

Rebel Recruitment Strategies and Violence Against Civilians

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Abstract:

Why do some rebel groups show restraint in the use of sexual violence while abusing civilians in other ways? We argue that rebels are more likely to employ such repertoires when they recruit more heavily with ideological appeals than material incentives. Mobilizing around ideological appeals produces more obedient and cohesive forces, increasing groups' ability and willingness to restrain sexual violence. However, these dynamics do not incentivize restraint in other abuses, which are more likely to be ordered, and less likely to foster cohesion. Using data on rebel recruitment practices and human rights violations, we find support for our argument.

Key Words: Rebel Recruitment; Sexual Violence; Civilian Victimization

The LTTE in Sri Lanka (Wood 2009, p. 147), the Sendero Luminoso in Peru (Leiby 2009), rebels in El Salvador (Cohen et al. 2013), and the PKK in Turkey (Haner et al. 2020) terrorized civilians in a variety of manners but had strong internal prohibitions against the use of sexual violence directed at the same populations they victimized. Data from the Rebel Human Rights Violations (RHRV) dataset (Walsh et al. 2024), which contains information on a variety of human rights abuses by rebel organizations, reveals that just over half of the 327 organizations in the dataset had at least one year in which they perpetrated at least one type of abuse against civilians, but in which there was no evidence of them engaging in sexual violence.

These examples illuminate an interesting puzzle: why do some rebel groups extensively and indiscriminately abuse civilians in a variety of ways while showing restraint in the use of sexual violence? Prior work addresses this puzzle by positing that rebel groups that produce obedient and well-disciplined fighting forces are better able to restrain unordered forms of violence, particularly rape, while inducing their soldiers to attack civilians when ordered to do so (Hoover Green 2016, 2018; Wood 2009). Rebel leaders can more effectively control their cadres when their organizations have strong hierarchies that allow for the enforcement of order and punishment of disobedience (Wood 2009) and/or are able to indoctrinate recruits to better align with the preferences of the leadership (Hoover Green 2016, 2018).

However, we argue that another missing piece of the puzzle is rebel *recruitment strategies*. Literature on the consequences of recruitment strategies tends to focus on whether rebel groups victimize civilian populations, lumping multiple forms of violence together (e.g., Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2005, 2007). However, rebels' repertoires of violence vary extensively, suggesting it is not just a choice of whether to victimize civilians, but what form that victimization takes (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood 2017).

We posit that armed groups that rely more heavily on ideological appeals than material incentives for recruitment are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence, but that they are *not* more likely to show restraint in other serious abuses against civilians. This is because heavy reliance on material recruitment incentives reduces the ability and willingness of rebel leaders to restrain their cadres' use of sexual violence. We also expect that materially driven rebels are less willing to restrain their use of sexual violence than their more ideologically motivated counterparts. However, we do not expect that ideological-based recruitment strategies consistently restrain other forms of violence.

To evaluate this argument, we employ data from the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID), which contains an ordinal measure of the extent to which rebel groups rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment. We pair RAID with the Rebel Human Rights Violations (RHRV) dataset (Walsh et al. 2024), which contains data on a diversity of human rights abuses perpetrated by rebels. We find that groups that rely more on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence, but *not* other abuses, employing repertoires of violence that involve the use of other types of violence, but restraint in sexual violence.

We borrow Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín and Elisabeth Wood's (2017, p. 24) definition of repertoires of violence which is "the subset of all possible forms of violence against civilians in which it regularly engages." They note that some rebel groups employ narrow repertoires of violence (a small number of types of abuses), while others use wide repertoires (a large number of types of abuses). Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood (2017, p. 24) also explain that groups vary significantly in the repertoires groups employ. Rather than focusing on how narrow or wide groups' repertoires of violence are, we are interested in explaining a specific, theoretically

puzzling, and important phenomenon: the decision by rebel organizations to show restraint in the use of sexual violence, even as they engage in a variety of other abuses.

This article offers two contributions. First, it is one of the only cross-rebel group *quantitative* analysis, to the best of our knowledge, that examines the factors that drive the use of sexual violence *relative to other forms of abuse*. Existing quantitative work tends to focus on individual types of abuses, including sexual violence (e.g., Cohen 2013, 2016; Nagel and Doctor 2020; Rustad et al. 2016; Sarwari 2021; Sawyer 2024; Whitaker et al. 2019), the killing and maiming of civilians (e.g., Fortna et al. 2018; Hultman 2007; Polo and Gleditsch 2016; Salehyan et al. 2014; Wood 2014), forced recruitment (e.g., Sawyer and Andrews 2020), and forced displacement (e.g., Balcells and Steele 2016). Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein (2006) examine overall levels of restraint, but do *not* examine repertoires of violence that involve restraint in some forms of violence but not others. Other studies compare sexual violence and killings as outcome variables, but they do not employ measures that capture the extent to which groups *combine* different types of violence (Guarnieri and Tur-Prats 2023; Savun et al. 2024).

While valuable, these quantitative studies do not provide a clear answer of how their explanatory variables of interest affect the type of abuse they are studying, *relative* to other abuses. In perhaps the closest study to ours, Michael Soules (2023), finds that rebel groups are less likely to perpetrate multi-perpetrator rape when they rely more on ideological appeals than material incentives for recruitment. However, Soules does not examine the effects of recruitment strategies on any other types of non-sexual violence and looks at rape specifically, not other forms of sexual violence.

A second contribution of this study is that it challenges the conventional wisdom regarding the impact of recruitment strategies on civilian victimization. Conventional wisdom suggests that

groups will be less likely to perpetrate multiple types of abuse, not just sexual violence (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2005, 2007). The commonly cited idea that greater reliance on ideological *recruitment* appeals restrains many forms of violence has largely not been quantitatively tested. Instead, we find that ideological-based recruitment strategies have a clear restraining effect on sexual violence but *not* other abuses.

Ideological Recruitment

We take a broad view of what “ideological recruitment” is. We distinguish between groups that rely more on material appeals for recruitment, such as salaries or the promises of loot, from those that mobilize around a variety of non-material or grievance-based issues. Groups that organize around non-material appeals can mobilize around a variety of grievances, some of which are directly related to commonly studied ideologies in civil wars, such as Marxism, radical jihadism, or ethnonationalism, and others which address more specific political or social grievances, such as local political problems or opposition to foreign military intervention (Soules 2023, p. 1822 – 1823). We consider recruitment appeals related to both grievances associated with broader ideologies as well as more specific grievances.

Building off prior work (e.g., Soules 2023; Weinstein 2005, 2007), we conceptualize groups’ reliance on ideological appeals as being on a spectrum, where on one end, some groups rely almost exclusively on material incentives, and on the opposite end, some rely almost fully on ideological appeals. There are many groups on the spectrum that employ both ideological and material appeals. While some still rely more heavily on one than the other, others employ a relatively even mixture (Soules 2023).

For instance, at one end of the spectrum, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) relied exclusively on non-material recruitment appeals (Weinstein 2005, p. 615-616). The group did not employ material recruitment incentives and individuals who joined the EPLF had to get rid of their personal property (Weinstein 2005, p. 616). On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Rally for Congolese Democracy primarily attracted recruits through the promise of pay (Marriage 2007, p. 283; Montague 2002, p. 111-112). More towards the middle of the spectrum, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, membership in the Ninjas served as one of the best sources of employment for many men in the area, but Christian theology also played an important role in mobilizing recruits (Carroll 2003).

As groups move more towards greater reliance on ideological appeals, we expect that they will be less likely to perpetrate sexual violence and more likely to wield repertoires of violence that involve restraint in sexual violence but not other abuses. While recruitment tactics might not always translate perfectly to the motives of recruits, we still expect that, on average, groups that rely more heavily on material incentives will have more materially motivated recruits, and those that rely more on ideological appeals will have more ideologically devoted recruits (Weinstein 2005, 2007).

