Gendered expectations and deadly stereotypes: A mixed-method analysis of female combatants' influence on conflict lethality

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Gendered expectations and deadly stereotypes: A mixed-method analysis of female combatants' influence on conflict lethality

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Abstract

Despite increasing literature on armed women's participation in rebel groups, few studies have investigated the influence of female combatants on conflict dynamics. This thesis contributes to the discussion by analyzing how the presence of female combatants influences conflict lethality. Following a mixed-methods approach and combining multiple linear regression analyses with an in-depth case study of the Somali rebel group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (HSM), this thesis investigates how gendered expectations shape the behavior of female combatants and the threat perception of their enemies. Summarily, the results indicate a significant effect of the presence and prevalence of female combatants on the lethality of civil wars. Moreover, these findings contribute to an increased understanding of women's participation in civil wars.

Keywords: female combatant, conflict lethality, gender and conflict

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Introduction

Gender norms are part of the underlying assumptions society has about individuals. These norms ascribe certain characteristics to men and women and set expectations for their behavior. One commonly held expectation characterizes women as inherently more nurturing and less violent than men (Alison, 2004). Women in conflict situations are often stereotyped as and cast into the role of 'victim'. This phenomenon essentializes women's experiences to caregiver roles and denies them agency (El-Bushra, 2007). Simultaneously, however, women are also increasingly joining the combat ranks of rebel groups (Braithwaite & Ruiz, 2018; Ness, 2007).

This increase of female combatants contradicts and challenges prevalent Western gender norms, especially those that deem women incapable of committing violence in the first place. According to Alison (2004), this omission results in two observations. Firstly, female combatants can exploit traditional gender norms for their objectives against the state, for instance, by hiding weapons and explosives under their clothing. Secondly, society often perceives female combatants as more merciless and fearsome than male combatants. Following these observations, the question arises whether the inclusion of women as combatants influences the rebel groups' combat performance and the lethality of conflict in general.

Without an improved understanding of women in rebel groups, an effective response to their violence is impossible (Alison, 2009). Thus, pursuing a "women-centered approach to war" (Skjelsbæk, 2001, p. 48) is crucial for a more nuanced and complete understanding of conflicts. Hence, this thesis pursues the following question:

Does the inclusion of female combatants in rebel groups affect the lethality of civil wars?

Even though literature has begun to investigate how "the presence of female combatants in rebel groups affects the behaviour of that group and conflict dynamics more generally" (Mehrl, 2022, p. 1), this research is still in the early stages. Therefore, this thesis intends to contribute to the broader debate on women in civil war and how their participation as combatants influences conflict dynamics.

To this end, the following chapter explores the existing literature surrounding female combatants and different aspects influencing the lethality of conflict. Two hypotheses are presented based on a preceding theoretical framework discussing how gender roles influence threat perception. Next, a mixed-method approach in the form of a nested analysis is conducted, combining a multiple linear regression with an in-depth study of an "on-the-line case" (Lieberman, 2005, p. 443). Subsequently, this thesis concludes with a joint discussion of the findings and offers suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Masculinities and femininities

Before examining the relevant literature surrounding women in conflict, a distinction between *sex* and *gender* should be made. *Sex* can be understood as the biological difference between people classified as male and female[1]; *gender,* on the other hand, is the socially constructed difference between these sexes. These constructions are further divisible into *masculinities* and *femininities*, with particular stereotypes, norms, and rules assigned to men and women (Sjoberg, 2007). Accordingly, gender is not a fixed category but a dynamic and subjective discourse that can change over time depending on the societal context.

[1] This biological dichotomy of male and female has been challenged by various scholars, arguing that not only gender but also sex exists on a spectrum. See Butler (1999), Sjoberg (2007) and Hyde et al. (2019).

It is imperative to understand the two opposing approaches that characterize the conceptualization of gender: *essentialism* and *social constructivism*. According to Skjelsbæk (2001), an essentialist understanding of gender assumes that gender identities are static. Any perceived differences between gender identities originate from underlying stable factors. Thus, biology is the fundamental source of different behavior, attitudes, and mindsets in men and women. Claims such as *women are inherently more peaceful than men* (Alison, 2004; Coulter, 2008) stem from this essentialist approach. Peacefulness is seen as a feminine characteristic and part of "women's essential nature" (Skjelsbæk, 2001, p. 52). On the other hand, men and masculinity are closely associated with militarism and character traits such as "toughness, violence, aggression, courage, control, and domination" (Eichler, 2014, p. 82).

The earlier introduced conceptualization of gender, stating that gender is the socially constructed difference between sexes, follows the social constructivist theory. This approach argues that "the world is constituted socially through intersubjective interaction" (McDonald, 2018, p. 49). Hence, gendered behavior results from socialization and "packages of expectations" (Enloe, 1989, p. 3). The portrayal of women, for instance, as being more peaceful than men is thus a product of women's repeated socialization and expectations of being non-violent rather than something in women's biological features.

Female combatants

Pertaining to women in conflict, the prevalent discourse has been on women's victimization (Alison, 2009; Ortbals & Poloni-Staudinger, 2018). Undeniably, the consequences of armed conflicts, such as sexual violence or forced internal displacement, are traumatic. Hence, Alison (2009) underlines the importance of engaging with these different dimensions of conflict. However, she further argues that persistent victimization corresponds to and reinforces problematic claims of women being inherently more peaceful (Alison, 2009).

These essentialist claims directly oppose existing feminist research, which shows that women are not inherently peaceful (Smeulers, 2015). For instance, Loken (2017) examined and refuted claims by other scholars, who suggested that the inclusion of women has a pacifying effect on armed organizations. Moreover, Fullmer et al. (2019) explain that female suicide bombers can avoid being detected by exploiting prevalent gender norms. These women can infiltrate and attack their target locations more efficiently, which results in heightened casualty rates. Alakoc (2020) confirms these earlier findings and states that the outcomes of suicide attacks perpetrated by women are likely to be more lethal. Overall, the phenomenon of female perpetrated violence has become an increasing point of interest for scholars engaged in feminist research. Studying conflict and its dynamics through a gender lens recognizes women as agents of political violence and results in new observations challenging the status quo of women being mere "camp followers or dependents" (Cohen, 2013, p. 383).

To this end, scholars have explored different aspects of women's inclusion in rebel groups and how their participation influences conflict dynamics. Therefore, the following section examines these circumstances and provides an overview of the most relevant literature. To begin with, Israelsen (2020) investigated the timing of female combatant recruitment and concluded that insurgent groups are more likely to recruit women during the civil war phase than in the guerilla activity phase. On the other hand, Asal and Jadoon (2020) reviewed the push and pull factors leading to the recruitment of female combatants. By analyzing the association between poor economic conditions and political violence, the scholars determined that regardless of differences in women's motivations for joining rebel groups, high levels of female unemployment increase the prevalence of female combatants within rebel groups.

