Thinking Outside of the Box: Transnational Terrorism in Civil Wars

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Abstract:

Scholars have written on the extensive risks that transnational terrorism entail for militant groups that perpetrate such attacks. However, despite these risks, transnational terrorism has become an increasingly common feature of civil wars. This raises the question: why do rebel groups launch terrorist attacks outside of the countries they are fighting civil wars in? I argue that weaker rebel groups are more inclined to turn to such tactics because they are desperate, and as a result, are more willing to make the gamble to signal their resolve, impose costs on their enemies, avoid direct military confrontation with domestic security forces, and generate external support. Using data on the transnational terrorist attack patterns of all rebel group-government dyads present in the Uppsala Conflict Data Project (UCDP) Dyadic Dataset from 1970 - 2013, I find that conventionally weak rebel groups are more likely to rely on transnational terrorism.

Author's Note:

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Civil wars in the past two decades have become increasingly internationalized, including in the spread of transnational terrorism (Walter 2017; Crenshaw 2020). However, while rebel groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), frequently launch terrorist attacks outside of the borders of countries they are fighting civil wars in, many still operate exclusively within the country they are based. Indeed, from 1970 – 2013, only 95 rebel groups identified in the Uppsala Conflict Data Project's Dyadic Dataset (Harbom, Melander, and Wallensteen 2008; Themnér and Wallensteen 2014) committed at least one terrorist attack that involved crossing borders.[1] This begs the question: despite the significant attention that the tactic receives from policy makers and academics (Mueller 2005), why do we observe relatively few rebel groups launching transnational terrorist attacks?

I argue that the relative infrequency of cross-border attacks by rebel groups in civil wars can be explained by the fact that it is a high risk, high reward tactic. Perpetrating attacks across borders entails a variety of risks. International backlash against these attacks can increase foreign counterterrorism aid to the governments fighting in these conflicts (Bandyopadhyay, Sandler, and Younas 2011; Butcher 2016), alienate supporters (Barceló and Labzina 2020), and put groups at risk of military defeat due to the challenges associated with operating across borders (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and Sandler 2011).

However, there are several potential benefits of transnational terrorism, including (1) signaling rebel resolve and imposing costs on governments, (2) helping groups avoid direct confrontation with government forces, and (3) serving as a propaganda tool to garner external support.

[1] This is based on data from the Global Terrorism Database (GTD).

Thus, transnational terrorism presents rebel groups with both the potential for great risks and great rewards. I posit that weaker rebel organizations have a greater likelihood of making this gamble because they are more likely to be annihilated by government forces (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009), and are thus more desperate to reverse their fortunes. This builds off the "Gambling for Resurrection" literature that has been used in both the interstate (Downs and Rocke 1994) and intrastate (Prorok 2018) conflict literatures. As with domestic terrorism (Polo and González 2020), rebels evaluate the risks and rewards of shifting tactics in response to reduced military capacity.

Using data on the transnational terrorist attack patterns of all rebel groups present in the Terrorism in Armed Conflict (TAC) dataset (Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin 2020a), which contains data on terrorist tactics of all rebel-government dyads in the UCDP Dyadic Dataset from 1970 – 2013, I find support for this argument. The results reveal that rebels are more likely to launch a greater number and higher percentage of their attacks across borders when they are weak, relative to the governments they are fighting.

This study makes several contributions. First, it contributes to our growing understanding of the role that transnational terrorism plays in civil wars. Scholars have proposed a variety of reasons why groups commit terrorism in civil wars, including regime type (Eck and Hultman 2007; Hultman 2012; Stanton 2013), rebel group capabilities and goals (Polo and Gleditsch 2016), battlefield losses (Polo and González 2020), and natural resource exploitation (Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin 2018). Relatedly, there exists a debate about the utility of terrorism (Hultman 2009; Thomas 2014; Fortna 2015; Hinkkainen Elliott, Polo, and Reyes 2021).

However, there has been less focus on the use of transnational terrorism in civil wars. This is despite the growing internationalization of civil wars (Walter 2017; Crenshaw 2020) and

the fact that domestic and transnational terrorism often have different causes (Enders, Sandler, and Gaibulloev 2011). Some studies of terrorism in civil wars examine only domestic terrorism (e.g., Thomas 2014; Fortna 2015), while many do not disaggregate domestic and transnational terrorism. Asal, Linebarger, and Greig (2021) and Piazza and Soules (2021) provide exceptions, as both examine the effects of counterinsurgency measures on the use of transnational terrorism by rebels in civil wars. Hägerdal and Krause (2022) examine how cross-border attacks are used to coerce other transnational, non-state actors to end their intervention in the perpetrators' conflicts.

Second, these findings contribute to the debate of whether terrorism is the weapon of the weak (Crenshaw 1981). The literature on the subject remains divided (Balcells and Stanton 2021), as some scholars find evidence, in the context of civil wars, that weaker groups are more likely to perpetrate terrorism (e.g., Hultman 2007; Wood 2010; Polo and Gleditsch 2016), while others do not (Stanton 2013, 2016; Fortna 2015; Asal et al. 2019).

Relatedly, it remains unclear whether transnational terrorism is a tactic favored by the weak, or one that only strong groups have the capacity to execute. While Piazza and Soules (2021) suggest that transnational terrorism might be adopted in response to power asymmetries by presenting evidence that ISIS ramped up its transnational terrorism in response to territorial loss, other studies use transnational attacks as a proxy for militant group strength (Young and Dugan 2014). Crenshaw (2017) and Kalyvas (2018) expect that Islamist rebel movements will increasingly rely on transnational terrorism in response to military losses. Relatedly, Asal, Linebarger, and Greig (2021) examine how state repressive strategies affect the propensity of groups to adopt transnational terrorism.

The results of my study show that reliance on transnational terrorism, even relative to domestic terrorism, increases for weaker groups. This provides important nuance to the debate about whether weaker actors turn to terrorism in civil wars. It also builds on prior work that examines only whether transnational terrorism is adopted, not its use relative to other tactics (Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021).

While Piazza and Soules (2021) posit that loss of capacity can drive militant groups to internationalize their violence, they examine only the behavior of ISIS, an organization that already has significant transnational aims and which has more resources than the typical rebel organization. Thus, this study provides more generalizable evidence that transnational terrorism is a tactic adopted by weak actors, holding other factors like ideology and goals constant.

Third and relatedly, from a theoretical standpoint, prior work does not extensively discuss the disadvantages of transnational terrorism in civil wars. I make a theoretical contribution by arguing that understanding these risks is essential to understanding why conventionally weak actors are more likely to adopt these tactics. Fourth and finally, using raw data provided in the TAC database, I build several measures of transnational attacks which other researchers can use.

I begin by discussing the scope conditions of this study. Next, I explore the rewards and risks of transnational terrorism. I then develop an argument about why conventionally weak actors are more likely to accept these risks. This is followed with a presentation of the research design, results, and robustness checks. I conclude with a discussion of the findings.

Scope Conditions

It is important to establish the specific type of violence I am examining. First, it is vital to define what terrorism is in this context, given the large number of existing definitions (Asal et al. 2012). I follow the GTD's definition of terrorism, which is "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a nonstate actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation" (GTD Codebook, p. 11).

Many studies also classify terrorism based on qualities of the target. For instance, some scholars may only consider an attack to be terrorism if it is perpetrated against a civilian, rather than a military, target (Asal et al. 2012). Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin (2020a) offer a distinction between deliberately indiscriminate terrorist violence and other forms of terrorism. However, I do not make such distinctions. This is because, from a theoretical standpoint, I am interested in rebels choosing to cross borders to commit violence, rather than their choice in targets.