Ideological-based recruitment is related to, but still distinct, from the broader ideologies of groups and ideological indoctrination. First, we should not conflate ideological appeals that are used specifically for recruitment with the broader ideologies of groups. Groups can still employ extensive material recruitment appeals even when they have broader, publicly declared ideologies. For instance, surveys of former members of Boko Haram (BBC 2017) and Al-Shabaab (Botha and Abdile 2014) reveal that a sizeable number joined, in part, for economic benefits.

Second, recruitment and indoctrination should not be conflated (Wood 2009, p. 140). If ideological and material recruitment appeals attract fundamentally different types of individuals (Weinstein 2005, 2007), then there can be variation in how such recruits respond to indoctrination. Indeed, if recruits attracted by ideological appeals are more willing to invest in long-term benefits than short-term gains, then they may be more amenable to indoctrination processes than recruits who are primarily materially motivated. For instance, evidence from Colombian militant groups reveals that, even within the same organization, ideologically driven recruits are less likely to desert or defect than their materially driven counterparts (Oppenheim et al. 2015). On the flipside, groups with extensive material wealth still sometimes mobilize around ideological appeals (Herbst 2000; Soules 2023). Moreover, while socialization and discipline are important, similar to Dara Kay Cohen, we argue that the “origin of group norms” can be found “in the recruitment choices of the armed groups.” (2016, 46).

Ideology, Violence, and Restraint

Existing literature examines how the ideological and material-based mobilization strategies of rebel organizations affect their treatment of civilians. Depending on its type and framing, ideology can itself have either a restraining or encouraging effect on violence (Hoover Green 2016, 2018; Leader Maynard 2019; Revkin and Wood 2021; Sarwari 2021; Straus 2012). Ideology can promote militant violence through at least two mechanisms (e.g., Basedau et al. 2022). First, ideology can promote the idea that the rebels are fighting for a “just cause,” which can increase animosity towards the ideological enemy and solidify the idea that violence is justified (Basedau et al. 2022). Second, armed groups’ ideologies can help them acquire external,

material support, which can provide them with the necessary strength to launch violent operations (Basedau et al. 2022).

Other work, however, focuses on how ideology can restrain rebel violence. The expectation is that groups that recruit with material incentives will be more violent towards civilians than those that employ ideological appeals because recruits in the former type of organization value private rewards more while those in the latter category work together to achieve common goals (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2005, 2007).

Restraint and Sexual Violence

Scholars have also investigated how ideology affects armed groups' perpetration of sexual violence. Mehwish Sarwari (2021) argues that left-wing rebels are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence, while religious groups are more likely to, because their ideologies place a different value on gender equality. Secessionist groups are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence because they are trying to acquire domestic support and legitimacy in the international community to bolster their claims of independence (Ju 2025).

Rebel institutionalization also affects patterns of sexual violence in civil wars. Rebel commanders must construct fighting forces that are willing to unhesitatingly employ violence in some contexts but show restraint in others (Hoover Green 2016). The commander can address this need through *recruitment*, training and socialization, discipline and internal intelligence (Wood 2018). Commanders may recruit members who are already committed to organizational ideology, aiding in this goal, or alternatively, they may recruit opportunistic recruits who are more difficult to control (Wood 2018). In addition, Hoover Green (2016, 2018) finds that rebel

movements with stronger, internal political education programs are more effective at socializing recruits to shift their preferences to align more closely with that of the rebel leadership, including restraining sexual violence. However, in situations where rebel institutionalization is weak, the result is unordered or unauthorized violence (Wood 2018).

Sexual violence differs from many of the abuses described in previous sections because sexual violence is typically *not* ordered by rebel commanders (e.g., Cohen 2016; Hoover Green 2016, p. 626, 2018; Ju 2022, p. 5 – 7; Wood 2009, p. 140 – 142, 2018, p. 514). Sexual violence is sometimes permitted or tolerated by rebel leaders, when preventing it would be too costly for them (Wood 2009) or when it can serve as a means of building cohesion among the rank-and-file (Cohen 2016). In addition, sexual violence leverages gender dynamics both in the benefit it provides the perpetrator (virility, strength, status, and even sexual gratification; Cohen 2016) and in the unique harm it can inflict upon victims (e.g., Diken and Lausten 2005; Sivakumaran 2007). Consequently, better disciplined, more obedient recruits are more likely to show restraint in sexual violence, which is typically unordered, but are not necessarily more restrained in the use of other forms of violence, which are often ordered by rebel commanders (Hoover Green 2016, 2018).

The Mechanisms

We expect that when rebel groups rely more heavily on material incentives than ideological appeals for recruitment, rebel leaders will be both *less able and less willing* to restrain their subordinates' use of sexual violence. We do not expect that this logic transfers to other forms of abuse against civilians.

Command-and-Control

Leaders of groups that rely more on ideological recruitment appeals have greater *ability* to ensure their cadres wield such repertoires of violence, as their recruits are less insubordinate, on average (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2005, 2007). We argue this is for two reasons. First, recruitment type should attract recruits with specific dispositions. In the language of Weinstein (2005), material recruitment attracts opportunistic joiners, while ideological recruitment attracts activist recruits. The former has shorter time horizons and are less focused on trust or the ultimate goals of the group, while the latter have longer time horizons, trust the group, are generally aligned with their goals and are more linked into social networks that enforce obedience. This suggests that ideological recruitment attracts a type of recruit with a different disposition than those recruited materially. They are more committed, trustworthy, and obedient, all else equal. As a result, ideologically motivated recruits are less likely to be disobedient, including being less likely to perpetrate unsanctioned acts of violence (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006).

Second, rebel groups have a variety of tools to socialize combatants to behave in specific ways (Hoover Green 2017; Wood 2018). Groups can indoctrinate recruits to more closely align their preference with those of the leadership. This makes it more likely that recruits will obey the orders of their leaders, showing restraint and perpetrating violence when commanded to do so (Hoover Green 2016, 2018). We expect that this process of aligning recruits' preferences with those of the rebel leadership will be easier with recruits motivated primarily by ideological appeals. First, because these groups are mobilizing around *shared* ideological and identity-based ties, recruits and leaders will already have preferences that are somewhat closely aligned with each other. Second, because ideologically driven recruits care more about engaging in pro-social

behavior that benefits their groups (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2005, 2007), we posit that these cadres will be more open to indoctrination.

Obedience is directly relevant to our expectations regarding sexual violence as commanders often have the incentive to restrain the use of sexual violence. Sexual violence is reputationally costly amongst potential civilian supporters (Whitaker et al. 2019). Moreover, a group's battlefield effectiveness is weakened using sexual violence due to the risk of contracting infections, the longer time it takes to perpetrate relative to other forms of violence, and the greater emotional toll sexual violence carries because of the close physical contact required (Cohen 2016, 33-5). Additionally, while sexual violence helps build social cohesion amongst disparate recruits, it weakens task cohesion which is needed to win on the battlefield (Cohen 2016, 26-7). Thus, from a principal-agent perspective it would be in the best interest of a commander to prohibit sexual violence when possible. We argue that ideologically motivated recruits are more likely to be obedient to these rules. Wood (2018) suggests that most groups that have perpetrated sexual violence do so as a tolerated practice, not a deliberately ordered policy, suggesting a breakdown in control or the interaction between commander and rank-and-file. A tolerated practice is more likely to flow from recruits who are opportunistic, less obedient, and who care less about the ultimate goals of the group.

