Women and Strategies of Violence: Gender Roles, Foreign Support and Maintaining the Rebellion

Caglayan Baser

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

Part of the International Relations Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License. Copyright © 2020 Caglayan Baser
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee and other faculty at Loyola University Chicago for the years of encouragement and guidance. I would like to extend special thanks to my advisor, Alexandru Grigorescu, for his endless support and encouragement. I am extremely grateful to him for believing in me and helping me to overcome many unexpected challenges I encountered throughout my doctoral studies. He provided crucial opportunities to develop my research skills, which had a great impact on how I think about political science research. He maintained a perfect balance between the genuine support of a good friend and the rigorous guidance of a professional researcher. I hope to follow in his footsteps when mentoring my own students. I am also grateful to Olga Avdeyeva and Molly Melin for their useful comments on earlier drafts, which helped me improve both the theoretical arguments and empirics. Their mentorship and continuous support for all the years throughout my Ph.D. have helped me become a better scholar. I also thank Güneş Murat Tezcür for his mentorship and feedback at the initial stages of my doctoral studies.

I am grateful for many colleagues and faculty members at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Especially Matt Winters, Bob Pahre, Avital Livny, Alyssa Prorok, and Cara Wong provided opportunities at Illinois, feedback on my work, and professional advice. I thank Tolgahan Dilgin and Se Young Jung for their valuable help with the IRB process and the technical issues about the experiments I conducted in this dissertation.

I thank Arthur Schmitt Foundation and Loyola University Graduate School for their generous financial support. I benefitted from discussions with seminar participants at the annual
meetings of International Studies Association, Southern Political Science Association, Midwest Political Science Association, International Studies Association – Midwest; Empirical Implications of Theoretical Models (EITM), Women in International Security, and Journeys in World Politics workshops; and the Online Peace Science Colloquium. In particular, I would like to thank John Patty and Maggie Penn for taking the time to engage with my research at EITM and pushing me to think further about my theoretical mechanisms. I am thankful to Amy Atchison for her detailed comments on Chapter 2, which helped me improve the clarity and organization of the arguments.

I was fortunate to have wonderful friends throughout my doctoral studies, whose presence makes me remember graduate school as a pleasant experience. Nuole Chen and Alice Iannantuoni have not only provided extensive feedback on my research at many stages but also have always been there to keep me motivated at difficult times. I am extremely grateful to them and my dear friends Chris Grady, Charla Weiss, Luke Plutowski, and Ekrem Başer -the members of our CACLEC writing group- who helped me greatly improve my writing. I could not have asked for a better academic and emotional support system. Finally, I would like to thank Patrick Hebert for his caring friendship and positivity.

I am grateful to my parents, Tahsin Çetin and Gülten Akdoğan, and my sister, Pınar Çetin Efe, who have continuously supported me before and during graduate school. Lastly, I am indebted to my husband and best friend Ekrem Başer, whose relentless support and patience have been the greatest gift. I cannot possibly express my gratitude enough for him. This dissertation is dedicated to him.
To Ekrem Taha Başer, hayat arkadaşım ve en iyi dostuma.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER ONE: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GENDER, VIOLENCE AND PEACE
- Theoretical Framework 1
- Significance of the Research 3
- Contributions to the Literature 13

## CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN INSURGENTS, GENDER ROLES AND MAINTAINING THE INSURGENCY
- Women’s Significance on Rebel Groups’ Ability to Resist Repression 31
- Research Design and Case Selection 33
- The Case Study: The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) 35
- Macro-Level Hypothesis Testing 56
- Discussion 73

## CHAPTER THREE: PUBLIC PREFERENCES AND FOREIGN SUPPORT FOR GENDER-DIVERSE ARMED MOVEMENTS
- Processing the Information on Militants’ Gender and Democratic Response to Public Attitudes 83
- Foreign Conflict Assistance, Gender Roles, Public Opinion: The Mechanisms of Support 88
- Macro-level Analysis: Foreign Power Support and Gender-Diverse Insurgencies 101
- Micro-Level Analysis: Public Opinion Toward Women Insurgents 111
- Discussion 136

## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION
- Limitations and Future Research 148
- Policy Implications 153

## APPENDIX A: ROBUSTNESS CHECKS FOR THE ANALYSIS ON WOMEN INSURGENTS AND RELATIVE REBEL STRENGTH

## APPENDIX B: ROBUSTNESS CHECKS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN SUPPORT FOR GENDER-DIVERSE ARMED MOVEMENTS
APPENDIX C: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS 165
APPENDIX D: EXPERIMENT ONE SURVEY INSTRUMENT 167
APPENDIX E: EXPERIMENT TWO SURVEY INSTRUMENT 171
BIBLIOGRAPHY 179
VITA 205
LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1. Descriptive Statistics</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2. Women Insurgents, Conflict Duration and Relative Rebel Strength</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3. Women Insurgents, Gender Roles and Relative Rebel Strength</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4. Potential Mechanisms of Support Driven by the Gender of the Insurgents</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5. The Effect of Women Combatants on Receiving Foreign Support</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6. The Effect of Using Suicide Bombing for Gender-Diverse Groups on Receiving Democratic Support</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7. Vignettes Used in Experiment 1</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8. Comparison of Support Means by Treatment Scenario (Experiment 1, Q.1)</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9. Comparison of Moral Obligation Mean by Treatment Scenario (Experiment 1, Q. 2)</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10. Descriptive Comparison of Binary and Categorical Support by Women Treatment</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11. The Effect of Women Insurgents on Potential Mechanisms</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 12. Mediators and Support (Experiment 1)</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 13. Comparison of Support Means by Treatment Scenario (Experiment 2, Q.1)</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 14. Comparison of Moral Obligation Mean by Treatment Scenario (Experiment 2, Q.2)</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 15. The Effect of Women Insurgents on Potential Mechanisms</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 16. Mediators and Support (Experiment 2)</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17. The Effect of Women Insurgents on Support by Respondents’ Sex</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18. Comparison of Support Means, Excluding the Responses which Identified the Kurdish Rebels

Table 19. Comparison of Support Means, Excluding the Responses which Identified the Kurdish Rebels or a Middle Eastern Group

Table 20. Comparison of Support Means by Party Identification

Table 21. Women Insurgents and Relative Rebel Strength, Ordinal Probit Models

Table 22. Female Combatants, Explicit Foreign Support and Democratic Support, Probit Models

Table 23. Female Combatants, Alleged Support and Autocratic Support

Table 24. Female Combatants, Explicit Foreign Support and Democratic Support
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Contributions of Women Militants to Rebel Organizations 32

Figure 2. Total Number of Rebel Groups with Female Combatants, Only Female Non-combatants, and All-Female Insurgents 61

Figure 3. The Impact of Women on Conflict Duration 65

Figure 4. The Impact of Women on Relative Rebel Strength 65

Figure 5. Average Marginal Effects of Female Combatants According to the Strength of Gender Stereotypes 69

Figure 6. Average Marginal Effects of Female Non-combatants According to the Strength of Gender Stereotypes 69

Figure 7. Average Marginal Effects of Female Insurgents According to the Strength of Gender Stereotypes 70

Figure 8. Foreign Support and Gender-Diverse Armed Groups 109

Figure 9. Respondent Opinions on Sponsoring Armed Insurgencies and Perceptions of Moral Obligation 116

Figure 10. Average Effect of Women Treatment on Supporting the Insurgency that Operates Through the Mediators 122

Figure 11. News Items Used in Experiment 2 124

Figure 12. The Effect of Women Insurgents on Potential Mechanisms 128

Figure 13. Mediators and Support 130

Figure 14. Gender of the Respondents 166

Figure 15. Political Ideology of the Respondents 166

Figure 16. Ethnicity of the Respondents 166
Figure 17. Opinions on the US Role in World Affairs 166

Figure 18. Opinions on Gender Roles 166
ABSTRACT

How do women affect conflict dynamics in different ways than men? I examine how expectations based on gender identities impact rebel group strategies, as well as attitudes of foreign publics and political elites toward rebel groups. First, women can substantially contribute to rebel groups’ ability to resist governments and maintain their rebellion through unique gendered ways. These include enabling greater tactical diversity, increased appeal to international audiences, and spearheading coup-proofing strategies against intra-organizational factions. Women’s contributions to rebel groups are most salient during times of crises and in settings where gender stereotypes are stronger. Second, rebel groups with women participants are more likely to attract foreign support from democratic states. Decisionmakers in democracies can more easily justify supporting gender-diverse rebel organizations to their domestic audiences because people are more likely to be in favor of supporting gender-diverse rebel organizations and are more likely to consider sponsoring such organizations as a moral duty. This support is driven by people’s expectations that women militants are less likely to attack civilians. Greater support for gender-diverse groups is also driven by the belief that such support would improve the sponsoring state’s reputation in the eyes of the international community. These findings are based on observational evidence on rebel group strength and women membership, survey experiments on people’s perceptions of gender-diverse rebel groups, and a qualitative case study of the PKK in Turkey. The results highlight the multifaceted nature of the relationship between gender norms and political violence. These results imply that scholars should take the social identity of the perpetrator group membership into account in analyzing the relationship between political violence and gender equality.
CHAPTER ONE
UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
GENDER, VIOLENCE, AND PEACE

Do women affect conflict dynamics differently from men? If so, how and under what conditions do women shape strategies of violence in civil wars? As mainstream research on conflict has overlooked gender until recently, our understanding of how war is shaped by gendered-dynamics remains limited. Women in conflict settings have been widely viewed as victims or peacebuilders (Cohen 2013, MacKenzie 2009). However, large numbers of women actively participate in rebel groups. A burgeoning literature on women’s involvement in political violence has begun revealing the variety of roles women perform in conflict settings, as opposed to the traditional perspective that views women as natural peacemakers (see, for example, Trisko-Darden, Henshaw, and Szekely 2019, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, Bloom 2012, Cohen 2013). However, we lack a comprehensive examination of whether and how women’s participation shapes the operation of armed organizations (Darden 2015, Thomas and Kanisha 2015). While recent studies suggest that rebel groups proactively use women members for propaganda activities to build legitimacy (Bayard de Volo 2001, Viterna 2014, Loken 2020), the extent to which the presence of women insurgents generates tangible benefits for armed groups remains underexplored. This study advances our understanding of how and under what conditions women insurgents shape the rebel operation and strategies of violence in civil wars.
It addresses important theoretical and empirical gaps by clarifying microfoundations of the relationship between the presence of women insurgents and their contributions (as well as costs) to the operation of rebel groups in their fight against adversaries. In doing so, it focuses on the role of gendered expectations emanating from the presence of women insurgents on rebel groups’ strength, survival, and the ability to attract support from external sources.

Combining insights from both feminist and positivist literatures in international relations, and engaging with multiple methods and data collection techniques, this dissertation examines how expectations based on gender identities impact the strategies of rebel groups, as well as the behavior of the foreign public, and political elites in civil wars. It consists of two main parts, each of which proposes a leading argument about the impact of women’s participation in armed movements and reveals underlying causal mechanisms. The first part provides a comprehensive analysis of whether and how women contribute to the strength of the rebel groups. It examines the Kurdish armed movement in Turkey as a theory-building case and tests the conclusions driven from the case at the macro-level using statistical analyses based on the data of a global sample of rebel groups. The results suggest that women contribute most to rebel groups during crises and at settings where gender stereotypes are stronger, by enabling tactical diversity, appealing to international audiences, and leading the organization’s coup-proofing strategy against intra-organizational factions.

The next part investigates whether the public support insurgencies with women fighters more than the ones that do not have women and, if so, through what mechanisms this support operates. The findings based on the macro-level evidence on the sponsor states and the prevalence of female combatants in a global sample of rebel organizations suggest that democratic states are more likely to support groups with women insurgents than those without women. The survey
experiments untangle the causal mechanisms behind this finding and evaluate the impact of public opinion on their governments’ decision to sponsor rebel groups with and without women insurgents. The results suggest that people are more likely to be in favor of supporting gender-diverse rebel organizations and are more likely to consider sponsoring such organizations as a moral duty compared to all-male organizations. This support is driven by expectations that perceive groups with women militants less likely to attack civilians, and more likely to support women’s equality and inclusive principles. The higher support for gender-diverse groups is also driven by the belief that supporting an armed group with women insurgents would be good for the reputation of the sponsoring state within the global community.

**Theoretical Framework**

This research evokes a reconsideration of the link between women and less violent behavior that is identified in various studies. In different social science disciplines, extant research has tended to focus on explaining women’s less violent behavior compared to men’s behavior. Earlier research tends to discuss it from an essentialist perspective, which underlines the role of biological differences between females and males, stressing the inherent pacifier role of women owing to their reproductive and mothering skills. This perspective argues that women’s less aggressive behavior is intrinsic, rather than learned (Archer 1996, Ruddick 1989) and has been criticized for feeding the patriarchal stereotypes of how men and women should behave. Today, the relationship between women and men is mainly discussed from the constructivist perspective. This approach argues that women’s attitude toward the use of less violence is influenced by the socially constructed gender roles where the boys are raised to be fighters, whereas girls are raised to be mothers (DeMeritt, Nichols, and Kelly 2014).
At the micro-level, studies focus on how attitudes towards the use of force show differences for men and women, or according to individual beliefs about appropriate gender roles. These studies tend to suggest that women are individually more compromising than men about the use of violence or military intervention (McDermott and Cowden 2001). Further, individuals who support gender equality are less likely to support the use of force (Tessler and Warriner 1997, Wood and Ramirez 2018). These arguments are reflected at the aggregate level too. At the macro level, studies demonstrate an empirically positive impact of gender equality on a state’s engagement in international conflict or intrastate war. These studies argue that the risk of political violence decline as gender hierarchies in societies erode. Countries with a higher status of women have greater prospects for peaceful conflict resolution (Caprioli 2000, 2005; Caprioli and Boyer 2001; Hudson et al. 2009, 2012; Koch and Fulton 2011; Melander 2005), whereas lower levels of gender equality result in higher chances for armed conflict (DeMeritt, Nichols and Kelly 2014, Melander 2005).

The impact of gender equality on the use of violence at the aggregate level tends to be explained by referring to the individual-level attitudes (Wood and Ramirez 2018). Studies that examine gender differences among leaders or individuals on decisions to use force can be given as an example of this category. Scholars argue that the treatment of women serves as a model of how others should be treated in society. Gendered hierarchies into which individuals socialized since birth shape perceptions about the power dynamics in social relationships. If a person grows up in a family where domestic violence is common, violence can be perceived as a normal response and be translated in other contexts in the long-run, shaping the behavior of individuals in their relationship with others (Hudson et al. 2009, 2012). On the other hand, societies that give relatively equal rights
to both men and women erode patriarchal order and adopt less violent behavior in general (Tickner 1992, 2001; Goldstein 2001).

Other studies linking gender equality and conflict focus on the role of domestic norms associated with patriarchal structures that reinforce violence as a legitimate means of attaining goals (Wood and Ramirez 2018). As Tickner (1992) argues, gendered structural hierarchies sustain domestic norms of oppression and violence by creating a shared environment that justifies the widespread use of force. Gender is a primary identity that permeates all societal relationships, and female oppression “provides the template for other types of oppression” (Bradley and Hudson 2010). The prevalence of gendered norms encouraging men to prove their “manhood” by engaging in warfare is translated into domestic and international decisions regarding the use of violence (Goldstein 2001).

These studies have contributed to an insightful discussion about the role of gender on political violence. However, the underlying mechanisms behind these arguments remain underspecified (McDermott 2015, Wood and Ramirez 2018) or are extrapolated from the presumptions on individual attitudes that view women as primarily nonviolent and men as violent. For instance, some of these gendered differences are linked to evolutionary biology and is argued that “non-alpha males are the prime candidates for reproductive failure, and thus are the prime candidates for social unrest in any human group” because “the key to reproductive success for a male is dominance.” (Bradley and Hudson 2010). This approach has raised concerns among feminist international relations scholars who argue that women are not inherently less violent than men (Kadera, Sjoberg and Thies 2018, Sjoberg 2016, Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, Meredith 2018). Existing research suggests that women commit political violence in a variety of contexts in diverse roles, be
them state military officers or rebel group militants. Women have engaged in war crimes (Sjoberg 2007), committed wartime rape (Cohen 2013), performed suicide attacks, and worked as guerilla fighters both in left-wing and right-wing organizations in various societies such as Rwanda (Sharlach 1999), Sierra Leone (Gberie 2005), Sri Lanka (Alison 2003), Mexico (Salas 1990) to Morocco (Ennaji 2016), Syria, Iraq (Sjoberg 2018), Germany (Karcher 2013) and Japan (Gonzalez Perez 2008). Despite the prevalence of women actively engaging in violent acts, it is referred to as mental illness, despair, or being dragged by their husbands or brothers instead of being an agential or purposeful act (Eager 2016). Scholars have pointed out that even the studies focusing on women combatants tend to take for granted that women take supporting roles in insurgencies and do not participate in violent acts (Cohen 2013). While the feminist scholarship encourages questioning the essentialist approach to women as agentless pacifiers, the fact that women can take part in political violence has been denied even by some feminists (Gentry 2012).

The argument above focusing on the transfer of domestic norms on violence to manage interstate relations points out a pathway through which societal gender relations can influence international relations. However, how and under what conditions domestic gender norms can shape relations at the global level remains unexplored. Further, the underlying mechanism of why gender relations - and not class, race, ethnicity, religion, nationalisms which are also entirely embedded in social hierarchies - is the ultimate norm projected to manage the relations regarding the use of force is not obvious and requires further clarification. For instance, the historical and systematic oppression of African-Americans in the United States, coupled with the slavery experience, is deeply embedded in US society and is considered by many as the central cleavage defining US politics in the contemporary world (Novkov 2008). From the similar perspective discussed in the feminist peace
framework, one can argue that individuals are deeply socialized in the societal hierarchies that view oppression toward other (African-American/minority) citizens as normal and that these norms can be reflected at the aggregate level in its relationships with other countries or intrastate groups. Moreover, recent studies show that having female political leaders, in fact, increases the risk of conflict (Caprioli and Boyer 2001, Koch and Fulton 2011), suggesting that the relationship between gender and less violence can be more multifaceted than claimed.

If women are mostly nonviolent, raised to be agents of compassion, and if collective attitudes reinforcing gender equality decreases the risk of use of force, how can we explain the prevalence of women supporting the use of violence, women perpetrators, or the violent organizations embracing gender-equality? Women’s relative lower engagement in violence should be understood within the framework of incentive structures and opportunities they have, rather than an attitude peculiar to females. The socially constructed gender roles can be considered as an aspect of the incentive structures through which women do what is best for them. They learn to be more passive to survive in an order defined by men’s dominance, where men typically are physically stronger and have easier access to arms. On the other hand, there are countless settings where these structures enable, influence, or motivate women to perpetrate violence or encourage others to engage in violence.

Engaging with multiple methods and building research designs aiming to reveal the underlying mechanisms between women and the strategies of political in civil wars, I show that the link between women and violence is more complex than the feminist peace literature suggests. By conducting an in-depth examination of an armed group, Kurdistan Workers’ Party, which embraces gender equality, both as a war tactic and as a core normative principle, I show that gender-equal
ideology can actually fuel violence. I provide a detailed account of how women not only become active and loyal members of a violent group but also acted as key agents strengthening its military capacity. I demonstrate that organizations embracing gender equality can maintain violence by taking advantage of the gender roles and lower status of women. Further, I show that organizations relying on violence to achieve their goals can attract more support if people perceive them to be embracing gender-equal principles. Contrary to the extant literature demonstrating women’s lack of support for the use of violence compared to men, I provide experimental evidence showing that women respondents are more likely than men to support violence if the perpetrators are women. The results suggest that the differences in individual gendered attitudes toward violence should not be evaluated independently from the conflict dynamics, particularly the gender identity of the perpetrator. Demonstrating that women and gender-equal ideology can be both be used to sustain violence, I argue that the positive relationship between gender and peace is far from being monotonic or universal, and, at best, incomplete.

Other reasons why presuming a linear relationship between women’s increased participation in governance and peaceful relations can be problematic are fourfold. First, emerging studies that replicate the findings on which the feminist peace arguments are based suggest that the empirical evidence is less robust than claimed (Kadera, Sjoberg and Thies 2018). Second, this approach dismisses the fact that women’s involvement in the public sphere often causes backlashes in societies (e.g., increase in domestic violence, the emergence of international men’s rights movements) (Alesina, Brioschi and Ferrara 2018; Guarnieri and Helmut 2018; Laidler and Mann 2008; Eswaran and Malhotra 2011) and that such change can be costly for women, alongside its benefits (Jacquette 1982, Jindy 1998, Tickner 2001).
Third, and more importantly, women’s empowerment framework discussed in the feminist peace framework relies on the aggregate socioeconomic measures; however, those socioeconomic conditions are considered to determine social norms about gender roles, which persist even when the initial conditions change (Alesina and Nunn 2013; Alesina, Brioschi, and Ferrara (2018). In that sense, it discounts the existing gender hierarchies embedded in the core underpinnings of the modern institutions (See, for instance, Pettman 1996). It amplifies the impact of adding more women to the current structural inequalities on having peaceful international relations.\(^1\) As such, it discounts a core feminist IR perspective that conceptualizes security “in a way that is truly inclusive” which “must account for gendered insecurities that stem from exclusionary practices that perceive women as victims rather than security providers, and from the structural inequalities that contribute to women’s economic, political, and social insecurities” (Tickner 1992, 22).

Fourth, the abovementioned points are not only relevant to academic debate. Assuming that there is a direct linear relationship between women, gender equality, and peace can have significant consequences in terms of policymaking. One noticeable desirable consequence of this approach would be an increased motivation for states to consider gender equality as a core security agenda and take steps for the amelioration of women’s rights in conflict and peace. However, overlooking the complexity of the gender-violence relationship can also have imperceptible negative consequences for gender equality. The core ideas the feminist peace leans on are analogous to the language used to explain the democratic peace theory (Kadera, Sjoberg, and Thies 2018). Similar to the democratic peace theory, feminist peace literature underlines the role of increased participation in politics, economics, and education on peaceful interstate-relations between states; but different from the

\(^1\) For more information on how the notion of modern rights and freedoms are based on and embedded in the patriarchal system that subordinates women, see Pateman (1988) and Yuval-Davis (2004).
democratic peace, it focuses on the other half of the population, namely women. This might be problematic because, in the past, policymakers relied on democratic peace theory as an ultimate way of building “world peace” and thought that the external promotion of democracy would build a durable peace. President George W. Bush stated, “[…] the reason why I’m so strong on democracy is democracies don’t go to war with each other…I’ve got great faith in democracies to promote peace. And that’s why I’m such a strong believer that the way forward in the Middle East, the broader Middle East, is to promote democracy” (Office of the Press Secretary 2004). These beliefs and the human rights violations were ultimately used to justify invasions in Iraq, which lead to spirals of violence and instability in the region (Russet 2005, Flint and Falah 2004).

It is essential to be careful about the promises of the feminist peace framework and to document its limitations because it can be used to justify further interferences by policymakers and rebels (as well as by media and public) who have incentives to instrumentalize their leverage in gender equality to achieve political gain. My research shows that the notion of gender equality can be militarized by armed groups through which they can convince foreign democratic leaders to attract more support to achieve their goals using violent means. Also, there are many instances where “saving vulnerable women” and bringing gender equality have been declared as a goal by leaders to justify foreign interventions and appease the domestic audience’s concerns of going into a war with another country. Such approaches aiming to provide external promotion of gender equality (or democracy alike) tend to discount the underlying dynamics paving the way for the existing order, which may lead to pursuing policies that might, in fact, undermine women’s empowerment in some contexts. For instance, the US political leaders’ rhetoric on the obligation to save “vulnerable” women in Afghan as a justification for invasion has been criticized for obscuring the local women’s
rights efforts and upholding the idea that Afghan women need the US as a protector (Stabile and Kumar 2005, Shepherd 2006). For these reasons, it is critical to recognize that the link between gender roles, gender equality, and violence is more complicated and necessitates a comprehensive understanding.

This dissertation makes a step toward untangling this complex relationship between gender roles, women, and strategies of violence. In Chapter 2, I examine the conditions and mechanisms through which women affect the sustenance of armed movements and argue that women contribute most to rebel groups during crises and in settings where gender stereotypes are stronger. I use a variety of empirical sources, including original data on noncombatant women in a global sample of rebel groups, and the archive of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) from 1982 to 2015 for the qualitative case study of the Kurdish armed movement in Turkey, which entailed engaging with over ten thousand pages of primary source material in Turkish. Results of the case study suggest that, despite the costs of integrating women into the organization (e.g., disruption of group cohesion), women substantially contribute to rebel organizations’ ability to challenge governments. Women benefit rebel organizations primarily through facilitating the organizations’ tactical diversity and coup-proofing strategy against inter-organizational factions. Statistical analysis of data of a global sample of rebel groups further shows that women participants provide the most advantages to rebel groups at settings where traditional gender stereotypes are stronger.

The results of the case study suggest that one of the key areas where women militants were demanded by the rebel groups the most is the mobilization of support and propaganda activities addressing both domestic and international audiences. Regarding international mobilization duties, women insurgents have been particularly useful in, first, building ties with, and securing support
from, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through women’s civil society groups that do not seem to have any official affiliation to the PKK. Second, Kurdish women insurgents attracted a lot of international media attention upon their effective fight against ISIS. Sjoberg (2020) characterizes Kurdish forces fight against ISIS as a conflict where women were “hypervisible” and central in its global coverage. This increased women fighters’ propaganda value further as media representation is the important medium for rebel publicity on which people tend to rely on to form their opinions on violent groups (Rajan 2011).

While women members are not as visible in other conflicts as the YPJ forces in the Syrian conflict, women fighters still attract more media coverage compared to men in general (Bloom 2011). What are the political consequences of such representations? Does the visibility of women fighters shape foreign public opinion and provide tangible benefits for their groups? How and to what extent observing the presence of women fighters can shape foreign public’s opinions toward the rebel group? Can the information on the presence of women fighters transform into tangible benefits, such as military and economic assistance for rebel groups?

In light of these questions, I ask whether people are more likely to support groups with women insurgents in Chapter 3. How does the presence of women insurgents affect foreign public opinion on their governments’ potential of sponsoring the armed movement? Women are usually considered “unfit” for the army and are not considered as primary agents of violence. Does the presence of women insurgents signal the weakness of the group and diminishes foreign democratic support due to concerns over the lower probability of victory? Alternatively, are female militants increase the legitimacy of the fight and increases support for gender-diverse groups? Using a global sample of rebel groups with women insurgents and their sponsor states, I show that rebel groups
with women participants are more likely to attract support from democracies. I argue that leaders of these states can more easily justify supporting gender-inclusive rebel organizations to their domestic audiences since these organizations are perceived as ideologically more moderate even though women members are perpetrators of violence. To provide evidence for the existence of this causal mechanism, I compliment the analysis with a survey experiment investigating public opinion toward leaders’ decision to sponsor rebel groups with gender-diverse membership. Using the University of Illinois’ student subject pool for conducting the experiment, I found that people are more likely to support government decision to send economic and military aid to an armed organization if the organization includes women fighters. Also, sponsoring gender-diverse groups is considered a moral obligation, while all-male groups are not viewed from a moral perspective. This support is driven by gendered expectations assuming the group is less likely to use violence against civilians and more supportive of gender equality and inclusive principles if it includes women. Further, people believe that sponsoring gender-diverse armed groups would be better for the reputation of their country among the global society, which is another factor mediating higher public support.

**Significance of the Research**

This study provides insight into how expectations based on social identities impact the strategies of rebel groups as well as the behavior of the public and political elites in civil wars. It aims to untangle the strategies of violence that are shaped by societal roles attributed to women and men. It argues that socially accepted gender roles are essential to understand conflict dynamics because the prevalence of gender roles shape the conflict strategies of stakeholders in unique ways. Focusing
on the consequences of women’s participation in rebel groups, instead of its determinants, this study explores the gendered strategies that sustain the rebel groups.

**Studying Gender to Understand Conflict**

Studying gender is essential to understand conflict dynamics because 1) there is an increase in the level of women’s participation in armed movements, 2) prevalence of traditional gender stereotypes precludes making realistic and comprehensive analysis on the gender dynamics in conflict settings, and 3) there is limited research on the consequences of women’s participation in armed groups. I explain each factor in detail below.

**Increase in women’s participation in armed movements.** The growing scholarship on the roles of women in conflict settings has shown that peaceful women stereotypes belie the diversity of roles women play in armed movements (Vogel, Porter and Kebbel 2014, Loken 2020, Eager 2016, Gentry and Sjoberg 2015). It is estimated that 40%-60% of rebel groups around the world recruit women combatants (Wood and Thomas 2017, Henshaw 2016). Based on the original data I collected, this ratio increases to 70% when we consider women who participate in rebel groups in supportive roles, such as spying, arms delivery, and propaganda. Some armed groups, such as Boko Haram, abduct women by force and use them in supportive roles. Others, such as People’s Protection Units (YPG) or Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), routinely rely on female leaders and combatants. The presence of women insurgents has not been limited by geography or ideology of the armed organization. While Marxist rebel groups of Latin America have typically attracted women in large numbers, various armed movements, from People’s Mujahedin Organization of Iran, to the Japanese Red Army, South Sudan Defense Forces, and Germany’s Baader-Meinhof have also heavily relied on women insurgents.
The proportion of women insurgents in rebel groups and the number of organizations recruiting women have increased in recent decades. The consequences of this trend entail a further examination. For instance, female participants of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) are estimated to have constituted 3% of the group population when the group started violent activities in 1964. This number increased to 35% in the 2000s, and to 45% in 2005 (Gonzalez-Perez 2008, 41; Ness 2005; Reyes 2007). The proportion of women in the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (CPN-M) has increased from 30% in the late 1990s to 40% in the 2000s (Gonzalez-Perez 2008, Henshaw 2013, South Asia Terrorism Portal 2001). Likewise, the proportion of women insurgents in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) is estimated to have increased from 10% in the late 1990s to 20% in the 2000s (Pugel 2007, 31). In the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), the ratio of women militants used to be 3% in 1997 (Specht 2006) while it increased to 20% in 2003 (Pugel 2007, 31). In Uruguay’s Movimiento de Liberación Nacional-Tupamaros (MLN-T), women members composed 10% of the cadre in 1966 while it increased to 25% in 1972 (Reif 1986, Kohl and Lit 1974, 290). The ratio of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN)’s women members is estimated to have increased from 20% in the early 1990s to 30-35% in the late 1990s (La Jornada 2003; Kampwrith 2002, 84).

Despite the surmounting evidence demonstrating women’s multiple roles in conflict settings, we lack comprehensive analyses recognizing the consequences of women’s participation in armed movements (Darden 2015). The persistence of incomplete gendered beliefs is one of the reasons why we lack a comprehensive understanding of the role of gender dynamics in conflict settings.

**Persistence of deficient gendered beliefs.** Women in conflict environments have been typically viewed as victims or side actors that are supposed to urge men to stop fighting. Even after
showing evidence for women’s perpetuating violence, people fail to update their beliefs about women’s capacity for violence and tend to regard it as an anomaly (Meredith 2018). The reason why is social roles attributed to the female and male are deeply embedded in the current patriarchal order. Despite the diversity of social organization forms that existed throughout history, the subordination of women is a standard order that almost universally existed (Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen 2020).

The gendered notions associating women with the private sphere (i.e., household, nurturing, childcare) ignore women’s agency in the public sphere, namely in governance, political action, and decision-making.

The argument that women lack the capacity to govern compared to men is deeply rooted. Philosophers ranging from Plato to Hegel has written about women’s incapacity for developing reasoning that is required to take active roles in the public sphere (Elshtain 1993). According to this unfounded understanding, if feminine traits, like emotions and desire, were allowed in public debates, the principles of universality, impartiality, and reasoning would be subverted (Goetz 2007). For instance, Rousseau (1762) emphasized women’s inability to grasp basic notions of judgment and warned them against trying to take over the societal roles of men --because trying to manage incompatibility of women would be futile and may end up in falling short of their caretaker abilities. According to Grotius (1625/1925, 497) whose ideas have shaped the modern international law, women are among those who are unable to adjudicate between just and unjust, lawful and unlawful.

