One-Sided Violence and Non-State Conflict
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Introduction

The first, and arguably the most significant, step in conflict prevention is having access to reliable information. The Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) has published annual data on armed conflict since 1987. Until now, the function of the UCDP has been to collect, analyze and present data on annual state-based conflicts, that is, interstate or intrastate conflicts. In 2002, the project expanded its data in two ways. First, total fatality numbers (precise numbers of how many people die in conflict) for all conflicts were estimated for 2002 and 2003, as a means to assess the severity of a conflict.

Secondly, UCDP expanded the scope of the data to include other types of collective violence. UCDP now codes for non-state conflict, or conflict between two groups, neither of which is the government of the state, and one-sided violence, or the unilateral use of force against civilians. These four categories—interstate conflict, intrastate conflict, non-state conflict and one-sided violence—are considered to be separate and mutually exclusive. Fatalities that are included in these categories must be the result of direct violence, or violence that occurs when one person or group inflicts harm directly on another.

The impetus for creating and coding additional types of collective violence arose in part from the sense that a considerable amount of violence had not been accounted for in the existing system. Above all, the aim of the new categories is to improve the understanding of the civilian effects of conflict. For example, many situations of extreme violence in the 1990’s—such as the mass killings in Rwanda—were not included in state-based conflict because the violence was not directed at a conflict actor, but rather at civilians. Rwanda was coded as an intermediate conflict in 1994 because the violence between the actual conflict parties did not cause over 1,000 fatalities, UCDP’s threshold for war. To have Rwanda in 1994 recorded as an intermediate conflict belies the severity of the violence that took place there. To understand the effects of conflict on the civilian population, there needs to be a broader understanding of different forms of collective violence.

In creating the new categories of non-state conflict and one-sided violence UCDP faced a number of theoretical and conceptual issues that influenced the way these categories were defined. These issues have the potential to affect the data that UCDP collects and reports. The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate on how UCDP constructed these definitions, in order to highlight potential questions or problems that may arise for those who wish to use this data.

1 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. This project was funded by the Human Security Centre, Liu Institute, University of British Colombia.
2 UCDP has attempted to ascertain yearly fatality estimates in previous years, but this data was not collected systematically, and was rarely published.
3 Fatalities recorded in interstate and intrastate conflict must have occurred in fighting between conflict parties; civilians are recorded only when they are killed in crossfire-like situations. Please see the UCDP definition for “battle-related deaths” for more information on this point.
Understanding One-sided Violence

Creating the “One-sided Violence” category: the issue of genocide and massacres

Wanting to better understand the pattern of violence against civilians, UCDP first considered coding the categories ‘genocide’ and ‘massacre’. This, however, became immediately problematic for a number of reasons: firstly, the terms genocide and massacre are highly contested; and, secondly, civilians are also killed in low-level situations which are neither massacre nor genocide, but which have important implications for the inhabitants of an area.

The term *genocide* was developed by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 from the Greek roots ‘genos,’ meaning nation or tribe, and ‘cide’ meaning killing. The term was subsequently employed in the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide (UNCG), which provides the classic definition of genocide, “Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”\(^4\) Both Lemkin and the UNCG conceptualized genocide in the context of recent events, namely Nazi Germany and post-WWI Armenia.

A number of aspects of this definition are contested, but most of the debate centers on the requirement that the victim group be defined in terms of racial, ethnic, national or religious criteria. Due to the political difficulties that arose during UN debates over the Genocide Convention, this definition did not recognize that genocide could be directed at groups defined by other characteristics—such as political or social.