Materially driven recruits, who care less about obedience and the success of their groups, will be more likely to engage in opportunistic sexual violence. Sexual violence in many contexts is used for personal benefit as part of Count Tilly's Reward (Mitchell 2004). Perpetrator interviews highlight a variety of personal motivations including sexual gratification, joy at inflicting harm on others, revenge, and the demonstration of masculinity and status (Cohen 2016).

Sexual violence can even be an informal form of compensation that is tolerated by (rebel) commanders (Baaz and Stern 2009, 2013; Wood 2014; Ju 2022). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, soldiers who did not receive their promised salaries believed they were denied the right to be with women in the “normal way,” through gifts or payment (Baaz and Stern 2009). Thus, sexual violence is sometimes framed as a morally acceptable form of compensation for soldiers who desire a material reward, one which commanders may tolerate rather than prohibit.

Indeed, groups that rely on contraband funding have a higher likelihood of sexual violence (Cohen 2016). Moreover, in groups that lack sufficiently strong command-and-control, enforcing punishment for sexual violence could be costly for commanders that may prioritize military objectives or unit cohesion rather than combatting sexual violence (Wood 2018), especially when punishment risks the security of the leader themselves. Because materially driven recruits care less about the long-term success of their groups, and because it is harder to align their preferences with that of the leadership, we expect that rebel leaders will have a more difficult time restraining these recruits and may themselves have incentives to tolerate sexual violence.

However, in contrast, we do *not* expect that groups that recruit more heavily with ideological appeals will be any more or less likely to perpetrate other forms of violence. Amelia Hoover Green (2016, 2018) explains why rebel groups that have highly obedient cadres are more likely to show restraint in the use of sexual violence but *not* other forms of abuse. Hoover Green argues that rational rebel commanders, who are concerned about the reputation and success of their groups, still order the killing of civilians. While it can be difficult for observers to determine whether specific killings were ordered or unordered, rebel leaders still sometimes strategically order the killing of civilians.

In contrast, Hoover Green, building off work by Wood (2009), explains that rebel leaders rarely explicitly order rape. Rather, Hoover Green posits that rape is a practice that spreads across the rank-and-file. Consequently, groups with obedient cadres are less likely to perpetrate rape because this form of abuse is typically unordered, but that such groups are *not* less likely to kill civilians, as this type of abuse is more commonly ordered by rebel commanders. Thus, obedient recruits will be more likely to show restraint in some areas, but not others, while disobedient recruits lack restraint in the use of a variety of types of violence (Hoover Green 2016, 2018). We expect that because ideologically driven recruits tend to be more obedient than those motivated by material gain, the former will be more likely to employ repertoires of violence that involve restraint in sexual violence but not other abuses.

Cohesion

Leaders of organizations that rely more on material incentives for recruitment will also be less *willing* to restrain their cadres' use of sexual violence because the cohesion building benefit of sexual violence incentivizes commander toleration. Cohen (2016) highlights a dilemma that when rebel organizations use forced recruitment, they need to create a coherent group from strangers who neither know each other, nor have loyalty toward the group they have been recruited into. Her answer is that costly, risky group violence helps groups build trust, loyalty and cohesion. Cohesion may follow from group violence because such violence creates a sense of collective responsibility for atrocities; sends a costly signal of loyalty and commitment; severs ties that combatants have to their previous lives through targeting people in their former communities; can help recruits gain acceptance from peers; and can serve as a performative act of group camaraderie (Cohen 2016).

Cohen notes that battlefield experiences and group perpetration of atrocities also help forge these bonds. Repertoires could include a variety of violence (i.e., arbitrary killings, detention and disappearances, torture, property violations, forcible recruitment, forced displacement, restriction of movement, and sexual violence). However, Cohen (2016) expects that gang rape, *relative to other forms of abuses*, will be particularly effective at fostering bonds. Gang rape in particular increases the social status of perpetrators. Moreover, gang rape involves “collective responsibility, loss of individual identity and values, and the creation of cohesion and camaraderie” (Cohen 2016, p. 29). Cohen further explains that gang rape is somewhat distinct from other forms of violence in that it is rooted in power dynamics, control, domination, emasculation, and has a particularly theatric nature. The perpetration of sexual violence carries a distinct hypermasculinist trait that may make it particularly relevant for building social cohesion among individuals that lack prior bonds (Cohen 2016).

Taken together, other forms of violence are not expected to be as effective as cohesion building tools. Thus, low levels of cohesion should have a much stronger association with sexual violence than other forms of civilian victimization. Similarly, we expect there to be variation in the levels of cohesion across groups that engage in voluntary recruitment. Other mobilization practices that lead to lower levels of cohesion are also associated with increased sexual violence by rebel organizations, including the recruitment of foreign fighters (Doctor 2021) and child soldiers (Faulkner and Welsh 2022).

The expectation in prior literature is that groups that mobilize around shared ideological and/or identity-based ties will be more cohesive than groups that primarily recruit with material incentives (Weinstein 2005, 2007). Groups using ideological appeals, as discussed above, create greater bonds of trust, and leverage social networks such as community and kin, for recruitment.

Thus, relative to groups that organize around material incentives, those that recruit with ideological appeals will have less need for additional cohesion building practices and derive less utility from sexual violence. Moreover, groups using ideological appeals may be more likely to pursue alternative socialization mechanisms that do not require violence as the primary mode for cohesion building exercises (see Hoover Green 2016). Indeed, Cohen (2016, p. 23) argues that groups that rely on existing social ties have less reason to employ gang rape. However, as noted above, because other forms of violence are not useful for achieving social cohesion in the same way as sexual violence, we do not expect recruitment appeals to influence other violations in the same manner.

Counterexample

There are some groups that exist who, in the pursuit of ideological agendas, also pursue sexual violence, using ideology to promote violence against perceived enemies. Despite this, we still believe in general that ideological appeals will have a restraining effect. First, these cases, while significant in scale (e.g., Bosnia, Rwanda, Myanmar), are less frequent than groups that utilize sexual violence as a tolerated practice (e.g., Wood 2018). Second, if ideology is strongly associated with increased violence, it will be harder for us to observe our expected effects empirically.

Finally, some groups that follow this pattern also showcase unique variation. Take for example the Islamic State (IS). This group uses a blend of material and ideological appeals (Soules 2023) and has strong ideological foundation underpinning their behavior (see Revkin and Wood 2021, 8-9). On the one hand, we expect that their use of material recruitment appeals will

lead them to attract less committed and less obedient recruits, increasing the likelihood of sexual violence. Given the code-of-conduct violations discussed below, this expectation is matched in certain cases. However, Revkin and Wood (2021) also find that IS developed “ideologically-motivated organizational policies” (3) authorizing specific forms of violence, suggesting that ideology can be violence promoting rather than violence restraining. Such policies led to Yazidis being targeted with widespread sexual enslavement – justified from the top-down.

However, additionally unauthorized practices falling outside the ideologically founded policy were also present, such as gang rape of Yazidi women and forced marriage of Sunni women. In fact, IS reportedly punished both officials and combatants for violations of these codes of conduct (Revkin and Wood 2021). Thus, despite IS perpetrating extreme violence including organizationally promoted sexual abuses, we observe the group’s foundational ideology, which was a primary appeal of recruitment, structuring group norms and restraining this extreme violence within a particular pattern.

Testable Implications

To summarize, we expect that rebel groups that rely more on ideological appeals than material incentives for recruitment will be more likely to employ repertoires of violence that involve restraint in the use of sexual violence but *not* other abuses. Our two main hypotheses are that:

H1: Rebel groups that rely more on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, will be less likely to perpetrate sexual violence.