The view that argues for the “unfitness” of women in the public sphere is typically discussed from the perspective of women’s “natural” differences regarding their physical appearance, temperament, and their role as mothers. For instance, Hegel (1820/1991) thinks that “the difference between man and woman is the difference between animal and plant.” According to him, “the animal is
closer in character to the man, the plant to woman, for the latter is a more peaceful [process of] unfolding whose principle is the more indeterminate unity of feeling” (Hegel (1820/1991, 207). The different nature of women provides the basis of various judgments about proper the behavior of women. As Kinsella (2011, 78) put it neatly, “differences of sex are translated into moral, social, and political distinctions that, in turn, are and demonstrating the existence of, putative biological differences upon which these social distinctions are premised.” Traditionally, women are considered to confine to their private roles as caretakers for their men and children, while men are regarded as the natural leaders of the public sphere. Sentiments of compassion and affection are associated with feminine nature, while power and rational thinking are attributed to men.

Not only are women typically excluded from taking part in governance decisions, but they are also envisaged to undertake a pacifier role in society. The association of women with peacemaking is also as old as their image as caretakers. For instance, *Lysistrata, a play written by Aristophanes in 411 BC*, tells the story of Athenian and Spartan women going on a strike to stop the bloody Peloponnesian War by denying their men of sexual intercourse to force men to negotiate peace (Aristophanes 1907). Their action turns out to be an effective deterrent; the men agree to stop fighting.

Of course, progress has been made in women’s status since then. However, women’s presumed victimhood and passivity are still prevalent among scholars, leaders, and policymakers. Men are considered natural warriors, while women are assumed to be innocent and peaceful. Steven Pinker (2011, 527) states that “over the long sweep of history, women have been and will be a pacifying force. Traditional war is a man’s game; tribal women never band together to raid neighboring villages.” Nelson Mandela said, “rebel groups should demonstrate the quality of their
leadership, by halting the slaughter of innocents such as women, children and the disabled” (cited in Carpenter 2005). The envoy from the Russian Federation during the United Nations Security Council debate in 2000 stated that “the words ‘women, peace, and security’ were a harmonious and natural combination. An unnatural combination was ‘women and war’ as was ‘women and armed conflict’” (cited in Kinsella 2005). Researchers have argued that these gendered assumptions are also reinforced strategically by the international community. Carpenter shows that these “gender essentialisms -which are tropes associating men and women with mutually exclusive and oppositional attributes” - are actively sustained by the civil society organizations (Carpenter 2005). She suggests that transnational advocacy networks instrumentally parallels the issue of “civilian protection” with the protection of “women and children” to appeal to international donors, reproducing the notion that “women and children” (but not adult men) are “innocent” and “vulnerable.”

Another prominent example is the United Nations Security Council’s (UNSCR) adoption of Resolution 1325 in October 2000. This resolution called the UN member states and the UN Secretary-General to 1) increase the participation of women in conflict resolution, including in security sector, 2) integrate gender perspectives in the analysis of international security issues, and 3) adopt measures to protect women from violence in conflict settings (UNSC 2000). Regional organizations such as the African Union (African Union Commission 2016), the European Union (Council of European Union 2008), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (Myrttinen, Shepherd and Wright 2020) have developed policies to incorporate the principles of the UNSCR 1325. Many civil society organizations have embraced the UNSCR’s agenda on women and security. As of August 2019, a total of 82 states have developed National Action Plans to implement
and advance the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda (Hamilton, Shepherd, and Naam 2019). All these actions have been significant steps forward to recognize that women experience violence as a result of armed conflict in unique and complex ways, and that they have an inherent right to participate in peace negotiations and reconstruction efforts that directly affect their lives (Miller, Pournik and Swaine 2014, Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011).

With the initiation of the WPS agenda at the UN level, various measures are taken to advance women’s status in conflict and peace, which are very valuable and promising. However, it is important to highlight the shortcomings of this approach that is widely undertaken by many international and local organizations. The 1325 agenda focuses on women’s role as victims and peacemakers, which reproduces the essentialist understanding of women while abating their agency in violence (Shepherd 2008, Loken 2017). Women do have critical roles in conflict resolution; women do indeed commit fewer violent crimes than men, and beliefs suggesting women are less violent are not entirely unfounded. However, instead of contemplating thoroughly what this fact entails, people tend to use shortcuts to understand the world around them, merely linking women with peace. This leads to an incomplete expectation that women cannot possibly be perpetrators of violence or that institutions embracing gender equality invariably promotes peace. These expectations portray an incomplete picture of women’s wartime experiences and complex gendered dynamics.

Policies based on this assumption can create new insecurities for women and communities. First, the reproduction of norms that ignore women as agents of violence increases extremist groups’ likelihood of using women in violent acts effectively as they are less likely to arouse suspicion (O’rourke 2009). Second, it precludes women’s inclusion in rehabilitation and reintegration
programs, because even if they participated in combat as perpetrators, they are not considered as primary agents of warfare (Mazurana et al. 2002). Neglecting women’s needs jeopardizes the success of post-conflict reconciliation efforts as equitable institutions is critical for maintaining ceasefires (Coleman 2004, Gates, Binningsbo, and Lie 2007). Third, as discussed above, women’s presumed victimhood has been instrumentally used to justify external military interventions (Zakaria 2017) and to obscure human rights violations (Bond et al. 2019). For instance, the US political elite tried to justify military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq by assuming a moral responsibility to save “vulnerable Muslim women.” (Jabbra 2006). Using women’s oppression in non-Western states as a “tool of statecraft to justify military action” has been criticized for reinforcing the paternalistic representations of third world women in need of saving by the white Europeans and for depreciating local women’s rights movements which disregards the Afghan women’s agency (Ayotee and Husain 2005).

Limited research on the consequences of women’s participation in armed groups.

Inquiries of gender have been marginalized in mainstream conflict research for decades (Reiter 2015). While the scholarly and policy communities have overlooked the consequences of this trend, the prevalence of women fighters has attracted a lot of media attention recently. However, instead of making grounded analyses, mainstream Western media tend to rely on oversimplified or sensational stories. For instance, numerous news articles praised the brave Kurdish women fighting against ISIS (Lazarus 2019, Subramanian 2020). Empowered women fighting against one of the most brutal organizations can sound pleasing. However, associating women’s militancy with empowerment and peace portrays an incomplete assumption of wartime circumstances. Participation in armed groups usually unleashes a new era of insecurities for women.
Women are often the first targets of violent extremist ideologies (The US Government 2019). Human trafficking, slavery, and kidnapping for recruitment are typical tactics many groups use, trapping thousands of women in cycles of repression. Women’s involvement in these organizations usually results in limitation of their civic rights, leading to different types of vulnerabilities. Once recruited, they are disproportionately used in the most self-destructive acts like suicide attacks (O’Rourke 2009), face sexual violence, and are further marginalized by male members for being “unfit” to fight (Duzel 2018). Some women engage in more violent activities to alleviate this perception, leading to further radicalization (Allison 2004).

Women’s participation in violent groups is not only detrimental to women; it threatens the overall security of societies because their involvement strengthens rebel groups and prolongs civil wars. Gender stereotypes linking women with peace help women insurgents to carry out clandestine tasks more efficiently (Parkinson 2013), bring a façade of legitimacy to the organization (Viterna 2014), increase local support and mobilization (Wood 2019), increase the use of suicide attacks (Alakoc 2018), solicit support from the diaspora and transnational advocacy networks by appealing to their concerns of women’s empowerment (Clifford 2005). I also show that gender stereotypes can also facilitate diversification of rebel tactics, strengthen the central command, and shift the foreign (Western) public opinion in favor of their rebel groups. We know that prolonged conflicts result in higher casualties and human rights violations, alongside many other indirect conflict costs (Ratnayake et al. 2008). Further, the perpetuation of violence leads governments to take sharper measures to cope with it, restricting freedom of citizens, undermining the relationships of fairness, transparency, and trust upon which governments are built (Bardall, Bjarneård, and Piscopo 2019).
In sum, women are increasingly getting involved in political violence, perpetuating the violence through unique gendered ways, and increasing vulnerabilities for themselves and their communities.

**Contributions to the Literature**

This study contributes to several strands of scholarship: 1) feminist political science, 2) conflict studies, 3) public opinion, and foreign policy. First, I examine how gender and gendered perceptions shape conflict. Specifically, I explore how gender roles impact the strategies of the major stakeholders in civil wars - rebel groups, foreign democratic leaders, and foreign public - and elucidate the gendered character of decision-making processes. In that sense, this research contributes to the scholarship that goes beyond viewing gender as an individual characteristic and, instead, treats gender as an analytic tool to study conflict processes and political institutions (Stauffer and O’Brien 2018, Hawkesworth, 2003).

Combining quantitative and qualitative methods with the feminist perspectives and clarifying the role of gender-based biases in political processes, I respond to the scholars’ calls for a need for “cross-pollination between feminist and quantitative researchers” (Stauffer and O’Brien 2018). The feminist scholarship emphasizes the importance of studying inequalities experienced by women in society and the political consequences of these inequities (ibid). The results of this research show that the gender stereotypes and lower life prospects of women create unique incentives that not only shape women’s behavior differently than men, but also contribute to the effectiveness of gender-diverse rebel groups differently from all-male groups. It highlights the practical consequences of gender discrimination on conflict processes.

Second, this study contributes to conflict research by exploring the mechanisms through which women and gender roles can impact the main factors of interest for conflict scholars, such as
the survivability of rebel groups, duration of civil wars, external support, and mobilization of public opinion. Civil war violence poses significant threats to the security of individuals, communities, and nations. Still, we know little about the factors sustaining and strengthening the non-state armed groups – the main actors of civil wars. By incorporating gender roles and gender composition of the rebel groups into conflict research, this study increases our understanding of the factors that facilitate rebellion, which can be useful for governments to build more effective counterinsurgency campaigns. It adds to a growing line of inquiry about the micro-dynamics of violent organizations as well as a broader literature on how these groups maintain rebellion as an international actor within a broader society. It links the literature on group composition and social identity of membership with the strategies of violence, which has been largely absent in conflict studies. It puts forward the social identity of the group membership as an important factor that needs to be considered in assessing the determinants of violent strategies.

Further, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods with the feminist scholarship allows me to explore the micro-mechanisms in conflict settings that cannot be captured by using solely one method. For instance, the in-depth examination of the Kurdish armed movement informs us why existing research finds a higher likelihood of using nonviolence or mixed strategies in armed organizations embracing gender-inclusive ideologies (Asal et al. 2013). The case study shows that the presence of women prompts the “peaceful women” stereotype, empowering women as civil resistance mobilizers and giving leaders a viable option to adopt unarmed methods effectively and credibly. This increases the organizations’ ability to implement nonviolent strategies. It suggests that it is the practical advantage of women in mobilizing nonviolence that allows leaders
to include this alternative to the organization’s repertoire rather than embracing feminist ideology as suggested.

Moreover, embracing a multi-method approach allows exploring in more detail the causal mechanisms embedded in existing hypotheses and to observe the prevalence of these mechanisms in other realms of social science research. For instance, the in-depth examination of the operation of a gender-diverse armed organization demonstrates that women are given more active roles in the organization when it is going through crises. This finding highlights the parallels between the role of women in rebel organizations, and economic and political organizations. Expansion of women’s responsibilities when organizations face serious challenges is akin to the “glass cliff” phenomenon—the term capturing the economic and political organizations’ higher likelihood of assigning women leadership duties at times of crises (Ryan and Haslam 2005, Smith and Monaghan 2013). Despite the vast organizational differences regarding structures, aims, and resources, women face similar barriers in these organizations that are typically led by men.

Third, this study contributes to our understanding of the link between public opinion and foreign policy decisions in conflict intervention. Bringing together the literature on gender roles and the variation in external rebel support, I examine how people’s expectations and preferences based on social identities impact the strategies of foreign sponsors in civil wars. I show that the presence of women insurgents shapes foreign leaders’ decisions in favor of supporting the insurgent group in democracies because foreign public opinion is willing to support organizations with women more than those with no women. Exploring the specific mechanisms through which the public preferences affect states’ prospects of getting involved in a civil war abroad reveals interesting findings that have attracted limited attention. For instance, gender-diverse armed groups are not
only more favored by the public based on the association of women with the righteousness of the movement (as discussed in the recent studies, such as Manekin and Wood 2020) but also based on the strategic benefits to the foreign sponsor. People tend to think that supporting a gender-diverse armed group would benefit the reputation of the sponsoring state in the eyes of the global community.

This result reveals another way through which the gender-equality framework can be used strategically to benefit the individual interests of the conflict stakeholders. Other examples of this kind discussed in this study include foreign leaders’ reliance on gender-equality as a way to appease domestic opposition, and armed groups’ co-optation of gender-equality as a mobilization and coup-proofing method to expand the support base and to strengthen the central command. In this sense, it responds to the feminist IR scholars’ calls to examine “the ways in which governments and the military use and alter prevailing discourses about gender to their own ends” (Whitworth 1994, 26).

Overall, this study reveals some important preliminary findings of how gender roles affect political violence in different contexts. It also points out the dynamic interaction between the evolution of organizations’ tactics and the women’s roles within these organizations. The in-depth exploration of the PKK shows that even organizations that are known with their embracement of feminist ideology and high level of women insurgents can experience severe problems in the integration of women into the ranks due to backlash from the male members, which leads to organizational inefficiencies. Similarly, it shows that one of the most progressive rebel organizations in terms of its approach to gender relies on traditional gender roles that do not consider women as agents of political violence to appeal to broader audiences, carry out clandestine tasks, switch between violent and nonviolent tactics efficiently, and to strengthen the central command. This
corroborates the arguments underscoring rebels’ reliance on societally accepted traditional values to reframe and rationalize the disruption of gender norms caused by women’s engagement in violence (Ness 2005, Loken 2017). On the other hand, the survey experiment suggests that the strength of the gender-equality norm (among the US students), which is by definition against the traditional gendered roles, can also allow political violence indirectly, paralleling the presence of women combatants to empowerment and fighting against gender inequality. In other words, traditional gender norms - prevalent across all nations at different degrees- enable the use of violence in rebel groups. At the same time, the norm of gender-equality opposing the prevalence of traditional gender norms - that is prevalent mostly in developed secular Western nations - can also enable the use of political violence indirectly. In that sense, it highlights the multifaceted nature of the relationship between gendered norms and political violence. It suggests that arguments concerning the role of gender on violence should take the organizational and contextual differences into account, as norms that are against or supportive of traditional gender roles can both enable political violence when women are involved in the conflict as perpetrators.
CHAPTER TWO
WOMEN INSURGENTS, GENDER ROLES AND MAINTAINING THE INSURGENCY

Do women affect conflict dynamics differently from men? If so, how do women affect conflict dynamics differently? As mainstream political science research on security and conflict have paid little attention to how gender roles shape conflict (Bjarnegård et al. 2015), we know little about the distinct contributions and costs of having women insurgents in rebel groups. Does women’s recruitment contribute to the strength of the militant groups, or does it disrupt the cohesiveness of the group and reduce their military effectiveness? What are the unique mechanisms through which women insurgents affect the resilience of rebel groups in fighting against governments? This study advances our understanding of how and under what conditions women shape rebel groups’ ability to resist their governments and maintain the rebellion. Using the Kurdish armed movement in Turkey as a theory-building case, I show that despite the costs of integration, women can substantially contribute to rebel groups’ ability to resist governments. The case study builds on the existing literature on women’s unique roles in armed movements and provides a nuanced account for the mechanisms explaining women’s contributions to the maintenance of the rebellion, including an increase in the fighting power, effectiveness in clandestine tasks and access to resources, increased mobilization and public support. More importantly, the case study informs us about previously underexplored ways through which women shape the operation of armed organizations. These include adapting and diverting strategies in response to changing circumstances, reinforcing the authority of the leadership by leading the organizations’ coup-proofing strategies, and building international networks. These findings are based primarily on the archive of the Kurdistan Workers’
Party (PKK)’s monthly bulletin *Serxwebun* from 1982 to 2015, involving over ten thousand pages of primary source material in Turkish. The case study not only lays out potential mechanisms through which women can contribute to the survivability of rebel groups, but also informs us about when rebel groups will demand and use these benefits. First, it shows that women’s responsibilities within the organization increase during periods of downturns and that women provide the most advantages at times of crises. Second, the case suggests that women benefit their organizations most in settings where traditional gender stereotypes are stronger. This is especially true for non-combatant women whose duties in covert roles require relying heavily on gender stereotypes.

To see whether women’s contributions apply beyond the Kurdish rebellion, I conduct analyses at the macro-level using the Women in Armed Movements Dataset (WARD) v.1.2, which includes information on the presence of women combatants in a global sample of rebel groups (Wood and Thomas 2017). Based on the finding from the case that women in supportive roles are critical contributors to rebel groups, I expand WARD by collecting original data on the participation of non-combatant women in approximately 200 armed groups. The results of the quantitative analyses provide evidence at the aggregate level for women’s positive effect on the survivability and resistance ability of militant organizations.

Informed by the case study’s finding suggesting a correlation between gender stereotypes and women’s contributions, I further test the scope conditions of women’s significance for their organizations at the macro-level. Using the level of female participation in the labor force as a proxy for the prevalence of gender stereotypes and the lower life prospects of women outside of the organization, I show that women’s impact on rebel groups’ ability to resist government repression is higher where gender stereotypes are stronger compared to settings where gender stereotypes are weaker. This impact of gender stereotypes is more salient for non-combatant women than
combatant women. These findings from the cross-organizational data support the mechanisms discussed in the case study.

Scholarship on women’s involvement in political violence often focuses on the reasons that condition women into participating in rebel groups (see Loken and Zelenz 2018, Henshaw 2016, Thomas and Bond 2015). I build on this research by drawing attention to the results of their participation. Analyzing the results of their participation, rather than the determinants, reorients discussions of women’s involvement in conflict away from the conditions enabling their initial mobilization and toward the mechanisms that sustain armed movements over time (Parkinson 2013). Concentrating on the understudied results of women’s participation clarifies the role they play in the strategic choices and the long-term survival of armed movements. Moving beyond the unitary actor assumption that dominates civil war research, I analyze the impact of gender composition on the resistance capability of armed organizations vis-a-vis government repression. It speaks to the calls of scholars who point out the need for comprehensive analyses of the women insurgents’ impacts on conflict processes (Darden 2015, Goldstein 2001).

This renewed understanding concerning the significance of women in armed groups can offer previously overlooked choices for decreasing overall violence. First, given the evidence that highlights the importance of women’s pursuit of gender equality in signing up for armed groups (Wood and Thomas 2017), the detrimental consequences of women’s deprivation of rights through their participation in rebel groups can encourage policymakers to address the conditions that lead women to take part in armed movements. Second, considering the advantages that women provide to armed movements, governments can adopt specific defensive policies that can mitigate their attacks.
Third, even when women participate in armed movements as combatants, they are typically considered to be taking minor roles within these organizations. Due to the incomplete understanding of women’s effects on the conflict, women insurgents are less likely to be included in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs (DDR) compared to men (Mazurana et al. 2002). Women’s participation in DDR is deemed crucial for the success of these programs (Coleman 2004), and the success of such post-conflict initiatives is a critical determinant of whether the conflict will terminate or recur (Gates et al. 2007). Given the crucial role of inclusive post-conflict institutions in maintaining ceasefires, ignoring the women’s impacts on the conflict processes can be harmful to the success reconciliation efforts.

Finally, this study combines insights from both interpretive and positivist feminist literatures in international relations (IR). It incorporates both macro and micro-level evidence and addresses the calls of scholars who argue that IR gender research needs to engage with multiple methods and navigate the differences between feminist approaches and statistical studies (Sjoberg et al. 2018; Stauffer and O’Brien 2018).

The remainder of this chapter proceeds in four sections. First, I discuss the relevance of gender-diverse rebel groups on rebel groups’ ability to resist and survive government repression. Second, I examine the mechanisms through which women can increase rebels’ resistance power using the PKK and explore that women insurgents contribute to the organization the most when the organization is going through crises and where gender stereotypes are stronger. Third, I demonstrate that the finding of the case, arguing for women’s effective contribution in sustaining the rebellion, can be generalizable to other cases. Fourth, I provide further evidence supporting the findings of the case study at the macro-level and demonstrate the impact of traditionally accepted gender roles on women’s contributions to rebel groups’ resistance capacities.
Women’s Significance in Rebel Groups’ Ability to Resist Repression

The primary goal of a rebel group is survival, which is necessary to achieve the organization’s political objectives (Crenshaw 1988). How does the presence of women militants contribute to survival? Some studies suggest that many armed organizations would not have been able to sustain their strength without them (Ness 2005; Gonzalez-Perez 2008). Others demonstrate the costs of managing gender-diverse cadres and suggest rebel leaders avoid recruiting women combatants, not only based on ideological reasons, but also because they consider it too risky for the group cohesion and discipline (Zoe 2013). This study seeks to adjudicate between these two perspectives by providing micro and macro-level evidence on the gendered-dynamics of the operation of rebel groups.

A vital component of rebel survival is resisting government repression. Typically, conflicts continue when at least one of the belligerent parties believes that fighting is more beneficial than termination of the conflict (Fearon 2004). Within this framework, whether rebels can continue fighting is a critical determinant of conflict longevity (Cunningham et al. 2009). Power asymmetries between rebels and governments necessitate differentiating between rebels’ ability to inflict costs on the adversary government and their ability to resist or evade government repression (ibid, 575). As rebel groups typically start weak relative to the government, they have lower prospects to defeat the government militarily. They, first off, try to survive the repression and sustain the resistance, thereby lowering the chances of a government victory.

I demonstrate that the recruitment of women increases the opportunities available to rebel organizations, which enhances organizations’ ability to resist governments and maintain the rebellion. This increase in the “ability to resist” affects the relative power dynamics and strategies of violence (Butler and Gates 2009). The combination of these strategies may not necessarily translate
into a victory over the state military, but it can strengthen the movement by making it difficult for governments to eradicate the organization and increase the odds of survival (Philip 2013).

To understand how women increase the opportunities available to rebel organizations, I develop a framework through which we can conceptualize the main duties women take over in political violence (see Figure 1). Building on the existing scholarship on women militants and on my analysis of the PKK, I show that women contribute to sustaining the rebellions and increase the groups’ resistance ability either by doing similar tasks as men (such as providing extra fighting power) or tasks at which women are more effective than men, due to the prevalence of stereotypes that disregards women as the primary actors of violence. These include effectiveness in clandestine tasks and contributing to public support and mobilization through local social networks (Eager 2016; Parkinson 2013).

Figure 1. Contributions of Women Militants to Rebel Organizations

Apart from these mechanisms discussed in the literature, I provide additional mechanisms that have received little or no attention using the PKK case. These include women’s advantage in enabling tactical diversity, leading the organization’s coup-proofing tactics, and building international
On the other hand, the recruitment of women can also be costly for organizations. I show that gender-diverse cadres can aggravate organizational inefficiencies by triggering unrest among male members and disrupting discipline due to the escalation of the intimate relationships among members. I conclude that women’s recruitment, overall, outweighed its costs and contributed vastly to PKK’s resistance capacity and survival.

Research Design and Case Selection

Examination of women’s duties in armed movements through case studies have revealed critical findings; however reaching generalizable insights informed by the micro-dynamics observed in these studies is challenging, due to the differences between statistical studies and case studies conducted through feminist lenses. (Sjoberg et al. 2018). To assess the patterns of whether, how and under what conditions women impact the operation of armed groups, it is important to design empirical models that are informed by an in-depth examination of gendered dynamics of violence. To this aim, I design a multimethod study that allows me to, first, explore the gendered nature of militancy; second, to test whether these gendered representations are part of a broader trend.

The first part of this article analyzes a single case study to 1) provide a framework linking gendered duties to organizational performance; 2) understand the micro-level mechanisms through which women help sustaining organizations; 3) determine the scope conditions of women’s contributions to rebel organizations; 4) determine the direction of causality between women and groups’ ability to resist. 2 Using these insights from the case study, the second part analyzes a global

---

1 See Wood (2019) for an exception examining female fighters and international networks.

2 One can argue that groups that already have high capability are better able to attract women compared to the groups with lower capacity (Thomas and Bond 2015).
sample of rebel groups to show that women’s significance on rebel resistance and conditions affecting women’s contributions can be generalizable to other cases.

I use PKK as a case because it offers substantial variation in both organizational resilience and how women are employed. Its longevity and tactical versatility with guerilla war, suicide bombings, and nonviolent campaigns provide a useful account to explore the role of women in organizational operations. PKK can be considered an extreme-value case of other rebel organizations recruiting women. According to the WARD, only 7.5% of all rebel organizations feature 20% or more women members, one of which is PKK. Since the late 1990s, approximately 30%-40% of PKK’s members are estimated to be women (Özcan 2007). Moreover, founded in 1978, and actively pursuing armed resistance since 1984, PKK is one of the longest-lived rebel organizations.

PKK’s use of women insurgents has notable similarities to contemporary leftist movements aiming to mobilize a broad cross-section of the population such as Maoists in Nepal, FARC in Colombia, FMLN in El Salvador, Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Tezcür 2015). Further, due to its ethno-nationalist character and reliance on youth movements, PKK may also be informative for understanding women’s role in similar insurgencies such as the Irish Republican Army and Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers (Davis 2017).

The analysis primarily relies on the PKK’s monthly bulletin Serxwebun from 1982-2015, which contains over ten thousand pages of primary source material in Turkish. This bulletin publishes the leader’s declarations, decisions taken in conventions, essays by militants, and diaries and obituaries of fallen fighters. In my review of these documents, I searched for the Turkish words for “woman,” “girl,” “madam/lady,” and recorded and analyzed the information regarding the benefits

3 “Kadin,” “kız,” “bayan,” in Turkish, respectively.
and costs women provide in sustaining the movement. I also benefited from the PKK’s leader Abdullah Öcalan’s books, reports, and other publications of the PKK, as well as interviews with PKK members by the local media.

It is important to note that the analysis relies on the resources written from the perspective of the organization. The target audience of Serxwebun is PKK’s members and sympathizers, which makes it a suitable venue for propaganda. I analyzed the documents being conscious of this bias. My analysis of the archives suggests that the strength of the organization is consistently exaggerated. That said, Serxwebun also aims to educate its audience on how to overcome the challenges the movement faces. For this reason, it discusses PKK’s weaknesses in detail and is blunt when explaining the inefficiencies caused both by male and female insurgents, making it a unique source to understand the micro-dynamics of the organization’s operation.

The Case Study: The Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)

Evolution of Women’s Roles within the PKK

The PKK has declared women’s emancipation as a fundamental goal since its establishment (Avesta 2001). However, women’s integration into the organization was not a linear process. Women’s unique contributions shaped the organization’s strategies of violence and expanded at times when the organization was going through crises.

The PKK was established in 1978 as a Marxist-Leninist organization. The armed insurgency against Turkey began in 1984 to create an independent state in the Kurdish-populated areas of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. Primarily run by men in its initial years, PKK increasingly assigned women to combatant and commander positions after suffering heavy casualties as a result of Turkish counterinsurgency campaigns in the early 1990s. In 1999, Öcalan stated that the PKK has
3000 women militants in Turkey and 5000 women militants in total, including the ones abroad (PKK January 1999, 28).

Increasing the number of female combatants in the 1990s, specifically in regions where male casualties were high, helped the organization survive Turkey’s counterinsurgency campaigns. However, fighting against both the Turkish forces and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP) hampered the PKK’s ability to maintain guerilla warfare. During this time, between 1996-1999, PKK relied heavily on women as suicide bombers – a tactic that has not previously been part of its repertoire.

The leader Öcalan was captured by the Turkish government in 1999. Following his arrest, PKK declared a ceasefire and turned to nonviolent strategies. Several developments in Turkey and around the region in the early 2000s further diminished PKK’s power. The rise of the current ruling party in Turkey (AKP) as a viable political alternative among the Kurdish citizens, the formation of a Kurdish autonomous region in Northern Iraq under the US protection following the invasion of Iraq, and the growing divisions within the PKK substantially limited its power by 2004 (Tezcür 2010). As a response, PKK resumed armed insurgency in 2005 and tried to maintain its status as the sole representative of the Kurdish movement. To this aim, PKK established a form of confederalism, comprising a network of local democratic assemblies that promotes gender-emancipation as *the core* principle (PKK March 2005, 4,24). Women’s roles entrenched further executing both violent and nonviolent tactics, which also granted them higher representation in the movement’s political party (Şahin-Mencütek 2016). The role of women has grown further since the rise of the ISIS. Women’s Protection Units (YPJ) -an all-women army of the PKK’s Syrian offshoot

---

4 Turkish resources claim that PKK had around 2500 militants in Turkey and around 3000-35000 militants abroad during 1998-9 (Özdağ 1999).
People’s Protection Units (YPG) received worldwide coverage and built alliances with prominent political figures in the US and Europe (Taştekin 2016). Here is a list of the key events concerning the PKK’s armed insurgency and the development of women’s movement within the PKK.

**Chronology of the PKK Insurgency and Women’s Movement**

1984: PKK’s first armed attack

1991-1992: PKK acquired advanced weapons and reached the peak of its military power after the Gulf War.

1993**: PKK’s military power is severely weakened due to the Turkish army’s air and land operation against PKK bases in northern Iraq.

1993: The first women’s army is established.

1994-1995: The number of insurgent attacks begins to fall dramatically (Aydin and Emrence 2015). Kurdistan Free Women Association (YAJK) is launched. YAJK established women’s defense units organized training sessions peculiar to women for the first time.

1995: The PKK’s 5th Party Congress acknowledges the one-man rule of rebel leader Abdullah Öcalan in order to reverse the military decline. (Aydin and Emrence 2015)

1995: Turkey’s cross-border counterinsurgency campaign targets rebel strongholds in northern Iraq and eliminates hundreds of rebels.

1996: PKK’s first suicide attack, done by a woman called Zilan.

1999*: Öcalan is captured and called for a ceasefire. PKK started to pursue unarmed civil resistance tactics.

1999: The first women’s party, the Kurdistan Working Women’s Party (PJKK) was established to develop a more organized women’s movement for the realization of serbilden tactics. It changed its name to the Women’s Liberation Party (PJA) in 2000.

2000: PKK renewed its goal of separation from Turkey. Instead of an independent Kurdish state, it emphasized advancing the Kurdish movement through a democratic and legal framework.

2000: PKK established the Free Women Academy in 2000 to train women insurgents.

---


* Years with stars (*) denotes the years with major crises.
2003: Formation of a de facto Kurdish state under US protection following the invasion of Iraq.

2004: The AKP emerged as the leading political force in Kurdish regions with the 2004 local elections.

2004: Divisions within the PKK advanced. A group of high-ranking PKK commanders left the organization and established a rival Kurdish organization (Partiya Welatparêzên Demokrat)

2004*: PKK started losing its ability to portray itself as the sole organization and resumed armed insurgency.

2005: Inspired by the ideas of theorist Murray Bookchin, Öcalan aimed to establish Democratic Confederalism which called for a grassroots democracy based on “ecological defense and gender-emancipation.”

2008-2012: Dramatic upsurge in PKK’s insurgent attacks in 2008. Turkish security forces launched airstrikes and ground operations against the PKK camps in Northern Iraq.

2012*: The YPG (People’s Protection Units) -the Syrian offshoot of the PKK- engaged in clashes against Al-Nusra over heavily Kurdish populated regions in Syria.

2013: The YPJ, Women's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin), an all-women army of the YPG, is established.

2014: YPG’s fight against ISIS intensified. ISIS launched a massive offense to take the city of Kobani.

2014: Kurds in Turkey widely protested the Turkish policy of non-intervention in the Kobani conflict between the YPG and ISIS. PKK employed suicide attacks in large Turkish cities. Turkish forces launched military operations in the south-eastern provinces of Turkey -considered as the PKK’s zone of control (see Aydin and Emrence 2015)

2015: YPG secured support from the US and took control of Kobani from ISIS.

2015-2018: YPJ’s fight against ISIS received extensive international attention.

**Mechanisms Explaining Women’s Significance for PKK**

To understand whether and how such duties of women translated into a stronger resistance, I discuss the pathways through which women contributed to PKK’s performance including providing 1) fighting power, 2) facilitating clandestine tasks (i.e., access to weapons, information,
targets, logistics) 3) mobilization 4) tactical diversity 5) coup-proofing, and 6) international networking. PKK case provides a nuanced account of the first three mechanisms, which are discussed in the literature, and reveals additional mechanisms (4, 5, and 6) that attracted limited attention.