Additionally, while transnational terrorism can take multiple forms, including a domestic rebel organization attacking a foreign national in the group's own country (Enders, Sandler, and Gaibulloev 2011), I focus on incidents that involve rebels crossing borders to launch attacks. I choose to focus exclusively on cross-border attacks because they are the most direct indicator of groups' efforts to internationalize their violence. Attacks on foreign nationals within the borders of the home venue of a group are likely easier to execute. Cross-border attacks carry more risks than attacks in a group's country of origin (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and Sandler 2011), and thus, are particularly theoretically relevant. Additionally, prior studies on transnational terrorism have focused exclusively on whether borders were crossed (Asal and Hoffman 2016; Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021; Piazza and Soules 2021).

Finally, it is important to clarify what I mean by rewards, risks, and costs. I consider rewards to be the benefits of strategies that contribute to the ability of groups to survive and/or achieve their goals, while risks are the consequences of strategies that can lead groups to their demise and prevent achievement of their goals. In this context, risks are distinct from costs, which are the resources groups must expend to pursue certain strategies. I expect transnational terrorism to be a high risk, high reward strategy, as it can lead to groups either reversing their fortunes or meeting their demise.

Why Rebels Attack Abroad

I begin by explaining the various benefits that transnational terrorism can afford groups.

Strategy of Attrition

First, transnational terrorism is thought to have important signaling effects and to impose significant costs on its targets. Terrorism can be used as an attrition strategy, as perpetrating groups send the signal that they are willing and able to continue the fight, that they are willing to employ extreme tactics to win, and that they can impose high costs on governments (Kydd and Walter 2006). Similarly, Piazza and Soules (2021) contend that transnational terrorism can signal to the international community that a group is still willing and able to fight, despite losses at home. When groups take on the risks associated with transnational terrorism (Gaibulloev and Sandler 2021), they signal a willingness to continue fighting, even when subjected to dire circumstances.

Asal et al. (2019) challenge the weapon of the weak theory, arguing that stronger groups are more likely to engage in terrorism in response to government repression because they have a greater capacity to overcome repression. However, Asal, Linebarger, and Greig (2021) posit that groups suffering from government repression will turn to transnational terrorism to signal their resolve and ability to impose costs. Thus, I expect that transnational terrorism serves as a tool for groups to send signals of resolve, even when they are unable to levy high costs at home.

Terrorism can also signal the inability of governments to protect civilians, which will lead civilians to pressure their governments to make concessions (Crenshaw 1981; Stanton 2012). Conveying government weakness is important for rebels that are struggling, as civilians will shift their allegiances towards governments that appear to be winning (Kalyvas 2006).

Transnational terrorism can signal government weakness, as it suggests governments are unable to contain the fighting within their own borders (Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021). While transnational terrorism might not place direct costs on domestic populations, such attacks can bring international pressures on a government to enter negotiations with the perpetrating rebels to end the violence (Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021).[2]

Avoiding Confrontation

Second, transnational terrorism can make perpetrators difficult to defeat. Conflicts in which rebels operate in the peripheries of society are hard to bring to a decisive end because the

[2]An extensive literature examines transnational terrorism as a response to foreign military intervention. Transnational terrorist tactics provide rebels with the ability to overcome power asymmetries and impose domestic political costs on intervening countries, which can lead intervening forces to withdraw (see Ryckman and Ryckman 2017). However, because it occurs in only some civil wars, foreign military intervention is not the primary focus of this paper.

state might not have the capacity to effectively project force in these regions (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). Groups that fear harsh government crackdowns often turn to terrorism to avoid direct battlefield confrontations (Carter 2016).

Militants that operate across borders are difficult to defeat because states are rarely able to project force beyond their own sovereign territory, which is beneficial for weak groups who are often unable to directly confront government forces (Salehyan 2007). Crossing borders has helped breathe new life into transnational rebel movements (Crenshaw 2020). Similarly, Kalyvas (2006) argues that operating in border regions, where governments have difficulty projecting control, can aid militant movements in regrouping and making comebacks.

Border fortifications are not effective at preventing the spillover of conflicts across countries unless the state can effectively monitor those areas (Linebarger and Braithwaite 2020). The logistical and legal complexities of international cooperation can make multilateral counterterrorism efforts difficult (Monar 2015) and domestic political factors condition the willingness of states to participate in these counterterrorism efforts (Whitaker 2010).

Thus, transnational terrorism is likely even more effective at avoiding direct confrontation with domestic security forces than domestic terrorism, which can make it difficult to completely defeat rebel movements. Weakened rebels can use this evasiveness to help reconstitute themselves and continue fighting.

Generating Support

Third, groups can tap into international support networks by moving some operations abroad. Terrorism can advertise the cause of groups and mobilize supporters by signaling

commitment and press attention is vital to generate pressure on governments to coerce them into making concessions (Kydd and Walter 2006).

Groups that are struggling to receive attention are likely to launch attacks across borders to attract media coverage to their cause (Asal and Hoffman 2016). Rebel organizations can distract from the reputational costs of losses in domestic conflict venues by striking abroad (Piazza and Soules 2021). Transnational terrorism could have especially strong propaganda value, as reports of such attacks will reach wider audiences.

This increased coverage is expected to help rebel movements build their support bases. Walter (2017) argues that civil wars have increasingly been waged by groups with transnational and radical Islamist aims because new technology, especially the internet, has allowed militants to connect with potential supporters across the world. Similarly, Crenshaw (2020) posits that transnational terrorism helps groups that have been militarily defeated at home gain new recruits and destabilize regional governments. Weaker groups have greater incentives to win international support to overcome power asymmetries (Bob 2005).

Transnational terrorism can aid groups in distinguishing themselves from competitors. The logic of outbidding holds that armed actors will turn to intense forms of violence when they are competing for support from the same constituents as other militant organizations (Bloom 2004; Kydd and Walter 2006; Nemeth 2014). Competition drives groups to perpetrate attacks that receive significant attention (Conrad and Greene 2015), which transnational attacks often do (Asal and Hoffman 2016). Farrell (2020) finds that Salafi-jihadist groups respond to competition from organizations with the same ideology by launching more severe attacks. Zelin (2014) likewise argues that competition for leadership in the global jihadist network could lead to larger-scale terrorist attacks.

Drawbacks of Transnational Terrorism

While transnational terrorism can afford benefits, each of these potential rewards come with potential risks too.

Drawbacks of an Attrition Strategy

While there are potential benefits of the strategy of attrition, consider the risks of using transnational terrorism for such purposes. First, there are potential drawbacks to signaling resolve. Fortna (2015) argues that signaling resolve also signals an unwillingness to compromise by indicating that groups are willing to do anything to win. Fortna explains that this decreases the likelihood that governments will offer concessions, undermining rebels' ability to achieve their long-term objectives. Transnational terrorism could signal that offending groups are unlikely to compromise, as they are willing to engage in risky behavior to achieve their goals.

Transnational terrorism may also be an ineffective signal of strength or tool for imposing costs on governments. Fortna (2015) posits that indiscriminate violence against civilians signals weakness, as attacking civilians is less costly than attacking military targets, and signals need to be costly to be effective. Relatedly, because cross-border attacks of any kind avoid direct confrontation with domestic security forces, they could signal that groups are ineffective at operating in their own base country. Thus, despite the logistical complexity of such attacks potentially signaling strength, the increased cross-border operations could signal that the group is unable to impose costs at home. Transnational terrorism, consequently, does not send a clear signal of strength.

Cross-border attacks also do not impose direct costs on the militaries of home states. Furthermore, transnational attacks increase foreign aid received by governments (Butcher 2016) and the intervention of foreign troops on behalf of the governments (Crenshaw 2017). Proactively used foreign aid can help governments combat transnational terrorist groups (Bandyopadhyay, Sandler, and Younas 2011). Therefore, transnational terrorism does not always erode the military capacity of the home state and it might even lead to it strengthening through increased international involvement. Externally supported actors are less inclined to bargain to avoid losing external support (Kaplow 2016). Therefore, transnational terrorism may lead external actors to pressure governments to be more resolved in their fights, rather than to give into rebel demands.