Dissatisfaction with the UN definition of genocide among scholars eventually became acute. Barbara Harff advanced the discussion by creating the term *politicide*, which is the murder of any person/people by a government/organized party because of their politics or for political purposes. Rudolph Rummel further expanded this concept with the term *democide*, which he defined as being the murder of any person/people by a government, including genocide, politicide and mass murder.\(^5\)

Instead of creating new terms, other scholars chose instead to conceptualize genocide in broader terms. Chalk and Jonassohn, for instance, define genocide as “a form of

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\(^4\) Art. II) ...Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

a) killing members off the group;

b) causing bodily or mental harms to members of the group;

c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part;

d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;

e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

\(^5\) Many have taken up where Harff left off, using ever more terms for describing genocidal behavior; there are a myriad of terms which have been created to label and categorize mass killings. Stein (2002, p.40) arranges them alphabetically: communalism, cultural genocide (culturecide), democide, destructive programme, ethnic cleansing, ethnocide, femicide, gendericide, gendered atrocity, genocidal killings, genocidal massacre, genocidal process, genocidal rape, genocidal state, genocidal society, genocide and genocide types, genocide/direct, genocide/indirect, genocide/selective, governmental crime, gynocide, Holocaust (destruction of European Jews), h/Holocaust (destruction excluding European Jews), infanticide, man-made deaths, massacre, mega murderers, pogrom, politicide, relations of genocide, Shoah, state crime, state sponsored mass murder, total war, vigilantism.
one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.”

While widening the genocide concept has its merits, there are also a number of criticisms of it, the most obvious of which is that the concept risks losing both clarity and force. In particular, many Holocaust scholars are critical of expanding the term, fearing that its original thrust will be lost in a conceptual morass.

Massacre as a term is also fraught with definitional ambiguity. Colombia provides a classic example of the difficulties of defining massacre: the Colombian police define massacre as at least 4 people killed in the same place, while the Colombian Human Rights Ombudsman defines massacre as at least 3 people killed in the same action. The Correlates of War project distinguishes between civil war and political massacres by requiring that the weaker side must impose casualties on its opponent equal to at least 5% of its own to be coded as civil war; thus, the groups being massacred provides no effective resistance. In short, these few examples demonstrate that there is no single accepted definition of massacre from which to depart.

Moreover, if UCDP were to code for both massacres and genocide, there would be the problem that the two categories are not mutually exclusive, as genocide is often made up of a series of massacres. To make the raw data useful, UCDP also sought to avoid subjectivity as much as possible; it was necessary that our definitions be broad enough to allow for individual researchers to exercise their own criteria.

Finally, in addition to the definitional issues with the terms massacre and genocide, we also found them inadequate to reflect all the types of violence to which individuals are subject. Civilians are often killed in contexts of low-level attacks in conflict areas that are usually not considered to be massacre. In India, for example, UCDP recorded a best estimate of fewer than 450 civilians killed by Kashmir insurgents in over 160 incidents in 2002; this produces an average of roughly 2.5 people killed per incident. The pattern of violence in Kashmir, like many conflict areas, is the low-scale, almost daily, killing of civilians throughout the region. We concluded that the best option would be a category that would record all killing of civilians, regardless of whether they were killed individually or in a large group. The term one-sided allows us to capture this behavior and to describe it in a way that is not conceptually loaded; thus genocidal behavior, massacre and low-scale killing of civilians is encompassed by the concept of one-sided violence.

Data Limitations for One-sided Violence

UCDP’s data on one-sided violence has its limitations. The main goal of the one-sided violence category is to record violence by states and organized groups which occurs in society, thus UCDP provides data on a small aspect of state repression. In particular, UCDP has excluded extrajudicial killings in government facilities. We have chosen to do this for two main reasons: 1) because we have no resources for investigating such violence and we felt that this would lead to a diminished quality of the overall data; and, 2) groups like Freedom House, Amnesty International, and
Human Rights Watch already investigate and report on such violence. Instead of trying to spread the one-sided violence category beyond the scope of what UCDP could reasonably collect data on, we have instead chosen to focus on a smaller aspect of one-sided violence and leave data collection on extrajudicial killings in government facilities to those organizations that have the experiences and resources to provide such data.

Indeed, UCDP’s ability to provide information on one-sided violence in general is also constrained by our access to information. UCDP is limited by the information available from journalists, witnesses, and human rights groups in ascertaining the extent of such behavior. Because those civilians killed are often labeled as being ‘rebels’ by the government, without case-by-case investigations or eyewitness testimonies, UCDP is unable to know exactly what the context of the violence was. There are often local NGOs that collect such data, but there is a great deal of regional variation in the availability of data.

