unofficial groups of armed individuals?

For a state to consider sponsorship of a PGM, distinct policy benefits must be present to justify its decision to not utilise alternative methods or coercion, such as military force, economic sanctions, or diplomatic negotiations (Berkowitz, 2017). The use of militias poses several strategic advantages. For one, there is a strong financial incentive to turn to militias, due to its members being trained on an ad hoc or part-time basis (Ahram, 2011). The inexpensive nature of sponsorship can outweigh the deployment of official military forces who require more expensive gear (Berkowitz, 2017). Secondly, commanders of militia troops are often local elites, which equips them with superior knowledge of their respective regions (Ahram, 2011). Thirdly, cooperation with non-state actors offers the state plausible deniability if civilians experience strategically useful violence perpetrated against them (Carey, Mitchell & Low, 2012). The state can easily deflect the consequences for this type of unprofitable escalation by blaming the pro-government militia and thereby avoiding punishment costs (Downs & Rocke, 1994).

The use of plausible deniability is reflected in the Rwandan Interahamwe case, the use of this militia by the Rwandan government aided in fuelling a genocide that would claim the lives of roughly one million Tutsis (Taylor, 2001). By utilising civilians, the government was able to deflect blame and employ their official forces for alternative purposes (Koren, 2017). Fourthly, the recruitment of civilians for roles in counterinsurgency can aid local support, which prevents civilians from enlisting in opposition forces (Böhmelt & Clayton, 2017). Furthermore, enlisting militias can improve conditions for the local population, by targeting insurgents selectively, the incentive to use discriminate violence can be reduced. Lastly, due

to lower standards of admission, militias can be sizably larger than traditional armed forces providing a state a benefit in numbers (Ahram, 2011). For a principal who lacks skill or time, delegation can prove to be advantageous (Mitchell, Carey, & Butler, 2014).

However, enlisting pro-government militias bears sizable risk. While the risk of agency loss is highly dependent on the PGM itself, the costs a principal can suffer -which are independent of an agent itself-, are notable (Berkowitz, 2017). State sponsorship of paramilitary groups can cause outcry in the international political community. A state-PGM relationship can result in diplomatic hostility from regional powers or global powers such as the United States. This disapproval can transform into action, for example by a continued programme of economic sanctions. This international isolation could in turn increase domestic unrest or diminish social wellbeing, giving way to more conflict. A state must balance the problems and difficulties connected to a PA relationship, against the benefit of not having to fulfil a task by itself.

Since the use of PGMs can have distinct advantages for a state, the answer as to why states would give up their monopoly on violence has been given. What remains is the question of what type of states need these advantages. It has been found that PGMs are more likely to emerge in so called 'weak states' that are faced with security threats, such as civil war and sudden insurgency (Abbs, Clayton, & Thomson, 2019). Under such circumstances, a state no longer performs its role as the local security provider which leaves space for PGMs to arise from civil society to provide a more adequate response to the threat of violence. Since weaker regimes often lack both the organizational and financial capacity to deploy official of paramilitary forces, they are forced to turn to PGMs, and thereby sacrifice some level of operational control (Böhmelt & Clayton, 2017). According to Yoroms (2017), the rise of militias is a strong indication of state failure, since the fundamental task of protecting both community and human security, for which the state was established, has been unsuccessful. Additionally, states who lack the capacity and authority to monopolize the use of violence within their territory are found to be more likely to tolerate the existence of militias who support their cause (Ahram, 2011). Therefore, the use or toleration of PGMs by a state is seen as an indication of a weak regime since a government is forced to concede control in order to obtain a cheap fighting force. As stated by Francis, "the majority of these weak states never had the capacity to exercise domestic sovereignty in the first place", meaning that the deployment of militias in such unstable countries can be seen as "using fuel to put out a fire (2017, p.19).

Most research focused on the link between PGMs, and civilian targeted violence thus

far has concentrated on exploring certain aspects of paramilitary organisations (Mazzei, 2009; Ahram, 2011) or the militia-government relation (Staniland, 2015; Carey, Colaresi & Mitchell, 2012). With some research concentrating specifically on the role militias play in genocide (Ahram, 2014), mass killings Koren, 2017) or human rights violations (Mitchell, Carey, & Butler, 2014). The role of the characteristics of the conflict a militia is deployed in by a state has not been analysed, which is the focus of this thesis,

Research into state-PGM relationships, and violence perpetrated against civilians, has focussed mostly on the role of the state. According to Ahram (2014), genocide is more prevalent in states that willingly share their privilege of oppression with non-state actors such as PGMs. The mobilization of armed non-state actors can grow beyond a state's control which can lead to an escalating situation where a militia can boldly pursue private agendas. This is a clear example of agency loss, where a principal loses control and suffers the cost of an overly independent agent (Berkowitz, 2017). This is reflected in the case of the Auto Defensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), one of the case studies analysed in this thesis. The militia, originally created in cooperation with the Colombian government to eradicate leftist guerrilla groups through counterinsurgency operations, seized control over swaths of the country and ruled with such violence their death toll surpassed that of the guerrilla army they were founded to combat (Mazzei, 2009). The asymmetry between the principal and agent resulted in the deaths of thousands of civilians.

While regime stability has been a prime focus in the academic discussion on state-PGM relationships, some literature focuses more heavily on the characteristics of the militia itself and the impact on the level of violence targeted at civilians (Böhmelt & Clayton, 2017). Those who have looked at how the pro-government militias as agents influenced the dynamics of violence during a conflict mostly analysed the link a PGM has to government (Abbs, Clayton, & Thomson, 2019). Research concluded that informal PGMs can be seen to increase human rights violations while sponsored groups are more likely to cause less fatalities and appear more likely to negotiate with their targets (Berkowitz, 2017). In addition, militias with informal links to a state will be more often deployed to partake in violence a state would like to evade accountability for, therefore these militias could show a higher tendency of violence towards civilians (Abbs, Clayton, & Thomson, 2019). Research done by Carey & Mitchell (2017) investigated various characteristics of militias themselves to predict the possibility of violence targeted towards civilians. Militias that draw from the local population present fewer difficulties concerning control, meaning that a link to the local community could limit predatory violence. Furthermore, the characteristics of militia

members offers valuable insight. Ethnicity has proved to be an important element to conflict, as civilians who share the same ethnicity as militias members are found to be safer in conflict situations (Stanton, 2015).

However, up until now, most research into PGMs and civilian targeted violence has focussed on merely two elements of the Principal-Agent theory. Either the focus is put on the role of the state, or less frequently the influence of the characteristics of the militia itself. The conflict at hand is hardly ever analysed. By merely identifying the principal as the player responsible for the loss of control, or the agent as a duplicitous participant, a case study is analysed from a limited perspective (Mitchell, Carey, & Butler, 2014). While it cannot be denied that the PA relationship consists of the two actors, the conflict itself is a variable that cannot be ignored during analysis if a complete picture is sought after. By introducing a characteristics of conflict typology, compromising of geography and conflict type, a novel theory is introduced to complement the existing rival theories revolving around state and militia characteristics. The aim of this thesis and proposed typology is not to replace rival theories but to supplement these theories by highlighting the improvement in violence prediction when the characteristics of conflicts are taken into account.