Drawbacks of Avoiding Confrontation

Again, another potential benefit of shifting operations across borders is that it helps avoid direct confrontation with domestic security forces. However, crossing borders puts groups at risk of being destroyed by the security forces of countries they enter (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and Sandler 2011). It can be challenging to operate and blend in on unfamiliar, foreign soil (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and Sandler 2011; Gaibulloev and Sandler 2013). Groups typically have greater support in their home countries, such as better access to funding, weapons, and operatives, which makes domestic operations easier (Gaibulloev and Sandler 2021). Transnational terrorism is thus a militarily risky strategy (Gaibulloev and Sandler 2021).

Another possibility is that groups are driven out of their home countries because their bases are destroyed by domestic security forces, rather than choosing to launch attacks from their

home bases into other countries. However, this scenario is still consistent with my argument, as the fact that these groups would rather continue fighting than surrender indicates that they are desperate to keep operating, even if abroad, to reverse their fortunes.

Reputational Costs

While some scholars expect that transnational terrorism can help groups generate support (Walter 2017; Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021), such tactics can carry significant reputational costs. Rather than generating support, terrorism can alienate fence-sitters and moderates who were potential supporters (Fortna 2015). Huber (2019) argues that groups that want to maintain positive reputations will avoid attacking civilians. Survey evidence indicates that external support for rebel groups declines when they use terrorism (Arves, Cunningham, and McCulloch 2019). Transnational terrorism could also undermine efforts to attract supporters away from competitors (i.e., outbidding), as civilians might avoid supporting groups that have signaled an unwillingness to compromise (Fortna 2015).[3]

Similar dynamics are observed for transnational terrorism. Barceló and Labzina (2020) find that the number of followers of ISIS related Twitter accounts declined following deadly attacks by the group, including attacks abroad. They argue that the loss of followers was due to disengagement following these incidents, as some former ISIS sympathizers withdrew their support because they opposed such forms of violence.

[3] Furthermore, there is not consistent empirical evidence supporting outbidding arguments (Findley and Young 2012).

Transnational terrorism is therefore not guaranteed to be an effective tool for persuading civilians to become supporters. When persuasion cannot be effectively employed, militant organizations can use terrorism to coerce support and gain control over civilian populations (Kalyvas 2006). However, transnational terrorism shifts resources away from trying to establish control over domestic populations. Thus, transnational terrorism risks failing as both a persuasive and coercive mobilizing strategy.

Efforts to forge transnational connections could also be detrimental to rebels. Nilsson and Svensson (2021) argue that Islamist rebel movements tend to last longer than others because the shadow of (potential) support from the global jihadist network generates significant uncertainty around the capabilities of groups. Governments also often receive significant external aid to help combat Islamist movements, which creates uncertainty around their capacity. Nilsson and Svensson argue that the uncertainties surrounding the capabilities of each side complicate negotiation processes, prolonging conflicts.

Thus, when a group engages in transnational terrorism to attract supporters, they risk creating greater uncertainty about the possibility of garnering externa support, which can cause problems with the negotiating process, making it difficult for groups to earn any sort of concessions.

Transnational Terrorism as the Weapon of the Weak

Given the significant risks associated with transnational terrorism, why do any groups strike abroad? While there are significant drawbacks to domestic terrorism (Fortna 2015), such attacks are less risky than cross-border strikes (Gaibulloev and Sandler 2021).

I argue that weaker groups are more likely to turn to transnational terrorism because they are more desperate. Given that transnational terrorism carries significant risks, weaker groups will be more willing to shift resources to this strategy if they are running out of options. Informative to my argument is the logic of "Gambling for Resurrection" in the interstate conflict literature, in which leaders that are threatened with removal from office during a losing war effort seek to escalate the conflict with the hopes that the fortunes of the fighting change, thus increasing the probability they remain in office (Downs and Rocke 1994). Given the difficulties associated with assessing an individual leader's competency, audiences judge the quality of wartime leaders based on countries' battlefield performance, incentivizing leaders to win conflicts, even if they are at a disadvantage, so they are not punished by their populations (Downes and Rocke 1994).

Prorok (2018) applies the Gambling for Resurrection logic to civil wars, arguing that rebel leaders who bare greater responsibility for conflict (i.e., leaders in power when fighting began), have a greater chance of punishment if their groups perform poorly, which incentivizes them to gamble for resurrection, so they are not disposed by their own officers, cadres, or supporters. Thus, civil wars in which rebel leaders bare greater responsibility are less likely to end because these leaders have a greater incentive to attempt reversing the fortunes of the conflict to avoid punishment.

I expect similar dynamics apply to the rebel group-level. Members of losing groups face an increased probability of death or imprisonment (Braithwaite and Chu 2018), and thus, will fight hard to avoid losing conflicts. To avoid punishment, rebel leaders and cadres are sometimes willing to shift their activities abroad in an attempt to turn the tide of conflicts. Again, operating across borders can provide groups with the chance to signal resolve, impose costs, avoid

confrontation with government forces and regroup, and garner support. While there is a significant risk of this strategy backfiring, weaker groups will be more willing to take the gamble as they have less to lose and are already facing a greater prospect of defeat (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009).

Scholars have asserted, for instance, that ISIS increasingly launched attacks outside of Iraq and Syria in response to both reputational and military losses, in the hope that it could reverse its fortunes, despite the associated risks (Watkins 2016). Similarly, The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) risked shifting its operations across borders and facing hostile military forces, because it was trying to, among other goals, regroup and acquire more resources following battlefield loses, so it could continue fighting the Angolan government (Mail and Guardian 2000; Pan African News Agency 2000; The New Humanitarian 2000). While it was risky for both ISIS and UNITA to launch attacks abroad, as doing so could invite further foreign military intervention against them, both groups were desperate and seeking to change the course of their respective conflicts. Thus, rebels operating in diverse contexts appear willing to launch terrorist attacks abroad to try to reverse their fortunes.

The Distribution of Resources

Given that transnational terrorism should be more appealing to weaker groups, it is important to consider how struggling organizations shift their resources in response. Rebel groups face the decision of not only whether to use transnational terrorism, but how they will use it in tandem with other tactics. Groups shift their tactical repertoires to increasingly rely on indiscriminate violence against civilians to compensate for a loss of resources (Hultman 2007;

Wood 2010; Polo and González 2020). Groups do not just adopt indiscriminate violence, but rather, increasingly shift dwindling resources to alternative methods for levying costs (Polo and González 2020).

More generally, groups shift away from reliance on tactics that are less effective (Blomberg, Gaibulloev, and Sandler 2011). Effective counterterrorism measures lead to groups substituting the modes of attack they rely on (Enders and Sandler 2002). Militant groups sometimes shift their operations to another country if they are unsuccessful at attacking at home (Enders and Sandler 2002). In sum, when a group is desperate, it has the incentive to alter its tactics to find other ways to coerce or defeat governments.

Relatedly, Polo and González (2020) posit that there are costs associated with terrorism that make some groups less inclined to adopt it. They expect that groups will be more likely to accept the risks of terrorism when they have lost the resources necessary to mobilize civilians through less coercive and reputationally costly means. Thus, when deciding whether and how to reallocate resources, rebel movements will consider the risks and rewards of different strategies.

I expect that weak groups that have been unable to achieve their objectives through domestic terrorism and other strategies will be more willing to gamble on transnational terrorism because they are desperate and have few other options. This goes beyond the simple adoption of a tactic, as the perpetration of a small number of attacks may not make a significant difference, particularly if a group has not shifted its attack strategies in other ways. Therefore, while transnational terrorism is a risky tactic, weaker groups that are running out of options have the incentives to shift their resources to focus on this strategy because of the potentially high rewards. This means both increasing the number of cross-border attacks to better access the

benefits, as well as shifting resources away from other strategies (which have proven less effective) towards transnational terrorism. This leads me to hypothesize that:

H1a: Rebel groups that are weak, relative to the governments they are fighting, will commit more terrorist attacks across international borders.