And

H2: Rebel groups that rely more on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, will be more likely to employ repertoires of violence that involve restraint in the use of sexual violence, but not in the perpetration of other types of abuses.

Research Design

Dependent Variables

To capture civilian abuses by rebel groups, we rely on data from the Rebel Human Rights Violations (RHRV) dataset (Walsh et al. 2024). The RHRV dataset builds off existing datasets on the killing of civilians (e.g., Eck and Hultman 2007) and sexual violence (e.g., Cohen and Nordås 2014; Dumaine et al. 2022), by providing information on a variety of types of human rights abuses perpetrated by rebel organizations.

This dataset contains information on groups that were active across the world during the period of 1990 to 2018. It includes information on rebel dyad-years for groups derived from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program's (UCDP) dyadic conflict dataset (Harbom et al. 2008). Thus, this dataset allows users to not only examine differences in behavior across rebel groups, but differences within these movements over time. The RHRV dataset draws information from U.S. State Department and Amnesty International human rights reports to measure the prevalence of eight types of human rights abuses: sexual violence, arbitrary killings, torture, detention, forced recruitment, forced displacement, restriction of movement, and property destruction. These variables are measured on a scale between no (0), occasional or infrequent (1), and frequent or systematic (2). This allows us to compare sexual violence to a wide variety of other abuses. The RHRV dataset codes sexual violence as any instance of rape, sexual assault, genital or breast

mutilation, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, sexual abuse/exploitation, and/or forced abortion (Walsh et al. 2022).

The core hypotheses posit that rebel groups that rely more on ideological appeals than material incentives for recruitment will show restraint in the use of sexual violence but employ other forms of civilian abuse. To capture this, we take a couple of different approaches. First, we build individual binary indicators of each of the eight types of abuses in the RHRV dataset that capture whether groups were reported as at least sometimes engaging in the abuse in a given year. Reporting biases can make it difficult to accurately capture the prevalence of human rights abuses, such as sexual violence (Davies and True 2017; Hoover Green 2018). Given this, we follow the precedent of prior scholarship and employ dichotomous measures of whether the specific abuse occurred at all (Davies and True 2017; Hoover Green 2018; Nagel and Doctor 2020; Soules 2023). Given that these variables are all dichotomous, we employ a series of logistic regression analyses.

Second, we also attempted to more directly measure repertoires of violence that involve the use of at least some forms of abuse but *not* sexual violence. To do this, we begin by using the above measures to create a binary indicator of whether a group *did not* employ sexual violence in a given year *but did* employ at least one form of lethal or non-lethal, non-sexual violence. However, treating this repertoire as a simple binary risks obscuring variation among groups that do not specifically refrain from using sexual violence while still employing other abuses. Indeed, some of these groups employ sexual violence along with a variety of other forms of abuse, while others do not engage in human rights violations against civilians at all. We want to be able to distinguish groups show restraint in sexual violence specifically from groups that show restraint in general.

To do this, we conduct multinomial logistic regression analyses where the outcome variable is coded as no civilian victimization (1), use of sexual violence (2), and restraint in sexual violence but *not* other abuses (3). To be classified in the second category, groups can also engage in non-sexual violence, they just need to have also perpetrated sexual violence. The third category captures groups that did not use sexual violence but did perpetrate at least one other type of abuse. We treat this third category, repertoires that involve restraint in sexual violence but the perpetration of other abuses, as the reference category. Treating this repertoire as the reference category allows us to most directly compare it to the other possible outcomes (no violence and at least some sexual violence). To find support for the second hypothesis, we would need to find a negative and statistically significant association between ideological recruitment and the other two categories, as this would suggest groups that rely more on ideological appeals are less likely to use sexual violence or no violence at all, relative to employing repertoires that show restraint in sexual violence but not other abuses. Approximately 36% of the observations fall into the first category, 17% into the second, and 47% into the third.

There are three additional points about this measure to consider. First, the question may arise as to why we compare sexual violence to all other abuses in the RHRV dataset. We do this, because as discussed throughout the article and in existing literature, there is a significant claim that sexual violence is distinct from other forms of violence, including in its reputational and physical costs (e.g., Cohen 2016, 2017).

Second, in the RHRV dataset sexual violence is a separately coded subset of torture. Essentially all instances of sexual violence are also coded as torture. This includes abuses such as rape and forced abortion, which are distinguished from “sexual torture” in other data (Dumaine et al. 2022). However, not all torture is coded as sexual violence. A group that commits forms of

torture (or any other abuse) that are *not* sexual, are coded as 1, while a group that commits any form of sexual violence specified earlier, is coded as a 0. Said differently, we count groups as committing torture when they are coded in the RHRV as engaging in torture but *not* engaging in sexual violence. A potential counterargument to this approach is that it induces measurement error because it cannot identify groups that engage in both sexual violence *and* non-sexual torture. While an important point to consider, we do not believe that it substantially affects our construction of the categorical measure of repertoires of violence. Indeed, a group is coded as a 2, engaging in sexual violence, if it uses sexual violence, regardless of whether it perpetrates additional abuses. Furthermore, because we breakout forms of non-sexual torture, groups that show restraint in sexual violence but do engage in non-sexual torture can be correctly coded as a 3 (restraint in sexual violence but not in at least some other forms of abuse). Said differently, our inability to isolate groups that commit both sexual violence and non-sexual violence does not change our coding of the multinomial outcome variable. Thus, while there is overlap in types of abuses, our measures distinguish between abuses that have at least some sexual dimension from those that do not.¹

Third, the RHRV dataset does not contain all forms of violence. It does not contain other common measures of civilian victimization in civil wars, including one-sided violence (e.g., Eck and Hultman 2007) and terrorism (e.g., Fortna et al. 2018). However, the RHRV dataset, to the best of our knowledge, provides the most comprehensive resource on the variety of types civilian abuses perpetrated by rebel organizations.

Independent Variable

Both hypotheses maintain that the extent to which rebel groups rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, will help shape their repertoires of violence. We employ data from the Rebel Appeals and Incentives Dataset (RAID) (Soules 2023). RAID contains several measures of rebel organizations' recruitment practices, including a five-point ordinal indicator measuring the degree to which groups rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment. This variable indicates whether a group recruits entirely with ideological appeals (4), mostly with ideological appeals and some material incentives (3), a relatively even mixture of ideological and material appeals (2), mostly with material incentives and some ideological appeals (1), or entirely with material incentives (0).

This variable was constructed using detailed, qualitative narratives on the recruitment practices of rebel organizations that were written to accompany RAID. The measure is based on evidence of both the specific types of recruitment appeals groups employ, as well as the relative frequency at which they employ them (Soules 2023). Specifically, Soules began by identifying whether the group employed material incentives, ideological appeals, or both for recruitment. If there was only evidence of the group employing just material incentives or just ideological appeals, the group was coded as being on the respective far end of the spectrum (fully material or fully ideological appeals). If there was evidence that a group employed both ideological and material appeals, Soules then endeavored to determine the relative frequency at which groups employed such appeals. If there was evidence of a group systematically employing one broad type of appeal (material or ideological), while only infrequently or idiosyncratically employing the other type, then a group was coded as either relying mostly on ideological and somewhat on

material incentives or vice versa. If groups appeared to employ both at the same relative frequency, then they were coded as taking a mixed approach.

Due to difficulties associated with gathering detailed information on rebels' recruitment, the measure of reliance on ideological appeals is time invariant. This is a limitation of the data, as some rebel organizations shift their recruitment strategies overtime. However, RAID is the only dataset that captures the extent to which militant organizations rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment.