**Fighting Power.** The inclusion of women means going beyond the pool of possible male participants and incorporating a larger number of members in the group. Women contribute to the organizations by participating in fighting and auxiliary roles, thereby increasing the number of participants and, consequently, the number and intensity of attacks (Siqueira 2015) and the probability of successful armed movements (Cunningham et al. 2009).

Women recruits are particularly useful when male recruitment is not readily available (Alison 2004). Like the Palestinian, Chechen, and Tamil movements which recruited women to substitute the male fighters targeted disproportionately by the adversaries (Stack-O’Connor 2007), PKK’s leader considered women initially as “a back-up” source (PKK January 1989, 27). However, after observing their contributions to organizational performance, Öcalan dismissed male members’ resistance against women fighters, praised women for “bravely challenge the enemy” (PKK September 1994, 11; March 1993, 31) and taking on duties that “even men were not able to do” (PKK March 1989, 6). He increased the number of women and expanded their roles both within the PKK and, later, within the YPJ in Syria, constituting approximately 40% of the cadre (YPJ 2018).

The main contribution of women combatants happened at times when the PKK weakened due to massive counterinsurgency campaigns. Women have taken combatant roles since the beginning, if sporadically. For instance, Azime Demirtas, one of the first woman combatants who died in 1983, is considered “a prominent figure of the insurgency” (PKK March 1986, 20). Berivan, worked in mobilization activities in Europe, investigation of spies, interstate logistics, and was a fighter. Necla Altun, Gevher Kara, worked as squad commanders between 1989-1991 (PKK January
1989, 3; PKK March 1989, 6). However, the first women’s army was established after suffering heavy defeats against state forces, precisely in the regions where the organization felt the greatest need to respond to counterinsurgency (Avesta 2001).

The PKK’s military power reached its peak in 1992 after gaining greater access to Iraqi territories upon Saddam Hussein’s defeat in the Persian Gulf War (Tezcür 2015). However, by the end of 1992, Turkey’s intervention in Northern Iraq severely weakened the PKK. As a response, the PKK built the first women’s army in 1993 to fight in regions where male casualties were high. By the early 1990s, the number of women fighters had substantially increased (Tezcür 2015). Women’s effectiveness as combatants led Öcalan to further institutionalize the women’s army (PKK September 1994, 27). Kurdistan Free Women’s Association (YAJK) was launched in 1994 which established defense units composed only of women with female-only training sessions (Avesta 2001). This alleviated men’s dominance on women units and helped women promote their unique ways of strengthening the organization (Düzel 2018), explained further below.

Clandestine Tasks. Recruitment of female militants can facilitate access to critical targets and resources such as weapons, information, and logistics (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007). Women insurgents enable this by distracting security forces (Klouzal 2008) and more easily slipping through security controls due to their stereotypical perception as peaceful (Bloom 2011). This makes women more effective in operations requiring covert activities than their male counterparts, such as spying, smuggling weapons, and drugs, which are typically used to finance these groups (Parkinson 2013). For instance, the founder of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Yassin, stated that Hamas decided to utilize female assailants because of the increasing problems of men getting close to their targets (O’Connor, 2007). Similarly, during the Algerian War, Algerian women took off their veils and
started dressing up in styles that make them look more European with heavy make-up and short skirts. This enabled them to pass through French checkpoints easily and to avoid interrogations (Eager 2008).

The PKK used women’s effectiveness in clandestine activities regularly to sustain everyday tasks and assigned them critical duties, especially in propaganda, spying, and facilitating communication between urban and rural centers (PKK March 1989, 6). For instance, a former woman militant’s diary recounts an event where she was able to trick the Turkish soldiers by disguising as a bride hiding at locals’ home. The household urged soldiers not to enter the bride’s room as it is traditionally inappropriate for men to intrude. Avoiding the risk of deviating from social norms, soldiers only took a cursory glance at the room and did not ask the “bride” to open her veil. Far from an isolated incident, women fighters frequently mention similar instances of using social norms to avoid detection (PKK September 2006, 28). Women’s advantage in informational duties is specifically important for irregular conflicts where the availability of information can be decisive of the conflict outcome and the level of violence (Kalyvas 2006).

This account also provides an example of women’s effectiveness in navigating local networks. Locals feel more comfortable cooperating with women as they consider it less risky, enabling women militants to mobilize other women and youth more easily, particularly in conservative regions where it is deemed inappropriate for men to approach households.

Apart from sustaining routine tasks, women’s advantage in clandestine missions was most critical when the PKK turned to suicide bombing upon losing power due to its fight against the government and the KDP in the early 1990s, with casualties peaking between 1994 and 1996 (TBMM 2013). When it was no longer able to pursue guerilla war, a woman engaged in a suicide attack for the first time in 1996, killing six soldiers and wounding thirty-five during a military
ceremony. Appearing pregnant, this militant woman code-named Zilan could hide the bomb under her clothes and approach to Turkish soldiers (PKK November 1996, 6). The stereotypes neglecting women as primary agents of violence allow them to become more efficient attackers than their male counterparts (Alakoç 2018; O’Rourke 2009). For this reason, the PKK relied heavily on women for suicide attacks. 75% of PKK’s suicide attacks are estimated to be committed by women (ibid).

Mobilization and Public Support. Due to stereotypes associating women with nonviolence, women’s involvement in a rebel organization can send a signal to the public that the current repression is so severe that even women are willing to commit violence (Loken 2018). This can also lend further legitimacy to the group and attract broader public support and mobilization (Alison 2009, Viterna 2014), which is correlated with organizational longevity (Cronin 2009). Greater public support can transform into direct behavioral support, such as providing financial assistance (Paul 2010) or higher tolerance for rebel activities, providing the group more room to carry out its operations. For instance, male members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) resisted women’s involvement in the organization at first, the need to “demonstrate that the group represented a mass social movement” pressured the leaders for the inclusion of women (Alison 2004, 454).

Activities of PKK’s women insurgents maintained societal support, attracted new audiences, and revitalized the Kurdish movement. Öcalan deliberately expanded women’s role within the PKK in time, thinking that “the movement survived all attacks because women have been an important part of it” (PKK January 2006, 15). Recognizing women’s critical role in carrying out mass propaganda activities and communicating with people who have been alienated by the long-lasting violence (PKK October 2003, 13), Öcalan tasked women with becoming “the key agents of democratic politics,” representing the moderate face of the movement, and building bridges with the society (PKK November 2001, 23).
Conceptualizing the PKK as the defender of women’s liberation and communicating this message easier to the public, women effectively mobilized diverse audiences beyond the Kurdish sympathizers. To illustrate, the Peace Mothers Initiative was founded as a civil rights movement in 1999 by the Kurdish women who lost their sons in the conflict. Their intense activism, including sit-ins, hunger strikes, and marches to the capital, has attracted popular attention and is still active as of today. The Free Women’s Democratic Movement brought hundreds of women from civil society, political parties, and local government bodies. It created Women’s Assemblies in dozens of cities, formed shelters for victims of gender-based violence, initiated women’s cooperatives, and opened academies providing training in feminism. These and other examples (see Goksel 2018) show that women helped appealing to people beyond its immediate Kurdish constituency and attracted broader support (Casier 2010).

Women’s propaganda activities helped sustaining the movement, especially during its weakest times. Öcalan’s capture in 1999 brought PKK to the brink of dissolution. Unable to maintain the armed resistance, PKK shifted to nonviolence. This elevated women from a “back-up” source to a primary source of PKK’s power (PKK November 2001, 15, 24, 26). From 1999-onward, there is a marked increase in Serxweban’s emphasis on women’s significance, so much so that in a 2001 interview, Öcalan said: “We might be over-emphasizing this, but it is very critical for women and youth to be the pioneers of the democratic peace process” (PKK November 2001, 10).

Deciding that the execution of nonviolent strategies required a more organized women’s movement, PKK established its first women’s party, Women’s Liberation Party (PJA), the same year

---

6 Later renamed Kongreya Jinen Azad (Free Women’s Congress).

7 While these initiatives do not openly declare allegiance to the PKK, they constitute the legal/non-violent branch of the Kurdish insurgency, draw from Öcalan’s teachings on resistance, and demand the release of Öcalan. See (Bianet 2016).
with Öcalan’s arrest. The PJA was assigned a pioneering role in the mobilization of masses and attracting support from the broader Turkish population (PKK September 2001, 10) by appealing to concerns for gender equality (PKK November 2001, 15). Women militants sought to build coalitions with Turkish leftist groups, students, environmental activists, and other marginalized groups appealing to their demand for greater sociopolitical rights for minorities (PKK November 2001, 15, 26).

Another time where women’s leadership in mobilization helped the organization survive a major crisis was when the PKK’s claim of being the sole representative of Kurdish people is shattered with the rise of internal factions and AKP as a viable political alternative appealing to Kurdish people. The PKK resumed armed insurgency in 2005 to rally supporters and shifted the organization’s focus from goals targeting the state to build community-based networks of democratic assemblies. This renewed strategy put women’s leadership at the center of the PKK’s agenda and gave women the ultimate responsibility to mobilize this initiative at the societal level (PKK March 2006, 4). The same year, women organized under the umbrella of Koma Jinen Bilind (High Women’s Council) and were assigned more leading roles in guerilla as well (PKK March 2005, 14). From establishing the first women’s party to putting women’s leadership as a core pillar, the PKK benefited from a more institutionalized women’s movement expanding its outreach.

**Tactical Diversity.** Diversification of tactics is a key innovation sustaining rebel groups (Bloomberg et al. 2011). Adapting to the dynamic war conditions faster than state militaries help the organizations catch them off guard and provide innovative ways to deal with repression (Horowitz et al. 2018). The PKK has employed a great variety of strategies over time: guerilla warfare, suicide

---

8 The name of the women’s party was Kurdistan Working Women’s Party (PJKK) when it was first established in 1999. Its name has changed to PJA in 2000.
attacks, civil resistance, or a mixture of all. Incorporating new strategies has been a significant source sustaining the PKK’s survival (Eccarius-Kelly 2012).

The analysis of the PKK suggests that women have been critical in enabling tactical shifts efficiently. They were instrumental in adopting suicide attacks when guerilla warfare was no longer sustainable. They also facilitated this tactical change indirectly by shaming men into suicide attacks. Moreover, women helped switching to nonviolence, not only by leading civil resistance activities but also indirectly by enhancing PKK’s credibility in its commitment to nonviolence.

The previous section on clandestine activities outlined women’s advantage in covert acts, like suicide attacks. The case also demonstrates that women indirectly facilitate tactical resilience by pressuring men to perform high-risk acts. The PKK used women to emasculate men who are not willing to execute suicide attacks. Sercâvebun includes many instances where women were used to pressure men into acts that were not in the PKK’s typical repertoire of action (PKK 2001, 28; November 1999, 17; November 1996, 7; June 1999, 12, 24; January 1999, 7, 15). For instance, Öcalan deems a female militant a hero on her suicide attack and belittles men on their inability to transform themselves in line with the PKK’s new strategies: “17-year old Leyla is a hero, but you, men, are ludicrous. If you do not reform yourselves, your manhood is not worth a penny to me” (PKK November 1996, 7).

The first suicide attack, committed by Zilan, was a turning point in this sense (PKK June 1999, 8). She became a symbol of the expected loyalty from the militants. In fact, the word “Zilanification” (Zilansıymak) was created as a euphemism for suicide bombings, glorifying militants’ suicide attacks as the epitome of sacrifice in service for the organization’s goals. Öcalan made frequent references to Zilan, urging men into fulfilling their renewed duties:

“You call yourself men? After Zilan’s act, men cannot be the same. I will not consider one who does not transform himself in line with the current
strategy] a “man” […]. The old manhood is completely dead.” (PKK June 1997, 13)

Serswebun reports male members mentioning their desire to follow in Zilan’s footsteps before their suicide missions, suggesting that emasculating strategies could be useful (PKK April 1999, 20).

Moreover, women were instrumental in expanding the PKK’s repertoire of actions to nonviolent tactics. The previous section on mobilization already highlighted women’s leading role in nonviolent activities. It is important to note that women were not only the principal actors of practically executing nonviolent tactics, but also represented the organization’s commitment to nonviolence during the peace process and increased its credibility of embracing unarmed tactics.

Despite the success of the PKK in carrying women away from their traditional roles to become fighters, women’s roles were still demarcated by the traditional understanding of women as natural peacemakers (PKK September 2001, 1). Öcalan noted, “Let mothers and daughters do peaceful protests. Let them become the bombs of freedom and peace. Women’s nature favors peace.” (PKK July 1999, 1). This understanding led the organization to believe that women can persuade the public about the movement’s righteousness. As Öcalan said, “All legitimate struggles and civil resistance activities are important for us. Because of that, the conference decided that these methods would be the methods of the Women’s Liberation Movement.” (PKK August 2001, 1).

According to him, women should employ nonviolent activities because conducting legitimate strategies is vital for attracting support (PKK August 2001, 7). He says,

“We should pursue our legitimate struggle not through violent means damaging our legitimacy, but through nonviolent methods. [...] Specifically, women should act carefully, knowing that they have the utmost responsibility to carry out this mission. [...] Peace Mothers’ remarkable protest shows you the vital role of women in creating peace.” (PKK November 1999, 25)

Öcalan specifically considers women’s movement as “an indicator the depth of PKK’s transformation to nonviolent resistance” (PKK August 2001, 12) and as “the strategic foundation of
the PKK’s transformation during its most critical periods.” (PKK June 2002, 18). The archives and aforementioned nonviolent initiatives suggest that women have been effective in allowing this tactical shift.

Women’s role in the PKK’s diversification of tactics can also inform us why existing research finds a higher likelihood of using nonviolence or mixed strategies in armed organizations embracing gender-inclusive ideologies (Asal et al. 2013). The PKK case shows that the presence of women prompts the “peaceful women” stereotype, empowering women as civil resistance mobilizers and giving leaders a viable option to adopt unarmed methods effectively and credibly. This increases the organizations’ ability to implement nonviolent strategies. This suggests that it is the practical advantage of women in mobilizing nonviolence that allows leaders to include this alternative to the organization’s repertoire rather than embracing feminist ideology, as suggested.

**Coup-Proofing.** Management of internal factions is a core determinant of organizational survival (Asal et al. 2012). A split could reduce troop size and public support. Rebel groups are typically challenged by factions due to weak enforcement mechanisms (Perlman and Cunningham 2012). The PKK is not an exception. Factions within the PKK have competed for the leadership and challenged the central command (PKK April 2002, 5).

Women have been critical in shaping the power dynamics within the PKK. Barring some exceptions, women worked effectively to repulse the challenges posed to the leader’s authority and have been more active and influential than men in overcoming internal challenges (PKK September 2001, 31). Establishing a strong women’s movement with a separate army worked as a coup-proofing strategy minimizing the possibilities of factions seizing power. Öcalan increased women’s

---

9 Öcalan condemns some women’s units for failing to repel the “internal enemies,” blaming women’s understanding and the structure of the organization for the growth of this threat (PKK 1999 September, 23).
influence by giving them critical roles, then deliberately positioned them as a shield against the competing factions. He considered the women’s movement as an alternative to the male-led factions which would carry the organization’s goals forward “even if everyone else gives up fighting” (Nurhak 2013).

Öcalan calls the women’s movement a “panacea against plotters” (PKK October 2001, 35) because women’s lower life prospects outside of the organization made them more loyal to the movement (PKK September 2001, 7): “Women, who have suffered most from the current system, are the ones who can develop the most radical solutions. Women have the potential to strongly react against the reactionary impulses within the struggle” (PKK October 2005, 19). He repeats similar ideas time and again: “women need democracy and freedom the most; they are the ones who can best internalize these values and sacrifice themselves in pursuit of them” (PKK September 2006, 23).

Indeed, the women’s party PAJK immediately issued a statement declaring their commitment to Öcalan after his arrest (Avesta 2001). Similarly, the women’s movement was the only organized group within PKK protesting solitary confinement for Öcalan (PKK January 2006, 3). These displays of allegiance were critical for the sustenance authority because factions specifically tried to gain women’s support to seize power (PKK June 1999, 13). The PKK claims that rivals’ reach out to women was a deliberate decision, as garnering their support would shift the power dynamics to their advantage because “they realized that women are becoming a power in and of itself.” (PKK April 2002, 5, 32; PJA 2004)\(^\text{10}\)

\(^{10}\) See also (PKK, April 2001, 5) and (PKK, April 2002, 19) for the activities of the fractions within the PKK targeting women.
PAJK’s statements further clarify women’s role in guarding the leader’s authority: “Women’s most essential duty is to protect the leadership—the leadership made us who we are today, taught us what being women means and created women’s organization. PAJK was established in 2004 when traitors were trying to develop strategies to take women to their sides” (PKK June 2006, 14). Women’s loyalty is strong particularly for Öcalan, who formed and maintained the women’s movement despite opposition from male members. In other words, Öcalan successfully transformed women’s lower chances of living prosperous lives to an army of loyal women that would protect the leadership in times of turmoil.

PKK’s cooptation of women’s movement as a coup-proofing strategy is akin to authoritarian regimes’ provision of women’s rights as a bulwark for political support and coalition-building (Donno and Kreft 2018). The PKK case suggests that incorporating women’s rights as a means to strengthen organizational power is a strategy adopted not only by party-based authoritarian states as suggested; but also by rebel groups to strengthen leaders’ authority.

**International Networking.** Rebels seek external support to mobilize resources, pressure governments, and build legitimacy among broader audiences. Competing for limited external resources, rebels frame their causes to match the interests of transnational actors. Exhibiting awareness on gender issues is often rewarded by Western progressive NGOs (Clifford 2005). PKK offers a neat example of benefiting from women insurgents to build international ties (PKK June 2002, 6). PKK’s endorsement of gender emancipation opened new collaboration venues with NGOs abroad.

Women insurgents’ activities in Europe have been crucial to mobilizing European public opinion against undemocratic practices of the Turkish government during the 1990s and 2000s when Turkey’s primary foreign policy goal was to become a member of the European Union. The
PKK established its first women’s association in Germany, instead of Turkey, and opened multiple branches throughout Europe (KJB 2011). This provided the organization more room to maneuver during heavy counterinsurgency at home and allowed women to build ties with European NGOs early on. (KJB 2011) For instance, the YAJK partnered with the Women’s International Democratic Federation in Paris and secured participation even in the UN’s World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (KJB 2011). Recognized as a terrorist organization by the European states, the PKK established “independent” women’s NGOs pursuing democratic agendas to sustain its activities:

“The organized women will be the principal source of democratization. […] We should establish new organizations abroad which should be viewed as independent and legal NGOs. These organizations should not be viewed as PKK’s different versions. Otherwise, they would harm the movement’s efforts to progress through democratic means.” (PKK 2001, 17-22)

Kurdish female militants’ international appeal has expanded even more since the rise of ISIS. Syrian offshoots of the PKK, YPG and the all-women army of YPJ, secured an alliance with the US and defended Kurdish-populated Syrian territories against the ISIS. YPJ’s women enjoyed extensive international support and media coverage, glamorizing their courage. Notwithstanding the concerns of the NATO ally Turkey, the US Central Command tweeted photos of Kurdish women militants displaying open support (CENTCOM 2017) while French President Holland welcomed Nesrin Abdullah, the commander of YPJ, at his palace (Tastekin 2015). She was also invited by the Italian government and gave a speech in the Italian Parliament (JINHA 2015). Öcalan was pleased with the Western reaction: “With the Kurdish resistance against ISIS, the negative perception against the PKK is destroyed in the eyes of the regional and international political actors. Especially women’s bold and moral fight against one of the most ruthless gangs doubled the attention towards the PKK” (PKK February 2015, 12).
Overall, women’s international networking activities have been crucial for increasing the Kurdish movement’s international appeal (PKK August 2001, 7). The PKK gained access to the network of women’s NGOs in Europe and competed for grants provided by them (PKK March 2005, 12).

Costs of Women’s Recruitment on PKK

Although rebel groups constantly need recruits to replace the casualties, 60% of them do not recruit women combatants (Wood and Thomas 2017). One reason concerns the costs of women’s integration. Rebel leaders may avoid recruiting women to avoid disruption of group cohesion and discipline (Thomas and Bond 2015).

While PKK’s effective integration of women is associated with feminism (Bethan 2017), the challenges the group -and the women- face during this process are usually neglected. Women’s integration into PKK was not a linear process; it was wrought with numerous challenges, some of which even resulted in women’s expulsion from key units. The main challenge of gender-diverse cadres has been dealing with the inefficiencies caused by male members’ disturbance on women’s integration, which disrupted group cohesion and discipline.

First, traditional understanding deeming women as lacking capacity to fight has been prevalent among men throughout the PKK’s history. This generated frequent controversies. Some units forced women to engage in propaganda activities instead of fighting (PKK December 2001, 29-30). Furthermore, women were marginalized based on their alleged apolitical attitudes and incapacity to understand the movement’s ideology (PKK October 2001, 35).11

---

11 This view was shared by some female members too (PKK August 2001, 4).
In effect, these pressures led some women to work harder to prove their usefulness (Bingol 2018) and engage in high-risk actions more than men (Duzel 2018). Also, women’s testaments reveal cases where male commanders, who are threatened by women’s successes, deliberately put women in risky situations to blame them for failures (Al-Ali and Tas 2018). Öcalan reveals the challenges faced during women’s integration:

“We managed to attract a decent number of women into our ranks[…]. However, the process is actually filled with tragic and sorrowful events. Men cannot deny their big guilt in this. Men are wretched and digressive. They are not able to comprehend the value of the women’s movement […] Women’s integration into the army is still left half-done and needs to be developed. Women will develop their own principles under YAJK. However, I still have some hesitations over this issue.” (PKK January 1999, 7).

Tensions on women’s roles peaked between 1993-1995 (PKK February 2015, 25). According to a female insurgent, “it was much more difficult to survive as a woman within the guerilla movement than fighting with the enemy. Öcalan’s order to create a separate women’s army was a lifesaver” (PKK February 2015, 25). However, the women-only army did not resolve the unrest over women’s roles. Deciding that “women constitute an obstacle for the advancement of the war,” PKK’s Amed (Diyarbakır) unit expelled women in 1994 and recommended banning them from combat in all regions (PKK September 1997, 21).

Controversies over women have continued even after the organization decided to adopt a women-centric order in 2005. Many times throughout the archives, Öcalan gets enraged at members who question women’s role within the army (PKK October 2006, 17) and states that a key challenge hampering the advancement of women’s organization is men’s failure to grasp women’s predominant role (PKK February 2015, 10). He urges male members to consider women’s predominant role as a core principle of the organization rather than treating it as a temporary tactical move and or considering it as power competition.
The second main problem has been the management of intimate relationships between women and men. Öcalan maintains that sexual desire is a threat to the success of the movement and bans romantic relationships. Feelings of love and desire should be diverted towards the party’s collective goals (Öcalan 1993, 109). The PKK seems to have seen frequent violations to this rule; throughout the archives, Öcalan regularly castigates members engaging in relationships for disrupting the discipline. According to him, the regulation of romantic relationships has been a major challenge hindering the PKK’s efficiency (PKK June 1999, 24).

**Discussion of the Case Study**

Two main conclusions are borne out of the case study. First, women are sought after when the organization faces serious challenges. Second, women’s involvement becomes particularly effective for the organization in settings where gender stereotypes are stronger, and where women face fewer life prospects outside of the organization.

First, the case suggests that women are sought after particularly when the organization faces severe crises. The PKK experienced its first significant challenge in 1992 when Turkey’s operation against the PKK bases in northern Iraq severely weakened its military power. The women’s army was established in 1993 as a response. Women fighters acted as substitutes to males during heavy casualties. This was crucial because rebel groups’ ability to challenge governments relies on the existence of a critical mass willing to risk their lives by fighting.

The next instances when women proved essential were when the PKK had to switch tactics in 1996 to suicide attacks and again in 1999 to nonviolence. Suicide attacks helped the organization continue inflicting costs to the state and ensured survival when guerilla war was no longer sustainable. After Öcalan’s arrest in 1999, the first women’s party was established for the realization of nonviolent tactics. Tactical diversification helps organizations maintain their strength and
increases their effectiveness in responding to repression (Horrowitz et al. 2018; Bloomberg et al. 2011).

Another significant downturn came in 2004 after PKK started losing its ability to portray itself as the sole organization representing Kurdish interests due to rival factions and the rise of AKP in Kurdish regions. In 2005, PKK declared gender-emancipation as its core principle. Women helped to maintain the public support acting as coalition-builders with leftists, marginalized groups, and international actors. Moreover, women led the organization’s coup-proofing strategy when factions posed a threat to Öcalan in 1999 and 2004. They reinforced the leader’s chain of command, which is typically associated with more efficient operations (Shapiro 2013).

The second conclusion derived from the case is that the principle mechanism explaining most of the women’s unique contributions is gender stereotypes. Gender roles associating women with a private sphere instead of a public sphere helps to evade suspicion on women insurgents. This provides women greater access to areas unapproachable by men, facilitates gathering information, enables greater destruction for violent tactics, facilitates switching to nonviolence, and signals credibility for the organization’s embracement of nonviolence. This provides tactical diversity and helps to attract the support of larger audiences who do not approve of violence.

Another related mechanism explaining women’s contributions is gender inequality in general, and the fewer life prospects of women insurgents outside of the organization, in particular. Women’s inferior social status helps the organization position itself as a supporter of women’s rights and broaden its support base who are concerned with gender inequality. Lower life prospects of women insurgents outside of the organization strengthens their loyalty to the organization, motivating them to resist internal threats against the organization’s survival. This is consistent with Bueno de Mesquita’s quality of terror model, which argues that decreased economic opportunity
makes more people willing to mobilize and increases the pool of high-quality recruits” (2005). It suggests that, if we accept this case as our guide, we can expect women insurgents to be more effective for rebel groups in settings where gender stereotypes are stronger, and women face higher inequality.

Ironically, these are the same factors explaining why rebel groups consider using women mostly at times of crises. Women’s advantage is stronger where gender norms are stronger. This is in line with Ness’ argument (2005, 357) suggesting that “in cultures where gender roles are traditional, it is that much more incumbent on women and girls to improvise techniques by which they can carry out their missions while still adhering to the gender dictates of the dominant social structure.” At the same time, the strength of the gender norms that do not consider women as agents of combat precludes rebel groups’ use of women at every stage (Goldstein 2011). Facing crises helps rebels overcome this line of thinking, as such challenges necessitate using women to maintain the organizations’ survival. This is in line with the reports of the Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin who stated that “women are like the reserve army, when there is a necessity we use them” (Business Recorder 2002, cited in Zedalis 2004). This does not mean that those organizations start embracing egalitarian gender roles. Incorporation of women into the militancy means disruption of gender roles, and this creates a tension for armed groups that are typically profoundly patriarchal. Groups navigate this tension by “stressing the temporariness of gender-role expansion, promising and preserving a ‘return to normal’” (Loken 2020, 1). Indeed, the literature on women militants in traditional societies informs a pattern “whereby women combatants are viewed as equal to men in issues relating to the struggle, but not outside of it” (Ness 2005, 357).
Macro-level Hypothesis Testing

The case suggests that, despite the challenges of maintaining group cohesion and discipline in gender-mixed cadres, women have profoundly contributed to the organization’s resistance abilities. While the case offers insight into complex processes of rebel group operation that quantitative data cannot easily reveal, it is important to assess the generalizability of its main conclusions. This section analyzes whether women’s recruitment overall has a positive impact on rebels’ ability to resist and maintain the movement, by comparing groups that include and exclude women insurgents.

The case shows that women contribute to their organizations not only by fighting but also by undertaking various duties as non-combatants. Research confirms that women are disproportionately delegated to support tasks that are instrumental in sustaining the group (Parkinson 2013), such as working as informants, medics, providing logistics, training, and attracting new recruits. Non-combatant women can also improve the effectiveness of operations by engaging in back-up military tasks such as building a roadblock, guarding a territory, spying, and alike. For instance, commanders of the Women’s Auxiliary Corps of Liberians United For Reconciliation and Democracy mention that they select some non-combatant girls to go to the checkpoint and to take care of the wounded soldiers on the battlefield (Specht 2010). According to Coulter et al. (2008, 17) many rebel forces in Africa would not be able to survive were it not for the agricultural labor of women who are responsible for harvesting, food production, and distribution during armed conflict.

While we separate combatant and non-combatant roles in theory, they are hard to distinguish in practice (Bouta et al. 2005). The boundaries between these roles are often blurred because women usually fulfill multiple roles (Mckay and Mazurana 2004). If combatant women are present, they almost always engage in non-combatant activities too, whereas the presence of non-combatant women does not necessarily mean that they also adopt combatant roles. To capture their
unique significance, I analyze the impact of 1) both female combatants and non-combatants (female insurgents) 2) female combatants, 3) only female non-combatants on the movement’s ability to resist government repression.

H₁: Rebel groups with female insurgents (both combatants & non-combatants) are more likely to resist government repression than groups without female insurgents.

H₂: Rebel groups with female combatants are more likely to resist government repression than groups without female combatants.

H₃: Rebel groups with female non-combatants (but no female combatants) are more likely to resist government repression than groups without female non-combatants.

The second part of the quantitative analyses tests the scope conditions of women’s impact on the sustenance and resistance capacity of rebel groups. The findings of the case study suggest that women’s impact should be higher where gender stereotypes are stronger. Also, the impact of the stereotypes on women’s ability to fortify the movement should be stronger for those in non-combatant roles because the nature of their duties (i.e., spying, arms delivery, propaganda) requires relying on gender stereotypes more heavily than combatant women. To engage in covert activities more effectively than men, non-combatant women need to take advantage of the stereotypes that do not consider them as agents of violence more than combatant women, whose contributions as extra fighting power in a guerilla war is more similar to their male counterparts.

H₄: Women insurgents’ impact on rebel groups’ ability to resist government repression is higher where gender stereotypes are stronger compared to settings where gender stereotypes are weaker.

H₅: Impact of gender stereotypes on rebel groups’ ability to resist government repression is more salient for non-combatant women than combatant women.

Data and Measures

The quantitative analysis is based on WARD v.1.2, which includes information on female recruitment for more than 200 rebel organizations operating between 1989 and 2009 (Wood and
The sample of rebel groups is based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program’s (UCDP) Dyadic Dataset, which is one of the most commonly used datasets for studying civil conflict (Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2007). WARD relies on the UCDP’s definition of armed conflict and armed groups. According to UCDP, armed conflict is defined as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths.” Armed groups involved in these conflicts are defined as “groups as any nongovernmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force to influence the outcome of the stated incompatibility.”12 The WARD excludes coups and related military factions. Ultimately, the WARD covers approximately 75% of the relevant groups listed in the UCDP Dyadic Dataset.

Female combatants are defined as frontline combatants, female suicide bombers, assassins, and auxiliaries or members of civil defense forces who receive military training, carry combat weapons, and could be called upon to participate in combat when necessary. Female combatant is a binary variable, indicating whether a rebel organization recruits female fighters (1) or not (0).

Since the WARD excludes women who do not directly engage in violence, I collected original data on the participation of non-combatant women in armed groups based on an extensive search using news reports, articles, books, and reports of the local and international NGOs. The definition of female non-combatants is based on the UN Women’s terminology (2012, 22-23): “women and girls who participated in armed conflicts in supportive roles, whether coerced or voluntarily. Examples include porters, cooks, nurses, spies, administrators, translators, radio operators, medical assistants, public information workers, or women used for sexual exploitation.”

---

12 For more information, see https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/
A few examples would clarify how I coded non-combatant women variable. For instance, in her article on the gender roles in Burmese oppositional struggles, Hedström (2016) discusses how Burmese women were active in the nonviolent phase of the movement but then were relegated to secondary positions when the movement turned violent. Hedström’s interviews with the former All Burma Students’ Democratic Front militants (ABSDF) provide valuable information about the roles of the women in the organization:

“They [male militants] think women are not suitable for that, so when you have committee member elections, there are one or two women in the committees, but they are assigned to medical issues, and also finance or audit or information. […] The women are not seen as suitable for this kind of life and this kind of struggle, so there’s a lot of name saying that women should take part only as medical or some office staff. So, they [male militants] did not allow the women to take the first batch of military training. … [But the women] fought for the right to participate in the military training. […] The women were finally accepted in training, but after the training, we had different rules. All men go to the military columns and mostly for the defense services, but women are not allowed on the front lines.” (ibid., 67-68)

Whenever possible, I double-check the information I found about women’s role from more than one resource. Swiss Peace Foundation’s report on Burma’s peace process, written by Burmese experts working in the field, confirms that women did not actively take up arms or serve in leadership roles in the ABSDF, but took up supportive roles (Khen 2014). Hence, while the presence of women in combatant roles is coded as 0 in WARD, I coded the presence of non-combatant women in ABSDF as 1.