A typology of the characteristics of conflict

In the following section, the proposed typology of the characteristics of conflict will be introduced. This conflict typology is created to not only frame findings but to present a risk assessment tool. By focussing on the type of conflict and the geography of where the conflict takes place, we aim to localise dimensions which affect government influence over these non-state groups, which forms the foundation of the state's drive to monopolize violence. The first variable which will be used in the typology is the type of conflict, which is divided into two categories: territorial and governmental (UCPC, 2021). When it comes to the second independent variable, geography, we focus on whether the area where the pro-government militia is deployed is under direct government control (the centre) or whether the area faces limited or contested control (the periphery). Conflicts in which PGMs engage are often undisclosed to the public, making it a challenging element of the PA theory to use as an analytic tool. However, this challenge should not prohibit us to ask the question as to whether or not the characteristics of conflict can explain if PGMs are more likely to prey or protect civilians (Carey & Mitchell, 2017).

Variable 1: Conflict type

Since research into the characteristics of conflict, in relations to PGMs, is extremely limited, theories and literature from research into the causes of civil war and intra state wars will be applied. When it comes to the context of civilian fatalities in armed civil conflict, earlier research has distinguished between two categories: territorial and governmental conflict (Buhaug, 2006). Territorial conflicts revolve around the status of a specified territory and often involve demands for succession or autonomy, these conflicts are usually labelled as separatist or territorial rebellions (UCPC, 2021). Governmental conflicts concern the replacement of a political system or central government, with examples being popular revolutions and coups d'états (Buhaug, 2006; Eck & Hultman, 2007; UCPC, 2021). According to this UCPC data set, roughly two-thirds of all conflicts can be categorised under the governmental category (Gleditsch et al., 2002).

Governmental vs. Territorial

The proposed conflict typology operates under the notion that governmental conflicts will pose a higher risk for violence perpetrated against civilians by pro-government militias than territorial conflicts. The reasoning behind this assumption is threefold. For one, governmental conflicts are associated with more powerful rebel groups (Buhaug et al., 2006). To overthrow

a government and gain control over a state apparatus, a lot of resources and power is needed. For example, states with relatively large marginalised ethnic groups are associated with a greater risk of civil war (Toft, 2002). This corresponds with the logic of the balance of power; conflict erupts if both parties believe to have a realistic chance of victory. Conflicts of a territorial nature involve a less sizeable opponent to the state, the rebel group has acknowledged the unfavourable power balance and concluded it will have to settle for sovereignty over limited grounds, as opposed to full governmental authority. Horrowitz states that groups "with a keen sense of weakness, are easily convinced…that their only hope of resisting domination lies in some form of separation" (1981, p.177).

What determines a rebel objective is relative capability, meaning that a rebel group will aim for the goal that seems achievable. If a rebel group finds that they are in possession of fighting forces that are equal or greater than the state they oppose, they will choose to engage in a governmental conflict over a territorial conflict. The need to reinstate a military asymmetry, where the state holds superiority vis-à-vis rebels, means a government is in need for new sources to reinstate their military capacity (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2014). A state will be inclined to use PGM forces in a governmental conflict because pro-government militias troops can be formed quickly and in sizeably larger numbers than traditional armed forces, since militia members are trained ad hoc and/or on a part-time basis. Additionality militia membership has a lower threshold and proves cost-effective because they do not require the expensive military gear and training official forces need (Ahram, 2011). However, by deploying unofficial forces a state sacrifices a certain level of operational control which can result in a militia boldly pursuing its own agenda, including uncontrolled violence and oppression of locals due to a lack of accountability. Furthermore, when a state is in quick need of many troops, PGM membership requirements will be lowered to reach the target amount. This can lead to the acceptance of militias consisting of those with less honourable intentions and backgrounds.

Secondly, governmental conflicts tend to be brief, lasting on average for two to three years (Fearon 2004). As established earlier, governmental conflicts demand great manpower and call for a -all or nothing- strategy, utilising rapid strikes to topple over the power balance. On the other hand, conflicts of a territorial character create longer conflicts lasting on average for about 10 years. Research has found that more lethal civil wars tend to be shorter lived, showing that a higher annual death toll is strongly linked to a shorter conflict duration. It can thus be theorised that governmental conflicts are more lethal than territorial conflicts because they are shorter. This notion proves plausible when we look at the nature of territorial

conflicts, that often manifests as guerrilla warfare. This type of warfare involves few combatants, many years and often occurs in the periphery where population density is low, meaning that the violence is far removed from areas where vast amounts of civilians reside resulting in lower civilian lethality.

Lastly, governmental conflicts can prove to be of much higher salience to a state than territorial conflict, since in governmental conflicts rebel groups pose a direct threat to state operations and their hold on power (Eck & Hultman, 2007). Because territorial conflicts remain in the periphery, they therefore pose a lower risk to the ongoing existence of a government which is reflected in the deployment of less troops and less militias. The idea that governmental conflicts will motivate a state to respond with a stronger and more lethal counterinsurgency strategy appears supported to some degree, since data has shown that most fatalities happen during governmental conflicts. In short, we theorise that governmental conflicts will pose a higher risk to civilians for three reasons. For one PGMs are formed in great numbers and in a relative short amount of time, which will result in less governmental oversight and the acceptance of allied fighters with criminal backgrounds and ulterior motives. Secondly, it is theorised that governmental conflicts are more lethal in general due to their short nature. Lastly, as governmental conflicts are of higher salience to a state more manpower and violence will be used to restore the power balance vis-à-vis rebels. The combination of strategy, duration and salience is expected to result in higher civilian lethality being present in governmental conflicts than in territorial conflicts.

H1: militias are more likely to perpetrate violence against civilians in governmental conflicts than territorial conflicts.

Variable 2: Geography

By focussing on the question where a conflict takes place, we ought to examine the explanatory power of geography. In short, does territory matter as a motivation for conflict and if so, how do pro-government militias and violence perpetrated against civilians fit into this variable? State principals deploy militias in order to carry out violence when or where a state cannot or will not be able to exert control themselves (Ahram, 2016). Militias are utilised in areas where they are more effective and efficient due to knowledge of the local area or because the intended violence must be carried out covertly in order to create plausible deniability (Koren, 2017).

Centre vs. Periphery

To analyse the role of geography, the centre/periphery concept will be utilised. This since the relationship between centre and periphery is of essence when wanting to understand societal relations (McKenzie, 1977). Due to their applicability within political science and conflict studies, the paper utilises insights by Stein Rokkan (Langholm, 1971). While Rokkan does not provide a clear definition of the concept of centre, it can be understood as territory within a state that is industrialised and urbanised (Rokkan, 1999). This means that the centre can also be described as territory that has a high level of population density and economic development. The term periphery can be defined as "the subordination of a group to the authority of a geographical centre or core upon which the periphery is dependent" (Wright, 1991 p. 299). Key characteristics of the periphery revolve around dependence, distance, and difference in relations to cultural standardization, economic life and political decision making.