The groups in RAID are taken from the list of actors, that were active between 1989 and 2011, in the Non-State Actor (NSA) dataset (Cunningham et al. 2013). 224 of the 232 groups in RAID are also found in the RHRV dataset, providing substantial overlap to leverage for the analysis. The measure of reliance on ideological appeals is included for all years for each of the 224 groups in the RHRV dataset, not just for the years 1989 to 2011, as the data in RAID are intended to cover the entire lifespans of groups (Soules 2023). Of the overlapping sample between RAID and the RHRV, 14 groups are coded as relying exclusively on material incentives; 26 as using mostly material incentives; 25 as employing a relatively even mixture; 64 as using mostly ideological appeals; and 95 as relying exclusively ideological appeals.

Control Variables

We briefly discuss the control variables here, providing justification for them in the appendix due to space constraints. First, we include three separate binary indicators for secessionist aims and left-wing and radical Islamist ideologies. These variables are built by combining data from the Women in Armed Rebellion Dataset (Wood and Thomas 2017) and the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence dataset (Braithwaite and Cunningham 2020).

Second, using data from the NSA dataset, we included a simplified version of the variable measuring a rebel group's strength, relative to the government. We include a three-point ordinal indicator of whether the group is much weaker, weaker, or at parity or stronger.² Next, with a binary indicator from the NSA dataset, we account for whether a group controls territory.

Fourth, using data from the Rebel Contraband Dataset (Walsh et al. 2018), we include a dichotomous measure of whether groups profit from lootable natural resources. We also control for whether a group receives funding from external actors, using data from Sawyer et al. (2017).

Fifth, with information from the NSA dataset, we include a binary indicator of whether a group has a clear central command. We also include a binary indicator of whether a group employs forced recruitment, using data from the RHRV dataset. Rebels that rely on material incentives are more likely to turn to coercive recruitment (Weinstein 2007) and groups that forcibly recruit are also more likely to perpetrate sexual violence (Cohen 2013, 2016). The measure of forced recruitment is not built into the dependent variable, however, we conduct alternative tests in which it is, and the results remain consistent.

We also hold constant conflict and country-level factors. We include the UCDP's binary measure of conflict intensity (whether there were 1,000 or more battle-related deaths in a given year) (Harbom et al. 2008). Additionally, we include the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset's measure of women's political empowerment (Sundström et al. 2017). We also employ the measure of Electoral Democracy from V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2022). With data from Fariss et al. (2022) we include logged measures of a country's per capita GDP and their population. Finally, to account for temporal dependencies, we include the time, time-squared, and time-cubed since the last occurrence of the abuse or repertoire of violence being analyzed (Carter and Signorino 2010).

Results

We begin by analyzing how reliance on ideological appeals affects a variety of different types of human rights abuses, the results of which are displayed in **Table 1**. The standard errors are clustered on the rebel group. In support of the core hypothesis, the results in **Table 1** show that more ideologically driven groups and recruits will be more likely to wield repertoires of violence that show restraint in the use of sexual violence, but not other forms of abuse. Thus, contrary to the conventional wisdom, ideological-based mobilization does not appear to have a uniform effect on the reduction of different types of violence.

Table 1: Reliance on Ideological Appeals and Types of Violence Against Civilians

	(1) Sexual Violence	(2) Killings	(3) Displacement	(4) Torture	(5) Property	(6) Detention	(7) Restrict Movement	(8) Forced Recruitment
Ideological Recruitment	-0.353** (0.132)	0.137 (0.0939)	-0.149 (0.159)	-0.0771 (0.0983)	0.122 (0.0856)	0.0805 (0.0908)	0.289+ (0.166)	0.0238 (0.117)
Secessionist Aims	-0.532 (0.438)	-0.262 (0.286)	0.0263 (0.449)	0.119 (0.365)	-0.298 (0.284)	0.203 (0.275)	-0.585 (0.386)	-0.521+ (0.272)
Left-Wing	-0.520 (0.458)	-0.0495 (0.281)	0.799+ (0.453)	-0.185 (0.384)	0.138 (0.319)	-0.105 (0.317)	0.130 (0.467)	0.839* (0.358)
Radical Islamist	-0.246 (0.441)	0.0699 (0.308)	0.559 (0.415)	0.163 (0.337)	0.0142 (0.297)	0.414 (0.341)	0.143 (0.447)	0.0269 (0.325)
Rebel Strength	-0.204 (0.272)	0.190 (0.185)	-0.441+ (0.251)	0.0909 (0.233)	0.515** (0.174)	0.269 (0.210)	0.793** (0.293)	0.201 (0.192)
Territorial Control	0.716* (0.343)	0.432* (0.200)	0.944** (0.352)	1.044*** (0.241)	0.426* (0.217)	0.840*** (0.242)	1.146** (0.390)	0.725** (0.233)
Lootable Resources	0.266 (0.256)	0.398* (0.194)	0.723* (0.294)	0.523* (0.235)	0.228 (0.239)	0.376 (0.241)	0.918** (0.329)	0.694** (0.242)
External Funding	-0.0930 (0.383)	0.0541 (0.259)	0.677+ (0.400)	-0.377 (0.264)	-0.279 (0.239)	0.163 (0.275)	0.578+ (0.342)	1.076*** (0.247)
Central Control	-2.250*** (0.562)	-0.764+ (0.454)	-1.838** (0.590)	-1.300* (0.589)	-0.457 (0.515)	-0.305 (0.583)	1.645 (1.343)	-0.0104 (0.580)
Forced Recruitment	3.118*** (0.336)	2.565*** (0.309)	1.646*** (0.349)	2.504*** (0.263)	1.790*** (0.220)	2.461*** (0.244)	1.828*** (0.299)	
Conflict Intensity	0.292 (0.286)	0.937*** (0.219)	1.016*** (0.275)	0.600** (0.222)	1.100*** (0.240)	0.803*** (0.214)	0.711* (0.352)	0.992*** (0.286)
Women's Political Empowerment	-0.202 (1.204)	1.208 (0.847)	-0.709 (1.105)	1.059 (0.857)	1.916* (0.877)	1.760+ (0.944)	-3.193** (1.126)	3.834*** (0.934)
Democracy Score	2.419* (1.042)	2.491** (0.813)	2.415+ (1.385)	1.031 (0.996)	1.469 (1.004)	1.587+ (0.921)	4.200*** (1.188)	-2.470** (0.924)
per capita GDP (ln)	-1.044* (0.485)	-0.0861 (0.299)	0.193 (0.504)	-0.746+ (0.398)	-0.107 (0.316)	-0.0169 (0.323)	0.929+ (0.497)	0.191 (0.336)
Population (ln)	-0.183 (0.299)	-0.120 (0.199)	-0.234 (0.312)	-0.544* (0.257)	-0.291 (0.202)	-0.0942 (0.204)	-0.0546 (0.384)	0.374 (0.234)
t	-0.964*** (0.171)	-0.994*** (0.222)	-1.276*** (0.272)	-1.132*** (0.156)	-0.591*** (0.120)	-0.525*** (0.139)	-0.502** (0.182)	-1.086*** (0.150)
t ²	0.144*** (0.0323)	0.148* (0.0602)	0.174*** (0.0501)	0.170*** (0.0310)	0.0666*** (0.0171)	0.0516* (0.0254)	0.0461+ (0.0275)	0.114*** (0.0243)
t ³	-0.00565*** (0.00163)	-0.00589+ (0.00331)	-0.00665** (0.00243)	-0.00658*** (0.00160)	-0.00212*** (0.000598)	-0.00190 (0.00122)	-0.00135 (0.00103)	-0.00319*** (0.000931)
Constant	0.907 (1.527)	-2.125+ (1.093)	-1.391 (1.568)	0.103 (1.195)	-3.904*** (1.157)	-4.072** (1.272)	-8.338*** (2.390)	-5.663*** (1.219)
Observations	1,095	1,095	1,095	1,095	1,095	1,095	1,095	1,095
Chi ²	166.5	240.5	173.6	310.1	265	231.4	151.1	168.3
Log Likelihood	-294.8	-496.2	-277.1	-390.8	-452.5	-458.3	-251.2	-430.5
Pseudo R-squared	0.404	0.330	0.405	0.408	0.302	0.372	0.431	0.327