Another example is the Sikh separatist Khalistan Movement in India where the presence of non-combatant women is coded as 1. Research based on interviews with the movements’ women insurgents reveal that women acted as messengers, couriers, and spies, instead of fighters:

“I used to receive and dispatch messages. I acted as an informer. I utilized my vocal skills to extract information about police activities and their informers by going from home to home in my village. Most women are fond of gossiping, and hence I spent a substantial duration of my day conversing
with women to seek information. It was a tiring and time-taking task. Sometimes for days, I could not get any crucial information. I had to be attentive all the time since at times apparently prosaic information could prove crucial. For instance, once during a conversation, I came to know that one police official, who had killed four of our brothers (militants), was coming to the village to attend a wedding. I passed on this information to the militants. The officer was shot dead in the wedding hall itself” (Mann 2015, 34).

Further, according to the INGO reports, Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines and Free Aceh Movement in Indonesia do not assign women to fighter roles but recruit them for other duties. Geneva Call’s report on the distinctive workshop held with the female members of 18 armed groups reveals that women played only supportive roles in MILF and GAM (Mazurana 2004, 32). For this reason, I coded the presence of non-combatant women variable for MILF and GAM as 1, while the presence of female combatants in these organizations is coded as 0 in WARD.

Female insurgents variable captures the presence of both combatant and non-combatant women and takes the value of 1 if the rebel organization features both female combatants and non-combatants, and 0 otherwise. According to this data, 70% of the armed groups have women insurgents. The correlation between female combatants and all female insurgents is 0.58. Female non-combatants variable excludes combatant women from all female insurgents and takes the value of 1 for rebel groups which feature women in non-combatant roles only.

The total number of organizations with the data on all female insurgents and only female non-combatants is 200 while it is 227 for the female combatants (See Figure 2). The number of cases is lower for all female insurgents and only female non-combatants than the latter (female combatants) because we lack information on the presence of female non-combatants for 27 groups whereas this is not the case for the presence (or lack thereof) for female combatants. These 27 groups do not have female combatants according to the WARD, so they are deemed as 0 in the dataset. Since we do not have enough information whether non-combatant women are present or absent in these groups, their values
are considered missing. The correlation between all female insurgents and female combatants is 0.58. The correlation between only female non-combatants and female combatants is -0.53.

Figure 2. Total Number of Rebel Groups with Female Combatants, Only Female Noncombatants, and All Female Insurgents

The numbers within the pie charts denote the total number of armed organizations in which women are present or absent as insurgents (both non-combatant and combatant), only non-combatants, and combatants, respectively \( \left[ \text{total number of organizations with female insurgents} = \text{presence of (female non-combatants + female combatants)} \right] \).

The first dependent variable, rebel strength, captures rebel groups’ ability to resist/evade government repression (Cunningham et al. 2013). It is a composite measure adopted from Non-State Actors in Armed Conflict Dataset (NSA) indicating whether the rebel group is much weaker, weaker, at parity, stronger or much stronger relative to the government, in terms of its ability to target government forces, resist repression, and procure arms (Cunningham et al. 2009, 580). The second dependent variable, duration, captures rebels’ ability to survive and sustain the armed

13 These groups are Patani insurgents in Thailand; FIAA in Mali; Hizb-i Wahdat in Afghanistan; PALIR in Rwanda; EPRLF and TELO in Sri Lanka; NRF in Sudan; RFDG in Guinea; MNDA, UWSA, DKBA 5, CPB, UWSA and RSO in Myanmar; NSCN-IM in India; SRRC and SSDF in Somalia; Wahhabi movement of the Buinaksk district in Russia; Lashkar-e-Islam in Pakistan; ATNMC in Mali; LRM in Laos; ADF in Uganda; PFNR and CDR in Chad; FDR and CRA in Niger; EIJM-AS in Eritrea; and National Democratic Front in Yemen.

14 The “much stronger” category has only six observations. Therefore, I grouped the “much stronger” and “stronger” categories in case these six observations are outliers.
movement. It is operationalized as the total number of years since the conflict initiation, based on the NSA.

The models control for alternative explanations deemed crucial for the relationship between women and the strength of the groups vis-à-vis governments. The first group of variables is related to the characteristics of rebel organizations. Whether rebel groups control any territory or have a central command structure impacts their ability to challenge their adversaries (Asal and Rethemeyer 2008). Also, groups with strong central command might be better able to deal with the problems of integrating women into the ranks, which may affect organizations’ likelihood of recruiting women. Similarly, women might be more willing to participate in organizations with territorial control that would protect them from government repression. Central command structure and territorial control are dichotomous measures adapted from the NSA, where 1 indicates rebels’ having a central leadership structure and controlling any territory, respectively. Because the data are time-invariant, rebel group measures represent the median values of the variables in NSA over the course of the conflict.

Another control is whether a group embraces a leftist ideology or not. Leftist ideology is expected to boost rebel capacity as they require the mobilization of a large cross-section of the population. Also, women are more likely to participate in leftist organizations, which tend to welcome gender-inclusive ideology and demand women participants for grassroots mobilizations (Wood and Thomas 2017). Whether groups embrace leftist ideology (leftist) is adapted from the WARD dataset.

The second group of variables controls for the features of the conflict environment in which rebel groups operate. The level of a country’s economic development, measured as GDP per capita, is included from WARD since countries with lower development levels render insurgency more feasible and attractive (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Research also suggests that the development level of
a country is also positively correlated with women’s propensity to participate in political violence (Dalton and Asal 2011). The models testing relative strength control for the duration of the rebellion as the strength of the group can change in time, and longer rebellions may create more opportunities for female recruitment (ibid). The models examining the lifespan of organizations control for the strength of the groups relative to governments.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>0.392</td>
<td>0.489</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Insurgents</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0.705</td>
<td>0.457</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Noncombatants</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Strength</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>1.769</td>
<td>0.726</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Labor Force Participation</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>50.839</td>
<td>19.823</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Control</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>0.381</td>
<td>0.487</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Control</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>0.935</td>
<td>0.246</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftist</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0.177</td>
<td>0.383</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>6.764</td>
<td>8.688</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Level</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>7.491</td>
<td>0.968</td>
<td>5.428</td>
<td>10.111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis

I test the hypotheses using OLS models, as Angrist and Pischke (2008) recommend using OLS even when the dependent variable is categorical due to OLS being more robust to model misspecification and distribution assumptions. Also, even with the appropriate assumptions or inputs, most likelihood estimation results are biased in small samples. That said, I did the same analysis using ordered probit models, and the results are very similar to the results from the OLS models (See Appendix A).

The models tested for the first part of the analysis are:

**Model 1**  
Conflict duration = \( \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Female Insurgents}) + \beta_2(\text{Rebel Strength}) + \beta_3(\text{Territorial Control}) + \beta_4(\text{Central Command}) + \beta_5(\text{Leftist Ideology}) + \beta_6(\text{Development Level}) + e \)
Model 2  Conflict duration = $\beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Female Combatants}) + \beta_2(\text{Female Noncombatants}) + \beta_3(\text{Rebel Strength}) + \beta_4(\text{Territorial Control}) + \beta_5(\text{Central Command}) + \beta_6(\text{Leftist Ideology}) + \beta_7(\text{Development Level}) + \varepsilon$

Model 3  Rebel Strength = $\beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Female Insurgents}) + \beta_2(\text{Territorial Control}) + \beta_3(\text{Central Command}) + \beta_4(\text{Leftist Ideology}) + \beta_5(\text{Development Level}) + \beta_6(\text{Conflict Duration}) + \varepsilon$

Model 4  Rebel Strength = $\beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{Female Combatants}) + \beta_2(\text{Female Noncombatants}) + \beta_3(\text{Territorial Control}) + \beta_4(\text{Central Command}) + \beta_5(\text{Leftist Ideology}) + \beta_6(\text{Development Level}) + \beta_7(\text{Conflict Duration}) + \varepsilon$

Models 1 and 3 look at the impact of the presence of female insurgents (combatant or not) on conflict duration and relative rebel strength vis-à-vis their adversaries, respectively. Models 2 and 4 allow comparisons between both rebel groups with female combatants and with only female non-combatant members vis-a-vis rebel groups without female insurgents, which is the omitted category. The results show that female militants increase rebel survivability. This is true whether one considers only combatants, non-combatants or both. The presence of female combatants is associated with longer conflicts; 6.6 years longer on average, while the presence of only non-combatant women can increase longevity by 2.2 years. Groups with female insurgents, overall, can prolong conflict duration by 4.6 years compared to those without female insurgents (see Figure 2 and Table 2).

Figure 3 shows the coefficient plot of the impact of women on relative rebel strength estimated by Models 3 and 4. The results are in the expected direction. Rebel organizations with (i) female combatants, (ii) only female non-combatants, or (iii) female members (combatant or not) all tend to have greater relative rebel strength compared to those without women participants. That said, only for organizations with female combatants is this difference statistically significant at the 0.05 level (see Table 2 for the complete results). It can suggest that the contribution of combatant women is higher for their rebel groups’ ability to resist government repression compared to those of non-combatant women. While non-combatant women are effective in maintaining the insurgency for longer durations compared to those without any women, they are not as effective as combatant
women (Figure 3). In a similar vein, women’s active fight in the frontlines seems to have a higher effect on groups’ relative rebel strength compared to women in supportive roles (Figure 4).

Figure 3. The Impact of Women on Conflict Duration

![Graph showing the impact of women on conflict duration](image)

The effect of women’s participation on conflict duration estimated by Models 1 and 2 with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 4. The Impact of Women on Relative Rebel Strength

![Graph showing the impact of women on relative rebel strength](image)

The effect of women on relative rebel strength estimated by Models 3 and 4 with 95% confidence intervals.
Table 2. Women Insurgents, Conflict Duration and Relative Rebel Strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Rebel Strength</td>
<td>Rebel Strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Insurgents</td>
<td>4.637***</td>
<td>0.204</td>
<td>0.308*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants</td>
<td>6.599***</td>
<td>0.308*</td>
<td>0.308*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Non-combatants</td>
<td>2.155*</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Strength</td>
<td>-2.665***</td>
<td>-2.874***</td>
<td>-2.874***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Control</td>
<td>3.911*</td>
<td>3.585*</td>
<td>0.495***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Command</td>
<td>1.527</td>
<td>1.053</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftist Ideology</td>
<td>1.682</td>
<td>1.594</td>
<td>(0.167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Level</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.758</td>
<td>-0.171**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>-0.018**</td>
<td>-0.020**</td>
<td>-0.020**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.071</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>2.913***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.172</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>0.217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

In the second part of the analysis, I examine whether the relationship between women’s participation in rebel organizations and the organization’s ability to survive (as captured by conflict duration and relative rebel strength) indeed depends on the prevalence of the traditionally accepted gender roles, as suggested by the case and formulated in hypotheses 4 and 5.

In order to test this proposition, I use the level of female labor force participation at the country level as a proxy for the traditional roles attributed to women in society. This measure is informative about the socially accepted roles for women to work outside the home, as it is for men, because social norms about gender confine the extent to which it is possible or desirable for women

15 Values for some covariates are missing; this reduces the sample to 197 observations.
to enter the labor force and these gendered norms have often been institutionally enforced in the form of restrictions on the types of work that women can do (Alesina et al. 2013).

While this proxy does not measure individual values on traditional gender roles, it can be considered as a measure suggesting the behavioral outcome underlying these values (ibid). Indeed, research shows that there is a close link between the objective measures from the country-level analysis, such as women’s labor force participation, and the subjective measures from individual-level analyses on the same topic, such as beliefs about whether women should have equal access to jobs (ibid.). This measure is employed by numerous prior studies to capture socially accepted gender roles maintaining that “female labor force participation at the aggregate level will depend on the distribution of preferences and beliefs (including beliefs about how others will treat women as a function of her work decision) within a country, and this distribution may also vary across countries, reflecting variation in culture” (Fernandez and Fogli 2009, 148). I adopted the female labor force participation (FLFP) measure from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators. It reflects the percentage of women aged 15 to 64 that are in the labor force measured in 2000.

Models 5-7 demonstrate results acquired from interacting female militants with FLFP. Model 5 considers the impact of women only in combatant roles. Model 6 tests the impact of non-combatant women and, to do so, controls for the role of combatant women. Model 7 considers all female insurgents (combatant or not):

**Model 5**  
Rebel Strength = β_0 + β_1(Female Combatants) + β_2(FLFP) + β_3(Female Combatants)*β_4(FLFP) + β_5(Territorial Control) + β_6(Central Command) + β_7(Leftist Ideology) + β_8(Development Level) + β_9(Conflict Duration) + e

**Model 6**  
Rebel Strength = β_0 + β_1(Female Noncombatants) + β_2(FLFP) + β_3(Female Noncombatants)*β_4(FLFP) + β_5(Female Combatants) + β_6(Female Combatants)*β_7(FLFP) + β_8(Territorial Control) + β_9(Central Command) + β_10(Leftist Ideology) + β_11(Development Level) + β_12(Conflict Duration) + e
Model 7

Rebel Strength = β₀ + β₁(Female Insurgents) + β₂(FLFP) + β₃(Female Insurgents)*β₄(FLFP) +
β₅(Territorial Control) + β₆(Central Command) + β₇(Leftist Ideology) +
β₈(Development Level) + β₉(Conflict Duration) + e

Based on these models, Figures 4-6 show the average marginal effects of female combatants, non-combatants and all female insurgents depending on the strength of the gender stereotypes, respectively.

The results support the hypotheses, suggesting that the impact of female insurgents on rebels’ ability to resist governments depends on the prevalence of traditional gender stereotypes. This impact is more salient for non-combatant women, as expected. Figure 4 (based on Table 3 below) suggests that the impact of gender stereotypes on the relationship between combatant women and rebel resistance is in line with the expectations, though not as strong as the case with non-combatant women. Figure 5 shows that the impact of non-combatant women is positive and statistically significant in settings where gender stereotypes are stronger (FLFP is weaker), whereas it diminishes as traditional gender roles erode (FLFP is higher). We observe a similar result for all female insurgents in Figure 6, providing evidence for the argument that the prevalence of traditionally accept gender roles is a crucial factor determining the significance of women insurgents for their organizations.

One can ask how the reasons for women’s involvement in an armed group influence the results of their involvement. Women’s involvement in armed groups is usually discussed from supply-side or demand-side dynamics, which refer to the conditions that enable the supply of insurgent women and the demands of the rebel groups, respectively (Thomas and Bond 2015). In terms of the supply-side, existing research suggest that there are no meaningful differences in the factors that condition women to participate compared to men’s participation, overall. Women and
men are both motivated to participate in political violence due to similar reasons, such as revenge, representations, or social role fulfillment (Speckhard 2008).

Figure 5. Average Marginal Effects of Female Combatants According to the Strength of Gender Stereotypes

![Average Marginal Effects of Female Combatants with 95% CIs](image1)

Average marginal effects of female combatants according to the strength of traditional gender stereotypes measured as women's labor force participation based on Model 5

Figure 6. Average Marginal Effects of Female Non-combatants According to the Strength of Gender Stereotypes

![Average Marginal Effects of Female Noncombatants with 95% CIs](image2)

Average marginal effects of female non-combatants according to the strength of gender stereotypes measured as women's labor force participation based on Model 6
Figure 7. Average Marginal Effects of Female Insurgents According to the Strength of Gender Stereotypes

Average marginal effects of female *insurgents* (both combatants and non-combatants) according to the strength of gender stereotypes measured as women’s labor force participation based on model 7.

In terms of demand-side, recent cross-national studies suggest that rebel groups that embrace gender-inclusive and leftist ideology are more likely to include women (Thomas and Bond 2015, Wood and Thomas 2018). Also, longer-lived rebel groups, as well as groups that are larger in size and that use terror acts, are more likely to include women compared to smaller and short-lived organizations (Dalton and Asal 2011, Thomas and Bond 2017). It can be argued that groups embracing leftist and gender-equal ideology aim to mobilize large segments of the population, which may show differences in group strength, fighting capacity, or other relevant factors compared to the rest of the groups in the sample. Yet, the available datasets do not show a direct positive correlation between leftist ideology and group strength or fighting capacity. I control for leftist organizations in my analysis to account for this factor.
Table 3: Women Insurgents, Gender Roles, and Relative Rebel Strength

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 5 Rebel Strength</th>
<th>Model 6 Rebel Strength</th>
<th>Model 7 Rebel Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants</td>
<td>0.412</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td>0.013***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.379)</td>
<td>(0.462)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Labor Force Participation (FLFP)</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.013***</td>
<td>0.013***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants*FLPF</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Insurgents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.750*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.315)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Insurgents*FLFP</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.011*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Non-combatants</td>
<td>0.663*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.266)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Noncombatants*FLFP</td>
<td>-0.012*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.005)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Control</td>
<td>0.478**</td>
<td>0.536***</td>
<td>0.557***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.150)</td>
<td>(0.131)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Control</td>
<td>-0.193</td>
<td>-0.130</td>
<td>-0.116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.202)</td>
<td>(0.212)</td>
<td>(0.220)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftist</td>
<td>-0.156</td>
<td>-0.199</td>
<td>-0.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.144)</td>
<td>(0.142)</td>
<td>(0.142)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>-0.016*</td>
<td>-0.018*</td>
<td>-0.016*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td>(0.007)</td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Level</td>
<td>-0.163*</td>
<td>-0.148*</td>
<td>-0.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.074)</td>
<td>(0.073)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.772***</td>
<td>2.156**</td>
<td>1.993**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.770)</td>
<td>(0.679)</td>
<td>(0.652)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations(^{16})</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.229</td>
<td>0.279</td>
<td>0.256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors clustered by country in parentheses *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

More importantly, it is important to note that these studies do not inform us about the direction of the relationship between women’s participation and rebel group characteristics (that are considered to influence women’s participation) because of the time-invariant nature of the datasets. It is tended to be assumed that groups that live longer or larger in size tend to recruit women more than those that live shorter and smaller in size, rather than considering women’s impact on duration,\(^{16}\) Values for some covariates are missing; this reduces the sample to 201 and 190 observations respectively.
mobilization, and strength. How women’s recruitment shapes these characteristics is usually overlooked. Based on my analysis of the case study, I argue that women’s participation is critical in maintaining the organization for longer years, for mobilizing broader audiences and keeping an active defense force against state repression.

While the large-N tests are not informative about the direction of causality, the case study providing evidence for women’s increased role during downturns speaks to this concern over the direction of the relationship between women and rebels’ resistance capacities. The case study does not find support for the argument that groups are more likely to integrate women when they are more powerful. On the contrary, an in-depth examination of the case suggests that women insurgents contribute the most at times of crisis when the organization struggles for survival. This point can clarify the direction of the positive correlation between the recruitment of women and the longevity of armed organizations. Women are typically incorporated into violent movements at later stages (O’Rourke 2009), and the proportion of women members tends to increase in the later stages of the conflict. The PKK case suggests that the late integration of women is not necessarily indicative of leaders’ ability to afford risking group cohesion once the group becomes more established. Instead, the evolution of conflict over time necessitates the organization to respond to a weakened performance, and integration of women is a solution to this problem.

This conclusion is critical for the interpretation of the statistical analyses. If the use of women increases when organizations are struggling to survive crises, we would expect weaker organizations to be more likely to resort to female recruitment. Given that we consider the PKK case as our guide, it means that the results comparing groups with and without women at the aggregate level can understate the relationship between women and relative rebel strength. The results of the statistical analyses can imply a stronger impact of female insurgents on group strength.
In other words, if the conclusion of the case study regarding the use of women in crises is prevalent among other organizations, these estimates found using statistical analysis can be understating women’s real impact.

Discussion

Despite recognizing the severe consequences of armed conflicts that threaten peace and security around the world, we still do not have a complete understanding of the factors that contribute to the strength and maintenance of the armed groups. By examining the impact of female insurgents on rebel groups’ ability to resist their governments, this research suggests that an important determinant to consider in the analysis of rebel strength is the gender of the rebel membership. It examines how and under what conditions women in different roles (combatant vs. non-combatant) provide contributions or costs to their armed groups. It suggests that women contribute most to rebel groups during crises and in settings where gender stereotypes are stronger.

This study highlights the role of women as a source of organizational resilience and speaks to the broader literature on the relevance of available endowments to understand rebel group strategy formation. It focuses on the dynamic relationship between insurgency’s strategies and the evolving modes of women’s engagement to the conflict, and emphasizes the advancement of women’s duties as a strategy to overcome downturns in group strength.

The results are based on a comprehensive analysis that combines micro- and macro-level analyses using multiple data sources. The in-depth examination of a single case provides a theoretical basis for testing the hypotheses using statistical analyses at the macro-level. This approach helps with the interpretation of statistical results as the findings can be embedded in the complex historical and political relationships, which may not be captured solely by the macro-level statistical analysis. It uses archival conflict data for the analysis of the case study to address the limitations associated with
traditional data sources and to reconsiders the mechanisms underlying the conflict, as recommended by Balcells and Sullivan (2018). It also contributes to the cross-national data collection efforts on women’s participation in conflict by introducing original data on the presence of non-combatant women, which has attracted limited attention in the literature compared to the combatant women despite the fact that women participate in armed groups mostly in supportive roles. Having reliable data on the participation of women in political violence is important because the lack of data leads scholars and policymakers to discount women’s contributions to the strategies of political violence. The results of the case study inform the statistical analyses in significant ways. An important finding of the case study is that the use of women increases when rebel organizations struggle to survive crises. If we take the PKK case as our guide, we can infer that organizations who are struggling to survive, or simply, weaker organizations would be more likely to resort to female recruitment. First, this finding informs us about the direction of the relationship between women insurgents and rebels’ ability to resist their governments. It does not support the argument that the groups are more likely to integrate women when they are strong enough to tolerate group incoherence. This finding arguing for women’s increased roles in rebel groups in times of crises is in line with the studies arguing that women militants are most useful when male recruits are scarce or not readily available (Dalton and Asal 2011, Segal 1995, Alison 2009, Schrijvers 1999, Stack-O’Connor 2007). Second, it suggests that the results of the statistical analyses at the aggregate level may underestimate the real effect of women insurgents because we would expect groups that recruit women insurgents to be weaker before the recruitment compared to the ones without women. Hence, the results of the statistical analyses might imply a stronger impact of female insurgents on group strength.
It is important to note that this study focused on women’s tangible contributions to their rebel groups and hence embraces an instrumental language rather than seeking to understand how women experienced or responded to the challenges faced during the conflict. In that sense, it does not provide an analysis of the women’s agency in rebel groups and focuses, instead, on how rebel groups navigate the benefits and costs of women’s recruitment. It does not mean that women did not have a voice. On the contrary, within the PKK, some women have been quite vocal against the PKK’s policies. Some of them posed a series of challenges to Öcalan’s authority, questioned some of PKK’s nationalist and gendered policies, faced accusations of betrayal and marginalization, leading several female key cadres to quit the PKK. Hence, the categorizations of women insurgents in this study that deems women’s participation as “highly-committed” or as a “back-up source” should not be regarded as exclusive categories defining women’s roles.
CHAPTER THREE
PUBLIC PREFERENCES AND FOREIGN SUPPORT
FOR GENDER-DIVERSE ARMED MOVEMENTS

Why do some rebels attract foreign support while others do not? How do public perceptions regarding the social identity of the rebel group members affect foreign powers’ decision to sponsor these groups? I argue that rebel organizations with women fighters attract more support from democracies because foreign public opinion is willing to support organizations with women more than those with no women due to expectations and preferences based on gender roles. Many rebel organizations receive significant assistance from external governments, which impacts the conflict dynamics in substantial ways. External involvement in civil wars tends to prolong conflicts (Regan 2002), cause more casualties (Heger and Salehyan 2007), and decreases the likelihood of resolving the conflict through negotiations (Cunningham 2010). We know that the sponsor state’s interests and characteristics of rebel groups are important in attracting foreign support. For instance, moderately stronger rebels receive more support than weaker ones (Salehyan, Gleditsch and Cunningham 2011). We also know that the preferences of the public can play a vital role in foreign policy decisions, especially in conflict intervention (Holsti 1992).

Public preferences can shape foreign policy decisions, especially in democracies, where such decisions can be costly enough for the survival of the leader. Public opinion can influence the continuation and success of military operations abroad (Baum and Potter 2015, Sobel 2001). Public opinion is particularly crucial in sponsoring armed groups because these groups lack the legitimacy
that an ally state possesses. Justification of sponsoring a militant group abroad can be more challenging for leaders than supporting sovereign states - the legitimate actors of the international system. Even if the input of citizens is not directly observed, their preferences can constrain or facilitate supporting an armed group abroad, as such alliances usually rely on the belief that engagement with conflict abroad is in the interest of the sponsor country and worth the potential (domestic) costs, rather than responding to an imminent threat (Kreps and Maxey 2018, Boetcher 2004). The decision to support an extremely violent group causing a high number of civilian casualties, for instance, can be used by the domestic opposition to hurt the ruling party and be costly to the national and international reputation of a democratic state (Salehyan, Siroky and Wood 2014).

However, the information available to foreign leaders and foreign public, which is necessary to make judgments about the conflict, is disproportionate most of the time (Baum and Potter, 2008). Individuals are typically considered to be uninformed about foreign policy (Delli-Carpini and Keeter 1996, Holsti 2004). Still, they compensate their informational deficiency “by employing heuristic cues that allow them to make reasoned judgments with small amounts of information” (Baum and Potter 2008, 44; Page and Shapiro 1992; Popkin 1994). I argue that the social identity of the rebel group members works as a cognitive shortcut (heuristic cue) informing people about the characteristics of the conflict environment, which in turn affects lending support for an insurgency abroad. Social identities, such as racial, ethnic, and gender identities, are associated with a set of norms or expectations for how someone in that category should behave (Bénabou and Tirole, 2006). These norms and expectations influence behavior because they affect the individual’s preferences (Benjamin, Choi, Strickland 2010). I examine how people’s expectations and preferences based on social identities impact the strategies of foreign sponsors in civil wars focusing on the gender composition of armed groups. I argue that the presence of women insurgents shapes foreign leaders’
decisions in favor of supporting the insurgent group in democracies because foreign public opinion is willing to support organizations with women more than those with no women.

Despite the advances in the literature exploring women’s participation in rebel groups, estimating 40-60% of rebel groups around the world to have women fighters (Thomas and Wood 2017, Henshaw 2015), we know far less about how women’s involvement in these groups affects attracting support. How does the presence of women in insurgent groups affect attracting support from foreign states? I argue that the presence of women in insurgent groups sends a signal about the group characteristics because men and women are associated with different types of traits, and influences people’s perceptions of the insurgent group. People tend to associate women with compassion and passivity, while men are viewed as more assertive and strong. These perceptions based on traditional gender roles can lead to differing judgments about gender-diverse armed groups, which would impact the likelihood of receiving foreign support differently.

How does the presence of women fighters impact public opinion and foreign support? On the one hand, as women are typically not considered as the primary agents of war and security, rebel groups with women insurgents might be less likely to be viewed as strong and assertive enough to succeed against an adversary state. Women political candidates, for instance, are seen as being less able to handle duties perceived as men’s realms, such as the military, security, and crime (Burrell 1994, Huddy and Terkildsen 1993, Lawless 2004, Matland 1994, Rosenwasser and Dean 1989). Little et al. (2007) show that people favor masculine faces over feminine faces in contexts of war, while in contexts of peace, participants prefer a more feminine look. The probability of success is an important determinant affecting both public opinion towards military involvement abroad (Feaver & Gelpi 2004, Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2006, Eichenberg 2005) and leaders’ decision to support armed groups (Salehyan, Gleditsch and Cunningham 2011). These perceptions that view women
insurgents as weaker and less likely to succeed in fighting against the adversary can decrease favorable views on supporting the insurgency and the likelihood of a deciding in favor of foreign support. If people consider lending support to an armed movement more in line with pursuing the interests of their state and view women as less capable of fighting, they would be less likely to agree to sponsor gender-diverse armed groups.

On the other hand, gender stereotypes that do not view women as the primary agents of war can work in favor of the gender-diverse rebel groups. Gendered beliefs that see women as peaceful caretakers are prevalent in conflict settings and are reinforced by rebel propaganda and media portrayal of female fighters. Rebel groups with female fighters can be viewed as less radical compared to organizations with no females (Viterna 2014, 2016). Scholars have argued that women’s participation in an insurgency suggests the gravity of the situation since women taking up arms is traditionally viewed as an anomaly, as the thinking goes “repression must be so severe that even women are fighting” (Sharoni 1992). Women’s engagement in the armed rebellion can also be perceived as a signal of broad support from the society for the insurgency, as they are not considered as the typical actors of the conflict (Viterna 2016, Loken 2018). The presence of women insurgents can also be considered as the organization’s embrace of women’s equality and inclusive values compared to those with only male insurgents (Sharoni 1992).

I examine whether the presence of women fighters increases the likelihood that the organization will be perceived as less brutal and in a more positive light by others. If this is the case, leaders of foreign states can more easily justify giving support to organizations with women insurgents to their domestic audiences. Specifically, democracies are hesitant to support ‘radical’ rebel organizations because of their vulnerability to popular pressure owing to the political system that holds them accountable for their actions compared to non-democracies (Salehyan, Siroky and
Wood 2014). All else equal, a democratic leader would favor supporting gender-diverse armed organizations because it would be less likely to result in a public outcry, as women insurgents evoke positive cues about the rebel organization. Moreover, if the presence of women insurgents evokes positive cues and increases foreign publics’ likelihood of confirming sponsoring the group, we would expect foreign states to be more likely to explicitly announce this sponsorship, as opposed to lending support covertly.

I test these claims, first at the macro level, using a dataset on a global sample of rebel groups. I find that groups with female insurgents are more likely to attract support from democracies. Also, the results show some support for the argument that foreign states are more likely to announce their support for gender-diverse groups explicitly. Second, to clarify the causal mechanisms, I use survey experiments evaluating the opinion of the foreign public on their governments’ decision to sponsor rebel groups with and without women insurgents. The results suggest that people are more likely to be in favor of supporting rebel groups with women compared to those without women. This support is driven both by moral and instrumental concerns linked to gendered perceptions. The public tends to perceive that the rebel group is less likely to attack civilians, and more likely to support women’s equality and inclusive principles if the group includes women fighters. There is no evidence for the argument that groups with women insurgents are viewed as less powerful. On the contrary, people tend to believe that supporting an armed group with women insurgents would be good for the reputation of the sponsoring state. These results suggest that having women insurgents is advantageous for attracting support both when people consider the sheer interests of the sponsoring state and when people consider the moral aspects of lending support to an armed group.

This study contributes to several strands of research. First, scholars have argued that public perceptions of legitimacy are essential to the survival of insurgencies (Loken 2018). This study
examines group composition as a factor influencing the legitimacy of both means and aims of the group, and, thus, a potentially important element sustaining the insurgency. Second, this study speaks to research examining the factors influencing third-party involvement in civil wars. It explores a previously unconsidered determinant of foreign support - group composition - and proposes a mechanism between them, highlighting the women’s roles in shaping rebel groups’ perceived characteristics.