Three reasons for why PGM violence perpetrated against civilians is more likely when pro-government militias are deployed in a peripheral region, have been theorised. Firstly, minority groups are more likely to engage in large-scale conflicts when it has some perceived rural base within a country, it is economically disadvantaged in comparison to dominant groups, and it has a larger rather than smaller share of a country's population (Fearon & Laitin, 1999). In short, conflict is more likely to erupt in a peripheral region when a non-dominant group is geographically concentrated, meaning they are settled in one contiguous area of a state (Buhaug et al., 2008). Concentrated ethnic groups are more likely to be strongly attached to their respective territory, because they are more likely to cultivate a large group of allies and potential combatants for communication and shared cultural values are greater due to the proximity (Toft, 2002). Centre conflicts concerning minorities are unlikely because those residing in the centre have a weak legitimacy dimension, because they are found to have a feeble sense of attachment to the region they reside in, which contrasts with peripheral ethnic groups (Buhaug et al., 2008). Therefore, it is theorised that PGMs will rarely be utilised in centre territorial conflicts due to the small likelihood of them occurring.

The second reason as to why the conflict typology operates under the notion that peripheral conflict poses a higher risk to civilians, revolves around the characteristic of the territory. While territory can be a source of conflict, it also impacts its susceptibility. Rough terrain has been argued to provide a foundation for conflict and, for example mountainous regions, provide shelter for government groups in a way that is favourable for guerrilla warfare (Buhaug, Cederman & Rød, 2008). Academic research has found that the risk of

rebellion grows in conjunction with the distance from the centre (Fearon & Laitin, 1999). A plausible explanation focusses on the fact that the state's counterinsurgency effort and efficacy lowers when a conflict erupts in rough terrain, for states prefer to fight an on-going low-level war over higher spending that would urge rebellions to a minimal level. When compared to groups living in good terrain, greater violence is predicted to take place on both sides during a conflict involving a group residing in rough terrain. Since militias are a cost-effective counterinsurgency tool, it is theorised that PGMs will often be deployed in peripheral conflicts. Additionally, commanders of militia troops are often local elites, which equips them with superior knowledge of their respective regions which is particularly valuable when a conflict takes place in rough unknown terrain (Ahram, 2011).

Lastly, "popular support" is a key feature of irregular, or guerrilla, warfare (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2014). State opposition in the periphery is highly dependent on the support and behaviour of the civilian population and their willingness to not denounce them to state security forces, and so civilians are often targeted by government troops and PGMs. Since rebels not only rely on the local population for support but also recruitment, state forces need to be vigilant when navigating the battle grounds. While the mere presence of PGMs is linked to higher rates of extra-judicial killings, attacks on civilians and torture, studies have also found that certain PGM forces proved better positioned to identify insurgents hiding among civilians then regular forces (Mitchell, Carey & Butler, 2014; Ahram, 2016). The combination of ethnicity, rough terrain and reliance on the local population lead to the theorisation that peripheral districts will see a higher risk of PGM violence perpetrated against civilians.

H2: peripheral conflicts will pose a higher risk for PGM violence perpetrated against civilians to take place due to limited or even contested state control over the district.

Table 1. Characteristics of conflict typology

Geography	Conflict characteristics	
	Governmental	**Territorial**
Centre		
Risk to civilians	Very high	Low
Periphery		
Risk to civilians	Extremely high	High

Methodology

Characteristics of conflict as a risk assessment tool

In order to answer the question, 'can conflict characteristics predict the risk of PGM violence perpetrated against civilians', a typology centred around the characteristics of conflict a PGM is deployed for, is presented. To create a sufficient typology three conditions will have to be met (Dotty and Glick, 1994). Firstly, variation that matters should be identified, because there is either reason to inquire about its causes or it can be expected to shape relevant phenomena. Secondly, types that minimize within-group variation and maximise between-group variations ought to be identified. Lastly, a good typology should be parsimonious, the typology should identify as few possible types which possess the greatest explanatory and descriptive potential.

Plausibility probe

A plausibility probe will be used to test the proposed characteristics of conflict typology, utilizing three case studies selected from the Pro-Government Militia Database (PGMD) Project (Carey et al., 2013). A plausibility probe can be explained as a preliminary study on relatively untested hypotheses and theories (George & Bennett, 2005). The aim of this study is to determine whether more laborious and intensive testing is justified to further fulfil the goal of theory development. This approach allows the location of indications as to whether the conflict as a variable can truly have any predictive power and whether using the proposed typology as a risk assessment tool has any merit or value. The areas that will be investigated include the characteristics of the conflict, the geographical location of where PGM forces are deployed to and the amount of violence perpetrated against civilians by pro-government militia forces.

To test whether the typology captures risk that is reflected in real life, cases with varying degrees of violence perpetrated against civilians by PGMs, ranging from a level of extremely high risk to high, will be assessed. Although concrete data on violence perpetrated against civilians by militias is hard to come by, due to the obscure nature of such conflicts, a survey of existing literature provides sufficient data to carry out an analysis on three case studies: the Colombian AUC, the Zimbabwean ZANU-PF youth militia, and the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions. It goes without saying that the three case studies are too heterogeneous and limited to provide an empirical basis to create a robust foundation for the proposed

typology (Parker et al., 2020). However, the plausibility probe will provide a foundation for further, more extensive research.

Selecting case studies

With the following plausibility probe we aim to gain insight in the usefulness of utilising the conflict a PGM is deployed to partake in, as a risk assessment tool. While four levels of risk are proposed in the conflict typology; extremely high, very high, high and low, only three levels will be analysed. This because it is theorised that the 'low risk' category does not present many suitable case studies, nor would it provide much insight in constructing the theory surrounding the conflict typology. For a non-state group to be defined as a pro-government militia, and therefore be eligible to be selected as part of the plausibly probe, a group had to meet the definition of Carey at al., which states that a PGM is a group that is pro-government or government sponsored, detached from regular security forces, armed and subject to some extent of organisation (2012). Additionally, selected case studies had to be included in the Pro-Government Militia Database (PGMD) Project created by Carey et al., (2013) which ranges from 1981 to 2007. The only case studied that was not included in the database was that of the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions, because they were founded in 2014 and therefore prove too contemporary for the database. However, analysis into the literature pertaining to the case places the battalions firmly within the definition of PGMs. In academic literature, the Colombian AUC is referred to as a both a paramilitary group and pro-government militia. However, because the non-state actor is included in the PGMD and adheres to the chosen definition of pro-government militias, this case is included in the study. The ZANU-PF youth militia successfully met both criteria. To ensure a contemporary discussion, militias had to be active between 2000 and now and preferably originate from different world regions to minimise any geographical bias.