Taking gender equality into account, Thomas and Wood (2018) found that increased rates of "women's participation in social, economic, and political processes" (p. 218), coinciding with the weakening of traditional gender roles, lead to an increased likelihood of women's

armed participation in rebel organizations. Additionally, while investigating the relationship between rebel group ideology and female recruitment, Wood and Thomas (2017) concluded that armed women are more likely to be recruited by secular groups who dispute existing social structures than by religious groups.

Other scholars examined the consequences of female participation on conflict dynamics. To this end, Giri and Haer (2021) investigated the effect of female combatants on conflict duration and determined that the inclusion of armed women results in prolonged conflicts. Braithwaite and Ruiz (2018) determined that rebel groups that include female combatants are more likely to achieve victory than rebel groups that do not include armed women. However, this conclusion is only applicable to rebel groups that do not forcibly recruit women.

The inclusion of female combatants can also provide other strategic benefits to the rebel groups. For instance, Thomas (2021) discusses that women who are recruited for terrorism provide their organizations with practical benefits and "improve their operations and achieve important tactical goals" (p. 772). As elaborated on earlier, Alison (2004) explains how women have "used local cultural expectations" (p. 456) and "existing conservative gender constructions and stereotypes" (p. 456) to gain an advantage over their enemies. Overall, Henshaw et al. (2019) deduce that the impact of female recruitment, and thus, women's inclusion, has largely been perceived as a positive development for rebel groups. To this end, the scholars conclude that "groups who recruit women fight longer, achieve more territorial gains, and increase their likelihood of a negotiated settlement" (Henshaw et al., 2019, p. 1092).

Conflict lethality

The second aspect of this research focuses on the lethality of conflict. Following an initial decline in civil wars after the end of the Cold War, Einsiedel et al. (2017) observe a steep increase in major and minor civil wars, with "the number […] ha[ving] almost tripled in the past decade" (p. 2). Moreover, the authors describe that "from 2011 to today [2017], there has been a six-fold increase in battle deaths, with 2014 and 2015 being the deadliest years on the battle-field since the end of the Cold War" (Einsiedel et al., 2017, p. 2). These observations align with the broader discussion on why some conflicts are more severe than others.

Research has primarily focused on the structural causes of conflict lethality to answer this question. To this end, Aliyev (2020) underlines the dominant focus on conflict type and the ethnic characteristics of the opposing parties. Concerning conflict type, Balcells and Kalyvas (2014) argue that irregular wars are significantly less deadly than conventionally fought conflicts. The literature remains divided about the influence of ethnicity on conflict. On the one hand, Eck's (2009) research found that conflicts in which mobilization takes place along ethnic lines are "92% more likely to escalate to war than nonethnically mobilized conflicts" (p. 384). Other scholars concluded that "ethnic fractionalization reduces battle-field severity" (Balcells & Kalyvas, 2014, p. 1405). Similarly, Lacina (2006) determines that ethnicity cannot explain the severity of conflicts. However, a study by Aliyev and Souleimanov (2019) underlines the relevance of ethnicity, arguing that "ethnicity plays a significant role in militias' contribution to conflict lethality" (p. 482).

The literature also discusses other possible explanations for conflict severity. Mierau (2015) stresses that religious, ethnonationalist, and leftist ideological groups positively impact conflict lethality. Moreover, Lacina (2006) affirms that political characteristics are fundamental for explaining conflict severity and concludes that civil wars in democracies are less lethal than in non-democracies. In addition, the author points out that foreign aid and intervention

influence the severity of conflict. This finding aligns with Beardsley et al. (2019), who affirm that peacekeeping reduces battlefield casualties. Investigating the relationship between militia presence and conflict lethality, Aliyev (2020) concluded that "the presence of PRMs [pro-regime militias] indicates that conflicts will likely become more lethal" (p. 763). Similarly, Asal and Shkolnik (2021) identify insurgent alliances as significant determinants of whether a conflict increases in severity.

Moving to capacity-related factors, Lacina (2006) hypothesized that more severe conflicts occur in weak states. However, the author concluded that state strength variables, such as gross domestic product (GDP), could not account for differences in battle-related deaths. Mierau (2015) investigated capacity-related factors further, examining the size of rebel groups. The author states that admittingly "larger groups tend to engage in more attacks"; this "may be simply a mechanical relationship (i.e. bigger groups engage in more incidents because they can mobilize more members)" (Mierau, 2015, p. 32). However, upon closer inspection, Mierau (2015) concludes that size is not a determining factor for conflict lethality.

This relevant discussion regarding female combatants and conflict lethality thus highlights the circumstances and consequences of including armed women in rebel groups and how this inclusion changes conflict dynamics. Furthermore, this section provides an overview of multiple factors influencing conflict lethality. However, the relationship between the inclusion of female combatants in rebel groups and conflict lethality has not been investigated yet. Therefore, addressing this gap in the literature and analyzing the relationship between female combatants and conflict lethality will contribute to a better understanding of women's roles in civil wars.

Theoretical framework

Having addressed the relevant literature, the following section describes the theoretical framework of this research. After conceptualizing the two main variables and outlining the proposed theories, this section will present two hypotheses to be tested in the analysis.

Conceptualizations

Female combatant

Mehrl (2022) explains that "in order to win any war, an armed group must defeat the enemy on the battlefield [and] also win and keep the support of the civilian population" (p. 2). On the one hand, recruiting women into the ranks of combatants provides rebel groups with more armed members, fulfilling the groups' recruitment goals while potentially strengthening their fighting capacities at the same time. On the other hand, female rebels are seen as "less dangerous" (Mehrl, 2022, p. 2) and not as "'real' combatants" (Cohen, 2013, p. 410). Ergo, female combatants are not perceived as a threat, which allows the rebel group to gain and keep the needed civilian support. Although the connection with the civilian population could be maintained by female rebel group members who do not bear arms, women in support roles do not participate in the fundamental aspect of war. Unarmed women cannot defeat the enemy on the battlefield. Therefore, this thesis only focuses on female combatants and not on women engaging in other non-combat roles such as "cooks, nurses, spies, administrators, translators, [or] radio operators" (Goetz, 2012, p. 24).

Wood and Thomas (2019) provide a detailed definition of who can be regarded as a female combatant: "all female members who underwent military training, received combat arms, and directly participated in organized violence on behalf of the organization in any capacity during the conflict" (p. 2). This definition clearly differentiates female combatants from

women in support roles. Hence, this conceptualization is the most suited for the scope of this thesis.

