

# Resources and Conflict Project

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Website: [civilwardynamics.org](http://civilwardynamics.org)

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# Why Target Civilians?

- ▶ Why do combatants in civil wars use terrorism and other forms of violence against non-combatants?
  - ▶ Civil wars are, in part, struggles for popular support
  - ▶ Violence makes securing such support more difficult
- ▶ Project focuses on developing data about the resource base or endowments of rebel groups, and analyzing how these shape conflict dynamics, including violence against civilians, across post-Cold War civil conflicts
- ▶ Consider debate about ISIS since late 2014:
  - ▶ Income from oil, antiquities, taxes has declined
  - ▶ Controls less territory
  - ▶ Have these shifts in its resource base led it to engage in more terrorism overseas? Or would this have occurred in any event?
  - ▶ Project seeks to develop and assess systematically such links between endowments and rebel strategy

# Is there a Rebel Resource Curse?

- ▶ How do economic endowments of non-state violent actors influence their political-military strategies during conflict?
  - ▶ Natural resources (drugs, oil, gemstones)
  - ▶ Criminal activity (extortion, piracy, kidnapping)
  - ▶ Support from external actors
  - ▶ Control of territory
- ▶ Investigate how rebels' endowments influences strategic choices:
  - ▶ Use of terrorism and violence against civilians
  - ▶ Strategies of government forces
  - ▶ Location and severity of conflict
  - ▶ Duration of civil wars

# Rebel Endowments and Conflict Dynamics

- ▶ Influential work (Weinstein, 2007) suggests rebels' endowments shape relationships with civilian population
- ▶ Rebels that exploit natural resources do not need as much support from population
  - ▶ More willing to victimize civilians and to engage in terrorism
  - ▶ Examples: Blood diamonds in west Africa, oil and ISIS
- ▶ Focus has been on the *what*—the physical characteristics of resources, such as ease with which they can be looted
- ▶ Little support for this contention in systematic studies of many rebel groups
- ▶ We suggest two reasons for this:
  - ▶ Lack of adequate data
  - ▶ *How* matters as well—politics of resource extraction influences conflict dynamics

# Rebel Contraband Dataset

- ▶ Unit of analysis: Conflict dyad-year from 1990 to 2012
  - ▶ List of groups from Uppsala Conflict Data Program
  - ▶ Example: LRA-Uganda 2012
- ▶ Key variables:
  - ▶ If and how much rebels profit from specific natural resources
  - ▶ How rebels profit—extortion, theft, booty futures, and smuggling
  - ▶ Rebel involvement in criminal activities (piracy, protection rackets, etc.)
  - ▶ Income, location, type and degree of uncertainty
  - ▶ Data sources: UN Group of Expert Reports, NGOs (ICG, Global Witness), UNODC, scholarly research, systematic searches of news media
  - ▶ Identifier variables to join with country-level, group-level, and GIS datasets

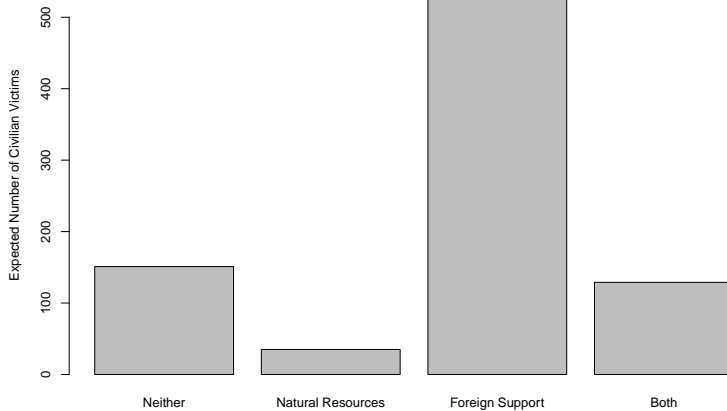
# Natural Resources and Rebel Strategy

- ▶ Permits first large-scale comparative study of link between income from natural resources and treatment of civilians
  - ▶ Statistical analysis of rebel-government conflict dyads from 1990 to 2012, controlling for external support, territorial control, rebel fighting capacity, and other factors
  - ▶ Profiting from natural resources increases expected number of civilian victims of rebel violence by over 150 percent

# Natural Resources and Government Strategy

- ▶ How do rebel endowments influence *government* strategy?
- ▶ Different endowments have different political-military consequences
  - ▶ External support increases threat rebels pose to the government, making it more desperate and willing to attack civilians
  - ▶ Natural resource finance attracts recruits motivated by income rather than political cause, leading to less effective combatants
- ▶ Natural resource endowments associated with less government violence, external support with more government violence