Variables

The case studies will be analysed through the two independent variables, geography and conflict type, and the outcome of the dependent variable, which is PGM violence perpetrated against civilians. To categorise a case study correctly into the geographic category of centre or periphery, the paper will utilise theories by Rokkan, as well as inferences drawn from the level of control a government, or principal, has over the region (Rokkan, 1999). The character of the conflict will be decided on the basis of the distinction and definition of territorial and governmental conflict by the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCPC, 2021). To analyse the level of violence perpetrated against civilians by PGMs the World Health Organisation's

definition of violence will be used. According to this definition violence is "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation" (WHO, 2002 p.4). The concept of violence consists therefore of more than just direct and intentional harm to a body. The inclusion of violence that is not directly expressed in death or injury ensures that violence against children, the elderly and women is incorporated.

Auto Defensas Unidas de Columbia – Colombia
Extremely high risk: periphery – governmental conflict

Violent civil wars between right- and left- wing political factions have existed throughout Colombia since its establishment, with many of these internal conflicts containing a role for militias (Mazzei, 2009). Around 1960, a conflict erupted in which several left leaning guerrilla groups were formed, including the infamous Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), with the goal to bring about socialism and social justice (Arjona, 2014). During the 1970s the FARC grew to be largest and most influential guerrilla group, engaging in criminal behaviour ranging from kidnapping to drug trafficking and cultivation (Richani, 2007). By the late 1990s, roughly three-fourths of all municipalities in the country were under guerrilla control. Pro-government militias were formed in the 1980s as wealthy citizens in rural parts of the area desired to protect their financial and material wealth, while the government was in need for additional counterinsurgency forces and drug traffickers wanted to safeguard their criminal enterprises from guerrilla extortion (Richani, 2007). The Las Tangas militia, created by Carlos and Vincente Castaño in response to the murder of their father, would align with official military forces and evolve into the Auto Defensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) (Stanford, 2018).

The AUC was derived out of various regional and local militias who enjoyed local leadership and autonomy (Estancona, Bird, Hinkkainen, & Bapat, 2019). The main goal of the PGM was the eradication of leftist guerrillas by carrying out counterinsurgency operations (Mazzei, 2009). While the AUC did engage in such operations, their repertoire quickly grew to include more criminal ventures. An estimate by U.S. officials stated that 40 percent of exported cocaine was controlled by the AUC, while the PGM additionally dominated the sale of gasoline, rice, and contraband cars (Rochlin, 2007). Furthermore, the violent streak of the AUC become so severe the Colombian government determined that by 2001 militias had killed more civilians than the main guerrilla army it was established to fight against (Wilson, 2001). A law signed in 2005 by President Uribe, which underpinned the demobilisation process of the AUC, led to the official dismantling of more than 31,000 members (LADB Staff, 2003). Human rights organisations like Amnesty International proved critical of the law, for it provided immunity to Colombia's "single biggest perpetrator of crimes against humanity" (Rochlin, 2007 p.88). A landmark peace deal was signed in 2016 between government parties and the FARC, which has renewed hope for a peaceful and stable Colombia after decades of conflict (Maher & Thomson, 2018).

Periphery

To correctly categorise the AUC case study, regarding the geographical variable, we must look where the AUC troops were deployed. Throughout the decades of conflict, the FARC kept a predominantly peasant, rural base (Molano, 2000). The group failed to successfully establish urban support and operatives, forcing it to remain active in insular and rural regions of the country. Since the AUC was deployed as part of a counter insurgency strategy against the FARC, the conflict took place where the FARC was active and influential. President Cesar Gaviria signed decree 368 in 1995, which stated that the creation of militias was for the sole purpose of providing improved security and intelligence in remote rural areas (Tate, 2001). The focus on remote rural areas results in the AUC case study being categorised as a peripheral conflict. As stated, the periphery revolves around dependence, distance, and difference in relation to cultural standardization, economic life and political decision making (Rokkan, 1999). The FARC originally operated from the remote jungles of the Andean Foothills, growing from begrudged farmers into a small army (Saab & Taylor, 2009). The rough terrain from which the rebels operated ensured distance and independence from the Colombian government, which in turn aided in creating an atmosphere where their radically different ideology was able to gain traction (Buhaug et al., 2008). The government's absence in the area allowed the FARC to rapidly establish power which in turn creating a hazardous environment where civilians felt compelled to take up arms in self-defence and join the AUC (Tate, 2001).

Governmental conflict

The conflict in Colombia can be categorised as a governmental conflict for the heart of the matter revolved around revolutionary political change. While the FARC was originally created after a conflict between different peasant groups concerning land reforms, the conflict is not categorised as a territorial conflict. The land reforms might have been the trigger for the conflict but the desire to create social change and peace, guided by Marxist ideology, fuelled the members of the guerrilla group to attack state forces to replace the capitalist system and unjust distribution of wealth (Crandall, 2011). As stated by Buhaug (2006), governmental conflicts revolve around the replacement of a political system or central government, specifically referring to popular revolutions. This desire of a political communist revolution formed the guerrilla group, as is reflected in their name *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC). While the group lost public support due to losing its ideological purity to the profit of kidnappings ransoms and their heavy involvement

in the Colombian drug trade, the character of the conflict remains governmental due to the revolutionist communist undertone (Crandall, 2011). The AUC did not chase any goals of societal, economic of political transformation, unlike their guerrilla enemy (Rochlin, 2007).

Violence perpetrated against civilians

In Colombia, PGMs have been accused of perpetrating of some of the most brutal crimes against civilians (Duque, 2019). Between 1985-2003 there have been reports of kidnappings (2,541), tortures (371), selective killings (8,902), massacres (1,166), forced disappearances (246) and millions of civilians who were forcibly displaced. The AUC cultivated close relations to the local community to create an informal network while simultaneously undermining the popularity and stature of official security forces (Mazzei, 2009). Through these tactics, the influence of the militia grew and with that its tolerance to critique lessened. Opposition was faced with violence and reached all corners of society, ranging from human rights advocates to students and journalists. This retaliation resulted in the death of 14,476 individuals between 1988 and 2003 alone (Richani, 2007). In 2001, it was established by the Colombian government that the AUC had killed more civilians than the FARC (Wilson, 2001). The atrocities were plentiful and violated human rights (Rochlin, 2007).

Analysis

The conflict typology theorizes that conflicts of a governmental nature form a greater risk of violence perpetrated against civilians by PGMs. This is hypothesised because governmental conflicts are associated with a strategy consisting of vast manpower and rapid attacks, resulting in shorter more deadly conflicts which are of higher salience to a state since it directly threatens the state operatus. When it comes to the case study of the AUC, arguments based on strategy and salience appear relevant while the expectation of a brief conflict is not.

The strategy associated with governmental conflicts revolves around the need to reinstate military asymmetry, to restore state superiority vis-à-vis rebels (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2014). While the FARC did not outnumber Colombian military forces by a long shot, the group was at its biggest in 2007 with 18,000 fighters, their chosen strategy of guerrilla warfare did disrupt the power balance significantly (CISAC, 2018). By the late 1990s, roughly three-fourths of all municipalities in the country were under control of the guerrilla organisation (Duque, 2019). Not only did the FARC control swaths of the country, but it also dominated the illegal drug trade. Due to the FARC's geographical isolation, there were little ties to urban areas and a lack of monetary support (Otis, 2014). To finance their revolution, the group started taxing drug smugglers and producers. The FARC's control over the

southern Colombian jungles, population and criminals left the central government completely powerless. The 16,000-square-mile region under complete guerrilla control was utilised to train more troops, grow coca, and stash hostages. In response to losing territory and political control, the Colombian government deployed AUC forces. The need to reinstate their governmental authority proved so great that the violent and criminal behaviour of AUC members was wilfully ignored.