Third, it contributes to our understanding of the consequences of women’s participation in politics in general. Research on voting in low-information contexts maintains that the gender of a political candidate operates as a social information cue and affects ideological voting, signaling that women candidates are more liberal and more dedicated to honest governance than men (McDermott 1997, 1998). This study shows that the gender of the members operates similarly in a nontraditional realm of politics in terms of signaling a social information cue, as it does for candidates in elections, perhaps with wider influence. Gender of the insurgency members goes beyond signaling the position of the women themselves and gives people cues about the whole insurgency, specifically regarding its ideology and strategies of violence. In that sense, it echoes the burgeoning research suggesting that women politicians evoke positive perceptions regarding honest governance (Dollar et al. 2001, Swamy et al. 2001), and are judged more frequently to be compassionate than men (Kahn 1992, Huddy and Terkildsen 1993). This research shows the arousal of similar positive perceptions in non-traditional realms of political engagement toward gender-diverse armed organizations even when they are acting as perpetrators of violence. It suggests that these gendered views so embedded that they are echoed in conflict settings and alter the dynamics of the conflict.
Fourth, it speaks to the broader literature discussing the link between women and violence. Existing empirical studies on gender and political violence suggest that women are less likely to support the use of force in foreign policy decisions compared to men (Tessler and Warriner 1997). Studies examining this link argue that a key factor causing this difference is the differences in individual traits between men and women (Wood and Ramirez 2018). In this research, contrary to the extant literature, I show that women respondents are more likely than men to support the armed movement if women insurgents are involved. The results suggest that the differences in individual gendered attitudes toward violence should not be evaluated independently from the conflict dynamics, particularly the gender of the perpetrator. Women can be more prone to the use of force when they see women are doing the act of fighting. In that sense, the results are in line with the research on voting in US politics which suggests that women who are represented by women tend to offer more positive evaluations of Congress members (Lawless 2004).

The rest of the study starts with examining how rebel organizations with female insurgents can be viewed differently from all-male groups. I draw upon feminist scholarship to discuss how existing traditional gender roles shape public perceptions about groups with female insurgents. In doing so, first, I discuss the peculiarity of democracies in responding to public preferences on the issue of conflict assistance. Second, I explore how the information on the gender of the militants is processed to reveal positive or negative perceptions about the entire armed group. Third, I explain the potential mechanisms through which traits associated with women can impact the support for the insurgency. In doing so, I discuss the role of rebel propaganda and media portrayal of women insurgents on reproducing and communicating gender stereotypes with the public. Fourth, I analyze the empirical evidence based on a global sample of rebel groups and their foreign sponsors and show that groups with women insurgents attract more support from democracies compared to
groups with no women. Fourth, I provide evidence using survey experiments that the public indeed are more predisposed to view rebels with women in a more positive light, and are more willing to approve of their governments supporting them. Fifth, I test the causal mechanisms leading people to favor gender-diverse groups using mediation analysis to argue that gender-composition affects foreign public support primarily by changing perceptions about the rebel group’s use of civilian violence as well as the reputational gains to the sponsoring state.

**Processing the Information on the Militants’ Gender and Democratic Response to Public Preferences**

Assisting a rebel organization is more convenient for sponsor states than waging war directly against a hostile regime. However, it is not costless. The decision to support a group that is not approved by the public can be used by the domestic opposition to hurt the ruling party, and be costly for a state’s domestic and international reputation (Salehyan, Siroky and Wood 2014).

Despite the advances in understanding the public opinion on conflict intervention and the gendered dynamics in conflict settings, we lack research about how women’s involvement in armed groups affect public perceptions about these organizations.¹ Do people view armed organizations with gender-diverse cadres differently than those with only male members? Does the public support armed organizations with women militants more than those without women? Is support for gender-diverse armed groups driven by moral or instrumental considerations? Does the presence of women insurgents are considered a weakness for the insurgency and lead people to disapprove of sending conflict assistance based on the presumed lower level of success? Alternatively, does it obscure the violent nature of the armed insurgency, arouse sympathy, and increases people’s chances of supporting sending conflict assistance to the insurgency? Through what mechanisms does support for gender-diverse armed groups operate? I begin by outlining four underlying premises
based on social psychology, foreign policy, and democratic institutions scholarships as to the question of why one would expect that the presence of women members to make a difference in conflict assistance.

First, scholarship in social psychology suggests that individual traits can become a powerful cognitive shortcut to identifying the whole group that those individuals belong to. The concept of “entitity” refers to “the perception that a collection of persons is bonded together in some way and is therefore seen as a meaningful unit” (Hamilton, Sherman and Castelli 2002). Scholars argue that entitity - the expectation of unity - leads perceivers to use the information available to infer dispositional qualities in the target group, to assume consistency across situations, to form an organized impression of the group and to attempt to resolve any inconsistencies in the information about the target group (Hamilton, Sherman and Castelli 2002, Hamilton and Sherman 1996). Based on this reasoning, I expect that people will infer certain characteristics of the whole group by observing the presence of female individuals as a part of the group. Projecting the traits associated with women to identify the entire rebel group could help people to cognitively resolve the inconsistencies aroused by the presence of women militants –notably, the dichotomy between the prevailing “peaceful women” perception versus the fact that these women are members of a violent group.

Second, foreign policy scholarship maintains that the information available to foreign leaders and the public, which is necessary to make judgments about the conflict, is disproportionate most of the time (Baum and Potter 2008). When people need to make decisions about politics, they often take advantage of shortcuts or heuristic cues to compensate for their lack of information (Popkin 1994, Lupia 1994). I argue that, especially in the absence of further information where there is

---

1 See the recent work by Manekin and Wood (2020) as an exception.
uncertainty about the true characteristics of the rebel groups, people will use the information on the presence of women militants to understand the context and dynamics of the conflict. This uncertainty about the rebel group characteristics allows the predispositions regarding gender roles to shape perceptions about the group. As Heilman and Haynes (2005) argue, “because ambiguity allows predispositions to shape perceptions, it encourages cognitive distortion in line with expectations, thereby preserving and perhaps even reinforcing them.”

The social identity of the rebel group members works as a cognitive shortcut/heuristic cue informing people about the characteristics of the conflict environment, which in turn affects lending support for the insurgency. Social identities, such as racial, ethnic, and gender identities, are associated with a set of norms or expectations for how someone in that category should behave (Bénabou and Tirole, 2006). These norms and expectations influence behavior because they affect the individual’s preferences (Benjamin, Choi and Strickland 2010). For instance, voters who value honesty and ethics in government are more likely to vote for a woman running against a man, while people most concerned about foreign policy issues are more likely to support a man over a woman (Dolan 2010; see also Dolan 2004, Lawless 200).

Third, I explore how women militants can maintain and reproduce their view as “peaceful” and “less violent” even when they are perpetrators of violence by referring to the role of rebel propaganda and portrayal of women militants in mainstream media. I suggest that rebel propaganda and mainstream Western media rely on similar frameworks to appeal to the public, where they both reinforce the existing gendered expectations and are shaped by them. We know that the mass media plays a critical role, alongside elites, in shaping the public’s attitudes about, and influence on, foreign policy (Baum and Potter 2008). While public attention to foreign policy and, thus, the demand for foreign policy-related news is typically low, several factors can arouse public interest and increase
demand for information, such as casualty levels and elite discord (Baum and Potter 2008). The presence of women fighters is one such case that prompts public attention. Female fighters garner more media attention than men, at a rate of eight to one, which increases their propaganda value for rebels even more (Bloom 2011). Sjoberg (2018) denotes that women have been hypervisible in the recent conflicts in Syria and Iraq, receiving disproportionately high attention and playing a central role in the coverage of the conflict.

Media reports news along with certain frames that would cue the receiver to put events into context. The selection of issues, words, sources, and photographs influence how the story is perceived. For sure, contemporary news media is highly diverse, and the news can be framed quite differently according to its outlet. However, framing along entrenched presuppositions of the target audience persists and is prevalent in mass media (Van Dijk 1988). We can consider mass media as a strategic actor relying heavily on the demand of the public – the ultimate consumers of information disseminating from media – which shapes the incentives for packaging news items using frameworks that would satisfy public preferences (Baum and Potter 2008). The mass media and rebel groups cater to different aims and interests. However, the portrayal of militant women in the Western mass media tends to corroborate the gender stereotypes exploited by the rebel groups as media also tries to appeal to people who are deeply exposed to gender roles that are profoundly accepted and constructed by societies. As Entman (2003) suggests, the framing of a news item is most powerful when it is culturally congruent with schemes that are habitually employed by most members of society. “The more congruent the frame with schemas that dominate the political culture, the more success it will enjoy” (Entman 2003, 422).

Framing patterns are especially crucial for terrorism news because media is the most important propaganda tool for the rebel groups, and people usually rely on the media to form their
opinions on terrorism (Rajan 2011). The mainstream media’s framing of women fighters is in line with the entrenched gender roles, which helps to communicate and sustain rebels’ instrumentalizing of women members as a point of attraction (Rajan 2011). For this reason, I refer to the rebel propaganda and news stories, whenever applicable, in explaining the mechanisms of support in the section below and clarify their role in sustaining the “peaceful women” stereotype even when women are using violence.

Fourth, scholarship on conflict assistance suggests that democratic countries are less likely to support non-state armed organizations compared to authoritarian regimes (Goldman 2016, San-Akca 2009, Maoz and San-Akca 2012). Among democracies, those with a higher quality of democratic institutions tend to support violent organizations even less (Goldman 2016). Similarly, Salehyan, Siroky, and Wood (2014) find an inverse relationship between democratic support for rebels and the rebels’ use of civilian violence. Democracies are more likely to support organizations that commit less civilian violence (or armed organizations receiving support from democratic states tend to limit the use of violence against civilians to maintain the flow of support), suggesting that democracies are more concerned with atrocities that occurred during the conflict. Unlike democracies, authoritarian states are more likely to get away with supporting militant groups since authoritarian states typically do not have a well-functioning system to hold their leaders accountable (San Akca 2009). Building on the premise that democracies are more selective in sponsoring an armed organization and more likely to be influenced by public preferences in this decision, I argue that democracies would favor supporting armed groups with gender-diverse cadres, all else equal.

The chief mechanism that links women militants’ participation to foreign sponsorship assumes that the public does care about the decency of governments’ actions and that policymakers are responsive to the public, depending on their domestic institutions.
Foreign Conflict Assistance, Gender Roles, and Public Opinion: The Mechanisms of Support

The traits associated with women can impact the support for the insurgency in divergent ways. Scholarship on public opinion on the use of force abroad emphasizes two underlying factors that determine public approval: moral concerns and national interests. The public can support militarily and economically intervening in a conflict abroad out of a sense of moral obligation to save others from devastating war conditions (Finnemore 2003). Alternatively, their support can be a function of strategic calculation on whether the intervention would surpass the costs and benefit the tangible interests of the sponsoring state (i.e., economic, security, reputational interests) (Eichenberg 2005).

Groups with women insurgents, on the one hand, can receive more support because it can trigger people to think that the insurgency is less violent, subject to more repression, more inclusive of the society, and more gender-equal. Associating the insurgency with these aspects can trigger people to consider sponsoring the insurgency regarding the morality of support. A growing body of literature suggests that the public tends to think about military interventions within the normative framework. Kreps and Maxey (2018) find that individuals’ support for military action and foreign intervention is conditional on the moral obligation to protect civilians, much more than other reasons such as strategic or reputational costs. If people see intervening in a conflict abroad more in normative terms, support for conflict assistance could be driven more by “the public’s belief that action is morally right than by costs or consequences” (Kreps and Maxey 2018). Similarly, Busby (2010) finds that the public is more likely to support US foreign policy acts when the issues are framed that resonate with respect for human rights.

On the other hand, the presence of women insurgents can repel foreign public support if people are more concerned with the instrumental interests of their country. Groups with women
insurgents can be perceived as militarily weak compared to those that do not involve women. There is ample evidence in the business literature that women’s performance on tasks that are considered as “men’s area” is devalued, and their competence is denied (Swim et al. 1989). These biased evaluations are “thought to result from the inconsistency between stereotypic perceptions of what women are like and the qualities thought necessary to perform a typically male job” (Heilman et al. 2004, 416). Women’s presumed “unfitness” to the military – a typical “male job”- may impact the opinions on supporting the insurgency negatively as people would like to support the group with a higher likelihood of success. Scholars have suggested that people decide on supporting an intervention based on the expected instrumental benefits and costs, such as presumed national security and economic interests, the effectiveness of the operation, the likelihood of success, or the effects on the states’ reputation (Gartner 2008). If people are primarily concerned with security interests, they would be more willing to support the use of force abroad if they think the action serves national interests (Goldsmith and Posner 2005).

Building on the literature on the gendered dynamics in conflict, and the normative vs. instrumental approaches to foreign conflict assistance, I outline four main mechanisms through which the presence of women insurgents can impact public preferences on lending support to an armed movement. These are 1) humane treatment, 2) ideology of the armed group, 3) sponsor state’s interests 4) consequences of inaction. Table 1 demonstrates the underlying factors that can impact support for conflict assistance as well as the assumptions deriving those factors. It also describes the reasons why the presence of women insurgents can fortify the salience of these factors facilitating or hindering support for the insurgency and outlines the indicators through which we can gauge the presence of these mechanisms. I explain the expectations about public attitudes on the use
of force and why gender-diverse membership can influence the salience of these expected behaviors in the following section.

**Humane Treatment**

Consistent with the normative approach, I examine people’s concern for humane treatment as an underlying factor of support. This concern can manifest itself in war settings in relation to gendered dynamics as consideration for 1) civilian violence and 2) proportionality in attacks. Protection of civilians is considered as an international norm; the Geneva Conventions require fighting parties to strictly distinguish between combatants and non-combatants and refrain from targeting civilians (International Committee of the Red Cross 1949). Existing research suggests that the harm to civilians is a factor that impacts people’s opinions on the use of force (Kertzer et al. 2014, Kreps and Maxey 2018). If we assume that people have a concern for the suffering of and care for protecting civilians in a war, we can expect that their opinions on whether to support sending assistance to an armed group can be influenced by the expected level of civilian violence used by that group. The presence of women insurgents in that armed group can increase the weight of this factor because women tend to be associated with less violence. This can increase the public perception that the group’s means are legitimate and are less likely to attack civilians.

The reason why women are associated with less violence is embedded in traditional gender roles evident in almost all societies. Traditionally, women are viewed as the gentler sex. Women are associated with motherhood, nurturing and peacemaking while men are typically regarded as warriors and protectors.² People tend to regard women also as the fairer sex. This view shapes the

---

² It should be noted that many scholars think that the conventional wisdom that views women as less likely to fight than men is oversimplified (see, for example, McDermott 2015) and that the association between women and peace is a “myth” that “has been imposed on women by their disarmed condition” (Tickner 1992, 59). My aim in this research is not to examine if women are more peaceful than men, but to show that the beliefs that relate women with peace is deeply rooted and these beliefs affect domestic and international politics.
governance dynamics as women are judged more frequently than men to be less corrupt and more moderate (O’Brien 2019; Pew Research Center 2015; Dollar et al. 2001, Huddy & Terkildsen 1993).\(^3\) I suggest that the presence of women incites similar positive perceptions in civil wars and alter the dynamics of the conflict.

How do women militants incite these perceptions about being peaceful even though they are actually the perpetrators of violence? The already existing gendered perceptions are used and reinforced by rebel groups as propaganda tools and echoed in the news stories in mainstream media, which increases their salience.

**Rebel propaganda.** One way through which rebels extenuate the violent nature of their actions is through capitalizing on women’s motherhood. As Viterna notes, “if an organization can demonstrate that many women –especially many mothers- are willing to commit political violence on their [people’s] behalf, then that organization becomes especially righteous.” (Viterna 2014, pp.191-192). As motherhood is traditionally glorified among societies, women’s resistance adds a ‘moral shield’ to the movement leading people to think that the acts of the organization should not be as extreme as other groups with no women. A male insurgent fighting in the Syrian Civil War illustrates how notions of motherhood are being attached to female fighters: “There are true heroes among women. They display courage on the battlefield while giving birth. That is what infuses a woman with greatness. Allah gave them qualities that men do not have” (Sputnik News 2015). PKK leader Ocalan also effectively used mothers to repair the organizations’ reputation damaged by the civilian killings (Serxwebun 11, 1999).\(^4\)

---

\(^3\) See also Bauer (2013) for a detailed discussion on how female candidates are perceived through gender stereotypes

\(^4\) See Loken 2020 for more information on how rebels use motherhood in their propaganda visuals.
Media frame. Media’s framing of women militants reinforces the existing perceptions associating women with morality and peace. To illustrate, a New York Times article about the Libyan uprising against Qaddafi emphasizes the legitimacy and inclusivity the women bring to the armed movement: “Perhaps most important, women here participated in such large numbers they helped establish the legitimacy of the revolution, demonstrating that support for the uprising has penetrated deep into Libyan society” (Barnard 2011). Another news title in Independent emphasizes the motherhood of women rebels: “Female Yemeni fighters carry babies and machine guns at the anti-Saudi rally” (Pasha-Robinson 2017). Such examples and existing studies suggest that rebel groups’ use of existing gender stereotypes overlaps with the news agencies’ aim to attract public attention as they consume the same gender beliefs.5

In a similar vein, we can assume that they would be concerned about the proportionality in attacks – a principle that is prevalent in the norms of warfare (Hurka 2005). People’s decision to support an insurgency can vary depending on what they think about the level of repression applied by the adversary state. Having a gender-diverse cadre can change the opinions on the assumed level of repression the insurgency faces because the presence of women militants arouses the thinking that the repression must be so severe that even the women are fighting. This may generate public sympathy for the insurgency and increase support levels for sponsoring the insurgency.

Rebel Propaganda. Rebels tend to advertise themselves as protectors of “vulnerable women” facing harsh state repression, precipitating mercy for the group. For instance, the Liberation of Tamil Tigers Eelam highlights its role in protecting women members from sexual

---

5 Similar themes are emphasized in novels as well. Examining the narratives of female fighters in several rebel organizations in Western novelistic accounts, McManus (2013) argues that women who commit violence are represented as “worthy of readers' sympathy” linking women with the perpetuation of life, namely motherhood. She argues that the divide between the life giver and life taker roles of a female terrorist is framed as suffering through maternal compassion. The sentimental narratives of terrorist women anchor them as an object of our sympathy.
violence by Sri Lankan forces. PKK frequently states its aim to empower and liberate women who have been enslaved by the government (Serxwebun 1999, 56). Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) has launched a website on 2013, called Mujer Fariana, peculiar to its women members and enunciated that women in FARC are no longer victims, but empowered freedom fighters defending the rights of the women oppressed under the regime. Portraying themselves as protectors, rebel groups reinforces the gendered perception that women are victims vulnerable to state repression, which in turn can have an impact on how people view the rebellion.

**Media frame.** Media reports tend to portray female fighters as selfless defenders of their communities resorting to violence only as a last resort, reinforcing the presumed gravity of the situation (Toivanen and Baser 2016). US media coverage echoing political leaders’ rhetoric on the obligation to save “vulnerable” Afghan women as a justification for intervention can also be given as an example of how media framing reinforces these stereotypes that are capitulated by the rebels. Scholars have shown these frameworks emphasizing the need for “liberating suppressed women” are prevalent in many conflict contexts, especially among Western media toward non-Western populations (MacDonald 2006), which can arouse concerns that they are facing severe repression.

**Inclusive Ideologies and Principles**

States are more likely to support rebel groups that share similar ideologies to themselves (Salehyan, Gleditsch, Cunningham 2011). While groups proximity to Marxist ideology has been a defining feature for conflict assistance during the Cold War, other features of conflicting parties have gained importance in foreign powers’ decision to support them in the post-Cold War era, such as groups’ stance toward human rights regimes, democratic principles or ideologies that advocate

---

6 See http://www.mujerfariana.org/
racial/religious supremacy. Assuming that people would prefer to support an inclusive group with community backing rather than a group of radical extremists, we can expect that public opinion on conflict assistance can be shaped by the insurgency’s (perceived) local support and stance toward inclusivity. The presence of women insurgents can alter opinions in these veins as women can signal the base community’s commitment to achieving their goals, hence can be linked with higher support from locals (Wood 2019) and with being more inclusive of the society (Loken 2018).

Similarly, we can assume that people, especially in liberal Western nations, would value embracement of gender equality. Achieving gender equality in all sectors of governance emerged as a global strategy, especially after the late-1990s, with a widespread endorsement from Western governments, regional and international institutions such as the European Union, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Organization of American States, the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Council of Europe (True 2003). Public opinion polls consistently show that people in Western liberal countries tend to be more concerned about gender equality than in other countries (Wike et al. 2019). Assuming that people value gender equality, we can expect that gender-diverse cadres would be more likely to receive a positive endorsement from the foreign public since the presence of women can be associated with a higher respect for women’s rights. While rebel groups usually mobilize primarily to achieve greater autonomy or political/economic concessions, the presence of women fighters gives the groups a chance to frame their goals that would appeal to the people who are concerned with women’s rights. This can increase the probability of an organization being viewed as a righteous movement in the

---

7 For instance, in the Syrian Civil War, the United Kingdom scrutinized the opposition rebel groups’ commitment to human rights before deciding to support them (BBC 2012). Relatedly, Meernik et al. (1998) suggest that the role of ideological affinity regarding the states' position on human rights gained prominence, while the relevance of strategic aims declined in US decision to provide foreign assistance. Lai (2003) finds that the U.S. gives less aid to countries with human right violations in the post-Cold War era. The studies that find an inverse relationship between foreign aid
eyes of the local and international communities, especially those in liberal democracies who tend to put more emphasis on women’s empowerment.

**Rebel propaganda.** Existing research suggests that rebel groups decide on including women, to enable inclusive images that appeal to people. For instance, male members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) resisted women’s involvement at first, but then, others pressured to include women to “demonstrate that the group represented a mass social movement” (Alison 2004, 454). Herrera and Porch (2008) suggest that women fighters of Colombia’s FARC help the organization appear more overtly represent the community since women make the rebel groups seem more inclusive. Similarly, rebel groups associate their women fighters with women’s empowerment and portray them within the gender emancipation framework. Even if a group does not embrace inclusive principles, the presence of women fighters can boost the organization’s image by giving it a façade of egalitarianism (D’Amico quoted in Peterson and Runyan 1993, 86). Democratic Union Party of Syria (PYD) fighting in the Syrian Civil War against ISIS provides a neat example of using women fighters as powerful marketing to appeal to broad audiences. The stimulus created by the Kurdish women militants attracted many international committees, intellectuals, authors, and politicians to Rojava to visit Yekineyên Parastina Jin (YPJ - Women’s Defense Units), the all-women fighting unit of the Democratic Union Party of Syria (PYD) (Sarya 2017), French President Francois Holland welcomed Nesrin Abdullah, the commander of the YPJ, at his palace and gave a reception to her. Swedish Defense Minister Peter Hultqvist also met her in Stockholm, and the US Central Command tweeted their photos mentioning the public demand to female fighters (US Central Command 2017).

and recipient country’s human rights abuses acquaint us that similar mechanisms can be at play between a sponsor state and rebel organizations.
**Media frame.** Contemporary news coverage, especially from Western media outlets, also corroborates with rebels’ depiction of women as combatting patriarchy (Nacos 2005). The news titles tend to refer to female militants as gender equality advocates working towards the emancipation of suppressed women in their region (e.g., McKernan 2019, Ashrafi 2016). A title from The Conversation reads “Colombian militants have a new plan for the country, and it’s called ‘insurgent feminism.’” (Boutron 2017). Regarding a Palestinian woman’s suicide attack on Israelis, a commentary in the Chicago Tribune noted that “the female suicide bombers are fighting for more than just national liberation; they are fighting for gender liberation” (quoted in Nacos 2005). Recent studies suggest that media frames female combatants as “exceptional, heroic, and one that deconstructs the masculinity of its adversary” (Toivanan and Baser 2016).

It is important to note that there are different views among the scholarly community on whether armed groups can be considered as sources of gender emancipation. Sixta (2008), for example, supports this idea and associates female terrorists in developing nations to the First Wave feminists and argues that female terrorists are fighting against Western oppression, societal oppression, and internal oppression within their organization. On the other hand, other scholars maintain that the link between armed movement and gender emancipation is more complex. Critical feminists argue that armed movements, even those promising gender equality, remain deeply patriarchal, usually give up on their promises after the conflict ends, and creates further vulnerabilities for women members even if they succeed in relegating women away from their traditional roles in the private sphere (Enloe 1983, Mazurana et al. 2002). The aim of this study is not to decide whether women militants are actually empowered or advocates of women’s rights, but to argue that representation of women militants in media can reinforce the existing cues associating women directly with morally-desired notions like gender equality, peace, and decency.
These simplifications can have unintended consequences, such as enabling the rebel and political leaders to strategically use these associations to attract support for the use of violence.\(^8\)

**Sponsor Interests**

The probability of success is an important determinant affecting both public opinion towards military involvement abroad (Feaver and Gelpi 2004, Gelpi et al. 2005; Eichenberg 2005) and leaders’ decision to support armed groups (Salehyan, Gleditsch, Cunningham 2011). The presence of women can be associated with military weakness. Studies repeatedly show the persistence of gender stereotypes in a variety of work settings (Heilman et al. 1989, Schein 2001) where women are depicted as caring and family/relationship-oriented whereas lacking leadership skills, ambition or achievement-oriented mindset (Heilman 2001). Women are perceived to be deficient in the attributes essential for success, particularly in traditionally male domains (Heilman 1983, 2001). Research shows that women in state militaries are deemed less effective in handling military duties and viewed as less competent by military students (Matthews et al. 2009). Surveys completed by the US and the UK army personnel suggest that the acceptance of women as a part of the military remains quite limited (Stiehm 1998, UK Defense Forces 2014). Similarly, female political candidates are viewed as being less able to handle duties perceived as men’s realms, such as the military, security, and crime (Burrell 1994; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993, Lawless 2004; Matland 1994).

As women are typically not considered as the primary agents of war and security and are deemed vulnerable, rebel groups with women insurgents might be less likely to be viewed as strong and assertive enough to succeed against an adversary state. These perceptions can decrease favorable views on supporting the insurgency and, hence, the likelihood of a deciding in favor of foreign

---

\(^8\) See the following studies for different perspectives on the relationship between women’s empowerment and
support. If people consider lending support to an armed movement more in line with pursuing the interests of their state and view women as less capable of fighting, they may not be willing to sponsor the armed group with women insurgents.

On the other hand, considering conflict assistance in line with instrumental concerns for the state’s interests can also yield stronger support for gender-diverse groups if people are concerned with the reputation of their country as a moral actor. People’s opinions on supporting an insurgency can be shaped by the considerations on whether supporting that insurgency is good for the reputation of the sponsoring state in the international community. If this is the case, supporting a group with women may work in favor of the sponsor country’s reputation in the global community as women’s involvement increases the legitimacy of the insurgency.

**Consequences of Inaction**

Scholars have argued that similar to the constraining effect of public opinion on the states’ use of force in their foreign policy decisions, the consequences of inaction to use of force can also impact leaders’ decision to use force. The public could assess interventions by weighing potential costs of actions and the consequences of inaction (Kreps and Maxey 2018). If people support the use of force abroad, leaders would be concerned about the consequences of their inaction in defiance of public support (Brule and Mintz 2006). As a result, “public support for the use of force acts as a constraint on non-force alternatives, ruling out passive foreign policy responses to international crises” (Brule and Mintz 2006).

One prominent finding in public opinion research is that individuals are casualty-averse (Mueller 1973, Everts and Isernia 2001, Lai and Reiter 2005). Recent studies suggest that people are not only concerned about the casualties of their nationals but also about foreign civilians (Kreps militancy Zarkov (2006), Sylvester (2010)).
2014, Walsh 2015). The public opinion polls of the US bombing campaign of South Vietnam show that the US citizens are perturbated by the targeting of civilian populations, and they prefer bombing campaigns to be conducted with as few civilian casualties as possible (Lee 2017). Expected death tolls from a military operation influence the levels of support for the government at war for different reasons; it can give cues about the necessity or legitimacy of operation/assistance, or it can be used as a signal for the probability of success (Gelpi et al., 2009). The sensitivity to casualties can be of particular importance to the groups with women insurgents because people might simply value women’s lives higher than men’s lives (due to women’s life-giving and nurturer roles). Also, in the presence of women insurgents, people may think the death toll will be higher, as women are viewed unfit for fighting and are tended to be associated with civilians incapable of fighting (Carpenter 2005). Hence, it may arouse perceptions that the casualties will be very high if the conflict assistance is not delivered, which, in turn, can affect people’s decision to support the insurgency.

---

9 Therefore, I did not categorize this factor under normative concerns.
### Table 4. Potential Mechanisms of Support Driven by the Gender of the Insurgents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Factors of Support</th>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Presence of Women Insurgents Makes These Factors More Salient Because:</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Expected Change in Opinions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humane Treatment</td>
<td>Care:</td>
<td>• Women tend to be associated with less violence.</td>
<td>Opinions on the level of civilian violence used by the insurgency.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women tend to be associated with civilians.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportionality:</td>
<td>• People might think that the repression is so severe that even women are fighting.</td>
<td>Opinions on the level of repression received by the insurgency.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideologies and Principles</td>
<td>Inclusiveness:</td>
<td>• Women can signal the base community’s commitment to achieving their goals and be linked with higher support from locals.</td>
<td>Opinions on the level of local support received by the insurgency.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Groups with women insurgents can be considered as being more inclusive of society.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender Equality:</td>
<td>• Presence of women can be associated with a higher respect for women’s rights in an organization.</td>
<td>Opinions on whether the insurgency supports women’s rights</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor interests</td>
<td>Reputation:</td>
<td>• Supporting a group with women may be advantageous for the sponsor’s reputation among global community as their involvement increases the legitimacy of the movement.</td>
<td>Opinions on whether supporting the insurgency is good for the reputation of the sponsor state.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success:</td>
<td>• Presence of women can be associated with military weakness as the military is considered primarily as a men’s realm.</td>
<td>Opinions on whether supporting the insurgency is good for the security interests of the sponsoring state.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• People may think that supporting a group with women insurgents can be bad for the security interests of the sponsoring state.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Casualties:</td>
<td>• People may value women’s lives more than men’s.</td>
<td>Opinions on the expected harm to the insurgency</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women tend to be associated with civilians.</td>
<td>Opinions on the expected overall harm to the civilians.</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Macro-level Analysis: Foreign Power Support and Gender-Diverse Insurgencies

Hypotheses

If people view supporting armed movements more in line with the normative framework (i.e., humane treatment and inclusive principles), I expect foreign powers to give unconcealed support to gender-diverse armed organizations instead of hiding the assistance. The leaders have an incentive to keep their support to groups without women low key and be more open about their support to groups with women. In many cases, foreign powers do not publicly announce their support of rebel groups. They tend to hide it to get away with domestic as well as international reaction since the principle of sovereignty entails non-intervention in another state’s domestic affairs. Also, states have an incentive to hide their support to avoid triggering retaliation by the state that the rebels are fighting against. Lending covert support to rebel groups enables foreign powers to get the most out of debilitating an adversary state without ‘getting their hands dirty’ (Byman 2005).

However, leaders can suffer domestic and international punishment if this covert support is exposed (Reiter 2012). Eventually, leaders need to decide whether to announce the support, depending on the costs and benefits. They can increase public support for specific policies by discussing them publicly (Kernell 1986), adding salience to the issue (Brule and Mintz 2006). I argue that they would be more likely to announce supporting gender-diverse rebel groups because they know the public is less likely to protest it compared to a decision to support an all-male organization, ceteris paribus.

10 This mechanism might not work for women in noncombatants roles. While female suicide bombers and fighters attract media attention, more than their male counterparts (Bloom 2011), women insurgents in supportive roles are not as visible in mainstream media. Women whose duty is to cook, clean, train or provide logistical assistance do not produce attractive news material. Thus, participation of women in auxiliary roles is less visible to public eye. Also, presence of women in supportive roles would not send as strong signal for the emergency of the situation as women
H₁: Rebel groups with female fighters are more likely to receive explicit support from foreign powers (as opposed to clandestine support).

Second, democracies would be more likely to support rebel groups with female insurgents because support is more easily justifiable to the domestic audience. Assistance to organizations with female fighters would be less likely to be considered as an act of adventurism by constituents, and it is less likely to create a public uproar. This does not suggest that leaders decide supporting an organization based on the mere presence of female fighters. States can sponsor rebel groups for a variety of reasons, the ultimate determinant being the rebels’ capacity to fulfill the aims of the sponsor governments. However, sponsors can have other ideological and domestic motivations (Byman 2008). The presence of female fighters gives the option of attaching a positive, moral spin to the decision of support. “Public attitudes can create political incentives for continuing or withdrawing from military conflict and acting against these preferences carries political costs” (Tomz and Weeks 2013, 850). Leaders can anticipate that they can sell the decision to support a group of female fighters easier to the public. Hence, ceteris paribus, they would prefer supporting gender-diverse groups.