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

The results in Model 1 show that there is a negative and statistically significant association between reliance on ideological recruitment appeals and the perpetration of sexual violence. This finding builds off previous literature (Soules 2023) by showing that ideological recruitment is associated with restraint in sexual violence more generally, not just rape specifically. However, contrary to the conventional wisdom, we do not find evidence that groups are more restrained in other types of abuse when they rely more on ideological appeals than material incentives for recruitment (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2005, 2007). Indeed, ideological recruitment even has a borderline statistically significant but *positive* association with the restriction of movement.³ **Figure 1** displays the marginal effects of reliance on ideological appeals on the perpetration of sexual violence. Groups that mobilize exclusively around material incentives have about a 12.95% chance of perpetrating sexual violence in a given year, while the probability is approximately 6.83% for organizations that employ a relatively even combination of ideological and material appeals, and is only 3.49% for groups that rely exclusively on ideological recruitment appeals.

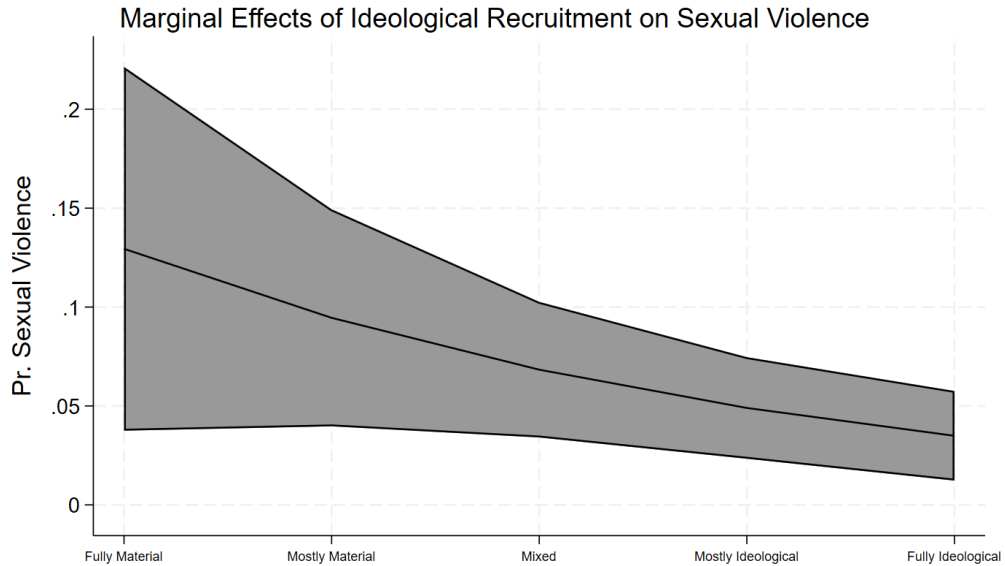


Figure 1: Marginal Effects of Reliance in Ideological Recruitment Appeals on Sexual Violence

Table 2 displays the results for the multinomial logistic regression analysis. We include multiple models that gradually add control variables, starting with bivariate analysis. We do this because suppression effects induced by the addition of control variables can drive results to become statistically significant (Lenz and Sahn 2021).

Across all models, greater reliance on ideological appeals has a negative and statistically significant association with both employing no forms of civilian abuse and employing repertoires of violence that include sexual violence, *relative* to using repertoires that involve some abuses but *not* sexual violence. The association between ideological recruitment and repertoires featuring sexual violence is statistically significant in all models, while the relationship between ideological recruitment and restraint in all forms of abuse is statistically significant in all but the bivariate model. Thus, we find consistent evidence that groups are less likely to employ repertoires that include sexual violence than *violent* repertoires that show restraint in sexual

violence when they rely more on ideological appeals. We also find some evidence that groups that depend more on ideological appeals are less likely to completely refrain from human rights abuses than they are to employ some violence (while showing restraint in sexual violence).

Figure 2 displays the marginal effects of ideological recruitment on the probability that each of the three repertoires of interest is employed. In line with our expectations, as reliance on ideological recruitment appeals increases, so to does the probability of groups wielding repertoires of violence that involve some abuses but which show restraint in sexual violence. However, as reliance on ideological appeals goes up, the probability that a group either does not perpetrate any abuses or engage in repertoires that include the use of sexual violence goes down. For instance, among groups that rely exclusively on ideological appeals, the probability of engaging in some abuses but showing restraint in sexual violence is about 70.39%. In contrast, groups that depend fully on ideological appeals are only approximately 5.84% chance of employing repertoires of violence that include sexual violence. The chances that groups with such recruitment tactics do not violate human rights in a given year is 23.77%. Taken together, these findings suggest that ideological recruitment has a particular constraining effect on sexual violence, even relative to other abuses.

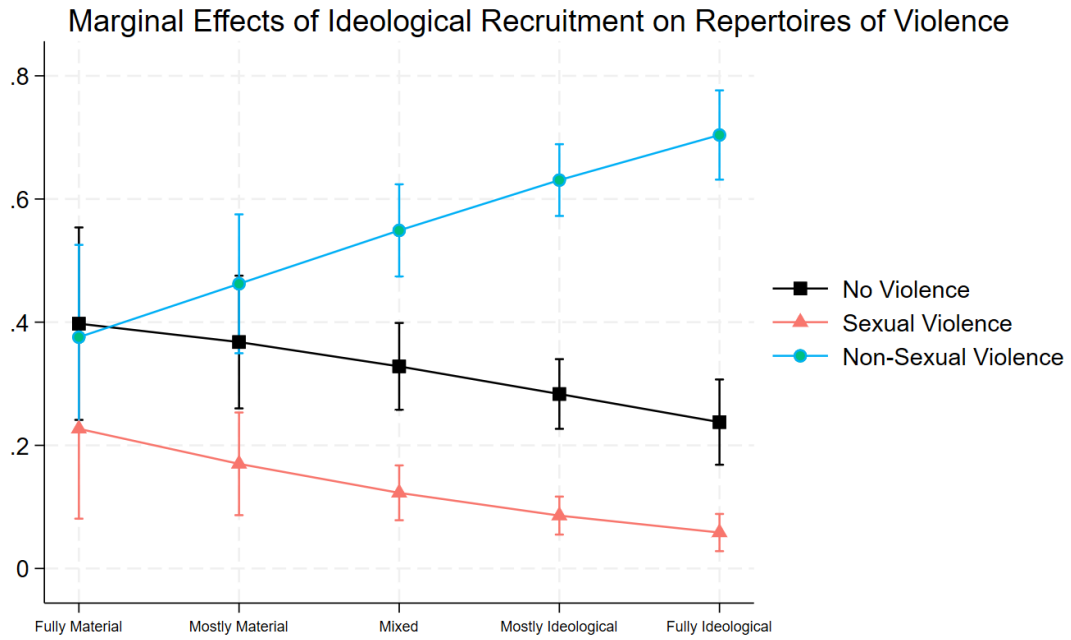


Figure 2: Marginal Effects of Ideological Recruitment on Repertoires of Violence

Table 2: Multinomial Logit – Ideological Appeals with Restraint in Sexual Violence as the Reference Category