The conflict was of great salience to the Colombian government for the FARC had not only managed to successfully control a region of the country and its lucrative drug business, but it had also done so for several decades (Eccarius-Kelly, 2012). Additionally, the FARC's leftist social ideologies, opposing capitalism and private property, directly threatened the government's current policy and democracy. The government's desire to combat the guerrilla group proved greater than the need to deal with the escalating AUC. As the militia grew in influence, so did their violence against civilians. Strengthened by their income derived from criminal activity, the AUC infiltrated the Colombian government, resulting in several politicians actively aiding pro-militia government policy and criminal violent behaviour (Mazzei, 2009).

The expected brief nature of governmental conflicts proves not present in the Colombian case study, as the AUC militia was active for well over 19 years (Mapping Militants Organizations, 2018). The duration of the conflict can however be explained by the geographical nature of the case study. Since the AUC was deployed predominantly in the periphery, their enemy's guerrilla warfare strategy resulted in a lengthy conflict (Fearon, 2004). The peripheral nature of the conflict further increased the risk of violence perpetrated against civilians by PGMs, due to the rough terrain and dependency on the local population. As stated, rough terrain has been theorised to provide a foundation for conflict, since it provides shelter which is favourable for guerrilla warfare and is associated with higher civilian lethality for a state is more likely to lower its counterinsurgency effort and efficacy (Buhaug, Cederman & Rød, 2008). Since the AUC was deployed into a mountainous region, the lack of governmental control in combination with favourable conditions for a long-lasting guerrilla warfare were created, which led to the formation of a particularly dangerous atmosphere for civilians.

Secondly, since the FARC relied heavily on the support of locals, and recruited many, suspicion against civilians in the region was high. Since PGM and state forces could not know with certainty whether they came across a civilian or undercover FARC member, innocent civilians faced severe violence fuelled by this suspicion (Rochlin, 2007). This was

particularly of importance in the case of the FARC, since most guerrilla members were recruited among locals. Roughly 73 percent of AUC commanders belonged to the rural elite, meaning that the troops were familiar with secluded parts, making them particularly adapt to combat an enemy who utilised this geographic knowledge as a strategy (Tate, 2001). The influence of geography on the duration of the Colombian conflict can in large be explained by the chosen guerrilla warfare tactics of the FARC. This is an indication that warfare strategy itself could hold explanatory power when it comes to state-PGM conflict lethality, this is a line of research that could be further explored in consequent research.

In short, the case of the AUC met two of the three proposed elements of the conflict type hypothesis, as the conflict was of high salience to the government and dealt with the need to reinstate a military power balance in favour of the government. The conflict was however not brief. It is proposed this discrepancy can be explained by the geography hypothesis which states that conflicts taking place in peripheral location will pose a higher risk to civilian lethality. The rebels had a large, concentrated rural base located in rough mountainous terrain. Furthermore, the rebels drew substantive support from civilians, meaning that the case study of the AUC met all three elements of the geographical variable.

ZANU-PF Youth Militia – Zimbabwe
Very high risk: centre – governmental conflict

For Zimbabwe, elections periods are dominated by violence, with the 2008 election reaching an unprecedented high, scarring communities both psychological and physical (Zambara, 2015). During the final eight years of President Robert Mugabe's rule as Zimbabwe's president, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) government had struggled to maintain in power due to a growing opposition led by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) party (Masunungure, 2011). While initially the MDC opposition, led by former trade unionist Morgan Tsvangerai, was easily dismissed as a western-driven external force tasked with reversing Zimbabwean progress, the election of 2008 proved more difficult. The plethora of political and socio-economic insecurities Zimbabweans were facing was retraced to the ruling ZANU-PF government (Duri, 2018). Mugabe's need for political control would become apparent in 2008, during the presidential run-off which despite the country's familiarity with violent elections, proved unmatched (Mwonzora & Helliker, 2020).

The initial election held in March failed to produce an outright victor, with Tsvangirai obtaining the majority of votes, but failing to meet the legal threshold of 50 percent and one additional vote (Masunungure, 2011). This resulted in a run-off election held two months later where the two opponents were to face each other once more. Mugabe's chances of winning the election were dwindling as his opponent Tsvangirai appeared to be preferred by voters (Mwonzora & Helliker, 2020). To secure his win Mugabe enacted an interim campaign of political violence, between March and June (Mwonzora & Helliker, 2020). The acts of aggression were carried out by young ZANU-PF supporters with unprecedented vigour. The unleashing of violence against his opponent proved fruitful, as Tsvangirai withdrew from the election and handed over the victory to Mugabe. While the terrorisation of voters wielded the desired result, Mugabe could no longer hide his regime's undeniable undemocratic credentials (Masunungure, 2011). The leaders of several southern African states denied his illegitimate claim to victory which left the president without needed regional credibility (Eppel, 2009). Humiliation followed suit when Mugabe was forced to accept the 2009 Global Political Agreement (GPA), which formed a joined government consisting of ZANU-PF, and two factions of the MDC (Zambara, 2015).

Centre

The ZANU-PF case study can be categorised as a centre conflict, for militia members were present and active throughout the entire country. While Rokkan does not provide a clear definition of the concept of centre, it can be deduced that centre refers to territory within a state that is industrialised and urbanised. This means that the centre can also be described as territory that has an index of population density, economic development and falls under direct government control (Rokkan, 1999). During the run up to the June elections, ZANU-PF militia members set up terror bases throughout the country, enabling a presence in both urban and rural areas (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2008). In local communities, the Green Bombers were deployed under the banner of 'ward youth officers', with the goal to initiate community development programs (Mwonzora & Helliker, 2020). By deploying militia members to more peripheral parts of the country, ZANU-PF's top echelons and their Joint Operations Command (JOC) managed to create local centres of control thereby turning former peripheral regions into parts under direct and stern government command (Marongwe, 2014). It can even be stated that rural areas especially served as state strong holds since the ZANU-PF had always viewed them as powerbases. Since the intended goal of the Green bombers was to install fear in the hearts and mind of the Zimbabwean electorate, it was essential their overt tactics of terror, repression, coercion, and violence reached every region of the country (Mwonzora & Helliker, 2020). We therefore categorise the 2008 election violence perpetrated by the Green Bombers as geographically taken place in centre, since the grip of acute and overwhelming violence was presented throughout the country as whole (Eppel, 2009). The violence appeared most prevalent in former and acute ZANU-PF voting regions, former ruling party strongholds, which were in the centre and east of Zimbabwe.