And

H1b: Rebel groups that are weak, relative to the governments they are fighting, will commit a higher percentage of their terrorist attacks across international borders.

Research Design

To test the hypotheses, I rely on data from the Terrorism in Armed Conflict (TAC) dataset, constructed by Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin (2020a). TAC contains data on 409 rebel group-government dyads in the UCDP Dyadic Dataset that operated from 1970 to 2013. The dataset links these organizations to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) to gather data on their use of terrorism in civil wars. Groups enter TAC either the first year a battle death occurs in the UCDP or the first year the group is found in the GTD, depending on which comes first. An organization exits TAC either in the last year it is found in the GTD or five years after the conflict is no longer active, whichever comes later (Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin 2020a). A major advantage of this structure is that it allows for the terrorist tactics of groups to be analyzed outside of only years that reach the UCDP's threshold of at least 25 battle-related deaths. Terrorist attacks sometimes occur outside of these active conflict years (Fortna, Lotito, and

Rubin 2020a), so it is important to consider low-intensity conflict years, which often feature weak actors.

While other high-quality datasets exist on the terrorist attack patterns of militant organizations, they are not as ideal for this analysis. The Extended Data on Terrorist Groups (EDTG) dataset (Hou, Gaibulloev, and Sandler 2020) contains data on the use of transnational terrorism by groups in the GTD. However, the EDTG contains only groups that use terrorism and is not specific to civil wars. Thus, I would not be able to analyze transnational terrorism in the context of civil wars nor would I be able to examine why some groups use transnational terrorism relative to no terrorism at all. Polo and Gleditsch (2016) link all groups in the UCDP Dyadic Dataset to the GTD, however, they do not provide information on individual attacks, and thus, the variables cannot be disaggregated into transnational and domestic attacks.

TAC enables users to download data on every individual attack launched by groups in the UCDP. Using the attack ID variable available in both the disaggregated version of TAC and the GTD, researchers can merge in available characteristics about attacks into TAC. Thus, I was able to merge in data from the GTD that enabled me to disaggregate transnational and domestic terrorism.[4]

Measuring Transnational Terrorism

I constructed three variables measuring the use of transnational terrorism by groups in TAC, using data from the GTD. TAC provides six different counts of terrorism based on the level of confidence in the connection between an actor in the UCDP and a potential perpetrator

[4]The TAC data disaggregated at the group-attack level can be accessed at: https://github.com/TACDataProject/TAC

in the GTD. I take the most conservative approach offered by TAC, considering only attacks that can be attached directly to perpetrators in the UCDP. Thus, attacks perpetrated by actors affiliated with a group, involved in the same conflicts, or with ambiguous identifiers that could be attached to groups in the UCDP, are not considered in the main analysis.

For an attack to be included in the GTD, it must fit two of the three following criteria. First, it must be used to try to achieve a political, social, economic, or religious goal. Second, there must be evidence that the attack was intended to coerce a broader audience beyond the immediate target. Third, the attack has to be "outside the context of legitimate warfare activities." While an attack only needs to meet two of these criteria to be included in the GTD, I take the conservative approach by including only attacks that meet all three criteria.

The GTD contains four measures of transnational terrorism. The first, which is the primary variable used in this study, measures attacks that are logistically transnational (INT_LOG) by comparing the nationality of the perpetrating group to the location of the attack. It measures whether a group crossed a border to carry out an attack. While most attacks in this category involve groups crossing national borders, some incidents are perpetrated by groups moving across non-contiguous, contested territory (e.g., Northern Ireland) or a secure border (e.g., West Bank or Gaza). The GTD also contains a measure of "ideological" transnational terrorism (INT_IDEO). This indicator measures incidents in which the nationality of the perpetrator and target are different. There is also a miscellaneous measure of transnational terrorism which indicates that an attack is either logistically or ideologically transnational, but it is unclear which one (INT_MISC). Finally, there is a measure in the GTD indicating whether an attack is coded as transnational based on any of these three criteria.

As noted earlier, *I focus exclusively on logistically transnational attacks* in the analysis. Again, my theoretical argument holds that groups will try to gamble for resurrection by both launching more attacks across borders and shifting a higher percentage of their activities abroad. Thus, I need measures that capture both dynamics. Using the logistically transnational attack variable from the GTD, I construct three measures of the use of transnational terrorism. The first is a count of the total number of logistically transnational attacks for each dyad-year. The distribution of this variable is presented in **Figure 1**. As shown, most rebel groups commit very few logistically transnational attacks. The mean number of logistically transnational attacks launched by a group in a year is approximately 0.41, while the median is 0, and the maximum is 95. Thus, transnational terrorism, even in the context of civil wars, is relatively rare.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

Second, I construct two measures of reliance on logistically transnational terrorism, relative to all logistically transnational and domestic attacks (logistically transnational/ logistically transnational + logistically domestic). It is a proportion of transnational attacks to all attacks, ranging from 0 to 1. I follow the recommendation of Enders, Sandler, and Gaibulloev (2011) and exclude attacks in the GTD that are not classified as transnational or domestic, due to insufficient information. They argue that these unclassifiable attacks do not follow a clear pattern, and thus, should not be lumped with domestic or transnational attacks.

The first of these variables considers all observations, even those in which a rebel group launched no attacks. Thus, dyad-years in which rebels launched exclusively domestic attacks, or

in which they launched no attacks at all, both have a value of 0. To distinguish between strategies involving exclusively domestic terrorism and no terrorism at all, I also create a measure of the proportion of transnational attacks to all incidents, excluding dyad-years with no terrorism. I refer to these as inclusive and exclusive measures respectively. In their examination of rebel groups' decision to attack soft and hard targets, Polo and Gleditsch (2016) exclude dyad-years in which no terrorist attacks occurred.

These last two measures are especially useful for assessing the link between rebel capacity and transnational terrorism. Groups that launch many international attacks can also perpetrate a significant number of domestic attacks, as they might adopt multiple forms of violence to compensate for power asymmetries. However, measuring the proportion of transnational to domestic attacks allows for a clearer picture of the tactics that are most preferred by conventionally weak actors.

Figure 2 displays the distribution of the share of attacks that are logistically transnational, for observations in which at least one domestic or transnational attack was perpetrated. The most common strategy among groups that use terrorism appears to be to use no logistically transnational terrorism. In general, strategies involving a high proportion of transnational attacks are rare, though there is somewhat of spike driven by groups that appear to launch exclusively transnational attacks in a given year.

[Insert Figure 2 Here]

It is also important to consider how rebel groups use transnational terrorism in tandem with other strategies. Organizations could employ transnational attacks as a compliment or substitute to domestic terrorism. Descriptive analysis reveals that groups that rely heavily on transnational terrorism tend to perpetrate fewer terrorist attacks overall than groups that rely more on domestic terrorism. **Figure 3** displays the correlation between the share of groups' attacks that are logistically transnational (for dyad-years with at least one attack), to the total number of attacks perpetrated (logistically transnational + logistically domestic). As shown, militant organizations that launch a high percentage of transnational attacks tend to commit fewer attacks overall than groups that rely more heavily on domestic terrorism.