Conflict lethality

In this thesis, conflict lethality is measured in the number of battle-related deaths that stem from the conflict. As such, this research relies on the commonly used definition of battle-related deaths provided by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). This definition states that "battle-related deaths refer to those deaths caused by the warring parties that can be directly related to combat" (Pettersson, 2021, p. 3). Therefore, this type of death "includes battle-field fighting, guerrilla activities (e.g. hit-and-run attacks/ambushes) and all kinds of bombardments of military bases, cities and villages" (Pettersson, 2021, p. 3). Although Pettersson (2021) points out that the targets of these attacks are primarily "military forces […], there is often substantial collateral damage" (p. 3). Thus, conflict lethality, measured in battle-related deaths, includes all casualties, military, and civilian, stemming from regular and irregular types of combat. Moreover, it should be noted that for this thesis, the terms 'lethality' and 'severity' are used interchangeably.

Gendered expectations and threat perception

The underlying concept for answering the proposed research question is society's different expectations for men and women. For one, these highly gendered expectations result in the previously discussed essentialist stereotype of women's peacefulness and men's aggression. Nevertheless, women join rebel groups and take up arms. Consequently, these women "interrupt gender stereotypes, [as] they are not the helpless and peaceful women that soldiers need to protect" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 5). Instead, society often deems armed women

"more violent and frightening" (Alison, 2004, p. 457) than their male colleagues[2]. This phenomenon can be explained by female combatants having to be "more tough, ruthless and less-sympathetic – in a word, more macho – in order to compete for status and recognition in a traditionally patriarchal context" (de Silva, 1995, p. 184).

Militaries are places that traditionally center on a rigorous understanding of masculinity. To this end, Marlow (as cited in Morris, 1996) explains that "in the world of the combat soldier […] masculinity is an essential measure of capability" (p. 708). These observations result in two interlinked and each other reinforcing phenomena. Firstly, the military becomes a hyper-masculine space that focuses on "toughness, self-sufficiency, and dominance" (Morris, 1996, p. 710). Secondly, masculinity becomes militarized. This concept of "militarized masculinity" (Eichler, 2014, p. 81) refers to "the assertion that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired and proven through military service" (Eichler, 2014, p. 81). Consequently, women have to adhere to hyper-masculine standards if they want to be recognized as capable members of rebel groups.

Similarly, Loken (2017) sees the organizational culture or "the set of basic assumptions, values, norms, beliefs, and formal knowledge that shape collective understandings" (Kier, 1997, as cited in Loken, 2017, p 82) as an explanation for violence. Violent behavior is reinforced through "group social identity and norm internalization" (Loken, 2017, p. 83). Thus, a hyper-masculine organizational culture pushes its members to commit violence. Aggressiveness and other characteristics associated with masculinity become a prerequisite for female combatants to be accepted as group members. This is especially important in the light of the commonly held view "that women are not 'real' combatants" (Cohen, 2013, p. 410). Ergo, female combatants must overcome gendered expectations by acting especially violent during combat

[2] These characterizations contradict statements about female combatants not being perceived as "real combatants" (Cohen, 2013, p. 410). This showcases the importance of contextualizing female combatants and how gender and gendered expectations are socially constructed.

activities. This way, armed women can prove themselves in the hyper-masculine environment associated with conflict and military structures. Therefore, it can be expected that the attempt to overcome gendered expectations through increased violence on the battlefield will result in more severe conflicts. Consequently, the following hypothesis can be derived:

H_1: The presence of female combatants in rebel groups increases the number of battle-related deaths.

In addition, the literature points out how the inclusion of female combatants can provide rebel groups with strategic benefits (Alison, 2004; Braithwaite & Ruiz, 2018; Henshaw et al., 2019). More specifically, rebel groups employing suicide terrorism as part of their battle strategies profit significantly from the inclusion of female perpetrators (Alakoc, 2020; Fullmer et al., 2019; Thomas, 2021). The success of suicide terrorism largely depends on the attackers' ability to get close to their intended target (Thomas, 2021). Cunnigham (2007, as cited in Thomas, 2021) elaborates that "one of the most significant advantages held by female terrorists is that their potential is denied, ignored, and diminished, and as a result they are almost always unanticipated, underestimated, and highly effective" (p. 776). This underestimation of women's ability to carry out violence stems again from gendered expectations about women's 'appropriate' behavior.

From the observations on suicide attacks, two questions can be derived. First, should terrorism be seen as a separate incident or as a warfare strategy, and second, how applicable are the advantages female suicide terrorists have compared to regular female combatants? In this study, terrorism is regarded as a combat strategy. This conclusion is in line with Sambanis (2008), who argues that "terrorism is a complex phenomenon" (p. 201) and thus, can be seen as both a combat strategy and a separate form of violence. Moreover, the casualties of suicide

attacks fall within the definition of battle-related deaths. Hence, a more complete picture of conflict lethality can be provided by including terrorism as a battlefield strategy.

Regarding the second question, it must be noted that terrorism relies on an initial element of surprise. The ability of women to provoke less suspicion is why female perpetrated suicide terrorism results in more fatalities (Alakoc, 2020). However, Article 44 (3) of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions stipulates that combatants must be distinguishable from civilians when they engage in military operations if the nature of the hostilities allows for such distinction to be possible (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1977). Consequently, the classification of 'terrorist' and whether terrorist non-state actors can be viewed as combatants is a contentious question.

It can be argued that terrorist attacks fall under hostilities that do not allow for a distinction between combatant and civilian. For successful terrorism, the perpetrators must be indistinguishable from civilians. To this end, terrorism is similar to other irregular tactics that rely on the element of surprise, i.e., guerilla warfare. Thus, in line with the definition of 'female combatant,' and under the condition that the terrorist attacks are conducted as part of a battlefield strategy, a female suicide terrorist is not only a terrorist; she is also a combatant. Therefore, as a female combatant, she can exploit the prevalent gender expectations of being inconspicuous.

Even if female combatants are visibly distinguishable from civilians during military operations, other than terrorism, these combatants still have to adhere to the same gendered expectations society stipulates. This means that the rebel groups' enemies underestimate female combatants, as they do not expect armed women to act as violently as they do. Women are not seen as a threat. Ultimately, this underestimation results in strategic advantages for the rebel groups, and their attacks result in more casualties.