	(1) No Violence	(2) Sexual Violence	(3) No Violence	(4) Sexual Violence	(5) No Violence	(6) Sexual Violence
Ideological Recruitment	-0.123 (0.116)	-0.439*** (0.125)	-0.213+ (0.124)	-0.502** (0.157)	-0.286* (0.116)	-0.496** (0.155)
Secessionist Aims			-0.176 (0.268)	-0.747 (0.478)	0.314 (0.323)	-0.616 (0.553)
Left-Wing			-0.445 (0.323)	-0.797+ (0.474)	-0.158 (0.356)	-0.622 (0.489)
Radical Islamist			-0.564+ (0.338)	-0.751 (0.473)	-0.193 (0.347)	-0.482 (0.512)
Relative Rebel Strength			-0.203 (0.206)	-0.0849 (0.293)	-0.230 (0.219)	-0.190 (0.298)
Territorial Control			-0.155 (0.245)	0.717+ (0.378)	-0.381 (0.242)	0.729+ (0.402)
Lootable Resources			-0.727** (0.277)	0.0959 (0.287)	-0.534* (0.246)	0.108 (0.285)
External Funding			0.235 (0.298)	-0.104 (0.390)	0.0297 (0.304)	-0.243 (0.457)
Central Control			0.280 (0.503)	-2.563*** (0.773)	0.447 (0.492)	-2.346*** (0.652)
Forced Recruitment			-2.402*** (0.385)	2.474*** (0.336)	-2.318*** (0.393)	2.626*** (0.335)
Conflict Intensity					-1.114*** (0.287)	0.119 (0.295)
Women's Political Empowerment					-1.343 (1.050)	-0.856 (1.371)
Democracy Score					-2.713** (0.944)	1.737 (1.188)
per capita GDP (ln)					0.0897 (0.349)	-0.926+ (0.536)
Population (ln)					0.302 (0.229)	-0.132 (0.328)
Constant	0.113 (0.358)	0.195 (0.380)	1.300 (0.793)	1.815+ (1.085)	2.991* (1.265)	2.180 (1.720)
Observations	1,269	1,269	1,104	1,104	1,095	1,095
Chi ²	12.29**	12.29**	199.3***	199.3***	283.2***	283.2***
Log Likelihood	-1278	-1278	-873.6	-873.6	-814.2	-814.2
Pseudo R-squared	0.0128	0.0128	0.223	0.223	0.271	0.271

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, + p<0.1

Robustness Checks

We employ a variety of robustness checks. The results are available in the appendix.

Alternative Dependent Variables (Hypothesis 2)

All forms of violence captured in the dependent variable measuring mixed repertoires of violence, besides arbitrary killings, are non-lethal forms of abuse. The fact that the dependent variable disproportionately measures non-lethal violence could be driving the results. To ensure that this is not the case, we construct an alternative version of the dependent variable that incorporates data from the UCDP one-sided violence dataset (Eck and Hultman 2007), which measures the number of civilians that rebel groups kill. We created a binary indicator measuring whether a group killed at least 25 civilians in a given year, which is the minimum threshold for a group to enter the one-sided violence dataset in a given year.

From this, we created an alternative measure of the multinomial dependent variable that includes whether groups met this minimum threshold of violence. Specifically, groups are still coded as engaging in no violence against civilians (1), repertoires that involve at least sexual violence (2), or repertoires involving the perpetration of other abuses but restraint in sexual violence (3). However, these “other abuses” can now also constitute one-sided violence. We rerun the main analysis, using this alternative dependent variable, and continue to find very similar results to the main analysis (**Table A1**).

We did not include forced recruitment in the initial measure, and instead, used it as a control variable. However, as a robustness check, we construct an alternative version of the multinomial dependent variable that includes forced recruitment as part of non-sexual abuses. Even with this

alternative measure, we continue to find the same pattern of results from the main analysis (**Table A2**).

Again, we are interested in understanding why groups restrain sexual violence, even when abusing civilians in other ways. While we believe that the multinomial logit tests best capture these dynamics, as described above, we want to ensure idiosyncrasies of this strategy are not driving the results. To do this, we conduct logistic regression analyses using a simple binary outcome variable capturing whether groups employ repertoires that involve restraint in sexual violence but *not* other abuses (1) or not (0). Across all models, we find a positive and statistically significant association between ideological recruitment and repertoires of violence involving restraint in sexual violence but not other abuses, providing further support for the second hypothesis (**Table A3**).

Ordinal Dependent Variables (Hypothesis 1)

We also consider alternative tests of the first hypothesis. As noted earlier, the RHRV dataset provides ordinal measures of each of the human rights abuses (Walsh et al. 2024). While we employ binary indicators in the main analysis, we run additional tests in which conduct a series of ordered logistic regression analyses using the ordinal measures as the outcome variables. Given concerns that including lagged dependent variables could bias results (Achen 2000), we conduct models both with and without these measures.

In the model without the lagged dependent variable (**Table A4**), reliance on ideological appeals has a strong, negative and statistically significant association with the prevalence of sexual violence. When the lagged dependent variable is included (**Table A5**), however, this

relationship drops below statistical significance. Including the lagged dependent variable does drop nearly 30% of the observations, which could bias the results. However, these results, taken with the main analysis, might also suggest that while ideological-based recruitment strategies restrain the decision of whether to use any sexual violence, they have less effect on the level of sexual violence if these types of abuses are employed. Regardless of whether the lagged dependent variable is included, reliance on ideological appeals does not have a statistically significant association with any of the other types of human rights abuses.

Temporal Issues (Both Hypotheses)

Another potential issue with the analysis is that the measure of ideological recruitment is time invariant. While at least some groups vary their recruitment strategies over time, RAID does not capture such variation due to limited information availability (Soules 2023). Thus, this measure of ideological recruitment misses at least some important temporal variation.

Additionally, using a time invariant explanatory variable makes it difficult to rule out reverse causality. If groups' patterns of violence affect their popularity and ability to attract recruits, then such violence could incentivize groups to shift their recruitment strategies to account for their shifting popularity.

To address the issue of using a time invariant explanatory variable, we take two steps. First, we consider the potential for reverse causality. From a measurement standpoint, reliance on ideological appeals is measured as temporally invariant in RAID because Soules detected information on temporal shifts in recruitment for only 9 of the 232 groups. For these 9 groups, their most frequently employed recruitment strategy was used for the cross-sectional measure.

However, in every case, this corresponded with the groups' initial recruitment strategies (Soules 2023, p. 1816). Thus, we expect that many groups in RAID did not substantially change their recruitment strategies over time, and for those that did, their initial recruitment tactics are captured. This reduces some of our concerns about reverse causality.

To address this issue empirically, we rerun both main sets of analyses, excluding the final two years of activities for every single group. We remove these late-stage observations because as conflicts draw on and groups become more desperate, they sometimes shift their recruitment tactics (Weinstein 2005, 2007) and repertoires of violence (e.g., Polo and Gleditsch 2016), which could make the relationship between the two variables more difficult to disentangle.⁴ When we do this, we find the same patterns of support for Hypothesis 1 (**Table A6**) and Hypothesis 2 (**Table A7**) that we do in the main analysis.

Second, we also want to account for the possibility that we inflated the number of observations by using a time-series cross-sectional dataset even though the explanatory variable is time invariant. To address this, we collapse the dataset into just a cross-section of groups. For all groups, we take the modal value of each outcome variable.