Governmental conflict

According to Buhaug (2006) governmental conflicts concern the replacement of a type of political system or central government, with examples being popular revolutions and coups d'états. When it comes to the case of the ZANU-PF youth militia it is clear the conflict is of governmental nature since it revolves around governmental elections. Since the MDC opposition was predicted to win the 2008 elections, dethroning long running President Mugabe, the militia was deployed to stop the replacement of the ZANU-PF led central government (Mwonzora & Helliker, 2020). The violence used by the non-state group had one goal, to ensure a victory for the sitting government through voter intimidation and the elimination of opposition. While the 2008 elections case does not revolve around a coup

d'états or popular revolution, we can speak of a significant change in the political sphere since the ZANU-PF government had been in power for a substantial amount of time. If democracy had been allowed to run its course, it is possible that the opposition had won, which would had resulted in a significant political and governmental change.

Violence perpetrated against civilians

The ZANU-PF youth militia has been one of the most frequent violators of human rights in Zimbabwe since January 2002 (Zambara, 2015) The accusations against the militia range from rape, torture, destruction of property to murder. During the interim period it is stated that roughly 6085 DMC supporters were assaulted and additional 7728 were forced to flee their homes (Duri, 2018). The youth group was used to disrupt MDC rallies, mount roadblocks, intimidate voters and to set up bases to conduct political re-orientation classes for those suspected to support the opposition party (Masunungure, 2011). The Green Bombers did not merely participate in physical violence, for they were responsible for politicising governmental food programs, and the denial to health care on partisan grounds. The violence perpetrated by the Green Bombers reached such heights in 2008, that most schools in rural areas were forced to close to safeguard both educators and pupils from assaults perpetrated by the ZANU-PF youth (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2008). Furthermore, gross violations of children and women's rights were reported, this in response to a male partner or child being supportive or involved with opposition politics. All sorts of weaponry were used, ranging from logs, barbed wire, knives to screwdrivers (Duri, 2018). The political violence report released by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO forum states that their report found "high levels of torture, abductions, displacement, rape and violations of the right to associate" (Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, 2008 p.2). This sentiment was echoed in a report published by the Catholic Commission diocese which stated that the Pre-Presidential period which lasted from 29 March to 27 June showed to be "the most violent and bloody of all postcolonial elections that we have witnessed as an observer group" (Masunungure, 2011 p.57). While the violence was initiated by the Harare government, tactics on the ground appeared to not be firmly controlled (Marongwe, 2014). According to the solidarity Peace Trust, the JOC failed to play a direct role in the months of May and June when it came to the daily implementation of violence. Due to the lack of oversight, members of the youth militia utilised their freedom to implement violence to settle personal scores concerning jealousies and competitions.

Analysis

To state whether the proposed conflict typology is correct in the case of the ZANU-PF youth militia, we will address the two proposed hypotheses. The typology operates under the notion that governmental conflict creates a greater likelihood of violence perpetrated against civilians by PGMs. According to the proposed theory, a governmental conflict means a government is faced with a more powerful rebel group (Buhaug et al., 2006). When we look at the government's opponent, the DMC and its electorate, we can state that they are not only powerful but also substantial. The DMC managed to collect 50 percent of the votes, which reflects not only a power in numbers but also in influence. The state's superiority over its political opponent was clearly dwindling during the 2008 election as it was suspected to lose the majority vote. In order to reinstate the political power balance, the youth militias were deployed. A member of the militia stated in a 2003 interview that: "We are ZANU-PF's 'B' team. The army is the 'A' team, and we do the things the government does not want the 'A' team to do" (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2003 p.4).

To state that the 2008 elections were of high salience to the ZANU-PF government would be an understatement. Robert Mugabe was president for a lengthy and uninterrupted time, allowing him to leave a permanent mark on the country through his reform programme known as the 'Third Chimurenga' (Marongwe, 2014 p. 83). Derived from the Zimbabwean Shona language, 'Chimurenga' can be translated as a revolt against a "racist, discriminatory or oppressive social, political or economic system (Ndhlovu, 2019 p.86). The Mugabe government framed the 2008 election as another liberation war, as part of a third wave of Chimurenga. By framing the democratic loss as part of a revolt against repression, the 2008 election became of major importance. It additionally gave party members the freedom to evoke their agency to freely cross the economic, political, and social rights of the "ethnic" MDC group, while enjoying guaranteed impunity (Marongwe, 2014 p. 83). The brief character of a governmental conflict is also present in the Zimbabwean case study, for the violence lasted merely 3 months. The expected -all or nothing- strategy, which utilises rapid strikes to topple the power balance, was not only present but also effective. Tsvangirai withdrew from the election before a second vote could take place, resulting in a victory for Mugabe.

When analysing the ZANU-PF case from the perspective of the geographical variable we expect to see lower levels of civilian targeted violence. Because the case is categorised as a centre conflict, the risk associated with a peripheral conflict should not be present. Since the

MDC electorate was scattered across the entire country, we do not see a concentration of "rebels", nor is there rough terrain. It can be said that popular support is present since the MDC voters were civilians and in support of their policies. While this could mean that the ZANU-PF case mostly falls in line with the proposed theory an annotation must be made. Those who were in support of the DMC were an electorate, not a rebellion or ethnic minority. Therefore, the proposed theory surrounding the geographical variable is hard to apply. Due to the lack of research surrounding the characteristics of conflict in which PGMs are engaged, theories had to be borrowed from research into the causes of civil war and intra state wars. This case study does not represent either of those conflicts. Therefore, an amendment is needed to include enemies of the state that do not express their influence in military but political power. By including a broader definition, the heterogenous nature of pro-government militias and their enemies will be better reflected, which in turn will allow more thorough analysis in the future.

Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions – Ukraine
High risk: periphery – territorial conflict

The spring of 2014 saw a rapidly emerging demand for separatism spreading to the Eastern Ukrainian counties of Luhansk and Donetsk, hereafter referred to as Donbas (Giuliano, 2018; Käihkö, 2018). The Maidan revolution -later called the Revolution of Dignity-, that had occurred several months earlier in 2013, had ousted President Viktor Yanukovych which crumbled the Ukrainian legitimacy and state authority (Käihkö, 2018). After Yanukovych abruptly changed his stance to enter into a trade agreement with the European Union, mass protest erupted on Maidan square in the nation's capital which led to pro-Russian Yanukovych to be overthrown (Katchanovski, 2017). The violent ousting of a pro-Russian leader led to Russian retaliation. During the ensuing aftermath and political unrest, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula and inflamed separatist sentiment in Eastern Ukraine (Käihkö, 2018). In response, volunteer battalions were mobilised to protect Ukrainian sovereignty to ensure no further territories were lost.