However, this advantage can only be sustained as long as armed women constitute a small portion of the rebel group's fighting forces. A lower number of female combatants preserves the element of surprise. If the prevalence of female combatants increases within a rebel group, and with every successful attack that can credibly be led back to a female perpetrator, the element of surprise diminishes. Hence, the opposing party's threat perception changes, and armed women are no longer a 'new' and 'surprising' phenomenon. Consequently, the opposing party is more aware of the potential danger women pose and expects women to carry out attacks. Hence, the opposing party changes their battlefield strategies in response to the new threat. Accordingly, a second hypothesis is proposed:

> H_2: *A lower prevalence of less than 5% of female combatants in rebel groups increases the number of battle-related deaths.*

Methodology

This study applies a specific form of a mixed-method analysis to test the two proposed hypotheses. Liebermann's (2005) nested analysis combines a large-N analysis (LNA) with a small-N analysis (SNA) of a case also investigated in the LNA dataset. To this end, the SNA can have a theory-testing function if the initial quantitative analysis yields robust results. Hence, the SNA complements the LNA by providing contextual evidence (Lieberman, 2005). A mixed-method approach was chosen as it increases the "confidence in the central findings" (Lieberman, 2005, p. 436). Relying on either quantitative or qualitative methods alone can limit the internal and external validity of the results. Data triangulation compensates for these limitations (Halpering & Heath, 2020). Moreover, by first quantifying data, which results in a generalizable theory, and then analyzing a specific case in detail for further theory-testing and

contextualization allows this study to draw comprehensive conclusions about the relationship between female combatants and conflict lethality.

Large-N analysis

The goal of the LNA is to provide a first assessment of the proposed hypotheses and investigate the relationship between the presence and prevalence of female combatants and conflict lethality. To this end, separate multiple linear regression analyses will be conducted. The utilized dataset for this study includes 304 cases and is based on different datasets. Rebel groups active during the observation period from 1989 to 2014 are the unit of analysis. The descriptive statistics for all variables can be found in Table 1 in appendix A.

To explain the influence of female combatants on conflict lethality, two datasets are crucial. To begin with, the Women in Armed Rebellion Dataset (WARD v1.3), introduced by Wood and Thomas (2017), provides information on the presence and prevalence of female combatants in different rebel groups between 1964 and 2014. Given the limited data on women in combat roles, this dataset has been described as "the most prominent and comprehensive dataset to record the number of female combatants per rebel group" (Giri & Haer, 2021, p. 6). As previously stated, battle-related deaths are a proxy for conflict lethality. Thus, the second dataset, the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset (BRD v.21.1) by Pettersson et al. (2021), contributes the needed estimates of battle-related deaths covering cases from 1989 to 2021. Consequently, the observational period for the LNA ranges from 1989 to 2014.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable, ***log battle-related deaths***, describes the log of the total number of battle-related deaths caused by all conflicts the rebel group was involved in during the observed time span. The data for this variable has been derived from the *bd_best* variable of the BRD

dataset. To take the uncertainty of the source material into account, the number of battle-related deaths recorded in the BRD dataset has been carefully evaluated and disaggregated (Pettersson, 2021). The UCDP BRD codebook states that "if different reports provide different estimates, an examination is made as to what source is most reliable. If no such distinction can be made, UCDP as a rule include the lower figure given" (Pettersson, 2021, p. 4). Consequently, ***log battle-related deaths*** has been created by combining all battle-related deaths per conflict into a single variable.

Independent variables

The LNA relies on multiple independent variables, which are all based on the *Cat4_prevalence_best* variable of WARD v1.3. Following the coding framework of WARD and the conceptualization of 'female combatant', a woman participating on behalf of a rebel group in at least one of the listed activities below was coded as a female combatant:

- Using arms in combat, including during defensive actions (e.g., protecting camps, returning fire when attacked during non-combat operations, etc.) or against civilian targets.
- Operating artillery or anti-aircraft weapons against enemy targets
- Service in auxiliary and militia forces, provided that they sometimes participated in offensive or defensive combat operations.
- Detonating mines or other explosives against enemy or civilian targets
- Conducting assassinations
- Conducting suicide bombings (Wood & Thomas, 2019, p. 3)

To test the first hypothesis, the independent variable ***female combatant present*** describes whether the rebel group includes female combatants or not. For the second

hypothesis, the LNA investigates the effect of different prevalences of female combatants in armed groups. In line with the *Cat4_prevalence_best* variable of WARD, the second independent variable, ***female combatant prevalence (<5%),*** includes rebel groups with a 'low' presence of less than 5%. The third variable ***female combatant prevalence (5-20%),*** indicates a 'moderate' presence of female combatants ranging from 5 to 20%. The fourth independent variable ***female combatant prevalence (>20%),*** includes rebel groups with a 'high' presence of more than 20% female combatants.

Control variables

Following the discussion presented in the literature review, multiple control variables are needed to test the proposed hypotheses adequately. The first series of chosen control variables is "a standard set of controls commonly tested in large-N analysis on civil war" (Aliyev, 2020, p. 758). Additionally, the LNA also includes context-specific control variables to enhance the internal validity.

During previous research Lacina (2006), Fearon and Laitini (2003), and Aliyev (2020), used gross domestic product (GDP) to control for state (in)capacity and economic development, respectively. This thesis uses a similar approach and includes the control variable ***log GDP***. Based on data from the World Bank (2022b), this variable describes the log of real GDP measured in current US dollars. To account for differences in country size, Aliyev (2020) introduced a variable on population size. Similarly, this thesis uses a log of population estimates from the World Bank database (2022a) to create the control variable ***log population.*** As prolonged conflicts potentially result in more battle-related deaths, it is crucial to control for the time rebel groups were actively involved in conflicts, accumulating at least 25 battle-related deaths. To this end, based on data from the BRD dataset, the control variable ***log conflict years*** has been included.

Lacina (2006) argues that regime type potentially influences combat severity as democracy is associated with fewer battle deaths. Hence, the binary variable, ***democracy***, based on data from the Polity5 dataset, takes the effect of democracy into account. Polity5 ranks countries from -10 (strongly autocratic) to +10 (strongly democratic) and categorizes countries that rate between +6 and +10 as democracies (Center for Systemic Peace, 2022). Consequently, countries ranking between +6 and +10 have been coded as democracies in the dataset of this study.

As underlined by Mehrl (2022), research on the inclusion of female combatants is in the early stages. Thus, information about the presence and prevalence of armed women might not be readily available for rebel groups active prior to 2000. To account for this possibility and based on BRD data, the binary variable ***active in the 2000s*** controls for rebel groups actively involved in conflicts past 1999.

Since the existing literature debates whether ethnicity influences conflict lethality, its potential effect must be considered. Therefore, the binary variable ***ethnic claim*** controls "whether a rebel group has made an exclusive claim to fight on behalf of an ethnic group" (Rüegger & Girardin, 2021, p. 2). Similarly, ***ethnic mobilization*** describes whether "a rebel group is recruiting from an ethnic group" (Rüegger & Girardin, 2021, p. 2). These variables are based on data from the 2021 version of the ACD2EPR dataset (Wucherpfennig et al., 2012), which combines the UCDP/PRIO armed conflict dataset and the ethnic power relations dataset.