H₂: Rebel groups with female fighters are more likely to receive support from democracies than those without female fighters.

In cases where women’s acts are presented as deviations from the expected gendered behavior, the participation of women would not signal moderation. On the contrary, it may create a backlash and alienate the relevant audience. In that case, leaders would not be able to justify their support based on the presence of female fighters. Helping an organization with “brutal, mentally-ill or mad female insurgents” may negatively affect leaders’ popularity. The presence of women in such cases would not signal moderation and are not expected to attract the support of democratic countries. The combatants do (because women in noncombatants roles do not necessarily disrupt gender roles). For these reasons, I
negative portrayal of women is most evident among female suicide bombers. For this reason, I test this expectation by analyzing the organizations that use suicide bombing.

**H3:** Rebel groups with female fighters that use suicide attacks are not more likely to receive support from democracies.

**Data and Research Design**

To test the hypotheses, I used expanded Non-State Actors in Conflict (NSA) dataset by Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan (2009), which provides information on third-party supporters of rebel groups. The NSA dataset contains all the conflict cases in the UCDP Dyadic Dataset and defines conflict “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths” in the rebel group-adversary state dyad (Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2007). The period covers the years from 1989 to 2009. The unit of analysis is the rebel organization-year, which constitutes one observation per organization-year.

I test the arguments using several dependent variables. First, the measure of explicit foreign power support is adapted from the NSA dataset, which captures whether an armed organization received military, economic, or other material support openly from any foreign state. The support can be in the forms of ‘endorsement,’ ‘non-military,’ ‘military’ or ‘troops.’ Second, I sorted out whether the foreign sponsors are democratic by matching the foreign powers with their Polity IV

---

11 The starting year, which denotes the end of the Cold War, fits well with the arguments of this research; since the dominant ideological paradigm in the Cold War period is identified with the communist-capitalist divide. Foreign powers’ decision to support a rebel group during the Cold War was determined by rebel group’s affinity to communism (Eastern bloc) or capitalism (Western bloc) more than their anything else. Also, certain underlying principles of the mechanisms discussed here (pertaining to the signal of moderation) were not prevalent before the Cold War. For instance, the norm against attacking civilians, a core observable aspect influencing rebels’ reputation (Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu 2016), or gender-inclusiveness have begun to be recognized as the responsibility of international community after the Cold War. Protocol II of Geneva Conventions relating to the protection of victims of non-international armed conflicts was ratified in the late-1980s to early 1990s, while Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified in the mid- to late-1980s by most of the democratic countries.
scores (Marshall and Jaggers 2010). States scoring “6” or higher on the combined Polity IV scale are considered democratic sponsors. “Democratic support” captures whether an armed organization received support from democracies or not in a given year. It is a binary measure accounting for the presence of at least one democratic state that supported the armed group. Third, to capture the impact of the combined sponsor profile, I use “Democratic proportion” which indicates the proportion of democratic supporters to all supporters. This variable aims to detect if female fighters attract a higher concentration of democratic sponsors.

To operationalize armed groups with female insurgents, I use WARD (Wood and Thomas 2017). It covers information on the prevalence of female fighters for more than 200 rebel organizations operating in different countries around the world. The sample of rebel groups is based on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program’s (UCDP) Dyadic Dataset (Harbom et al., 2008). The information on women fighters comes from news reports, academic works, as well as international governmental and nongovernmental organization reports. To specify female fighters, they used a definition that is commonly used in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs: female combatants who are “employed in frontline combat, female suicide bombers or assassins, and female auxiliaries or members of civil defense forces who receive military training, carry combat weapons, and could be called upon to participate in combat when necessary” (Wood and Thomas 2017).

The main explanatory variable, the presence of female fighters, is measured by two different variables. The first one is a binary variable that captures whether a rebel organization recruits female fighters “Female combatants.” The second one is a four-category ordinal variable measuring the prevalence of women combatants in a rebel organization, “Female combatant prevalence.” This variable

For these reasons, I expect female insurgents to have a limited impact on attracting support, if any, before the end of
is 0 when no evidence of women fighters exists, and it takes the value of 1 when less than 5% of the organization’s cadre consists of women, 2 when the women percentage constitutes 5% to 20%, and 3 when more than 20% of the total members are women (Wood and Thomas, 2017). To test the fourth hypothesis, I use a binary variable indicating whether a group utilizes “Suicide terrorism” from the Women in Armed Movements Dataset (WARD), which is originally adopted from the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (2015).

**Control Variables**

States tend not to get involved in conflicts that have been going on for a long time and conflicts with high casualties due to the concerns of not being able to manage such complex conflict (Aydin 2010, Bach-Lindsay et al. 2008, Regan 2002). Duration and the intensity of the conflict can also affect the presence of female insurgents. Organizations existing for longer years or those experiencing higher losses are more likely to recruit women. I control for the duration, operationalized as the years since the beginning of the conflict. The “conflict intensity” captures the best estimate for battle-related deaths in the rebel group-country dyad from the UCDP Battle-related Deaths Dataset (Allanson et al. 2017).

Recent research argues that foreign powers do not only consider intervening in a civil war based on their interests from the overall conflict, but they also gauge their options on which rebel group they should side with (Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham 2011). In this vein, the strength of the rebel group plays a crucial role in states’ decision to provide support or not (Salehyan, Gleditsch, and Cunningham 2011). Third parties would like to support an organization that would be able to effectively challenge the target government. The capacity of the organization can also influence female participation since sympathizers would be more willing to participate in a stronger Cold War.
organization that can provide them security. Also, rebel groups may be able to recruit females only after being able to tolerate the costs of women’s involvement, such as disruption of group cohesion (Thomas and Bond 2015). To assess the strength of the organization, I use “Troop size” from the NSA dataset, indicating the best estimate of the size of rebel armed forces.

The argument above, which presumes democratic countries to consider the moderation of a rebel organization in their decision to support rebel organizations, arouses similar expectations regarding the rebel groups which forcefully recruit civilians. Rebel groups that recruit high numbers of females by coercion would fail to signal moderation or broader civilian support. “Forced recruitment” is adapted from Cohen’s (2013) SVAC dataset. It is a binary measure that reflects whether abduction, press-ganging, or other coercive recruitment strategies are ever employed during a given conflict.

Competition among rebel organization in a conflict affects external support as well as the participation of female insurgents. The more competition rebel groups face from rival rebel groups, the more attention they are likely to pay to the needs and demands of their supporters to maintain the support (Walter 2015). In the presence of multiple rebel groups fighting against the same target, rebel groups compete over foreign support (Walter 2015). Also, the overall demand for recruits will increase, and rebel organizations would be more willing to attract female participants. “Rebel competition” captures the number of rebel groups actively fighting for the same conflict.

Research also suggests that armed groups with transnational diaspora/transnational constituencies are more likely to attract external support. The diaspora would be likely to pressure their governments to support the rebel groups of their fellow nationals (Salehyan, Cunningham and Gleditsch 2011). Many rebel organizations’ audience transcends national borders as rebel groups often represent a national segment of a broader ethnic group. For instance, Sikhs in India or Tamils
in Sri Lanka have large overseas diaspora, which often raises awareness of the ongoing conflict in their home countries. Transnational constituency indicates whether the insurgent group has a transnational audience that incites solidarity with other ethnic, ideological, or religious groups in other states. This audience can also help to attract more attention to women’s participation in respective rebel groups. It is a three-category variable from the NSA dataset which captures “explicit” and “tacit” support and no transnational constituency. Tacit support indicates that “the group makes appeals to a transnational constituency and that external, non-state actors express sympathy or solidarity with the insurgents,” whereas explicit support denotes “external non-state actors directly support the insurgency through material resources, funding, supplies, supplying foreign fighters, etc.” (Salehyan, Gledistch, Cunningham 2011).

The strategic importance of a country experiencing a civil conflict is also accounted for in the models and operationalized using the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score (Singer 1987). The strategic importance of the target state (target state power) controls for the deterrent effect of being a powerful and strategically important ally on third-parties’ decisions to support its adversary armed organizations. I take the natural log of this variable since the presence of outliers skews the data. This variable accounts for one possible alternative explanation of the hypothesized relationship, that stronger states can discourage others from funding their insurgents’ activities or that rebels operating against stronger states may be viewed as less likely to be successful (Salehyan, Gleditsch, Cunningham 2011).

Another control variable concerning the characteristic of the target states is its regime type. While democratic states supported rebel groups against their democratically-elected government many times during the Cold War period and earlier when geopolitical concerns were prioritized, the norm to respect the legitimacy of a democratically-elected government has become more salient in
the post-Cold War especially for democratic states. Based on the same logic with the democratic peace theory, “Target state regime” controls for the Polity2 score of the adversary state against which the rebels are fighting.

**Analysis**

The models test the arguments using three different dependent variables: 1) Explicit foreign support, 2) Democratic support, 3) Proportion of democratic supporters. The dataset consists of rebel group-target state dyads with annual accounts. Models use OLS regression on time series because OLS is argued to be more robust to model misspecification and distribution assumptions, and even with the appropriate assumptions, most likelihood estimation results likely to be biased in small samples (Angrist and Pischke 2008). That said, I did the same analysis using probit models, and the results are very similar to the results from the OLS models. I also tested the relationship between groups with women insurgents and autocratic support (as opposed to democratic support) as well as alleged foreign support (as opposed to explicit foreign support). The results show a negative correlation between women insurgents and autocratic support, and between women insurgents and alleged support (see Appendix B).  

The results presented in Table 5 show support for the hypotheses (see Figure 8). The presence of women combatants is in the expected directions and statistically significant at the traditionally accepted level in all models except the first one, suggesting that female combatants attract support from democratic countries.

---

12 While data on the presence of female fighters for an organization does not change over years, I used time series because the other variables are time-variant. I included an analysis using time-invariant data in Appendix B.
Model 1 shows that rebels with female fighters influence attracting explicit support, suggesting that foreign powers do not feel the need to hide assisting rebel groups when they have female fighters. However, this impact is not statistically significant at the traditional level. Model 2 and Model 3 show that the presence of female combatants increases rebel groups’ chances of receiving support from democratic countries. Holding other variables on their means, the probability of attracting democratic support increases by approximately 0.166 points in the presence of female fighters (Model 2). Model 3 shows the effect of female participation on having a concentration of democratic supporters among all supporters. The coefficient for female fighters is positive and significant, suggesting that the presence of female fighters in an armed organization increases the proportion of democratic supporters. These results lend support to the second hypothesis.
Table 5. The Effect of Women Combatants on Receiving Foreign Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.166*</td>
<td>0.130*</td>
<td>0.175*</td>
<td>0.142**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0821)</td>
<td>(0.0662)</td>
<td>(0.0524)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.055)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Terrorism</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.174)</td>
<td>(0.139)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants*Suicide</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td>-0.098</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.213)</td>
<td>(0.170)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Recruitment</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>-0.114</td>
<td>-0.106†</td>
<td>-0.113</td>
<td>-0.097†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.086)</td>
<td>(0.069)</td>
<td>(0.055)</td>
<td>(0.071)</td>
<td>(0.056)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Competition</td>
<td>0.047***</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.012)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td>(0.018)</td>
<td>(0.015)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troop Size</td>
<td>9.92e-06***</td>
<td>4.26e-06**</td>
<td>1.40e-06</td>
<td>4.28e-06**</td>
<td>1.24e-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.50e-06)</td>
<td>(1.56e-06)</td>
<td>(1.26e-06)</td>
<td>(1.58e-06)</td>
<td>(1.28e-06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaspora Support</td>
<td>0.096*</td>
<td>0.069†</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.068†</td>
<td>0.049†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.038)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.028)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.011***</td>
<td>-0.011***</td>
<td>-0.011***</td>
<td>-0.011***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Intensity</td>
<td>-3.13e-06</td>
<td>-1.38e-05*</td>
<td>-9.01e-06</td>
<td>-1.37e-05*</td>
<td>-8.74e-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4.09e-06)</td>
<td>(6.43e-06)</td>
<td>(5.50e-06)</td>
<td>(6.44e-06)</td>
<td>(5.51e-06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target State Regime</td>
<td>-0.007***</td>
<td>-0.008*</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.008*</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target State Power</td>
<td>-0.081***</td>
<td>0.043*</td>
<td>0.029+</td>
<td>0.044*</td>
<td>0.031†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0225)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td>(0.020)</td>
<td>(0.016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.285*</td>
<td>0.470***</td>
<td>0.366***</td>
<td>0.469***</td>
<td>0.369***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.144)</td>
<td>(0.128)</td>
<td>(0.103)</td>
<td>(0.129)</td>
<td>(0.104)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of dyads</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, †p<0.1.

Models 4 and 5 demonstrate the effect of using suicide bombing on the relationship between female fighters and democratic sponsors. I hypothesized that the presence of female fighters would not have a positive effect on attracting sponsors for groups that rely on suicide bombing (Hypothesis 4). I test this using interaction terms of groups using female fighters and suicide bombing. Models 4 and 5 show that the coefficient on the interaction term is negative but not statistically significant.
Albeit not statistically significant, we can infer that female insurgents do not have the same influence on sponsors’ decisions for groups engaging in suicide bombing as compared to the ones that do not use suicide bombing. Table 6 shows that for groups that do not use suicide bombing (suicide bombing equals 0), the effect of female fighters on attracting support is positive and significant; this is consistent with the hypothesized relationship. On the other hand, the coefficient of female fighters for groups using suicide bombing (suicide bombing equals 1) is positive-but smaller- and insignificant.

Table 6. The Effect of Using Suicide Bombing for Gender-Diverse Groups on Receiving Democratic Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Democratic Support</th>
<th>Proportion of Democratic Supporters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatant=1, Suicide=0</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>0.142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.52)*</td>
<td>(2.58)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatant=1, Suicide=1</td>
<td>0.069</td>
<td>0.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.33)</td>
<td>(0.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average marginal effect of adopting suicide bombing for rebel groups with women insurgents on receiving democratic support and proportion of democratic supporters. *p<0.05; ** p<0.01 Standard errors in parentheses

Overall, the results and substantive effects show that the presence of female fighters in armed movements helps to attract support from democratic powers. Moreover, the results suggest that female fighters attract rather open support from foreign powers, as opposed to secret or alleged support. Additionally, the results suggest that women who engage in suicide terrorism do not increase democratic support.

Micro-Level Analysis: Foreign Public Opinion Toward Women Insurgents

The statistical analyses support the hypotheses, but it does not provide evidence on how people perceive the involvement of women insurgents in armed conflict. Apart from a few case studies, how the public responds to the group composition of violent groups has not been tested. In
this section, I clarify the causal mechanism and examine how the presence of women in armed
groups affects foreign public opinion on assistance supporting these groups. I seek to answer three
main questions: (1) Does the foreign public support armed movements with women more than
those without women? (2) Does the foreign public view sponsoring armed movements with women
insurgents as a moral duty compared to those without women? (3) Through what mechanisms does
support operate?

I carry out survey experiments that correspond with the three questions outlined above that
examine differences in foreign public support between an armed insurgency scenario with and
without women participants. I conducted two different survey experiments to test the impact of
women insurgents on public attitudes on foreign support. Both experiments address similar inquiries
with a slightly different design (which are revised based on the feedback received from the scholars
in the field). All the experiments are conducted using the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign’s
student subject pool, which recruits students to answer survey questions in exchange for a 1/12 of
extra course credit. The first experiment is conducted between April 1 and April 19, 2019, as a pilot
providing a preliminary assessment for the plausibility of the hypotheses where UIUC students are
randomly assigned to control and treatment conditions involving a short vignette without photos.
The second experiment involves control and treatment conditions in the form of news articles,
which includes photos of women insurgents (treatment) and men insurgents (control) together with
a background story for the insurgency, which helps the respondents visualize the conflict as a
situation that is likely to happen. It is conducted between March 9- March 27, 2020. Details of each
experiment are provided below and in appendices B, C, and D.

**Students as Subjects.** It is important to note that the survey experiments are conducted
using a small sample of UIUC students rather than a representative sample of the US population.
College students tend to be more positive toward women’s engagement in male-dominated domains and may not be as disturbed as the general public by seeing women’s involvement in violent actions, which may raise questions about the generalizability of the results. Nevertheless, existing studies suggest that using student respondents does not intrinsically pose a problem for a survey experiments’ external validity as there are very limited situations in which using student participants constrain experimental inferences (Druckman and Kam 2011). Indeed, a recent survey experiment gauging public attitudes toward militants conducted using quota sampling to match the sample to US demographics for gender, race, age, and education finds that female fighters positively influence audience attitudes toward rebel groups (Manekin and Wood 2020). This finding, based on a larger sample of the US population, supports the main results of this survey experiment and alleviates concerns over using college students as respondents.

Still, it is important to interpret the results keeping in mind that college students in a large public university can have a different set of values than average Americans, and, of course, than individuals in other democracies. Appendix B provides more information on the characteristics of the respondents in terms of their gender, ethnicity, attitudes towards gender roles and the US’ role in world affairs. It shows that one notable difference between the student sample and the average US population is about the ideology of the respondents. 68% of the students in the sample consider themselves as democrats, while only 10% identify as republicans and 22% as independents. However, the percentage of American people who identify as republican is approximately 35-39%, while democrats account for 43-46% of the population in 2018, according to the data of General Social Survey and American National Election Studies, respectively (Pew Research Center 2019).

Notwithstanding the limitations of using students as respondents, I expect the results to hold in larger samples, especially in Western countries where women’s participation is considered as
a core liberal principle on which the societal values reside on. The results regarding the positive perceptions toward women militants may not hold in more traditional societies as women’s active engagement in the public sphere and eroding of gender roles are less likely to be welcomed by the public.

**Experiment 1: Preliminary Assessment of Support**

The first survey experiment examines differences in foreign public support between an armed insurgency scenario with and without women participants and tested the feasibility of different mechanisms shaping opinions on support. Students of the UIUC, who opted to participate in this study in exchange for an extra-credit, were randomly assigned to baseline and treatment conditions. The baseline scenario involves a simple description of a situation the United States could face in the future about deciding to send economic and military assistance to an armed insurgent group abroad who is fighting against a US adversary. For scientific validity, the respondents are told that the situation was general, and not about a specific country in the news currently. The treatment conditions add information about the gender composition of the rebel group members. The “men treatment” mentions that the insurgent group is composed of men while the “women treatment” mentions that almost half of the insurgent group is composed of women (see Table 7).

The respondents are then asked to answer several questions that aim to reveal their opinions about sponsoring the insurgency (see Appendix for the complete list of questions). The responses for the control group and “men” treatment were almost identical, probably because people tend to associate rebel groups with male fighters if no information about group composition is provided as men are the typical actors of political violence (See Tables 8 and 9). Hence, in the following experiment, I dropped the category with no gender and included only male insurgents as a baseline condition.
Table 7. Vignettes used in Experiment 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control</strong></td>
<td>The US government is considering sending economic and military assistance to an armed insurgent group abroad who is fighting against a US adversary. While many experts in the US think supporting the insurgent group is in line with the US strategic interests, others think that it will be too costly for the US.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td>The US government is considering sending economic and military assistance to an armed insurgent group abroad who is fighting against a US adversary. The insurgent group is composed of men. While many experts in the US think supporting the insurgent group is in line with the US strategic interests, others think that it will be too costly for the US.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>The US government is considering sending economic and military assistance to an armed insurgent group abroad who is fighting against a US adversary. Almost half of the insurgent group is composed of women. While many experts in the US think supporting the insurgent group is in line with the US strategic interests, others think that it will be too costly for the US.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9 (based on Tables 8 and 9) shows the differences between men and women treatments to these questions, respectively: 1) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States should support the insurgency? 2) To what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States has a moral obligation to support the insurgency? The respondents are asked to answer these questions over a Likert scale with five options: Strongly agree (5), somewhat agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), somewhat disagree (2), strongly disagree (1).
Figure 9. Respondent Opinions on Sponsoring Armed Insurgencies and Perceptions of Moral Obligation

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States should support the insurgency?

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States has a moral obligation to support the insurgency?

The preliminary investigation suggests that the presence of women in insurgent groups has an impact both on people’s decision to support the insurgency abroad and on people’s perception of the US’ moral obligation to help the insurgency. While the mean of support for the control group is 3.08, the mean of support for the women treat is 3.27, leading to approximately 0.2 increase in support, which is statistically significant at 0.5 level (see Table 8).

Table 8. Comparison of Support Means by Treatment Scenario (Experiment 1, Question 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Support Mean</th>
<th>Effect of the Treatment Compared to the Control Group (CI 95%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.078</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>3.117</td>
<td>0.039 (-0.084, 0.473)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3.272</td>
<td>0.194† (-0.084, 0.473)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†p<0.5, *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

The impact of “women treatment” is more salient when respondents are asked about their opinions on the US moral obligation to help the insurgency. The mean of responses who think the US has a moral obligation to support the insurgency is 2.77 for the control group while 3.05 for women.
treatment, leading to approximately 0.3 increase, which is statistically significant at 0.1 level (see Table 9). In other words, having women insurgents changes respondents’ opinions in favor of supporting the insurgency due to moral obligation by 0.3.

Table 9. Comparison of Moral Obligation Mean by Treatment Scenario (Experiment 1, Question 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Moral Obligation Mean</th>
<th>Effect of the Treatment Compared to the Control Group (CI 95%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.767</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>2.816</td>
<td>0.049 (-0.024, 0.340)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3.049</td>
<td>0.282* (-0.013, 0.577)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.5, *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

In order to better understand the degree of variation between women and men treatment, I provided the comparison between the results when breaking down the results based on the 5-point-categorical support scale to a “binary” measure of support (where “strongly disagree,” “somewhat disagree” and “neither agree nor disagree” are considered as no support while “somewhat agree” and “strongly agree” are considered as support). The baseline condition using binary measure of support shows that only 39.8% of the respondents supported sending foreign assistance to rebels with male insurgents whereas, in the women treatment, just over a majority, 51.5 %, favored foreign support, more than a 11 percent increase in support, which was statistically significant at the 0.1 level (see Table 10).
Table 10. Descriptive Comparison of Binary and Categorical Support by Women Treatment Scenario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Women Insurgents</th>
<th>Effect of Women Insurgents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Binary Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0: Oppose/No support</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>-11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Support</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categorical Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Strongly disagree</td>
<td>4.85%</td>
<td>7.77%</td>
<td>2.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Somewhat disagree</td>
<td>24.27%</td>
<td>16.50%</td>
<td>-7.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>31.07%</td>
<td>24.27%</td>
<td>-6.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Somewhat agree</td>
<td>37.86%</td>
<td>43.69%</td>
<td>5.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Strongly agree</td>
<td>1.94%</td>
<td>7.77%</td>
<td>5.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>103</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the preliminary results suggest several important findings. First, the variation in answers to different treatments suggests that people treat rebel groups with women insurgents differently than those without women insurgents. Second, citizens are more willing to intervene on behalf of the insurgents against the regime when the insurgent group includes women members. Third, people are more likely to think that the US has a moral obligation to support the insurgency if it involves women insurgents. This suggests that the gender composition of the insurgent group can be affecting support for the conflict assistance by changing perceptions about morality.

To understand how the gender diversity of a rebel cadre impacts peoples’ opinions on the insurgency, first, I demonstrate the impact of having women insurgents on the mechanism indicators. I show whether there are differences among public opinion regarding the indicators above if respondents are given the women treatment (see Table 11).
Table 11. The Effect of Women Insurgents on Potential Mechanisms\(^{13}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism Indicator</th>
<th>Control (SE)</th>
<th>Women Treatment (SE)</th>
<th>Effect of Women Treatment (CI 95%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radicalness of the insurgent group(^{14})</td>
<td>3.388 (0.099)</td>
<td>2.981 (0.088)</td>
<td>-0.408*** (-0.669, -0.147)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness of the insurgent group(^{15})</td>
<td>2.971 (0.081)</td>
<td>3.252 (0.086)</td>
<td>0.282** (0.049, 0.514)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights violations by the insurgent group(^{16})</td>
<td>3.204 (0.082)</td>
<td>3.010 (0.082)</td>
<td>-0.194* (-0.423, 0.035)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women equality(^{17})</td>
<td>2.952 (0.089)</td>
<td>3.660 (0.090)</td>
<td>0.709*** (0.459, 0.958)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repression by the adversary(^{18})</td>
<td>3.301 (0.073)</td>
<td>3.408 (0.081)</td>
<td>0.107 (-0.108, 0.322)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reports results from t-tests. SE: Standard Errors in parentheses, CI 95%: Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are in parentheses. *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

‘Effect of women insurgents’ column in Table 8 reports the result of the comparison of means tests of the effect of the women treatment on the presence of each potential mechanism. All the results

\(^{13}\) There are differences in each survey experiment in terms of the questions asked about the mechanisms. The first survey experiment – the pilot study- did not ask questions about all the indicators mentioned in the “mechanisms” section. It asked about the insurgent groups’ perceived radicalness & inclusiveness, commitment to human rights & women’s equality, and the repression the group is subject to. The second survey did not ask for the radicalness of the group, as “radicalness” is considered as a vague term that needs a further explanation. The latter survey asks about the level of civilian violence perpetrated by the group instead. The complete list of questions asked for each survey is available in the Appendix.

\(^{14}\) Question asked to respondents: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the insurgent group supports radical ideologies? An ideology that advocates racial or religious supremacy or opposes the core principles of democracy, liberty and universal human rights can be considered as radical.

\(^{15}\) Question asked to respondents: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the insurgency supports inclusive principles?

\(^{16}\) Question asked to respondents: If the United States does NOT send support to the insurgent group, what are the chances that each of the following events will occur? High level of human rights violations caused by the insurgent group.

\(^{17}\) Questions asked to respondents: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the insurgency supports women’s equality?

\(^{18}\) In your opinion, how much repression does the adversary face from the insurgent group?
are in line with the expected direction and are statistically significant. One exception is the opinions on the repression by the adversary; it is also in the expected direction but not statistically significant in the traditionally excepted level. The results suggest that opinions about the insurgency are substantively shaped by the gender of the membership. The respondents who receive the women treatment think that the insurgency is 1) less radical, 2) more likely to embrace inclusive principles, 3) less likely to commit human rights violations, and 4) more likely to support women’s equality compared to the respondents in the control treatment. The change in the perceptions about the group’s radicalness and gender-equality is especially greater. People tend to think that the insurgency with women members is 0.71 points more supportive of women’s rights and 0.41 points less radical compared to those without women members. (In percentages, these results correspond to 14.18% increase in perceiving the insurgency is supportive of gender equality and 8.16% decrease in perceptions about the radical nature of the insurgency). While these effects are interesting on their own right, I would like to see whether and to what extent these beliefs about women insurgents influence support for sending conflict assistance. In the next section, I conduct mediation analyses to understand if there is a causal relationship between these indicators and choosing to support women insurgents.

**Mediation Analysis: Mechanisms of Support**

I conducted a mediation analysis using Hicks and Tingley’s (2001) “mediation” package for Stata and the procedure outlined by Imai et al. (2011). I used this approach to estimate the treatment effect on each potential mediator and the effect of the mediator on support for intervention. These estimates are then used to compute the average causal mediation effect and the percentage of the total effect mediated by each mechanism (Imai et al. 2011, 773). It helps to differentiate between
alternative mechanisms using a potential outcome framework to calculate how much of the
treatment effect travels through each mediating variable.

Table 9 reports the results from mediation analysis based on the following two models,
where $M_i$ represents the observed presence or absence of the mediator, $T_i$ is a binary indicator for
the women treatment (the baseline is control group), and $Y_i$ is the observed support or opposition
to support the insurgency. These models do not contain any covariates as controls.

$$Mi = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 T_i + \epsilon_i$$
$$Y_i = \alpha_2 + \beta_2 T_i + \beta_3 M_i + \epsilon_i$$

Figure 10 shows the average effect of women insurgents on the decision to support the
insurgency that operates through the mediators based on Table 12. It shows the impact of mediators
both for the women treatment and men treatment separately where the baseline is the control group
with no mention of member gender. The mediators include perceptions about insurgency’s
inclusivity, radicalness, respect for human rights, concern for women’s equality, and the repression
applied by the insurgency’s adversary (based on the discussion in the mechanisms section above).
These analyses gauge whether each factor is a significant mediator of support and highlights their
relative influence by comparing how much of the total effect is transmitted through different
mechanisms.

The results of the mediation analyses show that beliefs regarding insurgency’s advocacy of
gender equality and inclusive principles account for the largest amount of mediated support for
sponsoring a gender-diverse insurgency. Contrary to a common expectation in the gender and
conflict scholarship, the presence of women fighters does not substantively change the perceptions
about the severity of the repression. While groups with women fighters are viewed significantly less
radical and less likely to commit human rights violations, these do not seem to have much influence on people’s ultimate decision to sponsor the insurgency.

Figure 10. Average Effect of Women Treatment on Supporting the Insurgency that Operates Through the Mediators

Interestingly, the results also suggest that insurgencies’ perceived lack of support for women’s equality can lead to lower levels of support for all-male groups. Taken together, while groups with women insurgents are considered as less radical and less likely to cause human rights violations as suggested, the main causal story leading people to favor these groups is related to their perception as inclusive and women’s rights supporter.
Table 12. Mediators and Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME)</th>
<th>%Total Effect Mediated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radical ideology</td>
<td>-0.002 (-0.067, 0.061)</td>
<td>-0.007 (-0.093, 0.067)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>0.088 (0.011, 0.191)</td>
<td>0.392 (-2.114, 3.993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s equality</td>
<td>0.178 (0.067, 0.316)</td>
<td>0.785 (-6.111, 7.210)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR violations (by insurgency)</td>
<td>-0.001 (-0.043, 0.039)</td>
<td>-0.002 (-0.036, 0.011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repression (by adversary)</td>
<td>0.054 (-0.060, 0.175)</td>
<td>0.243 (-1.617, 2.345)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mediation analysis was conducted on each mediator individually using the procedure from Hicks and Tingley (2011). Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are in parentheses.

This preliminary analysis tested only the plausibility of normative considerations regarding gender-diverse cadres and did not ask respondents questions about their instrumental considerations, such as perceptions about the strength of the insurgency or the expected interests of the sponsoring state. The vignettes presented in the first experiment are not narrated in a specific frame; neither do they reveal much information about the context in which the rebel group operates. One can argue that it is difficult to assess the real impact of women insurgents or mechanisms underlying the respondents’ decisions given the minimal information revealed to them. The next experiment provides more background information about the insurgencies, presents the women and men scenarios as a mocked-up news article, and asks questions about the mechanisms specified in the section above.

Experiment 2

The second survey experiment includes pictures for each treatment, which are designed as news item in a newspaper. The photos are found online and are selected based on their resemblance to each other; i.e., in both scenarios, the insurgents are holding guns upward and standing among
other insurgents (potentially in military training). Respondents are randomly assigned to the women and control treatments. Those who are assigned to the “women treatment” received the news item with women fighters. Respondents in the control group received the same scenario, with the only difference being the photo of male insurgents (see Figure 11). The surveys are conducted using the UIUC’s student subject pool in exchange for 1/12 extra course credit.

Figure 11. News Items used in Experiment 2

19 I used the photos of Kurdish YPG and YPJ insurgents fighting in the Syrian Civil War because, due to the salience of the issue in the news media, it was easier to find resembling photos of women and men insurgents to be used in the treatments. This information is not shared with the respondents; instead, they were told that the scenario is not about a particular insurgency in the news, assuming that the undergraduate students would not be informed enough to differentiate the Kurdish rebels from others. However, during conducting the experiment, the Kurdish insurgency gained further popularity due to the Trump administration decision to withdraw the US forces allying with the Kurds on the ground, which may have increased the probability of recognizing the Kurdish rebels from their visual images. At the end of the survey, the respondents are asked if they have any guesses on which insurgency can this group represent in real life. Only 12% of the respondents mentioned that it can be the Kurdish rebels (33 over 275 respondents). The potential consequences of recognizing the Kurdish rebels’ visuals in the treatments is analyzed further in detail in the Appendix.
Before the news items, respondents are told that they were going to read a situation the United States could face in the future and that the situation is general and is not about a real specific country or group in the news today. The news item includes information of a rebel group (with a fake name) fighting against a US adversary (with a fake name) asking for support from the US. The vignette for both treatments reads as follows:

“Last week, Falconian state forces launched a ground assault against Moravian Liberation Front—the rebel group who has been fighting against the Falconian government since 2005, for an independent Moravian state within Falconia. Moravian rebels (pictured above) retaliated yesterday, killing at least four Falconian soldiers during a military ceremony. As tensions escalate in the region, both the Falconian government and Moravian rebel leaders accuse each other of targeting vulnerable civilians. In an interview last week, a rebel from Moravia Liberation Front said, “we don’t want to separate from Falconia and set up a state. We want to live within the borders of Falconia, on our own land freely. We are fighting for Moravian ethnic rights.” The US is considering sending economic and military assistance to the Moravian Liberation Front against Falconia, a long-time US adversary. Many experts in the US think supporting the rebel group is in line with the US strategic interests, while others argue that it will be too costly for the US.”