For the first set of analyses, we continue to find a negative and statistically significant association between ideological recruitment and the perpetration of sexual violence. As with the main analysis, ideological recruitment does *not* have a statistically significant association with any of the other forms of human rights abuses (**Table A8**). Moving to the multinomial logits, across all models, ideological recruitment still has a negative and statistically significant association with repertoires that include sexual violence. However, ideological recruitment does *not* have a statistically significant association with the total absence of violence against civilians in any model (**Table A9**). Said differently, in the cross-sectional analysis, we continue to find

evidence that groups that rely more on ideological recruitment appeals are less likely to perpetrate sexual violence than they are to employ repertoires that involve some abuses but *not* sexual violence. However, we do not find significant differences in ideological recruitment's effects on employing no violence, relative to employing restraint in sexual violence, but not in other areas.

Illustrative Example

We now turn to discussing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as an illustrative example. Wood (2009) highlights the LTTE as a prime example of a group that extensively employed certain forms of violence, while showing significant restraint in the use of sexual violence. This is not intended to serve as fully developed case studies, but rather, as examples of the aforementioned mechanisms. Due to space constraints, we also include brief, qualitative vignettes of the Sendero Luminoso and the RUF in the appendix.

Wood (2009) explains that sexual violence was explicitly prohibited by the group's leadership and that perpetrators were severely punished. Indeed, there are relatively few reports of sexual violence perpetrated by members of the group. However, Wood notes that the LTTE engaged extensively in other forms of violence, including indiscriminate murder, torture, and forced displacement, including the forced displacement of 75,000 Muslim civilians from the Jaffna Peninsula (Wood 2009, p. 147). Wood also points out the even when the group was engaging in widespread ethnic cleansing and mass displacement, it perpetrated very little sexual violence. Wood argues that the prohibition against sexual violence was enforced from the top-down through both socialization and coercive punishment. Specifically, she explains that a

combination of rigorous training and enforcement of a strict code of conduct limited the perpetration of sexual violence.

As noted earlier, we still expect that it will be easier to both socialize and control cadres who join with ideological motives. Thus, the fact that the LTTE both relied primarily on ideological recruitment appeals (Soules 2023) and at least initially sought out highly committed individuals (Wood 2009), means that it might have been easier for the leadership to socialize combatants to enforce certain behaviors than it would have been if the ranks were swelled with opportunistic, uncommitted recruits.

Cronin-Furman and Arulthas (2024) argue that the LTTE's constituencies largely endorsed the group's use of extreme violence because it viewed the group as a legitimate force, including relative to other Tamil militant movements. This legitimacy has been attributed, depending on the source, to both the perceptions that the LTTE was able to protect the Tamil population from further government abuses and that the group was committed to Tamil nationalism. The group's ideology also contributed to the demonizing of Muslim and Sinhalese civilians, as well as reinforcing desires for revenge against government violence, which helped spur high levels of violence by the group (Dharmawardhane 2014).

Thus, the Tamil Tigers were able to employ ideology to promote certain forms of violence, even though it worked actively to restrain sexual violence. Certain forms of violence, such as the murder and forced displacement of ethnic groups, could help achieve its goal of creating an independent, ethnic-based state in ways that sexual violence simply would not.

Conclusion

It remains important to understand why some rebel groups show significant restraint in the use of some forms of civilian victimization, such as sexual violence, but extensively abuse civilians in other ways. We argue that the extent to which rebel organizations rely on ideological appeals, relative to material incentives, for recruitment, affects the probability they show restraint in sexual violence but *not* other abuses. Groups that mobilize heavily around ideological appeals tend to have more obedient and cohesive fighting forces, which increases their ability and willingness to restrain the use of sexual violence. However, such recruitment strategies do not have the same effects on other forms of abuse, which are more likely to be ordered, and less likely to build cohesion, than sexual violence.

Using data on the recruitment practices and treatment of civilians by rebel organizations, we find that groups are more likely to wield repertoires of violence that involve restraint in sexual violence but *not* other abuses when they rely more on ideological appeals than material incentives for mobilization. Relatedly, when analyzing abuses separately, we still find that ideological-based recruitment strategies are associated with restraint in sexual violence but *not* other forms of civilian victimization.

This analysis has provided at least two contributions to the literature. First, this is one of the only cross-rebel group *quantitative* analysis, to the best of our knowledge, that examines the factors that drive the use of sexual violence *relative to other forms of abuse*. Second, in this process we have challenged the conventional wisdom regarding the impact of ideological and material-based recruitment strategies on civilian victimization (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Weinstein 2005, 2007).

These finding also has significant policy implications. First, they suggest, in line with authors such as Wood (2018) that recruitment is a key component of the socialization process for individuals who are recruited into violent movements. The manner in which recruitment proceeds has significant implications for the types of violence we are likely to see manifest. Second, there are significant implications for theories on rebel governance and international law. Our findings suggest that groups can remain violent, while selectively restraining particular types of violence. For instance, while rebel governance affects patterns of sexual violence (e.g., Sawyer et al. 2021), it might not be the case that such governance affects all forms of abuses against civilians in the same way. Relatedly, while international laws and pressures can drive rebels to show restraint in specific types of abuses (e.g., Jo 2015; Ju 2025), it is also important to consider how such dynamics affect their overall repertoires of violence. Thus, generating rebel compliance with international humanitarian law might not just require general institutional development, as policymakers should consider solutions for the diversity of repertoires that rebels employ. This means the remedy to political violence is at least partially dependent on the exact type of violence being perpetrated. Violence as a blanket behavior is not sufficient for policymakers to engage with if they seek meaningful remedies for the harm inflicted during conflict. Policymakers must dive deeper into the specific forms of violence to adequately address these issues.

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Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study will be made available on the corresponding author's academic website: <https://www.michaelsoules.com/research>

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¹ However, to assess whether idiosyncrasies of how the RHRV is coded fundamentally alters its reported patterns of sexual violence, we compare coding in the RHRV to coding in SVAC (Cohen and Nordås 2014). Among the overlapping sample, we find that both datasets are in agreement about whether groups engaged in sexual violence for 93.67% of the observations. We use the RHRV's measure of sexual violence instead of SVAC's for consistency, as the former was constructed by the same team of researchers that built all the other measures of human rights abuses we employ. Furthermore, in the overlapping sample between the RHRV and SVAC datasets, the RHRV dataset finds evidence of sexual violence for 77 observations that does not. In contrast, the SVAC dataset only finds evidence of sexual violence for 3 observations that the RHRV dataset does not. Thus, the RHRV dataset might be slightly less prone to undercounting.

² We collapse the three highest categories of this variable together—parity, stronger, and much stronger—because they comprise only about 8.5% of all observations in the analysis. However, as a robustness check, we rerun the main analysis, using the untransformed version of this variable (**Table A10 – A11**). We continue to find support for our core hypotheses.

³ For the models measuring sexual violence, arbitrary killings, forced displacement, and torture, Stata reports that a small number of successes (at most 10, fewer for most models) and 0 failures are completely determined. When such a message is accompanied with missing standard errors in Stata, it indicates that the model is suffering from high levels of collinearity (Sribney n.d.). However, when the standard errors are not missing from the reported results, success and failures being completely determined is only indicate of at least one of the covariates being a strong predictor (Sribney n.d.). The standard errors were not missing for any of our results, indicating that the latter reason was the cause (Sribney n.d.). However, as a robustness check, we rerun this analysis, excluding the cubic polynomial variables, as they are strong predictors of the dependent variable. When we do this, success and failures are no longer completely determined in any of the models. Additionally, we still find a negative and statistically significant association between reliance on ideological appeals and sexual violence (**Table A12**).

⁴ Indeed, we observe changes in groups repertoires of violence over time. For instance, on average, in the sample, approximately 46% of observations are coded as not engaging in any form of civilian abuse when groups are in their final two years, while only about 32% of observations involve total restraint earlier in groups' lifespans. This lends support to the idea that groups' repertoires of violence are distinct towards the end of their life.