The political ideology of rebel groups influences the recruitment of female combatants and conflict lethality (Mierau, 2015; Wood & Thomas, 2017). Based on prior research, data from the Nonstate Armed Groups dataset (San-Akca, 2016) and Tokdemir et al. (2021), multiple binary control variables for political ideology were created. First, the variable ***no ideology*** includes rebel groups that do not have clearly verifiable political ideologies. Second,

to control for secularism and fundamentalism, the variable ***religious (non-Islamist)*** was added. This variable comprises groups that either "promote the interests of a specific religion or religious sect and seek to either establish autonomy from the central government or impose their group's religious doctrine on the entire state" (Wood & Thomas, 2017, pp. 39–40). Third, if the rebel group has the same aspirations but follows an explicit Islamist ideology, this is accounted for in the ***Islamist*** control variable. This distinction is based on observations by Wood and Thomas (2017), who describe that "fundamentalist Islamist beliefs are the least likely to support gender egalitarianism" (p. 40). Therefore, these Islamist groups have firm gendered expectations and deploy fewer women in combat roles (de Leede, 2018). ***Nationalist*** controls for groups that seek political change "on behalf of a distinct ethnic or national community" (Wood & Thomas, 2017, p. 40). The last control variable, ***leftist***, accounts for all rebel groups with a Marxist-inspired ideology, as those groups typically include more female combatants (Wood & Thomas, 2017).

Since increased levels of gender equality have been shown to impact female rebel recruitment positively (Thomas & Wood, 2018), this LNA includes the control variable ***gender equality***. This variable is based on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) published by the United Nations Development Programme (2022). The last set of control variables concerns the capacity of rebel groups. To this end, the Non-state Actor (NSA) dataset version 3.3 provides information about "the strength of the rebel forces relative to the government forces" (Cunningham et al., 2012, p. 4). This research introduces four different variables accounting for ***rebel strength*** using NSA data. These variables range from the rebel group being ***much weaker***, ***weaker***, having ***parity***, or being ***stronger*** than the opposing party.

Small-N analysis

To further test the robustness of the models inspected during the LNA, the implemented nested analysis approach includes a SNA. To this end, a single-case study of an "on-the-line case" (Lieberman, 2005, p. 442), meaning both variables of the hypothesis are present, will be conducted. A qualitative content analysis is carried out to investigate whether the hypotheses can be maintained. More specifically, a directed content analysis (DCA) is conducted. In this approach, the initial coding frame is based on the proposed theory, and additional categories can be added during the data analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Thus, DCA allows for a systematic and context-sensitive assessment of the selected material (Schreier, 2012). It should be noted that the focus of the SNA lies on testing *Hypothesis 2*, as the presence of female combatants is a prerequisite for having a prevalence in rebel groups.

While the strength of a single-case study lies in its ability to examine a case "intensively" (Halpering & Heath, 2020, p. 234), a comparative approach would "provide [a] greater scope for contextualization" (Halpering & Heath, 2020, p. 238). However, a comparative approach extends beyond the scope of this research.

Case selection

The SNA investigates the Somali rebel group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (HSM), or al-Shabaab. This group has a prevalence of less than 5% female combatants while also being involved in highly lethal conflicts; thus, HSM embodies an "on-the-line case" (Lieberman, 2005, p. 442). With allegiances to al-Qaeda, this Islamist rebel group has engaged in attacks as an independent organization since 2006 (Stanford University, 2019). HSM aims to oust the Somali government and foreign troops stationed in Somalia to "establish an Islamic emirate […] guided by a strict reading of Shariah law" (Stanford University, 2019, p. 7). To this end, al-Shabaab set clear expectations for women's 'appropriate' behavior. Due to these

conservative gendered expectations, women are not perceived as threats by al-Shabaab's enemies. Hence, the employment of female combatants by HSM increases the surprise factor of their attacks.

Data collection

The analyzed data for the SNA includes 23 newspaper articles published from the formation of HSM as an independent organization in 2006 until the end of the observation period in 2014. This research uses the database Factiva and applies the following search words *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen*, *al-Shabaab*, *attack*, *terrorist, female combatant*, *female terrorist*, and *women*, independently or coupled to filter for relevant articles. Newspapers were chosen as they "reflect all the sociological, political and cultural aspects of the society" (Krtalic & Hasenay, 2012, p. 2) needed to test the proposed hypotheses. Additionally, journalists often report on the ground, which provides additional contextualization of the events. The chosen recording units are sentences and paragraphs.

However, certain limitations arise from relying on newspapers as source material. For one, Somalia is a country experiencing prolonged political instability and conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Therefore, journalism is conducted under difficult and restricted circumstances, which potentially affects the reporting. Furthermore, it is impossible to include domestic Somali newspapers due to language barriers. Thus only articles written in English were considered for this research.

It can be questioned whether the media reports on the gender of the combatants involved in low-scale attacks. Articles often use ungendered terms like 'terrorist' and 'perpetrator' without further specifying if the attacker was a man or a woman. One could view these words as generalizing terms describing all perpetrators, including armed women. However, this is highly unlikely, as gendered expectations forbid women from committing

violence. Newspaper articles remain a suitable source for the SNA, as violent women often receive increased news coverage due to the sensationalizing effect of female perpetrated violence breaking gendered expectations (Auer et al., 2019; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008). Accordingly, this research expects newspaper articles to mention female perpetrated attacks explicitly.

Coding frame

The developed coding frame, found in Appendix B, is based on the assumptions and concepts discussed in the theoretical framework. The employed categories aim at investigating the prevalence of female combatants and conflict lethality. To this end, the category *female combatant*, with multiple subcategories describing numbers and activity levels, includes textual data mentioning female combatants or synonyms thereof. Moreover, the category *conflict lethality* looks at concrete numbers of battle-related deaths, whereas the category *attack type* investigates whether the attack falls under regular or irregular warfare. The subcategory *hidden weapons* records veiled women exploiting gendered expectations by hiding weapons under their clothing.

Results

Results LNA

Female combatant presence

A multiple linear regression was carried out to test whether the presence of female combatants in rebel groups significantly predicts conflict lethality. The regression results, which can be found in Table 2, indicate that the model is significant $F(17,160)=19.137$, $p<0.001$, and can explain 63.5% of the variance. Model 1 shows that the presence of female combatants in rebel

groups positively and significantly predicts conflict lethality (β=0.036, $p<0.001$). Therefore, if rebel groups include female combatants, compared to groups without female combatants' presence, the predicted change in battle-related deaths increases by 0.306, holding all other variables in the model constant.