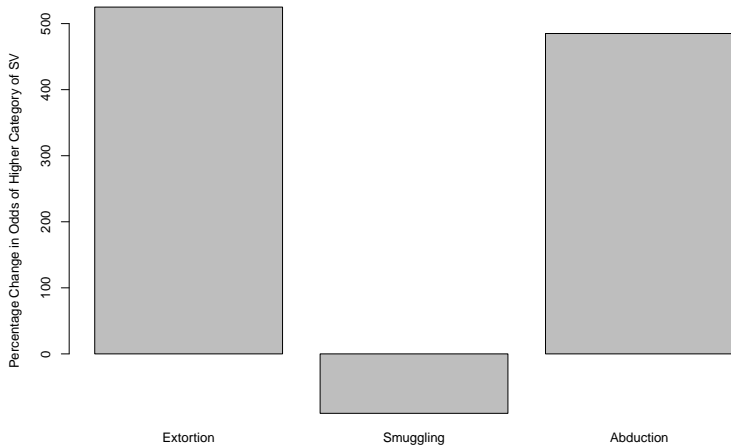
# Extortion and Smuggling

- ▶ *How* rebels profit from natural resources matters as well
- ▶ Extortion: Rebels use violence to extract rents by establishing control over production locations
  - ▶ Reduces incentives for restraint:
  - ▶ Generates income that reduces need for popular support
  - ▶ Alienates producers by reducing their incomes
  - ▶ Includes both lootable resources (diamonds in west Africa) and non-lootable resources (pipelines in Colombia, oil in Syria)
- ▶ Smuggling: Rebels use specialization in violence to move goods overseas
  - ▶ Strengthens incentives for restraint:
  - ▶ Success requires collaboration with non-combatants who have more opportunities to exit the relationship
  - ▶ Cannot establish control over entire area involved in smuggling

# Extortion, Smuggling, and Rebel Strategy

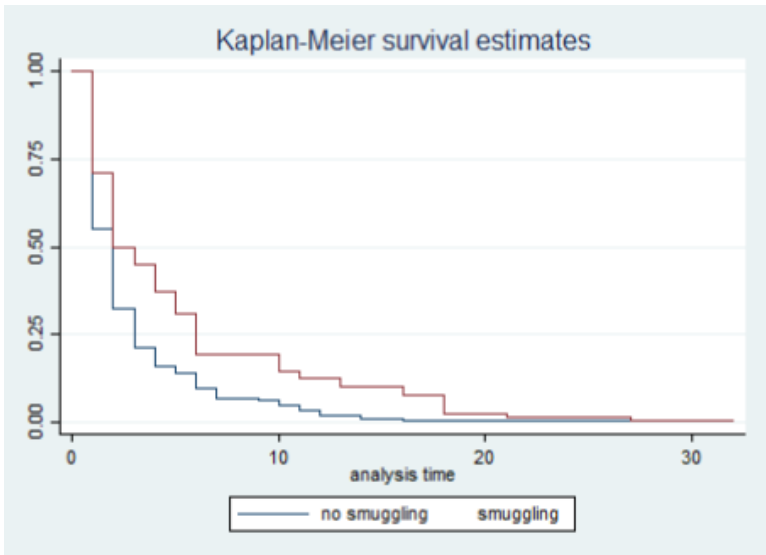
- ▶ Rebels that extort/smuggle should exercise less/more restraint in treatment of civilians
- ▶ Statistical analysis of use of sexual violence by rebel groups from 1990-2012
- ▶ Sexual violence can be a strategic activity of rebel groups to coerce local population or to build cohesion among rebel combatants (Cohen, 2013)
- ▶ But powerfully alienates non-combatants
- ▶ Extortion associated with large increase in use of sexual violence, while smuggling associated with decline

# Extortion, Smuggling, and Sexual Violence



# Extortion, Smuggling, and Conflict Duration

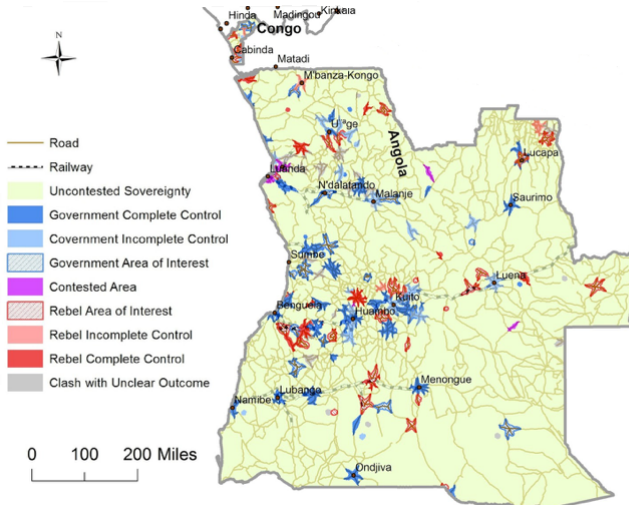
- ▶ Do conflicts involving natural resources last longer? Existing studies reach mixed conclusions
- ▶ Most rely on country-level data or case studies, rather than the rebel group, and do not identify if rebels actually profit from nearby resources
- ▶ Rebels that smuggle more resilient than those who extort
  - ▶ Violent activities spread over larger area with weak government presence
  - ▶ Not dependent on one geographic area or a single resource
  - ▶ Smuggling increases group's "power to resist"