[Insert Figure 3 Here]

Among groups that committed at least one attack and launched exclusively transnational attacks, the mean number of total attacks was 3.57, while the maximum number was 39. In contrast, for groups that committed a least one attack but relied only on domestic terrorism, the mean number of total attacks was 15.23 and the maximum was 494. There were only 145 dyad-years in which groups perpetrated exclusively transnational attacks, while there were 1,365 dyad-years in which a group used domestic terrorism but did not cross borders to commit such violence. The correlation between the share of logistically transnational attacks, and the total number of attacks, is somewhat weak (the Pearson correlation coefficient is approximately -0.09), but statistically significant. Thus, a general pattern appears to be that as groups come to rely more on transnational attacks, they use less terrorism overall.

Dependent Variables

To assess the central hypotheses, I employ the three aforementioned measures of logistically transnational terrorism as dependent variables. First, I consider the count of the total number of logistically transnational attacks. Some existing literature uses a binary indicator of whether transnational terrorism was adopted (Young and Dugan 2014; Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021). However, as Polo and Gleditsch (2016, p. 817) argue, employing a binary measure of terrorism does not adequately capture the relative importance of terrorism for groups' overall strategy nor does it capture overall levels of activity. They note that a dichotomous indicator does not distinguish between groups that use terrorism sporadically from those that frequently employ the tactic. Similarly, I use a count variable to distinguish between groups that heavily employ transnational attacks from those that use them rarely.

This variable has a significant right-skew. The median and mean values of the variable are also significantly different. Thus, I employ negative binomial regression as it is the ideal test for count variables with this distribution.

For both measures of the share of logistically international terrorism, I rely on the proportions estimator proposed by Papke and Wooldridge (1996) because I am using a fractional dependent variable. In their analyses of the proportion of terrorist attacks against soft targets, Polo and Gleditsch (2016) implement this technique.

Independent Variable

To test the hypotheses, I use the five-point ordinal indicator of a rebel group's strength, relative to the government it is fighting, taken from the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). This measure has been employed in a variety of

studies on the consequences of rebel group capacity (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009; Bapat and Bond 2012), including in Fortna's (2015) test of whether weaker groups are more likely to perpetrate domestic terrorism. **Figure 4** displays the average share of logistically transnational attacks per dyad-year, broken down by groups that are much weaker, weaker, or at parity or stronger than the governments they are fighting. The average share of transnational attacks decreases as groups get stronger, providing preliminary evidence for the hypotheses.

[Insert Figure 4 Here]

Control Variables

I control for a variety of potentially confounding factors. Walter (2017) argues that Islamist rebel groups are well-positioned and have strong incentives to internationalize their movements and can increase the resources available to them by doing so. Rebels with secessionist aims have strong incentives to appear legitimate to the international community, and thus, treat civilians well on a variety of dimensions (e.g., Jo 2015; Stewart 2018; Fazal and Konaev 2019), including restraining their use of terrorism (Fazal 2013). Thus, I extend data from the Women in Armed Rebellion Dataset (WARD) (Wood and Thomas 2017) and control for a binary measure of whether a rebel group has a radical Islamist ideology and a dichotomous indicator of whether it has secessionist aims.

Using data from the NSA dataset, I include a binary measure of whether a rebel group receives any external, military support from a transnational non-state actor and/or from the government of another state. External support affects the use of violence by rebels and their

ability to adopt logistically complex tactics (Horowitz 2010). Relatedly, with data from the NSA dataset, I control for a dichotomous indicator of whether a group has any bases abroad. Weak groups can more easily carryout operations when they can flee to bases in other territories (Salehyan 2007). I also control for the age of the group, as weaker groups tend to survive longer (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009) and because transnational terrorism affects militant group survival (Hou, Gaibulloev, and Sandler 2020).

Conflict and country-level factors also matter. Transnational terrorism attracts external support to government of states from which the violence is being exported, which can further exacerbate power asymmetries (Butcher 2016). Foreign military invention, however, can increase transnational terrorist backlash (e.g., Ryckman and Ryckman 2017), resulting in a vicious cycle. Thus, it is important to account for the role of international actors. Using data from Ryckman and Ryckman (2017), I control for the logged number of foreign military troops, that are fighting on behalf of the government, in a country each year. I also employ a binary indicator of whether a dyad-year occurred during the Cold War, as the end of this period marked a decline in transnational terrorism due to decreased state sponsorship of terrorism and involvement in foreign conflicts (Enders and Sandler 1999). These measures help capture the degree to which a civil war is internationalized.

Regime type affects the generation of transnational terrorism (Chenoweth 2013) and the incentive for rebels to deploy domestic terrorism (Stanton 2012). Thus, using data from the Polity IV dataset (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2018), I control for the 21-point ordinal indicator of how democratic a regime is. Similarly, because groups launch transnational terrorist attacks to compensate for lack of media attention (Asal and Hoffman 2016), I control for whether a country has a free press. Using data from the Global Media Freedom Dataset (Whitten-Woodring and

Van Belle 2015), and in accordance with the recommendation of the data creators, I include a binary indicator of whether a country has a free or imperfectly free press, as opposed to having no free press. The capacity of states to target rebel movements affects rebels' adoption of transnational terrorist tactics (Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021). Thus, using data from the World Bank, I control for the logged per capita GDP of a country each year. I also control for the logged population of a country using World Bank data.

I include a one-year lag of the dependent variable in all models to account for temporal dependencies. Including a lagged measure of the dependent variable captures how levels of transnational terrorism change over time, based on relative rebel group strength (see Keele and Kelly 2006; Wilkins 2018).[5] Finally, following the precedent of Polo (2020), who examines the factors that drive the proportion of militant group terrorist attacks against soft targets, I control for the total count of domestic plus transnational attacks (i.e., the denominator of the dependent variable) in the models analyzing the share of transnational attacks.[6]

Results

The results are presented in **Table 1**. In every model, the standard errors are clustered by the dyad. Across all models, I find strong support for the core hypotheses – stronger rebels are less likely to launch a larger number and share of transnational attacks. Models 2 and 3 are

[5] However, given concerns that including the lagged dependent variable in the model can lead to biased estimates (Achen 2000), I rerun the main models, excluding this measure. As an alternative method of accounting for temporal dependencies, I run additional models that include the time, time squared, and time cubed since the last attack. I also run separate models that include year dummies as a further check against temporal dependencies. The results hold.
[6] Summary statistics are available in the appendix.

particularly theoretically meaningful, as they show that weaker groups rely more on transnational attacks, even relative to domestic terrorism.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

There are important differences across models for the control variables. There is some evidence that Islamist groups rely more on transnational terrorism, as this relationship is positive and statistically significant in two models. Similarly, having bases abroad has a statistically significant association with transnational terrorism in the first two models. Groups also appear to rely less on transnational terrorism in countries with larger populations. The other variables do not produce consistent results.

The marginal effects of relative rebel strength in Models 1 and 3 are presented in **Figures 5 and 6** respectively. The marginal effects are presented with 90% confidence intervals and all control variables held at their means. Both figures show a decrease in transnational activity when moving from the weakest to the strongest groups.

[Insert Figure 5 Here]

[Insert Figure 6 Here]

A group being much weaker than the government, on average, results in 0.18 more logistically transnational attacks per year, while a group being at parity with the government only

leads to an increase of about 0.07 attacks. While this might seem like an insignificant change, the average number of logistically transnational attacks launched across all dyad-year is only 0.41. Transnational terrorism is a rare phenomenon in civil wars, and thus, even small changes indicate a concerted effort to adopt an unconventional tactic. In terms of the share of transnational attacks, being much weaker than the government results in an approximately 0.09 higher proportion of transnational attacks, while being at parity results in only about a 0.02 higher share of such incidents. Thus, while the weakest groups launch almost 10% of their attacks across borders, there is a steep decline in such activities for stronger movements.

Robustness Tests

I conduct a battery of robustness checks to assess the strength of the findings. The results are available in the appendix.