Regarding the control variables, ***rebel strength (stronger)*** was excluded from the analysis as no correlation exists. Moreover, while statistically significant, much weaker rebel groups negatively correlate with conflict lethality (β=-0.236, $p<0.013$). Consistent with prior expectations, the length of a conflict has a positive and significant influence on conflict lethality (β=1.420, $p<0.001$). The remaining control variables did not yield significant results.

Adding or dropping control variables did not change the substance of these findings, and the regression results support *Hypothesis 1*. Hence this thesis concludes that the presence of female combatants in rebel groups positively influences conflict lethality.

Table 2. *Linear regression model of the presence of female combatants on conflict lethality.*

	Model 1
(Constant)	2.947***
	(0.624)
Female combatant present	0.306***
	(0.093)
Log GDP	-0.015
	(0.066)
Log population	-0.100
	(0.076)
Log conflict years	1.420***
	(0.109)
Democracy	-0.169
	(0.101)
Active in the 2000s	0.124
	(0.096)
Ethnic claim	-0.053
	(0.112)
Ethnic mobilization	0.133
	(0.117)
No ideology	-0.114
	(0.152)
Religious (non-Islamist)	-0.096
	(0.156)
Islamist	-0.036
	(0.136)
Nationalist	-0.076
	(0.131)
Leftist	-0.251
	(0.152)
Gender equality	-0.107
	(0.229)
Rebel strength (much weaker)	-0.236*
	(0.104)
Rebel strength (weaker)	-0.012
	(0.104)
Rebel strength (parity)	-0.127
	(0.194)
R^2	0.670
Adj. R^2	0.635
N	178

Note: Regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets.
$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

Female combatant prevalence

Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to test whether different prevalence levels of female combatants in rebel groups influence conflict lethality. Accounting for <5%, 5-20%, and >20% prevalence of female combatants, respectively, Table 3 presents three different models and their results. The variable ***rebel strength (stronger)*** was again excluded from these analyses.

The regression results for Model 1 (<5%) indicate that this model is significant $F(17,160)=19.070$, $p<0.001$, and can explain 63.4% of the variance. Moreover, Model 1 shows that a low prevalence of female combatants (<5%) positively and significantly predicts conflict lethality ($\beta=0.319$, $p<0.001$). Thus, if rebel groups have a low prevalence of female combatants compared to groups without a low female combatants' presence, the predicted change in battle-related deaths increases by 0.319, holding all other variables in the model constant.

Model 2 (5-20%), another significant model $F(17,160)=17.63$, $p<0.001$, explains 61.1% of the variance. However, the coefficient for a moderate prevalence of female combatants (5-20%) in rebel groups is negative and statistically insignificant ($\beta=-0.098$, $p=0.590$). This means that in rebel groups with a moderate prevalence of female combatants, compared to rebel groups without a moderate presence of female combatants, the predicted change in battle-related deaths decreases by 0.098, holding all other variables in the model constant.

Model 3, investigating the influence of rebel groups with a high prevalence, >20%, of female combatants, also constitutes a significant model $F(17, 160)=17.512$, $p<0.001$, explaining 61.3% of the variance. Although a high prevalence of female combatants is positively associated with conflict lethality, it cannot significantly predict lethality ($\beta=0.217$, $p=0.278$). Hence, if a rebel group has a high prevalence of female combatants compared to groups without a high prevalence, the predicted change in battle-related deaths increases by 0.217, holding all other variables in the model constant.

The only control variables yielding significant results were again ***rebel strength (much weaker)***, having a negative influence on conflict lethality, and ***log conflict years*** with a positive coefficient for all three models. Furthermore, adding or dropping control variables did not change the substance of these findings. Thus, the overall regression results support *Hypothesis 2*. Therefore, this study concludes that a lower prevalence of less than 5% of female combatants increases the number of battle-related deaths.

Table 3. Linear regression model on the prevalence of female combatants on conflict lethality

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
(Constant)	2.991***	3.272***	3.246***
	(0.623)	(0.638)	(0.636)
Female combatant prevalence (<5%)	0.319***		
	(0.098)		
Female combatant prevalence (5-20%)		-0.098	
		(0.182)	
Female combatant prevalence (>20%)			0.217
			(0.199)
Log GDP	-0.015	-0.030	-0.031
	(0.066)	(0.068)	(0.068)
Log population	-0.107	-0.106	-0.101
	(0.076)	(0.078)	(0.078)
Log conflict years	1.511***	1.560***	1.520***
	(0.103)	(0.113)	(0.107)
Democracy	-0.188	-0.169	-0.156
	(0.101)	(0.104)	(0.105)
Active in the 2000s	0.141	0.139	0.127
	(0.096)	(0.099)	(0.100)
Ethnic claim	-0.059	-0.085	-0.078
	(0.112)	(0.115)	(0.115)
Ethnic mobilization	0.137	0.144	0.135
	(0.118)	(0.122)	(0.121)
No ideology	-0.115	-0.128	-0.122
	(0.152)	(0.157)	(0.157)
Religious (non-Islamist)	-0.096	0.073	-0.067
	(0.156)	(0.161)	(0.161)
Islamist	-0.079	-0.098	-0.075
	(0.135)	(0.140)	(0.140)
Nationalist	-0.100	-0.099	-0.083
	(0.131)	(0.135)	(0.135)
Leftist	-0.143	-0.167	-0.236
	(0.151)	(0.156)	(0.165)
Gender equality	-0.106	-0.225	-0.224
	(0.230)	(0.234)	(0.233)
Rebel strength (much weaker)	-0.272*	-0.267*	-0.264*
	(0.104)	(0.108)	(0.107)
Rebel strength (weaker)	0.003	0.001	-0.006
	(0.104)	(0.107)	(0.107)
Rebel strength (parity)	-0.111	-0.030	-0.032
	(0.193)	(0.199)	(0.198)
R^2	0.670	0.648	0.650
Adj. R^2	0.634	0.611	0.613
N	178	178	178

Note: Regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets.
$^{***}p < 0.001$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{*}p < 0.05$

Results SNA

The results of the quantitative analyses provide statistically significant evidence for the hypothesized relationship between the presence and prevalence of female combatants and conflict lethality. In line with the nested analysis approach of this thesis, the case study on al-Shabaab further tests and contextualizes the proposed theories. However, after conducting the DCA, the results of the SNA provide limited evidence for hypothesis verification.

Nevertheless, the analyzed articles offer valuable insights into the types of attacks perpetrated by Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen and the number of casualties caused by these attacks. Thus, the source material paints an accurate picture of conflict lethality. To this end, the articles outline the change in combat tactics and how HSM moved from "face-to-face fighting" to "guerrilla tactics" ("Fatal Product of Power Struggle," 2013, para. 8). This change in combat type and primarily executing "car bombings [and] suicide attacks" (Corcoran, 2014, para. 15) is the point where the proposed theories can be tested.