**Figure 1:** Extortion, Smuggling, and the Duration of Civil Wars

# Territorial Control and Conflict Dynamics

- ▶ Has ISIS loss of territory driven it to strike overseas?
- ▶ Measuring territorial control is not straightforward
- ▶ Develop new method based on:
  - ▶ Identifying which actor controls location after battles
  - ▶ GIS algorithms to identify contested areas and zones of incomplete control
  - ▶ Use information about drive times and road networks to map radius of control
- ▶ Data for civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa from 1989 to 2008



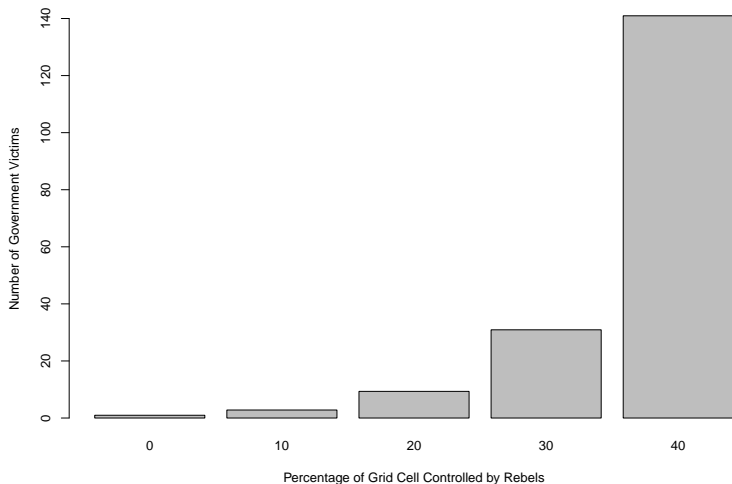
**Figure 2: Territorial Control in Angola, 2000**



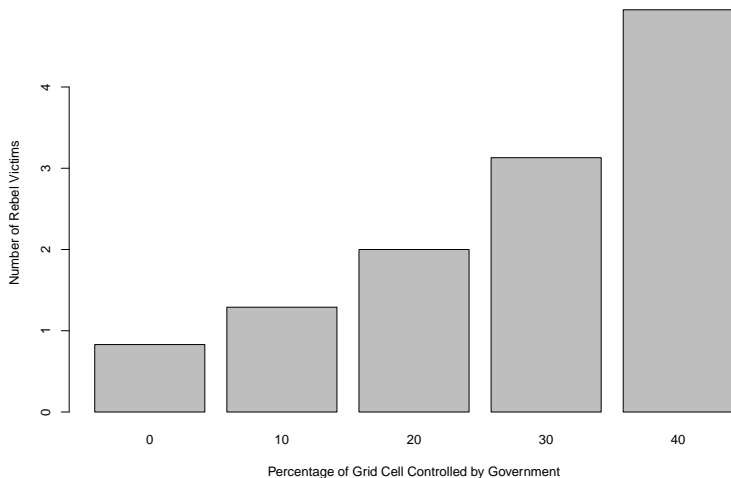
# Territorial Control and Conflict Dynamics

- ▶ Control or seizure of territory increases threat to opposing side
- ▶ Opposing side responds to increased threat with violence against civilians
  - ▶ Prevent defection
  - ▶ Extract resources (military personnel, equipment, intelligence)
- ▶ Effect on government violence larger because:
  - ▶ Government forces typically have more military capabilities, which can inflict more harm on civilians
  - ▶ Loss of territory threatens government's legitimacy and claim to exercise monopoly over violence

# Government Attacks on Civilians When Rebels Control Territory



# Rebel Attacks on Civilians when Government Controls Territory



## Conclusions and Next Steps

- ▶ How armed groups resource themselves influences use of violence against non-combatants
- ▶ Findings suggest potential trade-offs in seeking to protect civilians:
- ▶ Finance from natural resources leads to more civilian victimization by rebels, but less by governments
- ▶ Extortion: More sexual violence but not longer civil wars
- ▶ Smuggling: No effect on sexual violence, but longer civil wars
- ▶ Next steps:
- ▶ Detailed geo-coded data on mineral locations in developing world; will allow micro-level focus on how nearby resources influence location and scale of battles and victimization
- ▶ Open source, near-real time semi-automated system for measuring territorial control from event data; researchers and organizations could use this to develop maps of territorial contestation in other conflicts