Desperation and Temporal Variation

I begin by considering two interrelated issues. First, while militant group strength and level of desperation are closely related, they are not identical. A group can be weak but not desperate, particularly if it is able to operate on the fringes of society and avoid detection by governments forces (Cunningham, Gleditsch, and Salehyan 2009). This is relevant as a core component of the theory is that rebel groups turn to transnational violence out of desperation. Measuring "desperation," however, can prove difficult as data on the characteristics of rebel organizations tend to vary little over time. Second, and relatedly, another concern is the potential

for reverse causality. Given that transnational terrorism entails serious risks, it is possible that transnational terrorism makes groups weaker.

However, the main independent variable—the five-point ordinal indicator of relative rebel strength—directly measures strength, rather than desperation, and varies little *within* groups over time. To overcome these issues, I take a similar approach to Piazza and Soules (2021) and use the variable from the GTD that measures the number of perpetrator fatalities in an attack (*nkillter*). I use this measure to create two new variables. First, I create a variable that is a logged count of the number of combatants killed in operations in the prior year. Second, I employ a measure of the logged running count of the number of combatants killed during terrorist operations for a group over its lifespan, up to the point of the observation.

These are imperfect measures, as they capture only groups that engage in terrorist operations, and only fatalities from these attacks, not all fatalities groups experience. However, they provide some of the few temporally varying measures of group desperation, allowing me to account for potential reverse causality, by including both lagged and running count measures, which capture the effects of past losses on current behavior.

Across all models, both the logged running count and the lagged (and logged) count of combatant fatalities have a positive and statistically significant association with increases in both the count and share of transnational attacks. While strong causal identification is difficult given the nature of the data, these measures provide some assurance that the results are not just capturing the potential for transnational operations to degrade the strength of militant groups.

Figure 7 shows how the share of transnational terrorism changes with the number of combatants lost over time for four different dyads. As the general trend shows, groups launch a

higher percentage of their attacks abroad as they lose combatants. However, there is a decline transnational activity for some groups at the very end of their lifespan. This provides some evidence that after groups turn to transnational terrorism as a desperate last effort, they may eventually lose the capacity to launch a significant number of attacks.

[Insert Figure 7 Here]

There are several examples of rebel groups increasing their use of transnational terrorism in response to facing difficulties at home. For instance, the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) had not been successful in its original venue of Uganda, particularly because of harsh government crackdowns. In response, the group shifted operations abroad, and started attacking throughout the Great Lakes region (Nantulya 2019). Similarly, after a period of struggling, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) became more successful when it spread its geographic scope (Crenshaw 2020).

UNITA began launching terrorist attacks across borders following the erosion of its conventional military capabilities. UNITA launched attacks in Namibia and Zambia to acquire resources to compensate for its losses; deter foreign military intervention; and help regroup and relaunch attacks in Angola (Mail and Guardian 2000; Pan African News Agency 2000; The New Humanitarian 2000).

Similarly, when the Ugandan military dislodged the bases of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the group crossed the border and began wreaking havoc in several other central African countries. While the LRA has largely been unable to regroup, it still engages in violence and

looting. The group experienced mass defections, however, many members remain in the group because they fear legal punishments if they are to return home (Neiman 2020).

There are multiple examples of groups that increasingly launched transnational attacks in response to territorial losses at home including ISIS (Watkins 2016), al-Shabaab (Mueller 2018), the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) (Brynjar and Åshild 2001), and Boko Haram (Watkins 2016).

Another interesting example is the Afghan Taliban, which launched attacks across the border into Pakistan after facing significant government counterinsurgency measures (Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021). However, the Taliban would later go on to retake power following the withdraw of U.S. forces due to the strong operational capacity it worked to build (Jensen 2021). While it is relatively rare for militant groups to regain power once they have lost it, the example of the Taliban highlights the possibility that some groups are able to adapt to challenges and refocus their operations to their domestic venues. Thus, there are many examples of groups increasingly turning to transnational terrorism *after* they face adversity.

Alternative Measures of Strength

Given that rebel capacity is difficult to measure, I use multiple indicators of rebel strength. I begin by transforming the main independent variable into two different measures. The first is a simplified, three-point ordinal measure of whether a group's relative strength is much weaker, weaker, or at parity or greater. I collapse the highest three categories because there are relatively few groups in each. Second, I include a binary indicator of whether a group is coded as "much weaker" than the government it is fighting (lowest level of the variable). I also employ the NSA dataset's ordinal measure of a group's fighting capacity, relative to the government.

The findings remain fairly consistent. The narrower, ordinal measure has a statistically significant association with the dependent variable in all three models. The other two measures are statistically significant in two of their three models.

However, two other measures of rebel capacity do not produce consistent results. First, I use a logged measure of the ratio of rebel to government troops. I obtain data on the number of rebel troops from the NSA dataset and the number of government troops from the National Material Capabilities dataset (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972; Singer 1987). The logged ratio of rebel to government troops has a negative and statistically significant relationship with the number of transnational attacks launched by a group but does not have a significant effect on the share of such attacks. Second, I use a binary indicator from the NSA dataset of whether a group controls territory, as territorial control is expected to affect the ability of militant organizations to launch terrorist attacks (de la Calle and Sánchez-Cuenca 2012). This variable is never a significant predictor of transnational terrorism.

These results indicate that different aspects of group capacity affect the decision to internationalize operations in different ways. For instance, while a lack of territorial control might incentivize domestic terrorism to help militant groups gain control over local populations (Kalyvas 2006), transnational attacks would not help groups establish control over the population of their home base.[7] Future work should explore how different types of weakness affect reliance on transnational terrorism.

[7] Piazza and Soules (2021) find that ISIS increased its reliance on transnational terrorism as it lost territory. However, the NSA dataset's measure of territorial control varies little over time. Thus, territorial loss, rather than whether territory is controlled in the first place, might have a stronger effect.

Alternative Measures of Transnational Terrorism

I also consider alternative measures of the dependent variable. As noted earlier, when constructing the primary measures of transnational attacks, I used only the most conservative standard employed by TAC for linking attacks in the GTD to groups in the UCDP (direct matches and armed wings – Level A). However, there are five additional levels of matching, each of which become increasingly inclusive in the attacks attributed to groups. This ranges from attacks by factions and umbrellas (Level B) to attacks in which the perpetrator is unknown (Level F). To ensure that this choice does not drive the results, I construct five additional sets of variables measuring transnational terrorism, each of which corresponds to a higher level of inclusivity for attribution. The results remain robust to all five alternative sets of measures.

The measure of the share of logistically transnational attacks has a denominator that is only the sum of attacks that are confirmed to be either logistically transnational or domestic. It excludes attacks from the GTD that were classified as "unknown" on this dimension. However, I conduct the main analysis again with a modified version of the variables that also include unclassified attacks in the denominator. The findings hold.

I took the most conservative approach by examining only attacks that meet all three inclusion criteria in the GTD. To show that this decision does not drive the results, I reconstruct the main measures of transnational attacks to also include incidents that only meet two of the inclusion criteria. The results remain robust.

There is also a possibility that rebel strength affects the decision to turn to transnational terrorism differently than it does the decision to launch a higher percentage or greater number of cross-border attacks. To account for this, I conduct logistic and rare events logistic regression

analyses where the dependent variable is a binary indicator of whether a group launched any cross-border attacks. I continue to find support for the main hypotheses.

Government Repression

One factor not accounted for in the main analysis is broad-based repression, which Asal, Linebarger, and Greig (2021) posit can incentivize greater reliance on domestic terrorism due to the domestic grievances that such behavior generates. Thus, following Asal, Linebarger, and Greig (2021), I rerun the main analysis, employing the same five-point ordinal indicator of state repression from the Political Terror Scale (PTS) data (Gibney et al. 2020) to account for the possibility that broad-based repression deters groups from going abroad. The results hold. All models also include a measure of the logged per capita GDP of the state, which I use as a proxy for the state's ability to conduct narrowly targeted repression of armed groups, which can spur transnational terrorism (Asal, Linebarger, and Greig 2021).