An increased reliance on irregular warfare tactics would allow female combatants to use gendered expectations in their favor and create a more significant element of surprise. However, the analyzed articles only sparingly discuss the overall involvement of armed women in combat activities. Only one article explicitly states that "a woman was among the suicide bombers" ("Suicide Car Bomb Kills 20 in Mogadishu," 2011, para. 5), while another article reports on a perpetrator being "a man dressed in women's clothing" (Mohamed & Childress, 2009, para. 8). The observation that men can dress as women and exploit the existing gender stereotypes does not confirm the proposed hypotheses. However, it offers further evidence for the underlying theoretical assumptions about gendered expectations and threat perceptions.

Despite the scarce reporting on female combatants within al-Shabaab, one highly lethal and potentially female perpetrated attack received substantial news coverage. In September 2013, HSM attacked the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, killing over 70 people and

wounding 200 more (Counter Extremism Project, 2022). Some sources express that al-Shabaab denied the involvement of women in the Westgate attack. According to an alleged tweet by the rebel group, HSM has "an adequate number of young men who are fully committed and [they] do not employ [their] sisters in such military operations" ("Al-Shabaab Denies Women Involved in Kenya Mall Attack," 2013, para. 4). Nevertheless, other sources maintain the involvement of a female terrorist (Blair & Lough, 2013; Gacheru, 2013). Moreover, Gacheru (2013) reports on a Twitter account representing al-Shabaab as having "praised Lewthwaite for being "a brave lady"" (para. 9). Samantha Lewthwaite, the implicated woman, is also alleged to have been involved in other lethal HSM attacks, such as a grenade attack in Mombasa in June 2012 (Counter Extremism Project, 2022). Some publications portray Lewthwaite as "a key fundraiser and bombmaker for al-Shabaab" (Fife-Yeomans, 2013, para. 12) and as "the chief financier, recruiter, coach, and trainer of terrorists" (Gacheru, 2013, para. 10), ascribing her an important role within the rebel group.

Nevertheless, there is a discrepancy between al-Shabaab's alleged tweets and the other reporting. Gendered expectations can explain these differences. On the one hand, the analyzed sources indicate a general, albeit marginal, willingness to involve women in al-Shabaab's fight and use gendered expectations to the group's advantage. On the other hand, HSM would have to justify using female combatants in the radical Islamist circles the group belongs to. HSM can avoid justifying their battlefield strategies by denying female involvement in prominent attacks while maintaining consistent messaging about 'appropriate' female behavior. On the grounds of the analyzed articles and the "tendency for journalists to sensationalize stories about female terrorists" (Auer et al., 2019, p. 282), it cannot definitively be concluded whether a female combatant was involved in the highly lethal attack and the subsequent siege of the Westgate Mall in Nairobi. Consequently, the case study on Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen fails to

confirm the proposed theories explicitly. However, the analyzed articles offer evidence of how this rebel group has utilized gendered expectations to their advantage.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to investigate the relationship between female combatants' presence and conflict lethality. Based on a thorough literature review and the theoretical framework, this study argued that *the presence of female combatants in rebel groups increases the number of battle-related deaths*. Moreover, this study also suggested that *a lower prevalence of less than 5% of female combatants in rebel groups increases the number of battle-related deaths*. These underlying assumptions have been formed on the grounds of society's gendered expectations of what constitutes 'appropriate' behavior for men and women.

Women are typically seen as peaceful and less violent than men (Alison, 2004; Coulter, 2008), while men have to conform to expectations of "toughness, self-sufficiency, and dominance" (Morris, 1996, p. 710). In these hyper-masculinized conflict and rebel group environments, women are breaking with prevalent and essentializing gender norms. Armed women are not "the helpless and peaceful women that soldiers need to protect from enemies" (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 5). Instead, female combatants often have a "violent and frightening" (Alison, 2004, p. 457) reputation.

Further, this thesis argued that due to the predominance of hyper-masculinity, female combatants have to overcome the current gendered expectations that portray them as more peaceful by committing and participating in violent acts. Moreover, instead of overcoming gendered expectations, female combatants can try to exploit them. To this end, armed women can remain inconspicuous by using their clothing to hide explosives and weapons. Therefore, their enemies do not perceive women as threats, and more lethal attacks can be perpetrated.

However, this advantage can only be sustained for as long as the threat perception and gender stereotypes do not change. Hence, the employment of a low prevalence of female combatants is key in sustaining the element of surprise necessary for successful female perpetrated attacks.

These hypotheses have been tested through a mixed-method analysis. The multiple linear regression analysis result indicates a positive and significant relationship between the presence of female combatants and conflict lethality. Moreover, the results for testing the influence of a lower prevalence of female combatants on conflict lethality also showed positive and significant results. The subsequent case study on the Somali rebel group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen provided further evidence and contextualization for the proposed theories, albeit to a lesser extent. Therefore, on the grounds of the qualitative and quantitative analyses, it can be concluded that the presence of female combatants in rebel groups affects the lethality of civil wars.

However, further research into this relationship is needed. First, the utilized dataset does not account for temporal variations of female combatants in rebel groups. Taking the timing of women's recruitment, as well as fluctuations in female combatants' presence into account, would provide additional information about the influence of armed women on conflict lethality and how this influence changes over time. Second, instead of conducting a single-case study, a comparative approach should be implemented to account for the different levels of female combatant prevalence. Such an approach would allow for more thorough theory testing. Third, future research should include different types of source material, such as direct statements of rebel groups or female combatants. This would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of gendered expectations and threat perception. Lastly, the observation period of this thesis should be extended to the present day. As described by Einsiedel et al. (2017), there has been a significant increase in battle deaths since 2014. Thus, an extended observation period would allow these latest developments to be incorporated.

Further, this study also has policy implications. With an increased understanding of women not only being victims of conflicts but also active participants, states, as well as national and international organizations, need to adjust their responses to rebel groups. First, policies need to be developed to prevent women from becoming combatants and joining rebel groups. To this end, the push and pull factors of rebel recruitment need to be closely examined, and policy responses need to be adjusted to include the needs of women. Second, to avoid attempts to overcome stereotypes through violence or the exploitation of existing gender norms, efforts should be made to reduce harmful gender stereotypes for men and women alike.