We observed while collecting data for 2002 that governments that are not in conflict are, for the most part, able to keep one-sided violence behind closed doors, i.e. in jails/other government facilities. In almost every case, it was governments that were dealing with some kind of conflict that resorted to open one-sided violence. The societal breakdown that accompanies conflict often forces governments to conduct their repressive behavior more openly.

Why attack civilians?

There is only a limited amount of research that attempts to explain why governments or rebel groups sometimes target civilians. Some of the hypotheses include: to intimidate the population into supporting the attacking party;\(^8\) to destroy the opposition party’s support base,\(^9\) for personal reasons,\(^10\) and for economic reasons, such as looting. Another hypothesis is that there may be a connection between military setbacks and attacks on civilians; according to this line of thinking, the targeting of civilians in armed conflicts is sometimes used by warring parties as a signal of resolve when losing battles in order to alter the bargaining range for the future.\(^11\)

Civilian support is often crucial for success; rebel groups rely on local populations for supplies and housing. Rebels are also often numerically weak in comparison to the government, meaning that their ability to conduct an insurgency campaign is dependent on their ability to hide from government forces. Civilians are also important to the government, which needs the assistance of local populations in finding rebel groups, particularly in rural areas and areas with difficult terrain. Moreover, both parties sometimes seek to eliminate those civilians that are suspected of supporting their enemy. Kalyvas writes that part of a rebels group’s strategy is to eliminate the representatives of the state, both formal (police, etc.) and informal

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8 Kalyvas (1999).
9 Valentino et al. (2002).
10 Kalyvas’ study of the Greek civil war found that violence in the context of a civil war is often highly personalistic and localistic--rather than purely political or informed by the conflict's grand issues (Kalyvas 2000a).
(suspected civilian informers and collaborators). Governments also seek to eliminate rebels and rebel supports, but must walk a fine line, as Fearon and Laitin point out, “effective counterinsurgency requires government forces to distinguish active rebels from noncombatants without destroying the lives and living conditions of the latter.”

A number of studies suggest that the type of conflict can be important—some researchers assert that guerilla warfare is more likely to elicit attacks on civilians. One large-N study on government-sponsored mass killings found that guerilla warfare proved to have “significant and powerful effects on the likelihood of mass killing.” The same study found that civilian support to rebels was significant, the authors concluded that, “…guerilla warfare is associated with mass killing because guerilla wars tend to involve more direct civilian participation than other forms of combat. In other words, civilian support provides a single causal mechanism that explains both the general association between guerilla warfare and mass killing, as well as the increased likelihood of mass killings in those guerilla wars with the highest levels of civilian support.”

**Non-State conflict: the criminal-political conundrum**

The level of organization required for this category is looser than for state-based conflicts, in order to include many different levels of collective violence. Conflicts between formally organized rebel groups—such as between the FARC and the AUC—are included, as are conflicts between more loosely organized groups. These conflicts, sometimes called communal conflicts, are often defined as conflicts in which disputants describe themselves according to ascriptive criteria, such as race, religion, language, culture, or caste. While groups may mobilize along identity lines, the conflicts themselves often involve a complexity of different explanatory factors.

One main difference between UCDP’s definition for a state-based conflict and a non-state conflict is that unlike in state-based conflicts, the definition for non-state conflict does not require an incompatibility. This is due to the fact that we found it difficult, if not impossible, to adequately define political violence in the absence of a state. The reasons that communal groups fight can often be various and overlapping. In Nigeria, for example, the Hausa-Fulani and “indigenous” ethnic groups were engaged in non-state conflict that took on ethnic and religious overtones. But the conflict was also related to the distribution of resources and the groups’ political representation within the state. Similarly, there are numerous groups that fight over access to resources, be it farmland, control of trade routes, drug crops, etc. Some of these disputes are generally considered “criminal” or “economic” in nature, such as those between rival