Dropping Outliers

I also rerun the main analysis, excluding potential outliers. Following the precedent of Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin (2018), I rerun the main analysis, excluding all rebel actors that are classified as engaging in coups in the NSA dataset. Further following the advice of the creators of TAC, I conduct the analysis again, excluding Al-Qaeda (Central), because the group was not involved in a civil conflict and it is not similar to groups in other transnational conflicts in the UCDP (Fortna, Lotito, and Rubin 2020b). The results hold.

Other Types of Terrorism

Again, while the main analysis focuses exclusively on logistically transnational terrorism, the GTD also contains data on ideologically transnational terrorism, miscellaneous attacks, and a measure that encompasses all three types. I built additional measures of the count and share of ideologically transnational terrorism and total transnational terrorism (the sum of all three types).

Relative rebel strength has a negative and statistically significant association with the count and shared-based measures of both ideologically transnational terrorism and any transnational terrorism. However, when I rerun the main analysis, controlling for the number of ideologically transnational attacks launched by groups, I continue to find a negative and statistically significant relationship between relative rebel strength and the count and share of logistically transnational attacks.

Finally, I conduct additional, negative binomial regression analyses in which the dependent variable is the count of logistically domestic attacks. I do not find evidence that weaker groups perpetrate domestic terrorism more frequently. Furthermore, the various models with the fractional dependent variables show that weaker groups are more likely to depend on transnational terrorism, relative to domestic terrorism.

Conclusion

Why do some rebel groups launch terrorist attacks abroad, despite the risks? I argue that conventionally weak militant groups are more likely to accept the risks of transnational terrorism because they are more desperate. I find robust, cross-rebel group evidence that weaker militant organizations are more likely to use transnational terrorism, even relative to other terrorist

tactics. Given that these groups have little else to lose, they will attempt transnational attacks in the hopes of signaling their resolve, levying costs on their enemies, avoiding direct fighting with government forces, and attracting attention and support to their movements. However, transnational terrorism can backfire and undermine efforts to achieve some of these objectives, making it a risky strategy.

There are several potential avenues for future research. A variety of specific theoretical mechanisms are presented in this article, however, they are not tested. To remedy this, future work could unpack these mechanisms. For instance, data on the quantity and quality of media attention that a group such as ISIS receives, could be paired with existing data on a group's transnational attack patterns (e.g., Piazza and Soules 2021), to examine whether rebels launch transnational attacks in response to reputational damage. Additionally, scholars could combine data on rebel battlefield losses in civil wars (e.g., Polo and González 2020), with data from this article, to investigate whether transnational terrorism is used to avoid more direct (and unsuccessful) battlefield confrontations. Analyzing specific causal mechanisms is vital to understand why rebel groups employ transnational terrorism in civil wars.

As civil wars become increasingly internationalized, it is vital to understand why some rebel groups shift operations abroad. This article makes an important contribution by examining why weak militant groups disproportionally rely on transnational terrorism. Understanding the types of groups that adopt this strategy is crucial to understanding how transnational terrorism affects civil wars.

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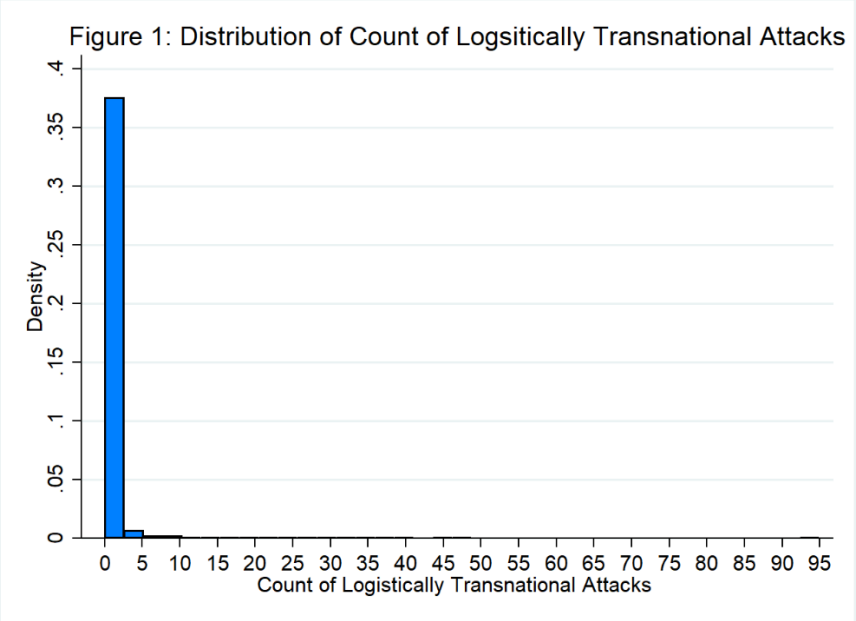
Tables and Figures



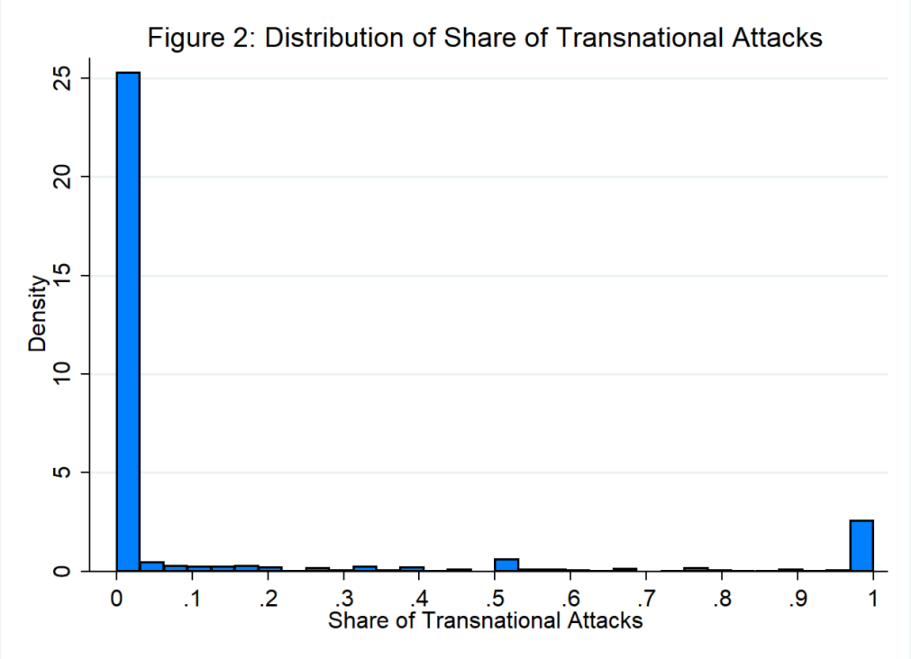
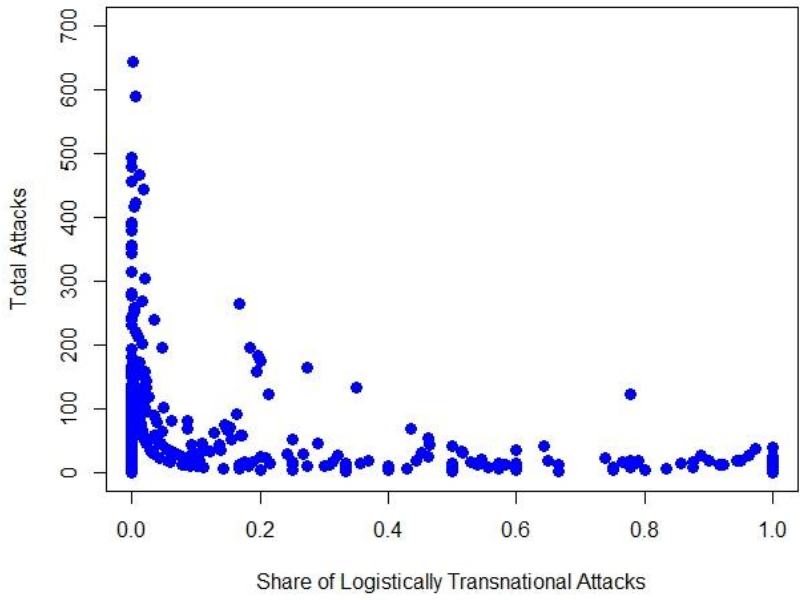