These so called "Territorial Defense Battalions" emerged in part due to government influence and spontaneously against a backdrop of an impotent Ukrainian army and intelligence service (Umland, 2019). While pro-Russian organisations in Donbas had been marginal only a year earlier, the events in Crimea led to a surge in popularity (Giuliano, 2018). By April of 2014, activists had captured government buildings by force while proclaiming themselves leaders of the self-styled Peoples' Republic of Luhansk (LNR) and the Peoples 'Republic of Donetsk (DNR). What followed were declarations of sovereignty being adopted and referenda of state sovereignty being held in May. To crush the insurgency in its infancy, a militia group under the command of Igor Strelkov, a former Federal Security Service (FSB) officer, was deployed (Grossman, 2018). During the so-called Anti-Terror Operation (ATO), taking place in Eastern Ukraine in 2014, 7000 out of roughly 50.000 soldiers, proved members of volunteer units. It is estimated that the Donbas conflict has created a total of 3 million refugees, which includes 1.7 million of internally displaced citizens (Katchanovski, 2017). The conflict is still ongoing to this day.

Periphery

The Ukrainian case study can be classified as a peripheral conflict, as is reflected by the word 'Ukraine' itself, which is derived from the Russian word 'okraine' and can be translated as

periphery or borderland (Umland, 2019). The key characteristics of the periphery revolve around dependence, distance, and difference in relations to cultural standardization, economic life and political decision making (Wright, 1991). When it comes to cultural standardization and political decision making the Donbas region, along with Crimea, has been the most pro-Communist and pro-Russian region in the country since its 1991 independence (Katchanovski, 2017). This has become apparent through the regions political support for presidential candidates, political parties, foreign policy orientations and the regions desire to officially name Russian as the second Ukrainian official language. Ukraine has been characterised by a political divided between the pro-European west and the pro-Russian east since its independence (Katchanovski, 2017). The Donbas is located in the eastern part of the country, making it generally pro-Russian. However, with 30 percent of the population identifying as Russian, and 11 percent identifying as both ethnic Ukrainian and ethnic Russian, the distance and political difference to the Ukrainian centre is large.

Research done by Giuliano (2018) showed that ethnicity proved to be an important factor, for those of Russian identity backed separatist issues more frequently than ethnic Ukrainians in the region. However, issues concerning discriminatory redistribution in Ukraine and the economic consequences of joining an EU trade deal played a bigger role for those supporting separatist claims. Generally, the sentiment that Ukraine's new government in Kiev was guilty of betraying its citizens in the east through its actions and policies echoed throughout the region. In short, with the distance between the nation's capital and Donbas encompassing almost 900 kilometres, the region is distant from the centre not only by land but also through cultural identity, ethnic boundaries and a feeling of betrayal and abandonment economically. All these elements combined ensure that the Donbas can be seen as a periphery according to Rokkan his definition.

Territorial Conflict

Since the conflict concerns a specific territory, the Donbas region, and involves the demand for autonomy we can state that the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions were deployed in a territorial conflict. According to the definition used in this research, territorial conflicts revolve around the status of a specificized territory and often involves the demands for succession or autonomy (Buhaug, 2006). By the end April of 2014, separatist forces had proclaimed themselves leaders of the self-styled Peoples' Republic of Luhansk (LNR) and the Peoples 'Republic of Donetsk (DNR). Not long after, declarations of sovereignty were adopted, and referenda of state sovereignty were being held in May. Russia initiated talks

with separatist forces in Donbas, offering the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk "to choose their own government, legislative authorities and governors" while additionally being allowed to handle their own economic affairs (Grossman, 2018 p.58).

Violence perpetrated against civilians

According to reports at least 9,404 people, of which more than 2,000 civilians, were killed between April 2014 and May 2016 during the conflict (OHCHR, 2016). Most of these deaths are the result of indiscriminate shelling of residential areas and the execution of civilians who did not take part in the hostilities. The Aidar and Azov battalions are frequently identified as armed forces who partook in acts of violence against locals (Umland, 2019). The Azov unit was in part run by volunteers who turned into law enforcement officers, which allowed more legal room. However, since Ukraine had never declared war, but operated under the Anti-Terror Operation, many volunteers were left in legal limbo (Käihkö, 2018). While they were deployed to use violence against fellow citizens, they did not have the legal authority to do so, which led to an escalating situation where the rules of conduct were unclear. Due to the state paralysis, militia members enjoyed a great amount of freedom and limited oversight, which has resulted in reports of human rights violations (Amnesty International, 2014).

The Aidar battalion, which was active in the north Luhansk region, showed involvement in widespread abuses ranging from abductions, unlawful detention, possible executions, theft, il-treatment, and extortion. Some of the abuses of power and violence can be branded as war crimes (Sanders, 2017). The ambiguous status of the conflict and the absence of state oversight and control created a power vacuum which was filled by volunteers who had invented their own ways and means (Käihkö, 2018). While the battalions were officially under government oversight, the financial support received by the non-state armed group remained murky, with many donors allegedly supporting far-right ideologies. This political influence was present throughout various battalions, with key commanders being known to have held neo-Nazi leanings and fascist ideologies (Umland, 2019). While these far-right formations only constitute a minority of the armed forces active in the Donbas conflict, they have been disproportionally involved in violence against civilians (Katchanovski, 2017)

Analysis

In order to conclude whether or not the predictions of the typology concerning territorial, peripheral conflicts are correct, in the case of the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions, we must

first focus on the conflict type variable. Three explanations are given as to why we theorise that territorial conflicts will pose a lower risk to civilians. For one, territorial conflicts are expected to present a less powerful enemy. Less than a third of those living in the Donbas region supported separation from Ukraine, meaning that separatism was not the dominant political opinion among residents (Guilano, 2018). The Donbas separatists acknowledged the unfavourable power balance and concluded they had to settle for sovereignty over limited grounds. Because the government did not need to reinstate military asymmetry, nor was the state's continuous hold on power under threat, the conflict was of less salience. Since the conflict is still ongoing no concrete analysis can be made about the duration of the conflict. However, since the conflict has been active since 2014, it can be stated that it does not qualify as a brief conflict. Therefore, we can state that the Ukrainian case study appears to meet all the theorised requirements of a territorial case study since it did not involve a more powerful enemy, nor was it of high salience or brief.

When we look at the variable of geography, we expect to see a higher risk of violence perpetrated against civilians by the volunteer battalions since the conflict took place in the periphery. To support the hypothesis that peripheral conflicts result in higher civilian lethality three explanations are provided. For one, conflict is expected in peripheral regions where an ethnic minority is geographically concentrated. The Donbas region has the highest reported concentration of ethnic Russians and those who identify as both ethnic Ukrainian and Russian in the Southern and Eastern regions (Guilane, 2018). We can therefore state that the ethnic minority is concentrated in the region. The connection to their ethnicity is heightened by proximity, for the region is in the eastern part of the country, making it generally pro-Russian. Secondly, rough terrain is expected to increase the risk of violence perpetrated against civilians. However, the Donbas regions is referred to as a steppe, and cannot be branded as containing rough mountainous terrain for Ukraine only houses two mountain ranges in the South and West, not East (Kuomiya, 2002). The Donbas region is dominated by plains and a large mining industry; the absence of rough terrain seems to allow a more effective state-run counterinsurgency campaign than was hypothesised.