Individuals are then asked to answer a series of questions regarding their attitudes toward the US possibility of sponsoring the armed group, including sending military and economic assistance (see Appendix for questions). Based on these responses, first, I conducted t-tests and investigated differences in support, as well as thinking support in moral terms, between the baseline (male insurgents) and the treatment (female insurgents). Table 13 demonstrates the comparison of support means by treatment scenario based on the question “to what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States should support the insurgency?” where the respondents used a Likert scale with five options: Strongly agree (5), somewhat agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), somewhat disagree (2), strongly disagree (1).

People who receive the news with male fighter photos support sponsoring the armed group 0.29 points less than those who receive the women treatment, with the mean support of 3 points for
male insurgent treatment, and 3.29 points for female insurgent treatment, which is statistically significant at 0.05 level. This effect confirms the findings of the first experiment. The treatment effect is larger than the effect found in the first preliminary experiment (0.287 vs. 0.194), which suggests that seeing images of women insurgents might have a favorable impact on the decision to support the insurgency.

Table 13. Comparison of Support Means by Treatment Scenario (Experiment 2, Question 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Support Mean</th>
<th>Effect of the Treatment* (CI 95%)</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control (Men)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3.287</td>
<td>-0.287** (-0.509, -0.064)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*diff = mean(Control) - mean(Women);  *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 14 shows the means of the response by treatment scenario to the question “to what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States has a moral obligation to support the insurgency?” The results are in line with the expectations. The respondents who receive the women treatment are more likely to think that the US has a moral obligation to support the insurgency by 0.123 points which is statistically significant at 0.5 level.20

---

20 While the respondents chose from a Likert scale with 5 options in all questions, the respondents were offered 7 options only for this question on the moral obligation of the US. This was done by mistake. I converted 7-point scale to a 5-point scale for consistency where I combined “strongly agree” and “agree” together and coded them as 5, and combined “strongly disagree” and “disagree” as 1. I believe the relative weakness of the treatment effect regarding moral obligation question in this second experiment compared to the first experiment stems from using a 7-point scale instead of 5-point scale. Still, it shows that the main conclusion holds regardless of using different scales; in both experiments people are more likely to think that the US has moral obligation to assist the armed insurgency if it includes women militants.
Table 14. Comparison of Moral Obligation Mean by Treatment Scenario (Experiment 2, Question 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Moral Obligation Mean</th>
<th>Effect of the Treatment&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt; (CI 95%)</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.237</td>
<td></td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>3.360</td>
<td>-0.123† (-0.308, 0.215)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reports results from t-tests. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are in parentheses. <sup>a</sup>diff = mean(Control) - mean(Women); †p<0.5, *p<0.10, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Table 15 reports the result of the comparison of means tests of the direct effect of the women treatment on the presence of each potential mechanism, and Figure 12 demonstrates the results based on Table 15. The presence of women insurgents has the highest impact on perceptions about the insurgency’s use of civilian violence and its embracement of gender equality and inclusive principles.

First, the results suggest that respondents who receive the female treatment are substantively more likely to think that the insurgency is less likely to target civilians (p<0.01). While people think that the insurgency with a photo of male fighters can use civilian violence by 3.35 points over 5 point-scale, the insurgency with female cadre is perceived to use civilian violence by 2.99 points with a difference of 0.36 points.

Second, there is not a meaningful difference between people’s perception of adversary repression for different treatment scenarios. This result is in line with the first experiment. Third, those who receive the women treatment are overall more likely to think that the insurgency embraces inclusive principles with 0.318 difference, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Fourth, in line with the expectations, people tend to think that the insurgency is more likely to support women’s rights if the insurgency has women militants (3.46 over 5) compared to 2.79 points for the all-male insurgency with a difference of -0.672 (p<0.01). Fifth, based on the conflict literature, I expected that the presumed support the insurgency receives from the local people
should be higher for groups with women insurgents. The results suggest that this is not the case; indeed, it is the opposite. People are more likely to think that the insurgency is supported by the locals if the group does not include women insurgents (p<0.1).

Figure 12. The Effect of Women Insurgents on Potential Mechanisms

The results gauging the relationship between women militants and sponsor interests reveal interesting results. The group with women insurgents is viewed as slightly less powerful than the all-male group; however, this difference is very small (0.083 points) and is statistically significant only at 0.5 level. In a similar vein, considerations about the sponsor state’s security interests do not yield meaningful differences for the insurgency with or without women members. However, there is a substantive difference in the concerns over the US reputation between treatments. The group who received the women treatment think that sponsoring the insurgency would be good for the US reputation in the global community by 3.05 points in mean support, which is 0.24 points higher than those who receive the control with all-male insurgents (p<0.05).

The remaining two indicators suggest that concerns for the consequences of the US inaction do not differ substantively according to the treatment. While the harm to civilians, if the US does
not send support to the insurgent group, is considered to be about the same for both treatments, harm to the insurgency is expected to be 0.106 higher for the group with women militants (p<0.5).

Table 15. The Effect of Women Insurgents on Potential Mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism Indicator</th>
<th>Control (SE)</th>
<th>Women Treatment (SE)</th>
<th>Effect of Treatment% (CI 95%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilian violence (used by the insurgency)</td>
<td>3.345 (0.064)</td>
<td>2.985 (0.07)</td>
<td>0.360*** (0.173, 0.547)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repression (by the adversary)</td>
<td>3.683 (0.064)</td>
<td>3.603 (0.065)</td>
<td>0.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>3.072 (0.069)</td>
<td>3.390 (0.068)</td>
<td>-0.318*** (-0.508, -0.127)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s equality</td>
<td>2.791 (0.063)</td>
<td>3.463 (0.080)</td>
<td>-0.672*** (-0.872, -0.471)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public (local) support (for the insurgency)</td>
<td>2.986 (0.062)</td>
<td>2.838 (0.060)</td>
<td>0.147* (-0.023, 0.318)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurgency Strength</td>
<td>2.892 (0.078)</td>
<td>2.809 (0.076)</td>
<td>0.083† (-0.130, 0.297)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Reputation</td>
<td>2.813 (0.083)</td>
<td>3.052 (0.08)</td>
<td>-0.239** (-0.465, -0.012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Security</td>
<td>2.799 (0.079)</td>
<td>2.816 (0.086)</td>
<td>-0.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm to insurgency</td>
<td>3.784 (0.072)</td>
<td>3.890 (0.072)</td>
<td>-0.106† (-0.306, 0.095)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm to civilians</td>
<td>3.813 (0.084)</td>
<td>3.802 (0.071)</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reports results from t-tests. SE: Standard errors in parentheses; CI 95%: Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are in parentheses. \( \text{diff} = \text{mean (Control)} - \text{mean (Women)}; \text{\textsuperscript{a}} p<0.5, \text{\textsuperscript{b}} p<0.10; \text{\textsuperscript{**}} p<0.05, \text{\textsuperscript{***}} p<0.01 \)

Mediation Analysis: Mechanisms of Support

I use mediation analysis to illustrate the effect of the women insurgent treatment operating through each mechanism (see Figure 13, based on Table 16). These analyses gauge whether each factor deemed as a mechanism is a significant mediator of support for the insurgency and highlights their relative influence by comparing how much of the total effect is transmitted through different mechanisms. Disaggregating gendered mechanisms of support shows that the concerns over the US reputation in the global community for sponsoring the group and the group’s embrace of
inclusive principles account for the largest mediated percentage of support. In other words, the US reputation in the global community and the insurgency’s perceived inclusiveness mediate the relationship between the presence of women fighters and the support for sponsoring the insurgency. The mediational effect in which women militants increases support for the insurgency through the US reputation and insurgency’s perceived inclusiveness are the indirect effects. The indirect effect represents the portion of the relationship between the main independent variable (women fighters in armed groups) and the dependent variable (foreign public support for armed groups) that is mediated by the perception that supporting the insurgency would be good for the US reputation in the global community and the expectation that the insurgency embraces inclusive principles.

Figure 13 shows that receiving the news item with women insurgents increases support for sending military and economic aid to the armed insurgency by 0.117 points through the mediate effect of concern for the US reputation among the global community, and by 0.08 points through the mediated effect of the insurgency’s perceived inclusivity.

Figure 13. Mediators and Support
These results are very similar to the findings of the first experiment, where the concerns for inclusivity and women’s rights have the largest mediation effects. In this experiment, concern for insurgency’s support for women’s rights also appears as an effective mediator, yet it is not statistically significant at the traditionally accepted level. The major addition of this second experiment is the finding that concerns over US reputation among the global community mediate the relationship between women insurgents and supporting the insurgency (see Table 16). The similar results of the first and second experiments also suggest that the presence of women fighters convey similar opinions regardless of the message medium (i.e., news item or simple vignette) or the frame of the narration.

Table 16. Mediators and Support (Experiment 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediator</th>
<th>Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME)</th>
<th>% Total Effect Mediated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civilian violence by the insurgency</td>
<td>0.032 (-0.017, 0.091)</td>
<td>0.112 (0.062, 0.448)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repression by the adversary</td>
<td>-0.009 (-0.047, 0.0155)</td>
<td>-0.0327443 (-0.125, -0.0179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness</td>
<td>0.08 (0.024, 0.158)</td>
<td>0.278 (0.152, 1.117)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s equality</td>
<td>0.059 (-0.024, 0.153)</td>
<td>0.202 (0.111, 0.793)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public support for the insurgency</td>
<td>0.019 (-0.005, 0.06)</td>
<td>0.067 (0.037, 0.291)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurgency Strength</td>
<td>0.003 (-0.013, 0.027)</td>
<td>0.011 (0.006, 0.047)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Reputation</td>
<td>0.117 (0.002, 0.24)</td>
<td>0.40 (0.218, 1.571)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Security</td>
<td>0.008 (-0.089, 0.106)</td>
<td>0.028 (0.015, 0.123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm to insurgency</td>
<td>0.036 (-0.036, 0.115)</td>
<td>0.126 (0.068, 0.495)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm to civilians</td>
<td>-0.002 (-0.046, 0.042)</td>
<td>-0.005 (-0.021, -0.003)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mediation analysis was conducted on each mediator individually using the procedure from Hicks and Tingley (2011). Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are in parentheses.
How does support levels change by the respondent’s sex? Gauging the levels of support by respondents’ sex reveals interesting findings (see Table 17). The female respondents show more support for the insurgency compared to male respondents if the insurgency includes women militants. For female respondents, seeing women insurgents increases the mean support for the insurgency by 0.28 points, which is statistically significant at 0.05 level. While male respondents also show more support to groups with women insurgents than all-male groups, the difference in support levels between treatment and control conditions is smaller for male respondents than female respondents. In other words, female respondents’ support levels change at higher levels than male respondents upon receiving information about the gender of the militants. This result is important; the scholarship consistently observes women are less likely to support the use of force than men, yet those studies do not test the results according to the gender of the perpetrator. Contrary to the literature, this study suggests that women can be more likely to support the use of force if they see that women are doing the act of using force.

Table 17. Effect of Women Insurgents on Support by Respondents’ Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male Respondents</th>
<th>Female Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women Insurgents</td>
<td>3.182 (2.882, 3.481)</td>
<td>3.321 (3.12, 3.521)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men Insurgents</td>
<td>2.953 (2.720, 3.186)</td>
<td>3.041 (2.843, 3.238)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference*</td>
<td>-0.229 (-0.599, 0.142)</td>
<td>-0.280** (-0.559, -0.0006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of respondents</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reports results from t-tests. The results exclude the responses from 4 people who identified their gender as “other.” Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are in parentheses. *diff = mean(control) - mean(treatment); †p<0.5 *p < 0.1; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.

Potential Biases regarding Survey Experiment Photos

The insurgency pictures I used in the news items belong to the Kurdish rebels fighting in the Syrian Civil War. Especially after the Trump administration decided to withdraw troops from Syria,
the issue of assisting Kurdish rebels in their fight against the ISIS and Assad government gained salience in the US, triggering debates about the consequences of the US abandoning Kurdish allies. This may impact the results in two main ways. First, people were more exposed to the pictures of the Kurdish rebels, which may increase the possibility of identifying them through their photos. If people have been exposed to information presented by the media, those who receive the news item with male insurgents might be able to associate the insurgency with the Kurdish rebels in Syria and the prevalence of women fighters in the group, even if they did not receive the women treatment. This may increase the support levels for the respondents in the control group.

To determine if having photos of the Kurdish rebels in the experiment leads to biased results, I ran several analyses. First, I included a question in the survey experiment asking whether the respondents can identify the group in the photos. Among 275 respondents, only 33 were able to identify that the photos belong to Kurdish rebels accurately. (Among those 33 respondents, we do not see a substantial difference in their support levels; those who receive the women insurgents support the insurgency by 3.2 points while those in the control group supports the insurgency by 3.16 points.) Apart from those who identify Kurdish rebels, 35 other respondents gave somewhat close answers mentioning that groups are from Syria or the Middle East. On the other hand, 29 respondents erroneously thought the group is related to ISIS or Al-Qaeda, increasing the possibilities of lower support.

---

21 The question reads: “As mentioned at the beginning of the survey, the actors mentioned in the scenario is not real. Do you have any guesses on which insurgency can this group represent in real life? Please write down your answer:___”
Table 18. Comparison of Support Means, Excluding the Responses which Identified Kurdish Rebels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Support Mean</th>
<th>Effect of the Treatment(^a) (CI 95%)</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.975</td>
<td></td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Treatment</td>
<td>3.298</td>
<td>-0.322*** ((-0.555, -0.090))</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reports results from t-tests. It excludes the responses which associate the groups in the pictures with the Kurdish rebels. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are in parentheses. 
\(^a\)diff = mean(Control) - mean(Women); *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

I ran t-tests, 1) excluding the responses which identified Kurdish rebels and 2) including only the responses which do not have an idea about the real identity of the group (excluding the answers who thought the group represents the Kurdish rebels, a Middle Eastern group or ISIS/Al-Qaeda). The results hold for both tests (see Table 19 and 20, respectively.)

Table 19. Comparison of Support Means, Excluding the Responses which Identified the Kurdish Rebels or a Middle Eastern Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Support Mean</th>
<th>Effect of the Treatment(^a) (CI 95%)</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Treatment</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>-0.23* ((-0.503, 0.043))</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reports results from t-tests. It includes only the responses which do not associate the groups in the pictures with the Kurds, Middle Eastern groups. Ninety-five percent confidence intervals are in parentheses. 
\(^a\)diff = mean(Control) - mean(Women); *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Second, the issue of withdrawing assistance from the Kurdish rebels has been subject to debate along party lines where Democrats criticized Trump administration’s decision, whereas Republicans were more likely to support it. If the respondents were able to identify the Kurdish rebels in the photos, the results can be influenced by the party ideology of the respondents. Also, literature suggests that, regardless of identifying the rebels in the photos, partisanship can impact attitudes toward foreign policy issues, including the use of force (Berinsky 2007), and approaches to moral
decisions (Jost et al 2003, Kreps and Maxey 2017). I therefore analyzed whether partisanship affects the influence of the women insurgents scenario (see Table 21).

Table 20. Comparison of Support Means by Party Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Independents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>2.688</td>
<td>3.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>3.376</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td>-0.345**</td>
<td>-0.313†</td>
<td>-0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-0.609, -0.081)</td>
<td>(-1.126, 0.501)</td>
<td>(-0.550, 0.443)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table reports the results of two-tailed comparisons of means. 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. 'diff = mean(Control) - mean(Women); †p<0.5, *p<0.10; **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

As Table 21 illustrates, receiving the women insurgents scenario increased support for all party identifications, but the impact is the highest for democrats. Receiving the women treatment increased Democrat’s support by 0.345 (p<0.05) while the increase is 0.313 points for Republicans (p<0.5). However, the higher increase in support for the women treatment by the Democrats does not necessarily mean that the respondents decided based on the recent debate along party lines over withdrawing US troops from Syria. The results are in line with other studies that revealed similar findings regarding the lack of increase in support for humanitarian interventions among Republicans (Kreps and Maxey 2018). To have a better understanding of how partisanship affects support for gender-diverse armed groups, further experiments should use block randomization to detect heterogeneous treatment effects.
Discussion

This study combines insights from diverse theoretical and empirical literatures to build a theory about how the inclusion of women in armed groups changes the public attitudes and elite strategies toward armed groups. It shows that a distinct area where women offer a substantive contribution to rebel groups, through capitalizing on gender roles, is foreign support. The presence of women insurgents in armed groups shapes foreign leaders’ decisions in favor of supporting the armed group in democracies because foreign public opinion is willing to support organizations with women more than those with no women. The presence of female fighters in a rebel group gives the leaders an option to take advantage of this positive opinion among the public, which influences the actual decision to support the group.

Using macro-level evidence concerning supporter states and the prevalence of female combatants in a global sample of rebel organizations between 1989 and 2009, I find that rebel groups with women participants are more likely to attract support from democracies. Further, leaders are more likely to announce sponsoring gender-diverse armed groups, as opposed to covertly sponsoring those groups like many other sponsors tend to do. This is because leaders can more easily justify supporting gender-inclusive rebel organizations to their domestic audiences since these organizations are perceived as more legitimate even though women members are perpetrators of violence.

To provide evidence for the existence of the causal mechanism, I compliment the analysis with a survey experiment investigating foreign public opinion toward leaders’ decision to sponsor rebel groups that include women or not. I find that people are more likely to support their governments’ decision to send economic and military aid to an armed organization if the organization includes women militants. People are more likely to be in favor of supporting rebel
groups with women compared to those without women. Further, people are more likely to consider supporting the rebel group from the moral perspective; they are more likely to think that their government has a moral obligation to support the insurgency if the group has women militants. The findings of the experiments further suggest that, contrary to the common assumption in gender research in conflict, people do not think that the repression the rebel group faces by the adversary must be very severe if women started fighting. Neither they think that local public support is higher for the groups with women insurgents. Also, there is no evidence that the presence of women signals the weakness of the armed group. Instead, groups with women militants are perceived to be using less violence against civilians compared to those without women militants. Groups with women militants are considered to support women’s rights and embrace inclusive principles. Further, people think that supporting an armed group with women fighters would be good for the reputation of their country in the global community.

The survey experiments further examine the causal pathways through which gender-diverse armed groups attract more support than all-male groups. The results of the mediation analyses suggest that the higher foreign public support for gender-diverse groups is mediated through the perceptions that the group is more inclusive and that supporting the armed groups would increase the reputation of the sponsoring state in the eyes of the global community. This is an important finding as it suggests that people decide to support the gender-diverse armed groups not only based on normative concerns but also from the perspective of instrumental gains; that is, reputational concerns.

Another important finding of the survey experiment is about the gendered preferences on the use of force. Extant literature suggests that women are less likely to support the use of violence in foreign policy decisions. However, women’s preferences toward the use of force are almost
always empirically tested in cases where the perpetrators are men, not women. This study shows that female respondents are actually more supportive of sponsoring a violent group with women militants compared to male respondents. In that sense, it provides preliminary evidence that people can be more supportive of the use of violence for the perpetrators sharing the same social identity as themselves.

This study responds to the feminist IR scholars who call for greater dialogue between feminist researchers and quantitative methodologists (Sjoberg, Kadera and Thies 2016, Stauffer and O'Brien 2018) and makes contributions to several strands of research. First, exploring whether and how the presence of women in rebel organizations affect receiving support from foreign powers, this study contributes to the literature examining the determinants of external support in conflict. Foreign power involvement in civil wars increases the conflict duration (Regan 2002) and leads to a greater number of casualties (Heger and Salehyan 2007). The grave consequences of external support in civil wars urge us to expand our understanding of the reasons why some states support certain organizations but not others. While the conflict literature emphasizes characteristics of rebel organizations in attracting foreign support, such as the strength or the ideology of the rebels (Salehyan, Gleditsch and Cunningham 2011), the gender composition of rebel organizations has attracted little attention as a factor influencing foreign support.22 This study takes an initial step to fill this gap, suggesting that gender-diverse armed groups are more likely to attract support from states whose domestic institutions are accountable to the public.

Third, this study contributes to the scholarship concerning pathways shaping public opinion on foreign policy decisions. Despite the advances in the literature exploring women’s participation in rebel groups, we know far less about how women’s involvement in these groups affects public

---

22 See, for exceptions, Manekin and Reed Wood (2020), Wood (2019).
perceptions of those organizations. By differentiating among mechanisms of support, I demonstrate that women’s presence increases favorable opinions regarding the morality of the movement. This finding provides one of the first pieces of empirical evidence for the argument that women’s presence brings legitimacy to the armed organization (Viterna 2014). Differentiating among the mechanisms of support reveals other interesting findings. Gender-diverse armed groups are not only more favored by the foreign public based on the association of women with normative principles (i.e., embracing inclusiveness and gender equality), but also based on the strategic benefits to the sponsor.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Women actively participate in armed movements, and gender dynamics play a central role in civil wars. Women insurgents take up multiple roles in armed groups as combatants and non-combatants and shape the strategies of rebel groups, political elite, and the behavior of the public. While we know that rebel groups proactively use female combatants for propaganda, the consequences of women's increased involvement in conflict remain unclear. Does their involvement generate unique benefits for armed groups? In this dissertation, I asked how the presence of women insurgents shape conflict dynamics differently from men. I propose and test arguments discussing whether and how female insurgents advance rebel goals, namely rebel survival, the ability to resist government repression, and attracting foreign support. Using a multi-method approach and leveraging data from case studies, observational and experimental analyses, I provide insight into how expectations based on social identities impact the strategies of key actors of civil wars—rebel groups, foreign public, and democratic sponsors. Drawing on the scholarship on political violence, international security, gender studies, public opinion, and foreign conflict intervention, this study contributes to several important debates in the political science literature regarding the critical role the social identities play in conflict settings. It is one of the first studies addressing the theoretical and empirical gaps of the consequences women's recruitment in armed movement by clarifying the micro-mechanisms shaping the strategies of rebel groups and foreign audiences at different levels of analysis. It adds to the burgeoning evidence suggesting that women can tangibly improve militant outcomes (Braithwaite and Ruiz 2018, Loken 2018, Wood 2019).
The first chapter engages with feminist international security literature and discusses the current debates about the relationship between women, gender roles, and the use of violence by individuals and states. Briefly, the extant literature associate women's attitudes with less support for the use of violence at the individual level, and correlates gender-equality with lower levels of use of force at the state level. I critically engage with the underlying mechanisms through which the existing studies reach and communicate the findings concerning the relationship between women and political violence. I maintain that, while women, in general, commit violent crimes or supportive of using violence less than men, the link between women, gender equality, and violence is more complex than a direct linear relationship. I suggest that combining macro- and micro-levels of analysis and engaging with multiple methods and data collection techniques reveal important results to understand the complicated relationship between women, gender roles, and strategies of political violence, which might not be captured by relying only on one method or data collection technique.

In the second chapter, I assess the overall impact of women insurgents on the operation of their rebel organizations. Do women insurgents provide tangible benefits facilitating rebel goals of survival and resisting government repression? Alternatively, do the costs of managing gender-diverse cadres (i.e., disruption of group cohesion/discipline, reaction from male members) exceed its benefits? I adjudicate between these two perspectives using a case study to understand the micro-foundations of gendered-dynamics in rebel groups, and I test these findings with cross-organizational data to understand if the results of the case study are part of a broader trend. The theory-building case study further informs the interpretation of large-N analysis in terms of the direction of causality and the biases of comparing the rebel groups with and without women insurgents at the aggregate level. The analyses are based on a variety of empirical sources, including
original data on non-combatant women in 200 rebel groups around the world, as well as the examination of the PKK's online archive for over 30 years.

The case study highlights several mechanisms by which women increase and decrease the resilience of militant organizations. Women benefit rebel organizations primarily through facilitating the organizations' tactical diversity, enabling coup-proofing strategy against inter-organizational factions, carrying out clandestine tasks, as well as mobilization of domestic and foreign support. Despite the costs of integrating women into the organization, women substantially contribute to rebel organizations' ability to challenge governments.

The case study highlights the dynamic process of women's integration into rebel groups rather than treating it as a one-time decision of joining/recruiting or not. While the roles men are supposed to take in an armed group are rather established, women's roles are constantly debated. Women are expelled from the army, reintegrated into the ranks, and continuously struggled to defy members who oppose women militants. It suggests that women's integration into the rebel group ranks can be a challenging process even for the organizations renowned for their gender inclusivity.

The findings from the case study suggest that women contribute most to rebel groups in settings where gender stereotypes are stronger and during crises. This result highlights the parallels between the role of women in rebel organizations, and economic and political organizations. Expansion of women's responsibilities when organizations face serious challenges is akin to the "glass cliff" phenomenon prevalent in the business and public policy literatures (Ryan and Haslam 2005, Smith and Monaghan 2013). Glass cliff captures economic and political organizations' higher likelihood of assigning women leadership duties at times of crises. Despite the vast organizational differences regarding structures, duties, and resources, women face similar barriers in these
organizations that are typically led by men. Women's potential to improve their organizations is recognized only after these organizations try to survive through the crises.

The results at the aggregate level suggest that rebel groups that recruit women into either combat or non-combat roles live longer, and are more effective in fighting their adversary states than groups that do not have women militants. That said, the presence of combatant women is more likely to increase rebel survivability and resistance capacity than non-combatant women. The results also provide macro-level evidence for the outcome of the case study arguing that women insurgents’ impact on rebel groups' ability to resist government repression is higher where gender stereotypes are stronger compared to settings where gender stereotypes are weaker. This positive impact of traditional gender stereotypes on rebel groups' ability to resist government repression is more salient for non-combatant women than combatant women as most of their duties require heavier reliance on gender stereotypes.

The examination of women's role in international networking in the second chapter provides a basis for the analyses in the next chapter. The findings of the case study in the second chapter suggest that women members are highlighted particularly regarding their duty as mobilizers of public support both among domestic and foreign networks. In terms of mobilization activities abroad, women members have been highly effective in facilitating PKK's activities first and foremost through building covert women's organizations in Europe that do not seem to have official affiliations with the PKK (as it is considered a terrorist organization by most European countries). Women insurgents have been influential in building ties with and attracting the support of European NGOs that aim to promote democracy and women's rights. A recent study shows that the presence of women fighters increases the rebel groups' likelihood of receiving support from extant international NGOs (Manekin and Wood 2020), suggesting the generalizability of this mechanism I
discussed in terms of the unique impact of women fighters in attracting the support of international NGOs.

Another channel discussed in the second chapter where women helped their organizations with international support is through attracting the praiseful attention of international media and boosting rebel propaganda. The "hypervisibility" of women fighters of the YPJ by the Western mainstream media, as well as the explicit welcoming of Kurdish women fighters by the political leaders, has attracted the attention of scholars (Sjoberg 2020, Dirik 2014, Kollárová 2016). We know from existing studies that women fighters, in general, garner more media attention than men, which increases their marketing value for rebel groups (Bloom 2011). However, we do not know whether the visibility of women fighters shape people's opinions and provide tangible benefits for the rebel group. How and to what extent seeing the presence of women fighters can shape foreign public's opinions toward the rebel group? Can the information on the presence of women fighters transform into tangible benefits, such as military and economic assistance for rebel groups?

To understand whether gender-diverse groups have an advantage on attracting external support, Chapter 3 explores whether observing the presence of women fighters in a rebel organization can impact foreign people's opinions about lending governmental support to the insurgency and whether these opinions can shape democratic governments' decision to support rebel groups with women fighters. How does the presence of women militants affect foreign public opinion on their governments' potential of sponsoring the armed movement? Women are usually considered "unfit" for the army and are not considered as primary agents of violence. Does the presence of women insurgents signal the weakness of the group and diminishes foreign support due to concerns over unsuccessful outcomes? Alternatively, are female militants associated with morality and less violence and, thus, increases support gender-diverse groups?
I argue that the presence of women insurgents shapes foreign leaders’ decisions in favor of supporting the insurgent group in democracies because foreign public opinion is willing to support organizations with women more than those with no women. The presence of female fighters in a rebel group gives the leaders an option to take advantage of this positive opinion among the public, which can influence the actual decision to support the group, all else equal. Using macro-level evidence concerning the supporter states and the prevalence of female combatants in a global sample of rebel organizations between 1989 and 2009, I find that democratic states are more likely to support groups with women insurgents compared to groups without women insurgents.

To test the causal mechanisms, I use survey experiments evaluating the foreign public opinion on their governments' decision to sponsor rebel groups with and without women insurgents. The results suggest that people are more likely to be in favor of supporting rebel groups with women compared to those without women insurgents. Sponsoring gender-diverse groups is considered a moral obligation, whereas this is not the case for all-male groups. This support is driven by gendered expectations that women fighters are less likely to attack civilians and are more likely to be supportive of gender equality and inclusive principles. Further, people believe that sponsoring gender-diverse armed groups would be better for the reputation of their country among the global society, which is another critical factor that mediates higher public support.

The results provide important insights into the gender dynamics affecting foreign public perception in conflict settings. The gender composition of parties has been deemed critical in shaping actors' preferences in the traditional realm of politics and nonviolent movements. For instance, states' dependence on foreign donors, specifically on the US, expands women's political participation in recipient states as a signal of their commitment to international norms and as a mutual assurance (Edgell 2017). Research in US politics contends that the presence of female
representatives increases the legitimacy of US democratic institutions (Dovi 2007, Phillips 1995, 1998). Recent research using experimental approaches on gender in US politics further shows that women's presence affects citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of the legislative decisions (Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo 2019). Democratic theorists argue that the systematic exclusion of certain groups erodes the legitimacy of the democratic political institutions whose raison d'être is to represent and serve to the interest of these social groups and are accountable to the public (Dovi 2007). This study shows that women's inclusion arouses similar perceptions not only in traditional politics but also for violent political groups. Women's inclusion can increase the legitimacy of the armed movements, which are not necessarily expected to act in line with democratic principles or accountability.

Overall, the case study in the second chapter shows that rebel groups can excel in taking advantage of traditional gender roles even if the group itself embraces gender equality, not only instrumentally as a war tactic but also as a core normative principle. These gendered roles usually rely on the understanding that views women as selfless mothers, passive victims, or compassionate peacemakers. This account corroborates with the studies suggesting that rebels' gendered propaganda builds on the prevalent gendered understandings, rather than pledging to change them (Loken 2020, Ness 2005). At the same time, rebel groups can also rely on the norm of gender-equality and position themselves against traditional gender roles when the audience they want to appeal to is concerned with enhancing women's empowerment, for instance, when seeking support from Western countries. I show that this gendered strategy of rebel groups, in other words, appealing to divergent gender norms depending on the audience, succeeds in reaping tangible benefits in their fight against adversaries.
I demonstrate that gender roles that dismiss women as primary agents of violence help rebel groups maintain the armed movement and advances the unique contributions of women insurgents for their groups. At the same time, I show through the survey experiments that the prevalence of norms that challenge traditional gender roles can also help armed groups sustain their strategies of violence, because people are more willing to support armed groups that embrace gender-equal principles and associate the presence of women insurgents with gender-equality. This suggests that norms that are against or supportive of traditional gender roles can both enable political violence when women are involved in the conflict as perpetrators. This challenges the arguments suggesting a linear relationship between gender equality and nonviolence, discussed within the feminist peace framework. The results highlight the multifaceted nature of the relationship between gendered norms and political violence, and suggests that arguments concerning the role of gender equality on political violence should take organizational differences and the social identity of the perpetrators into account.