Figure 3: Share of Transnational Attacks vs. Total Attacks



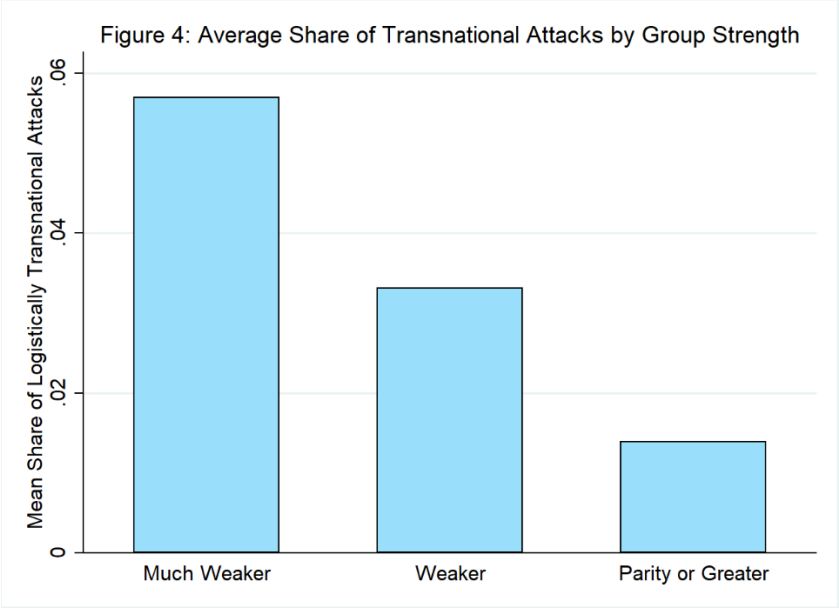


Table 1: Relative Rebel Strength and Transnational Terrorism

	(1) Count Transnational	(2) Share Transnational (Inc.)	(3) Share Transnational (Exc.)
Relative Rebel Strength	-0.469**	-0.471**	-0.501**
	(0.198)	(0.201)	(0.213)
Islamist	0.814***	0.654***	0.435
	(0.306)	(0.252)	(0.273)
Secessionist Aims	0.0147	0.172	0.266
	(0.289)	(0.294)	(0.269)
Bases Abroad	0.747***	0.589**	0.411
	(0.290)	(0.294)	(0.314)
External Military Support for Rebels	0.376	0.193	0.186
	(0.268)	(0.279)	(0.291)
Group Age	0.0146	0.0133	0.00593
	(0.0132)	(0.0104)	(0.0100)
Occupying Troops (Logged)	-0.0124	-0.0619**	-0.0405
	(0.0273)	(0.0271)	(0.0302)
Polity2	0.0619**	-0.0235	-0.0629***
	(0.0260)	(0.0212)	(0.0210)
Free Media	0.0850	0.404	0.148
	(0.332)	(0.259)	(0.273)
per capita GDP (Logged)	-0.0492	-0.0112	-0.0530
	(0.0442)	(0.0569)	(0.0388)
Population (Logged)	-0.284***	-0.137*	-0.123
	(0.0765)	(0.0781)	(0.0827)
Cold War	-0.523	-0.420	-0.597**
	(0.325)	(0.293)	(0.255)
Count Transnational$_{(t-1)}$	0.476***		
	(0.0883)		
Total Attacks		0.00345**	-0.00222
		(0.00154)	(0.00248)
Share Transnational (Inc.)$_{(t-1)}$		3.527***	
		(0.326)	
Share Transnational (Exc.)$_{(t-1)}$			4.009***
			(0.420)
Constant	3.132**	-1.222	0.107
	(1.432)	(1.265)	(1.530)
Observations	3,978	3,978	1,120

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 5: Marginal Effects of Rebel Strength on Total Transnational Terrorism

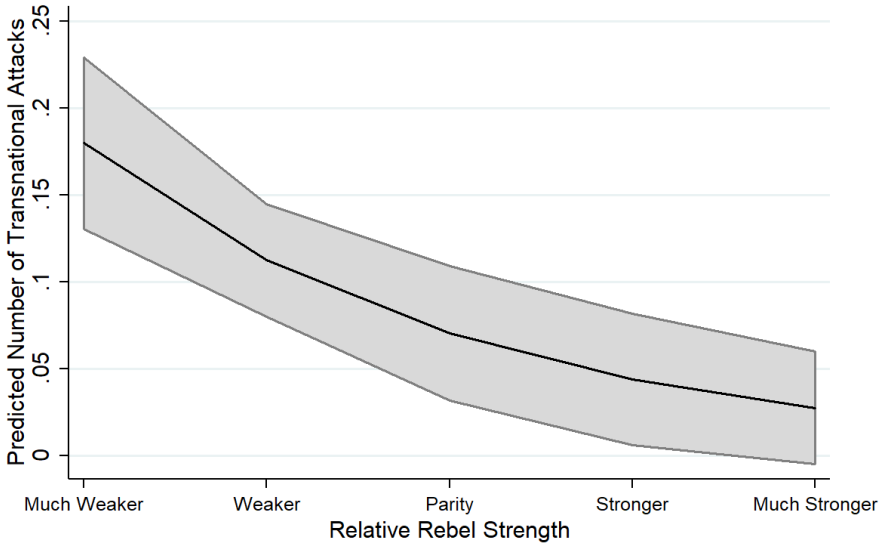


Figure 6: Marginal Effects of Rebel Strength on Share of Transnational Terrorism

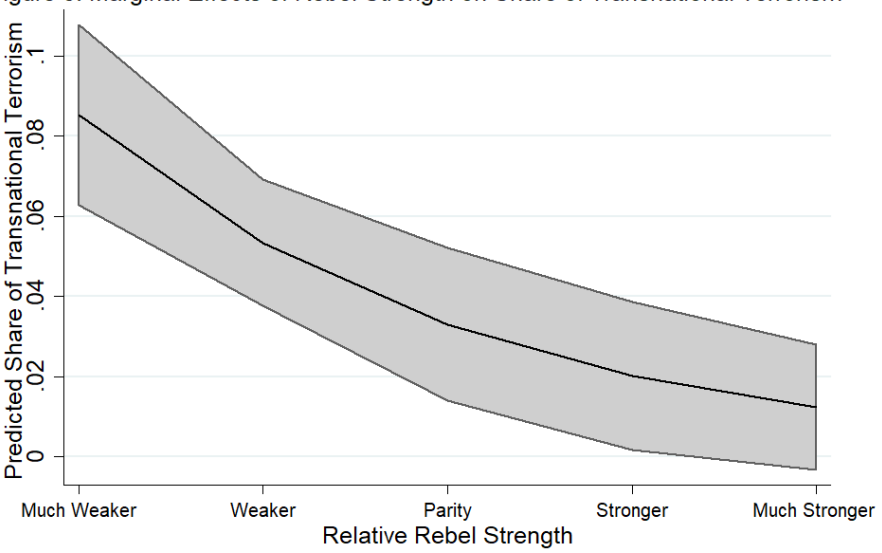


Figure 7: Cumulative Loss of Combatants and Share of Transnational Terrorism