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12 Kalyvas (2000b).
14 Valentino et al. (2002): p. 31-32. It should be noted that this study focused on “mass killings” carried out by governments in the context of civil war. This includes direct violence, as well as indirect deaths caused when perpetrators deliberately create conditions expected to cause widespread deaths. Thus, the definitions used in this study differ considerably from UCDP’s.
15 These are only a few examples. For more information on communal conflict, see Gurr (2000). There is also a great deal of literature on ethnic conflict, for instance, Horowitz (1985), Esman (1994), Sisk (1996) and Brown (1993); please note, though, that ethnic conflict usually refers to state-based conflict which has ethnic aspects.
drug cartels. But we did not see a fundamental difference between two groups fighting over land on which to plant drug crops and those fighting over land on which to plant legal crops.

Unwilling to use an ad-hoc approach and unable to find a satisfactory solution to the question of how to define what is political/criminal in the absence of a state, we concluded that we would code all non-state conflict regardless of their motives. As a result, it is possible for all types of non-state conflict to be coded, including incidents usually thought to be of an organized “criminal” nature, such as mafia, drug cartel or gang violence. In practice, this is rarely an issue because of UCDP’s source selection: the main source of information is wire service reports, which do not generally include information on gang violence because of the lack of international interest. Thus, mafia/gang/cartel violence and the like often goes unreported, partially because of the lack of interest by international news bureaus, and partially because of the secretive nature of the groups.
References


Webpages:

http://www.ucdp.uu.se (UCDP’s homepage)
http://www.pcr.uu.se/database/basicSearch.php (UCDP searchable online database)
http://www.amnesty.org (Amnesty International)
http://www.hrw.org (Human Rights Watch)
http://www.freedomhouse.org/ (Freedom House)
Appendix 1. UCDP Definitions

One-sided violence:
One-sided violence is the use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organized group against civilians which results in at least 25 deaths. Extrajudicial killings in custody are excluded.

The separate elements of the definition are operationalized as follows:

1. Use of armed force: use of arms in order to exert violent force, resulting in death
   1.1 Arms: any material means, e.g. manufactured weapons but also sticks, stones, fire, water, etc
2. 25 deaths: a minimum of 25 civilian deaths per year and per actor
3. Government: the party controlling the capital of the state
4. Formally organized group: any non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force
5. State: a state is
   4.1 an internationally recognized sovereign government controlling a specified territory, or
   4.2 an internationally unrecognized government controlling a specified territory whose sovereignty is not disputed by another internationally recognized sovereign government previously controlling the same territory.
6. Extrajudicial killings in custody: when the government of a state kills a person in its custody
   5.1 custody: when the person is located in a prison or another type of governmental facility

Non-state conflict:
A non-state conflict is the use of armed force between two organized groups, neither of which is the government of a state, which results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.

The separate elements of the definition are operationalized as follows:

1. Use of armed force: use of arms in order to promote the parties’ general position in the conflict, resulting in deaths.
   1.1 Arms: any material means, e.g. manufactured weapons but also sticks, stones, fire, water, etc.
2. 25 deaths: a minimum of 25 battle-related deaths per year and per warring dyad
   2.1 battle-related deaths: deaths directly related to combat between the warring parties
3. Organized groups: must be either
   3.1 a formally organized group: any non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force, or
   3.2 any group who does not have an announced name, but who uses armed force and whose violent activity meets at least one of the following organizational requirements:  
           3.2.a) there must be a clear pattern of incidents which are connected, or
           3.2.b) there must be evidence that violence was planned in advance
4. State: a state is
   4.1 an internationally recognized sovereign government controlling a specified territory, or
   4.2 an internationally unrecognized government controlling a specified territory whose sovereignty is not disputed by another internationally recognized sovereign government previously controlling the same territory.
5. Government: the party controlling the capital of the state

Location: states either the governmental party involved (one-sided violence by government) or states the country in which the majority of the violence takes place (one-sided violence by organized groups and non-state conflict).

Regions:
Africa—excluding Egypt
States in Armed Conflict 2003

Americas—including North, Central, and South America and the states in the Caribbean
Asia—including Oceania, Australia and New Zealand
Europe—including the states in the Caucasus
Middle East—Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey and the states of the Arabian peninsula