Another important conclusion suggests that beliefs that do not consider women as an actor of violence persist even when faced with disconfirming evidence of women’s capacity for violence. Instead of updating beliefs by using new information showing women as potential perpetrators of violence, people tend to assimilate data into beliefs as these existing beliefs or embedded expectations influence interpretations of evidence, as Mercer (2010) argues. Upon learning women are involved in an armed group, people use certain traits associated with women as a cognitive shortcut to identifying the whole rebel group. Entitity, which refers the perception that a collection of persons is bonded together and is seen as a meaningful unit (Hamilton, Sherman and Castelli 2002), allows people to use the available information on the presence of women to infer certain qualities in the group (i.e., the group supports gender equality), to form a uniform impression of the
group, and to attempt to resolve the inconsistencies in the information about the group. The survey experiments suggest that, upon seeing women as part of the rebel group, people tend to identify the entire rebel group as less violent, instead of updating beliefs about women's capacity for violence. The lack of further information about rebel characteristics and the media portrayal of female insurgents in line with the similar gendered frames used by rebel groups further facilitates resolving cognitive tensions between the available information and the existing gendered beliefs. In other words, projecting their embedded gendered beliefs to the entire rebel group helps people resolving the inconsistencies between the "peaceful women" expectation versus the fact that these women are actually part of a group that primarily relies on violence.

**Limitations and Future Research**

Any attempt to elaborate novel research questions faces challenges and limitations and this research is not an exception. Notwithstanding the important initial results, there are several limitations to this research that should be considered in discussing its contributions. In the following section, first, I examine the extent to which the findings of the case study in the second chapter and the survey experiment in the third chapter can be generalizable to broader cases. Second, I discuss possible challenges to infer the direction of the relationships.

**Generalizability of the findings**

The case study and the survey experiment in the second and third chapters, respectively, aim to provide theoretical frameworks linking gendered duties and perceptions to organizational goals and to assess the mechanisms through which women impact sustaining rebel organizations. For this reason, in contrast to a random sampling of cases from a representative population usually employed for hypothesis-testing, the case and the context of the survey experiment are particularly chosen to fill theoretical gaps. As the goal of theoretical sampling "is to choose cases which are likely to
replicate or extend the emergent theory," I choose cases in which the mechanisms/processes of interest are "transparently observable" (Eisenhart 1989, 537).

**The case study.** The second chapter analyzes the PKK to understand the mechanisms through which women militants provide costs and benefits in terms of maintaining the rebellion. Being one the longest survived rebel organizations, it offers substantial variation in organizational resilience and the roles of women insurgents. This makes the PKK a useful case to examine how women help rebels achieve their goals. However, as the findings rely only on one case, it is important to note the limitation in the applicability of the conclusions to other cases at large.

The proposed mechanisms can be relevant for similar contemporary groups aiming to mobilize a broad cross-section of the population (i.e., leftist groups like Maoists in Nepal, FARC in Colombia, FMLN in El Salvador, Sandinistas in Nicaragua, and Guatemalan National Revolutionary Units, the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front in Ethiopia). Due to its ethno-nationalist character and reliance on youth movements, PKK may also be informative for understanding women’s role in similar insurgencies such as the Irish Republican Army and Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers (Davis 2017). I maintain that most groups have common reasons for using female combatants (e.g., clandestine tasks, mobilization, diversification of tactics). However, some organizations might have ideologies that are more conducive to generating other benefits from using female insurgents.¹ This means that some of the mechanisms discussed for the PKK case may be less applicable to other organizations at the opposite ideological spectrum, or the importance of the mechanisms can change depending on the organization and context.

¹ See, for instance, Bloom and Matfess (2016).
For instance, in religious groups, the use of women may have less impact on mobilizing conservative audiences who would not approve of the abandonment of women's traditional roles in the private sphere. Nevertheless, research on women militants in religious violence suggests that women participate extensively in religious armed groups (Loken and Zelenz 2018), and despite trying to achieve significantly different orders, there is not much difference between secular and religious violent groups in terms of socially justifying women's engagement in political violence (Ness 2005). Females who enter into armed resistance represent a challenge to the social order for both secular and religious groups, whereby they reframe and rationalize this "anomaly" in societal roles with reference to old values so that they can be accepted in during the conflict (Ness 2005, Schalk 1994).²

Further, I argue that the rebel leader effectively positioned women cadres as a shield against competing factions within the organization and to strengthen his central command (by taking advantage of the limited outside options that make women more loyal to the organization). The generalizability of this dynamic to other groups might be limited, simply because this strategy requires a significant number of female members and elaborate planning. Cases from authoritarian regimes' provision of women's rights as a bulwark for political support and coalition-building (Donno and Kreft 2018) can suggest similar strategies are used by institutions who are capable of such planning. Still, it is noteworthy to mention that these mechanisms may not be relevant at the same degree for all rebel groups with women insurgents. Further research can benefit from looking into the prevalence of these specific mechanisms in extant organizations.

² For further information on the women's role in religious armed movements, see Loken and Zelenz (2018), Cunningham (2008), Cook (2005).
Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of women insurgents in an organization. While I identify women's participation at different times of the PKK as "highly-committed" or a "back-up source," these categorizations leave out the variance in women's experiences. Instead, different women insurgents have provided different agentive contributions at different levels (as commanders, combatants, or non-combatants) that shaped what the PKK is and what its survival might mean. In that sense, how women and gender roles affect the strategies of violence is likely to vary by context is a fruitful topic for future research. Another area that merits further research is the variance in women militants contributions and costs depending on the intersectional differences and diverse pathways through which they participated, such as forceful versus voluntary participation, and politically-motivated versus motivated by revenge or material gains.

The Survey Experiment. The survey experiments are conducted in the US, by asking students about a decision the US government is to take regarding militarily and economically sponsoring an armed group that fights against an adversary of the US - a developed Western democracy where the integration of women in social and political spheres is overall considered a norm. The arguments I developed are general and assume that the underlying mechanisms are prevalent cross-nationally. Nevertheless, the power and extent of gender stereotypes can vary highly depending on the social and cultural context (Wood and Eagly 2002). The results highlighting the positive perceptions toward women militants may not hold in more traditional societies as women's active engagement in the public sphere and eroding of gender roles are less likely to be welcomed by the public. Female combatants may even aggravate backlash among some audiences (perhaps especially when female recruits are first introduced into the ranks). Certain mechanisms, such as higher support through perceived gender equality, can be more prevalent in Western democracies
where women's participation in the public sphere is considered a core liberal principle on which the societal values reside on. In more traditional societies, support for gender-diverse cadres may not be driven by their perceived embracement of gender equality.

**Direction of causality**

I developed multi-method research designs to understand the micro-dynamics of the hypothesized relationships comprehensively. However, the concerns over the direction of the mechanisms can still serve as a limitation, particularly for the link between women insurgents and durable and powerful insurgencies explored in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 discusses the relationship between recruiting women militants and group strength. This is a potentially endogenous relationship: Do groups need to be sufficiently strong to absorb the potential internal backlashes of recruiting women, or does the recruitment of women make the groups stronger? The time-invariant nature of the existing dataset (WARD) and the relatively small number of observations make quantitative testing for endogeneity difficult. For this reason, I rely on the in-depth exploration of the case study to assess the direction of the relationship between rebel strength and women recruits. The case study provides evidence that the recruitment of women militants increased in times when the group needs to respond to critical challenges (i.e., during massive counterinsurgency campaigns or factional feuds). It also suggests that women's duties within the organization increased during times of crisis. I make the case that, while women's contributions are stronger in settings where gender stereotypes are stronger, similar gendered stereotypes that view women unfit for the military can preclude rebel groups' use of women on a regular basis. Facing crises mitigates this line of thinking, as such challenges necessitate using women to maintain the survival of the organization. However, the concerns over the case study's generalizability can also be relevant to the extent of this extrapolation. This is primarily because women were present from the
origins of PKK's establishment; as such, it does not allow to compare the strength of the group before and after women's involvement.

Still, the case study provides strong evidence for the increased women's role in times of crises, and this finding corroborates the findings in the conflict literature arguing that women militants are most useful when male labor is scarce (Dalton and Asal 2011, Segal 1995, Alison 2009, Schrijvers 1999, Stack-O'Connor 2007). Future research can benefit from collecting cross-group time-variant data on the recruitment of women, being meticulous about the problems of finding reliable information. Likewise, how different women's cadres shape insurgencies differently (leaders vs. other recruits, forced-recruits vs. voluntary participants, high-skilled vs. low skilled) merits another research.

**Policy Implications**

Understanding the role of gender norms is critical to neutralizing influences leading to violent radicalization and creating communities resilient to such influences (DCAF 2019). The results of this dissertation can be relevant for policymaking in two main domains. First, as mentioned above, the results suggest that policymakers should be careful about extrapolating the promises of feminist peace arguments, both at the individual and state levels. Demonstrating the ways through which gender-equal ideology can be instrumentalized by different stakeholders to achieve political gain, this study encourages policymakers to take active responsibility to understand the complexity of the gender-violence relationship depending on the unique characteristics of the actors involved in violence.

Second, the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 in 2000 has been effective in creating awareness for women's participation in conflict resolution and the integration of gender in the analysis of international security issues. However, little progress is made in tackling sexual abuse,
systematic exclusion of women in peace negotiations, or integration of women in the security sector (Hamilton, Naam and Shepherd 2019). The main problem with the UNSCR 1325 agenda is the absence of political will to implement the strategies. UNSCR's 2014 report on Women Peace Security Agenda (WPS) highlights that the implementation remains the main challenge despite the achievements at the normative level.

Leaders around the world tend to declare their commitments to gender equality as a normatively desired goal; however, upholding gender-equality norms does not tend to bring meaningful improvements for women's status. The framework presented in this dissertation focusing on women's role in perpetuating conflict can help policymakers consider women's empowerment as a core security issue and can urge them to implement policies to achieve 1325 goals. The 1325 agenda focuses on women's role as victims and peacemakers, which reproduces the essentialist understanding of women while abating their agency in violence (Sepherd 2008). It is important to acknowledge women's critical role in conflict resolution; however, focusing solely on their victimhood or peacemaking portrays an erroneous picture of their wartime experiences. Achieving the UNSCR 1325 objectives requires understanding the multiple dimensions of women's roles in conflict.

This study suggests that women's participation in violent groups is not only risky for themselves but also threatens the overall security of societies because their involvement results in prolonged conflicts, stronger rebel groups, and higher public support for violent groups. We know that prolonged conflicts with foreign support result in higher casualties and human rights violations, alongside many other indirect conflict costs (Ratnayake et al. 2008). The perpetuation of violence leads governments to take sharper measures to cope with it, restricting the freedom of citizens, undermining the relationship of trust upon which governments are built.
Recognizing the detrimental consequences of women's deprivation of rights for the security of states would increase political will to take the women's inequality more seriously and address the elimination of the causes that lead women to take part in the armed movements vigorously. We know from research that women's deprivation of rights is a key factor explaining their participation in armed movements. Women are more likely to sign up for armed groups that promise gender equality, and are more likely to participate when they are deprived of socioeconomic rights (Thomas and Bond 2015, Dalton and Asal 2011). Socioeconomic marginalization of women leads armed groups to employ gendered strategies to recruit both women and men and to strengthen their military effectiveness leading to cycles of violence. I further show that women's unique contributions to the sustenance of violence become particularly salient in settings where they lack access to economic opportunities. These are part of broader economic inequalities. For a sustained improvement in women's and men's security, countries must implement policies targeting advancement in women's economic status. This is in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reaffirming that gender equality is critical not only for development but also for sustainable security (UNGA 2015).

These points mentioned above suggest that failure to grant women rights is not only destructive to women or desirable normatively. Instead, it is a security issue in which the local and global communities pay collective costs. Acknowledging this would encourage policymakers to 1) include gender as a core issue in national security agenda, 2) implement policies to mitigate gendered violence strategies, 3) incorporate women's integration in the security sector as part of counterterrorism and deradicalization programs, and 4) provide the international community a more gender-equal framework that does not reproduce essentialist stereotypes. Highlighting the tangible consequences of women's participation in security seeks to work as a catalyzer motivating
policymakers to integrate gender perspectives and helping to reach the ultimate goal of gender equality. Indeed, research shows that while changing the masculine culture faces strong resistance, militaries are more favorable to the arguments of women's integration for better effectiveness in military duties and are more likely to recruit women when defensive operations increase (Egnell and Alam 2019). For instance, Jordan adopted policies to increase women's participation in the army and police forces instrumentally after the devastating attacks of female suicide bombers (Iskra 2002). That said, it is critical to acknowledge that for a long-term sustained change, it is imperative to incorporate the ways through which militaries/governments can internalize gender perspectives and move beyond seeing women's inclusion as a combat technology, acknowledging that women should participate in all sectors of security and governance in line with the principles of justice and respect for human dignity.
APPENDIX A

ROBUSTNESS CHECKS FOR THE ANALYSIS ON WOMEN INSURGENTS AND RELATIVE REBEL STRENGTH
I run the analysis in Table 2, Chapter 2, using ordinal probit models for robustness check as the dependent variable, relative rebel strength, is a categorical variable. The results reveal similar findings as to the results we acquired using OLS models. The effect of female combatants on relative rebel strength is stronger with ordinal probit models compared to the OLS models.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3.a Rebel Strength</th>
<th>Model 4.a Rebel Strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Insurgents</td>
<td>0.330 (0.224)</td>
<td>0.489* (0.242)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants</td>
<td>0.489* (0.242)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Noncombatants</td>
<td>0.156 (0.266)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Control</td>
<td>0.843** (0.257)</td>
<td>0.825** (0.256)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Command</td>
<td>-0.0745 (0.408)</td>
<td>-0.0960 (0.398)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftist</td>
<td>-0.0830 (0.296)</td>
<td>-0.157 (0.311)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Duration</td>
<td>-0.0300** (0.0108)</td>
<td>-0.0336** (0.0119)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Level</td>
<td>-0.334** (0.105)</td>
<td>-0.330** (0.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant cut1</td>
<td>-2.605** (0.897)</td>
<td>-2.622** (0.917)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant cut2</td>
<td>-0.946 (0.899)</td>
<td>-0.946 (0.920)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant cut3</td>
<td>0.0398 (0.925)</td>
<td>0.0554 (0.945)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ordinal probit models, standard errors clustered by country in parentheses, *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05
APPENDIX B

ROBUSTNESS CHECKS FOR THE ANALYSIS OF FOREIGN SUPPORT FOR GENDER-DIVERSE ARMED MOVEMENTS
Table 22. Female Combatants, Explicit Foreign Support and Democratic Support, Probit Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1.a</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2.a</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 4.a</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explicit Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic Support</td>
<td></td>
<td>Democratic Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants</td>
<td>1.793+</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.190*</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.288*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.026)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.952)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.962)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Terrorism</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.828</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female * Suicide</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.694</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Recruitment</td>
<td>2.578**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.906+</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.978+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.813)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.039)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.046)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Competition</td>
<td>1.234***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.599+</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.611+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.338)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.326)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.339)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troop Size</td>
<td>0.0001***</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.41e-05***</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.50e-05***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.40e-05)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.82e-05)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.91e-05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaspora Support</td>
<td>1.608**</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.127*</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.129*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.501)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.506)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.526)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>0.0594</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.160***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.160***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0375)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0327)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0322)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Intensity</td>
<td>-3.01e-05</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0002+</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0002+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.00e-05)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target State Regime</td>
<td>-0.225***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0533</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0531</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0674)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0533)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0533)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target State Power</td>
<td>-0.735*</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.439+</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.439+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.298)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.253)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.258)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-11.74***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.389</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.516</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.108)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.624)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.672)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>707</td>
<td></td>
<td>707</td>
<td></td>
<td>707</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of dyads</td>
<td>134</td>
<td></td>
<td>134</td>
<td></td>
<td>134</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Models use probit regression on time series for the binary dependent variables. Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

The presence of women combatants is positive and statistically significant in all models, suggesting that female combatants do have an impact on attracting support from democratic countries. Model 1 shows that rebels with female fighters influence attracting explicit support (female combatants is statistically significant at p<0.1 level), suggesting that foreign powers do not feel the need to hide assisting rebel groups when they have female fighters. The marginal effects of this model show that the likelihood of receiving explicit support increases by 6% if the group has female combatants. Model 2 and Model 4 presents a statistically significant relationship at 0.05 level between having
female fighters and receiving support from democratic states.

The analyses in the third chapter show demonstrate the relationship between female combatants and receiving explicit foreign support (as opposed to covert or alleged support) as well as receiving support from democracies. For robustness, I tested the relationship between female combatants, alleged support and receiving support from autocratic states. Models 1, 2 and 3 in Table 20 above use Alleged support, Autocratic support and Proportion of autocratic supporters as dependent variables, respectively. Alleged support refers to whether a rebel groups has allegedly (and not explicitly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alleged Support</td>
<td>Autocratic Support</td>
<td>Autocratic Support Proportion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants</td>
<td>-0.959</td>
<td>-1.152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.073)</td>
<td>(1.114)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Recruitment</td>
<td>-2.565**</td>
<td>2.116*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.956)</td>
<td>(1.026)</td>
<td>(0.0728)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Competition</td>
<td>-6.66e-05</td>
<td>9.00e-05**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(2.96e-05)</td>
<td>(1.57e-06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troop Size</td>
<td>-0.0171</td>
<td>0.0926**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.073)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaspora Support</td>
<td>-0.200</td>
<td>0.0612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.478)</td>
<td>(0.215)</td>
<td>(0.0161)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>-7.29e-06</td>
<td>-1.52e-06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0004)</td>
<td>(0.0001)</td>
<td>(5.69e-06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Intensity</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>-0.222**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.0704)</td>
<td>(0.0717)</td>
<td>(0.0033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target State Regime</td>
<td>-0.319</td>
<td>1.322*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.514)</td>
<td>(0.542)</td>
<td>(0.0362)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target State Power</td>
<td>1.256***</td>
<td>0.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.304)</td>
<td>(0.307)</td>
<td>(0.0206)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-0.349</td>
<td>-3.771+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.044)</td>
<td>(2.205)</td>
<td>(0.132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>707</td>
<td>707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of dyads</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Table 23. Female Combatants, Alleged Support and Autocratic Support
received support from a foreign state. Autocratic support is a binary variable and captures whether a rebel group received support from autocratic state or not. States scoring “6” or lower on the combined Polity IV scale are considered autocratic sponsors. The proportion of autocratic support refers to the ratio of autocratic sponsors to all foreign sponsors (similar to the measure of the proportion of democratic supporters). Table 20 shows that alleged support and support from authoritarian states are negatively correlated with the presence of female combatants. While the results are not statistically significant at the traditionally accepted levels, they are informative in underlining the relevance of regime type in lending support for gender-diverse groups.

Table 24. Female Combatants, Explicit Foreign Support and Democratic Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1 Explicit Support</th>
<th>Model 2 Democratic Support</th>
<th>Model 3 Proportion of Democratic Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female Combatants</td>
<td>0.087 (0.093)</td>
<td>0.106 (0.095)</td>
<td>0.184* (0.081)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Recruit</td>
<td>0.171 (0.125)</td>
<td>-0.105 (0.085)</td>
<td>-0.102 (0.069)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebel Competition</td>
<td>0.052 (0.046)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.046)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.036)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Troop Size</td>
<td>3.82e-06* (1.84e-06)</td>
<td>4.46e-06** (1.54e-06)</td>
<td>1.30e-06 (1.17e-06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaspora Support</td>
<td>0.093 (0.063)</td>
<td>0.058 (0.049)</td>
<td>0.013 (0.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>0.010 (0.008)</td>
<td>0.028* (0.011)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Intensity</td>
<td>9.47e-06 (1.30e-05)</td>
<td>-1.52e-05 (1.53e-05)</td>
<td>-1.07e-05 (1.10e-05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target State Regime</td>
<td>-0.024** (0.008)</td>
<td>-0.011 (0.008)</td>
<td>-0.011 (0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target State Power</td>
<td>-0.006 (0.032)</td>
<td>0.0710* (0.028)</td>
<td>0.0810** (0.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.110 (0.176)</td>
<td>0.516* (0.215)</td>
<td>0.601** (0.186)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.288</td>
<td>0.242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors clustered by conflict id in parentheses; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1
While data on the presence of female fighters for an organization does not change over the years, I used time series in the text because the other variables are time-variant. Here, I included an analysis using time-invariant data. Results represented in Table 21 suggest that only the proportion of the democratic supporters is statistically significant at the traditionally accepted level. That said, the correlation between the presence of women insurgents and democratic support, and women insurgents and explicit support are positive.
APPENDIX C

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS
Figure 14. Gender of the Respondents

Figure 15. Political Ideology of the Respondents

Figure 16: Ethnicity of the Respondents

Figure 17. Opinions on the US Role in World Affairs

Figure 18. Opinions on Gender Roles

Figure 17 - Question: Which of these statements comes closer to your view? A) The United States should take an active role in world affairs.  B) The United States should pay less attention to problems overseas and concentrate on problems here at home.

Figure 18 – Question: Please indicate how strongly you disagree or agree with this statement: There are certain jobs, like a military officer, that just naturally fit with men’s skills better than women’s skills.
APPENDIX D

EXPERIMENT ONE SURVEY INSTRUMENT
The following survey was conducted between April 1 and April 19, 2019 with 306 participants recruited through the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign’s student subject pool. Students participated in the survey in exchange for a 1/12 of extra course credit.

Background information given to all respondents:

We are going to describe a situation the United States could face in the future. For scientific validity, the situation is general, and is not about a specific country in the news today. After describing the situation, we will ask a few questions. Please read the details very carefully.

Control Group

The US government is considering sending economic and military assistance to an armed insurgent group abroad who is fighting against a US adversary. While many experts in the US think supporting the insurgent group is in line with the US strategic interests, others think that it will be too costly for the US.

Men Treatment

The US government is considering sending economic and military assistance to an armed insurgent group abroad who is fighting against a US adversary. The insurgent group is composed of men. While many experts in the US think supporting the insurgent group is in line with the US's strategic interests, others think that it will be too costly for the US.

Women Treatment

The US government is considering sending economic and military assistance to an armed insurgent group abroad who is fighting against a US adversary. Almost half of the insurgent group is composed of women. While many experts in the US think supporting the insurgent group is in line with the US's strategic interests, others think that it will be too costly for the US.
All respondents were then asked the following questions.

**Support**
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States should support the insurgency?
- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

**Moral Obligation**
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States has a moral obligation to support the insurgency?
- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

**Radicalness**
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the insurgent group supports radical ideologies?
- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

An ideology that advocates racial/religious supremacy or opposes the core principles of democracy, liberty and universal human rights can be considered as radical.

**Inclusiveness**
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the insurgency supports inclusive principles?
- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

**Women’s equality**
To what extent do you agree or disagree that insurgency supports women’s equality?
- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)
Human rights violations
If the United States does NOT send support to the insurgent group, what are the chances that each of the following events will occur? - High level of human rights violations caused by the insurgent group.
  • Very likely (5)
  • Likely (4)
  • 50%-50% chance (3)
  • Unlikely (2)
  • Very unlikely (1)

Repression
In your opinion, how much repression does the insurgent group face from the adversary?
  • A great deal (5)
  • A lot (4)
  • A moderate amount (3)
  • A little (2)
  • None at all (1)
APPENDIX E

EXPERIMENT TWO SURVEY INSTRUMENT
The following survey was conducted between March 9- March 27, 2020 with 275 participants recruited through the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign’s student subject pool. Students participated in the survey in exchange for a 1/12 of extra course credit. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and approved the research study (Protocol Number 20638).

**Background information given to all respondents:**

We are going to describe a situation the United States could face in the future. For scientific validity, the situation is general, and is not about a real specific country or group in the news today. After describing the situation, we will ask a few questions. Please remember that information you provide in this survey will remain confidential.

Please read the following news item carefully. You are going to answer questions based on the information presented here.
Moravian Rebels Seek Foreign Support as Conflict Escalates

By Forum News Service on Oct 28, 2019, at 12:02 p.m.

Last week, Falconian state forces launched a ground assault against Moravian Liberation Front—the rebel group who has been fighting against the Falconian government since 2005, for an independent Moravian state within Falconia. Moravian rebels (pictured above) retaliated yesterday, killing at least four Falconian soldiers during a military ceremony. As tensions escalate in the region, both the Falconian government and Moravian rebel leaders accuse each other of targeting vulnerable civilians. In an interview last week, a rebel from Moravia Liberation Front said, “we don’t want to separate from Falconia and set up a state. We want to live within the borders of Falconia, on our own land freely. We are fighting for Moravian ethnic rights.” The US is considering sending economic and military assistance to the Moravian Liberation Front against Falconia, a long-time US adversary. Many experts in the US think supporting the rebel group is in line with the US strategic interests, while others argue that it will be too costly for the US.
Moravian Rebels Seek Foreign Support as Conflict Escalates

By Forum News Service on Oct 28, 2019, at 12:02 p.m.

Last week, Falconian state forces launched a ground assault against Moravian Liberation Front—the rebel group who has been fighting against the Falconian government since 2005, for an independent Moravian state within Falconia. Moravian rebels (pictured above) retaliated yesterday, killing at least four Falconian soldiers during a military ceremony. As tensions escalate in the region, both the Falconian government and Moravian rebel leaders accuse each other of targeting vulnerable civilians. In an interview last week, a rebel from Moravia Liberation Front said, “we don't want to separate from Falconia and set up a state. We want to live within the borders of Falconia, on our own land freely. We are fighting for Moravian ethnic rights.” The US is considering sending economic and military assistance to the Moravian Liberation Front against Falconia, a long-time US adversary. Many experts in the US think supporting the rebel group is in line with the US strategic interests, while others argue that it will be too costly for the US.
All respondents were then asked the following questions.

Support
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States should support the Moravian insurgent group?
- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Moral obligation
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the United States has a moral obligation to support the Moravian insurgent group?
- Strongly agree (7)
- Agree (6)
- Somewhat agree (5)
- Neither agree nor disagree (4)
- Somewhat disagree (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

Civilian violence
In your opinion, to what extent the Moravian insurgent group uses violence against civilians?
- Very high (5)
- High (4)
- Neither high nor low (3)
- Low (2)
- Very low (1)

Repression
In your opinion, how much repression does the Moravian insurgent group face from its adversary, the Falconian state forces?
- A great deal (5)
- A lot (4)
- A moderate amount (3)
- A little (2)
- None at all (1)

Public (local) support

---

1 In this question, respondents chose from 7 options instead of 5 as in other questions. This was an error. The results are calculated converting the responses to a 5-point scale for the consistency. Strongly disagree and disagree options are combined and denoted as 1, whereas strongly agree and agree options are combined together and denoted as 5.
In your opinion, to what extent the Moravian insurgent group receives support from local people?

- A great deal (5)
- A lot (4)
- A moderate amount (3)
- A little (2)
- None at all (1)

**Inclusive principles**
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Moravian insurgent group supports inclusive principles?

- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

**Women’s equality**
To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Moravian insurgent group supports women’s equality?

- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)

**Insurgency Strength**
How powerful do you think the Moravian insurgent group is compared to its adversary, the Falconian state forces?

- Very powerful (5)
- Somewhat powerful (4)
- Neither powerful nor weak (3)
- Somewhat weak (2)
- Very weak (1)

**US (sponsor) reputation**
To what extent do you agree or disagree that supporting the insurgency would be good for the reputation of the United States in the global community?

- Strongly agree (5)
- Somewhat agree (4)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (2)
- Strongly disagree (1)
US (sponsor) security interests
To what extent do you agree or disagree that supporting the insurgency would be good for the security interests of the United States?
  • Strongly agree (5)
  • Somewhat agree (4)
  • Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  • Somewhat disagree (2)
  • Strongly disagree (1)

Harm to the insurgency
If the United States does NOT send support to the insurgent group, what are the chances that each of the following events will occur? - Excessive harm would be done to the insurgent group.
  • Very likely (5)
  • Likely (4)
  • 50%-50% chance (3)
  • Unlikely (2)
  • Very unlikely (1)

Harm to civilians
If the United States does NOT send support to the insurgent group, what are the chances that each of the following events will occur? - Excessive harm would be done to the weak or vulnerable civilians.
  • Very likely (5)
  • Likely (4)
  • 50%-50% chance (3)
  • Unlikely (2)
  • Very unlikely (1)

Identify insurgency by their photos
As mentioned at the beginning of the survey, the actors mentioned in the scenario is not real. Do you have any guesses on which insurgency can this group represent in real life? Please write down your answer: __________________________

Gender
What is your gender identity?
  • Male (1)
  • Female (2)
  • Other (3)

Political Ideology
Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...
  • Strong Republican (5)
  • Republican (4)
• Independent (3)
• Strong Democrat (1)
• Democrat (2)

**Ethnicity**
What racial or ethnic group(s) best describes you?
• White (1)
• Middle Eastern (2)
• Hispanic/Latino (3)
• Black or African American (4)
• Asian (5)
• American Indian/Alaska Native (6)
• Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (7)
• Other (8)

**Gender Roles**
Please indicate how strongly you disagree or agree with this statement: There are certain jobs, like a military officer, that just naturally fit with men’s skills better than women’s skills.
• Strongly agree (5)
• Somewhat agree (4)
• Neither agree nor disagree (3)
• Somewhat disagree (2)
• Strongly disagree (1)

**US Role in World Affairs**
Which of these statements comes closer to your view?
• The United States should take an active role in world affairs. (1)
• The United States should pay less attention to problems overseas and concentrate on problems here at home. (2)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Ashrafi, Maryam “Meet the Brave Women Fighting ISIS in Syria” September 3, 2016, Huffington Post. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/kurdish-women-fighting-isis_us_56e05e98e4b065e2e3d46569


———. "Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Inequality in Predicting Internal


Cronin, Audrey Kurth. *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*. 


Herrera, Natalia, and Douglas Porch. "'Like Going to a Fiesta’—the Role of Female Fighters in Colombia's FARC-EP." Small Wars & Insurgencies 19, no. 4 (2008): 609-634.


Kadera, Kelly, Laura Sjoberg, Cameron G. Thies “Critiquing the Feminist Peace” Prepared for Presentation at the 2018 Meeting of the Midwest International Studies Association.


Kollárová, Marta. "Good or Bad Agents? Western Fascination with Women and the Construction of Female Objects during the ISIS Crisis." PhD Dissertation, Central European University, 2015.


Lazarus, Sarah “Women. Life. Freedom. Female Fighters of Kurdistan” CNN. January 28,


PKK, Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, Serxwebun (March 1986)

———. Serxwebun (January 1989)

———. Serxwebun (March 1989)

———. Serxwebun (March 1993)

———. Serxwebun (September 1994)
——.—. Serxwebun (November 1996)
——.—. Serxwebun (September 1997)
——.—. Serxwebun (July 1999)
——.—. Serxwebun (June 1997)
——.—. Serxwebun (January 1999).
——.—. Serxwebun (April 1999).
——.—. Serxwebun (June 1999).
——.—. Serxwebun (November 1999).
——.—. Serxwebun (September 1999).
——.—. Serxwebun (June 2001).
——.—. Serxwebun (July 2001).
——.—. Serxwebun (August 2001).
——.—. Serxwebun (December 2001).
——.—. Serxwebun (November 2001).
——.—. Serxwebun (October 2001).
——.—. Serxwebun (September 2001).
——.—. Serxwebun (April 2002).
——.—. Serxwebun (June 2002).
——.—. Serxwebun (October 2003).
——.—. Serxwebun (March 2005).
——.—. Serxwebun (January 2006).
——.—. Serxwebun (June 2006).
——.—. Serxwebun (March 2006).
———. Serxwebun (October 2006).

———. Serxwebun (September 2006).

———. Serxwebun (February 2015).


Sjoberg, Laura, Kelly Kadera and Cameron G. Thies, "Reevaluating Gender and IR Scholarship: Moving Beyond Reiter’s Dichotomies Toward Effective Synergies," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62, No. 4 (2018): 848-870


UK Defense Forces, Women In Ground Close Combat, Review Paper, December 1, 2014


VITA

Dr. Çağlayan Başer received her Bachelor of Science in International Relations from the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey. She completed her Master of Arts Degree at Istanbul Bilgi University, Turkey. Upon receipt of her master’s degree, Dr. Başer moved to the United States to pursue a doctorate in Political Science at Loyola University Chicago, specializing in International Relations and Comparative Politics. During her Ph.D. studies, she worked as a visiting research scholar at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). At Loyola and UIUC, she taught undergraduate courses on international relations, gender and security, racial and ethnic politics, and social justice. Her research contributes to the areas of political violence, gender politics, and domestic sources of international relations. Her research is published in *World Politics*. 