Lastly, more violence against civilians was expected to arise due to presence of popular support. Since both separatist forces and volunteer battalions consisted of locals, violence fuelled by suspicion was present. Since the conflict erupted quickly the acceptance of militia members with less honourable intentions and backgrounds was prevalent in the Ukrainian Aidar Battalion (Steiner, Steinert & Carey, 2018). In order to counteract sudden Russian aggression, the Ukrainian government allowed allied fighters with anti-Semitic and

criminals backgrounds to take up arms against the aggressor, leading to countless violations of human rights.

In conclusion, while the variable of conflict type was expressed as expected a discrepancy was found when looking at the geographical nature of the Ukrainian conflict. While the Donbas region was found to be peripheral, it simultaneously shows elements which are normally attributed to the centre. The region has been urbanised and industrialised housing a large mining industry and several cities (Kuomiya, 2002). However, the Donbas region was clearly subordinated to the authority of a geographical centre of which they were dependent. Ukraine's new government installed an anti-Russian language policy, after the Maidan Revolution, which particularly affected the Donbas region for it is primarily Russophone (Arel, 2014). Furthermore, the region felt betrayed by Kiev because the policies and actions of the central government failed to take their region into consideration. An argument could be made that the Donbas region can be categorised as both centre and periphery. Besides the presence of this duality, we do see reports of the volunteer battalions operating without government oversight. The Aidar battalion has been accused repeatedly of kidnapping local men (Amnesty International, 2014). The victims are stripped of their money, cars and passports and taken to secret detention facilities where they are tortured and released after substantial financial sums are paid to the militia members. Any reports made to the police prove fruitless. Further research into the battalion states that while formally under the command of government forces, militia members are free to act without control or oversight. This indicates that while the Donbas region could be categorised as a centre conflict due to the level of urbanisation and industrialisation it lacks one important factor, government control. By amending the geographical variable to focus more on the level of government control in a region, instead of the level of economic development, such duality could be avoided in the future.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to examine whether the risk of PGM violence perpetrated against civilians can be predicted by the characteristics of a conflict. By introducing a small-N analysis of militia perpetrated violence in three distinct case studies, selected based on the conflict type and geographical nature of the conflict, this study aimed to contribute to literature assessing state-PGM relationships through the Principal-Agent theory. The claim that not merely the principal and agent are in need of analysis, but that the characteristics of the conflict itself also hold explanatory power, had remained neglected in the existing academic literature on state-pro-government militia dynamics. This study proposed a conflict typology and two accompanying hypothesis that stated that PGMs are more likely to perpetrate violence against civilians in governmental rather than territorial conflicts and that peripheral conflicts will pose a higher risk of PGM violence being perpetrated against civilians than those taking place in the centre.

The results of the plausibility probe demonstrated that the proposed independent variables of conflict type and geography appeared to have palpable explanatory power, for they were able to explain differing levels of perpetrated violence. The conflict type variable, which stated that governmental conflict posed a higher risk of PGM civilian targeted violence, consisted of strategy, duration, and salience. All three elements were present in the case study of the ZANU-PF youth militia, which demonstrated a positive relationship between data and the proposed conflict typology. The Zimbabwean case study did however show that an amendment is needed to include enemies of the state that do not express their influence in military but political power. Because the ZANU-PF youth militia targeted the electorate of the MDC and not rebels or an ethnic minority, a term will have to be introduced that encompasses a wider variation of state opposition to ensure greater inclusivity and analytic power.

The case study of the Colombian AUC only demonstrated two of the three elements of the conflict characteristic variable, supporting the notion of strategy and high salience. Due to the conflict's long duration, it failed to meet the standard for a brief conflict. However, this discrepancy can be explained by the second variable of the conflict typology, the geographical nature of the conflict. The typology operates under the assumption that conflicts which take place in the periphery of a country will pose a higher risk of PGM violence being perpetrated against civilians. This hypothesis is supported by arguments surrounding ethnicity, rough terrain, and the reliance on locals. Since peripheral conflicts have been found

to last for substantial amounts of time, the peripheral nature of the AUC conflict can explain why it did not meet the standard of a brief conflict which has been theorised to accompany governmental conflicts. The guerrilla warfare tactics of the FARC further influenced the duration of the conflict significantly. This is an indication that warfare strategy itself could hold explanatory power when it comes to state-PGM conflict lethality, this is a line of research that could be further explored in consequent research.

The lengthy nature of peripheral conflict was also present when looking at the case study of the Ukrainian Volunteer Battalions. The Ukrainian case was the sole example of a territorial conflict in this study, since it was theorised that centre-territorial conflicts were unlikely to occur, while additionally forming a low risk to civilians. The volunteer battalions did however only demonstrate two of the three proposed elements of the geographical variable. The role of ethnicity was prevalent for pro-Russian separatist were concentrated in the region and therefore formed a rebellion. Additionally, the case study provided us with further confirmation of the conflict type hypothesis. While the separatists were concentred in the region of Donbas, they remained a minority which resulted in the conflict being of territorial nature instead of governmental. Furthermore, the reliance on the local population resulted in civilians being exposed to more violence, due to PGMs handling out of fear and suspicion for they could not confirm a civilian's innocence or affiliation with separatist forces.

The only element that was not present in the Ukrainian case study was the expectation of rough terrain. This raises an interesting point of critique, for this could indicate that the definition used to identify a region as centre of periphery might not prove adequate. According to the definition used a centre region is both urbanised and industrialised, while a peripheral region revolves around dependence, distance, and difference in relations to cultural standardization, economic life and political decision making (Rokkan, 1999). In the case of the Ukrainian Donbas region both definitions seem to match, for the region is highly developed yet physically, economically, and culturally distant from Kiev. This duality might explain why the case study did not meet all three elements of the proposed hypothesis and would need further analysis and possible amendments.

The findings presented in this study offer several implications for further practice and research into state-PGM relationships. For one, this study has introduced the conflict as a variable worthy of analysis for this plausibility probe has shown that the characteristics of conflict have the potential to explain and predict the dynamics of violence in state-PGM relationships. Since this point of view has been neglected in the literature of PGMs, a new

area of research has hereby been discovered.

Secondly, this study has further broadened our understanding and knowledge surrounding the deployment of PGMs and the risk they pose on civilians. By analysing the previously "black boxed" decisions made by states, when it comes to deploying these non-state groups in violent conflict, new insights into why civilian targeted violence takes place have been produced. More importantly, this newfound understanding has the potential to be translated into a risk assessment tool which in turn has the potential to prevent similar violence taking place in future conflicts. While a causal relationship between conflict typology and militia violence requires further and more detailed research, this study has shown that the characteristics of conflict can indicate why some conflicts turn more lethal than others. This does not undermine the significance of the principal nor the agent, as this conflict typology has always been created as an addition to already extensive academic research into state-PGM relationships. This study has shown the significance of the characteristics of conflict when analysing the conduct of pro-government militias in violent conflict, which is required to determine the exact impact the deployment of militias has on the escalation of violence. For if the control of violence lies at the heart of the nation state, it is of the essence that we understand the logic and risks associated with the delegation of that power.

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