Moreover, women or people dressed in clothing typically associated with women, should not be overlooked when it comes to threat assessment. Women's roles in conflict and rebel groups are multifaceted, and acknowledging women as credible sources of violence allows for more effective countermeasures to female perpetrated violence and battlefield strategies. Recognizing female combatants as serious threats and capable members of rebel groups is necessary to understand the full complexities of civil war.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Descriptive statistics

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics.*

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Log battle-related deaths	304	2.623	.827	1.40	5.25
Female combatant present	304	.28	.451	0	1
Female combatant prevalence (<5%)	304	.181	.386	0	1
Female combatant prevalence (5-20%)	304	.056	.230	0	1
Female combatant prevalence (>20%)	304	0.461	.210	0	1
Log GDP	268	10.312	1.00	8.31	14.47
Log population	304	7.413	.734	5.60	9.12
Log conflict years	304	.418	.404	0	1.41
Democracy	304	.21	.408	0	1
Active in the 2000s	304	.57	.496	0	1
Ethnic claim	304	.53	.500	0	1
Ethnic mobilization	304	.74	.439	0	1
No ideology	304	.30	.460	0	1
Religious (non-Islamist)	304	.06	.230	0	1
Islamist	304	.16	.371	0	1
Nationalist	304	.49	.501	0	1
Leftist	304	.14	.346	0	1
Gender equality	188	.673	.192	.173	.995
Rebel strength (much weaker)	304	.296	.457	0	1
Rebel strength (weaker)	304	.339	.474	0	1
Rebel strength (parity)	304	.066	.248	0	1
Rebel strength (stronger)	304	.010	.099	0	1

Appendix B: Coding framework and analysis table

Table 4. *Coding framework.*

Category name	Subcategory name	Coding tag	Description/ Indicators
Female combatant	Female combatant present	FCP	The text mentions female combatants, armed women, female terrorists, female freedom fighters, or female martyrs in general.
	Female combatant number	FCN	The text mentions a specific number of female combatants, armed women, female terrorists, female freedom fighters, or female martyrs in general.
	Active female combatant	AFC	The text mentions female combatants, armed women, female terrorists, female freedom fighters, or female martyrs being the perpetrator of an attack.
Conflict lethality	Battle-related deaths	BRD	The text mentions concrete numbers of battle-related deaths (as defined by the UCDP Battle-related deaths dataset (Pettersson, 2021, p. 3).
Type of attack	Irregular combat	CA	The text mentions suicide attacks, car bombs, ambushes, or other irregular types of combat.
	Open confrontation	OC	The text mentions tactics associated with conventional warfare, such as engaging in an open confrontation.
	Concealed weapons	HW	The text mentions how women (or men dressed in women's clothing) used their clothing to conceal weapons.

Table 5. *Female combatants and conflict lethality qualitative analysis table.*

Category	Subcategory	Example of quotes
Female combatant	Female combatant present	"The administration of moderate Ahlu Sunna Waljama's ASWJ on Sunday charged Al shabaab fighters in Gedo region in southern Somalia with starting of recruiting toddlers and women to fight from their side." ("Al Shabaab Recruiting Kids And Women , Says Ahlu Sunna," 2011) "While the shock of the involvement of a female terrorist has made headlines around the world, females engaging in acts of politically motivated violence is not a new, or rare, phenomenon." ("Deadly Venom of Terror 'Widows,'" 2013) "These young men, and sometimes women, have been the mainstay of suicide operations inside Somalia." (Howden, 2013) "The following day, al-Shabaab forced residents of

		Bulo Burde district in Hiran region to attend a public rally where they presented women and young children waving guns in the air." (Mohamud, 2014)
	Female combatant number	"Few Kenyans had ever heard the name Samantha Lewthwaite before that fateful Saturday morning last week when terrorists, who subsequently identified themselves as Al-Shabaab fighters, attacked the upmarket Westgate Mall in Westlands, Nairobi." (Gacheru, 2013)
	Active female combatant	"Survivors told Reuters at least one of the attackers was a woman." (Blair & Lough, 2013) "A key fundraiser and bombmaker for al-Shabaab, she was reportedly last seen last June after grenades were thrown into a Mombasa bar killing three people." (Fife-Yeomans, 2013)

		"In additional, Somali police spokesman Abdullahi Hassan Barise confirmed that a women was among the suicide bombers." ("Suicide Car Bomb Kills 20 in Mogadishu," 2011)
Conflict lethality	Battle-related deaths	"At least five people were killed Monday in southern Somalia including a district police commander after al-Shabaab guerrillas attacked and captured a district near Baidoa, seat of Somalia's interim parliament." ("5 Killed As Ethiopians , Al-Shabaab Clash Near Baidoa," 2008) "EXPLOSIONS last night rocked Kenya's Westgate Mall where Islamic militants have killed at least 69 people in a three-day hostage bloodbath." (Fife-Yeomans, 2013) "Al-Shabaab's first signature strike outside of Somalia came in 2010 when co-ordinated explosions killed more than 70 people in the

		Ugandan capital, Kampala, on the night of the World Cup soccer final." ("Fatal Product of Power Struggle," 2013) "At the same time, some Al-Shabaab factions began what appeared to many Somalis as senseless attacks -- a suicide bombing against a graduation ceremony for doctors in 2009 which killed 19 people; an attack on a medical clinic used by African Union forces and civilians in January 2010; and last October another suicide attack against scholarship students gathered for an event near the Education Ministry. That attack killed more than 100 people." (Lister)
Type of attack	Irregular combat	""They have developed guerrilla tactics instead of face-to-face fighting," said a Somali intelligence officer who identified himself as Ahmed, a former

	Islamist fighter. ("Fatal Product of Power Struggle," 2013)
	"The group's senior leadership reportedly trained in Afghanistan and quickly adopted the tactics of the Afghan and Iraqi Islamist militants; car bombings, suicide attacks and highly publicised beheadings." (Corcoran, 2014)
	"Islamist insurgents have been carrying out frequent raids in the Mogadishu area." ("Somali Minibus Attack Toll Rises," 2008)
	As al-Shabaab has been losing the war against the government, it has increasingly turned to terrorist tactics such as suicide attacks, car bombings and targeted assassinations. (Odowa & Tarvainen, 2014)
Open confrontation	"Feared throughout the Horn of Africa, the Somalia-based militant group operates as both an insurgent force – capable of

	conventional-style warfare in seizing and holding territory - and a terrorist movement prepared to hit civilian targets in order to inflict as many casualties as possible." (Corcoran, 2014)
Concealed Weapons	"In a separate incident on Friday, insurgents attacked the convoy of President Abdullahi Yusuf as it was leaving for Ethiopia for talks over the country's fragile ceasefire." ("Somali Minibus Attack Toll Rises," 2008) "The bomber appeared to have been a man dressed in women's clothing, according to evidence seen by a Wall Street Journal reporter present at the scene, and a statement by the Somali information minister." (Mohamed & Childress, 2009)