A ‘LOST GENERATION’?
A Study of Child Soldiers and Violence After War

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TABLE OF CONTENT

1.1 Disposition ............................................................................................................... 4
1.2 Who are child soldiers? ......................................................................................... 4

2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH ............................................................................................. 6

3 THEORY ...................................................................................................................... 8
3.1 Central concepts .................................................................................................... 8
3.2 Why do countries experience post-conflict violence? ............................................. 9
3.3 Youth and (in)stability ......................................................................................... 11
3.4 Theoretical argument and hypothesis ................................................................... 13

4 RESEARCH DESIGN ................................................................................................ 14
4.1 Sample and scope conditions ............................................................................. 14
4.2 Operationalization ............................................................................................... 15
   4.2.1 Dependent variable ...................................................................................... 15
   4.2.2 Key independent variable: child soldiers ...................................................... 16
   4.2.3 Control variables ......................................................................................... 17
4.3 Illustrative case study ......................................................................................... 18

5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS .................................................................................... 19
5.1 Quantitative results ............................................................................................. 19
5.2 Illustrative case study: Democratic Republic of Congo, 2003-2006 .................... 21
5.3 Discussion ............................................................................................................ 24
   5.3.1 Alternative explanations ............................................................................ 24

6 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................ 25

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1 Flow chart of the theoretical argument p. 14
Figure 2 Scatterplot of the main variables p. 20
Table 1 Distribution of main variables p. 19
Table 2 The effect of child soldiering on post-conflict violence, 1989-2007 p. 21
1 INTRODUCTION

Of the millions of children and youths who everyday face consequences of armed conflicts around the world, at least 300 000 are themselves members of armed groups. Becoming a child soldier is seldom much of a free choice, and besides experiencing ongoing hostilities first-hand, they are commonly subjected to various forms of both physical and psychological abuse by the leaders (UN n.d.). But what happens to these children and youths once the war is over? Policymakers as well as academics have expressed concern that if large groups of young people grow up in armed groups, this will negatively affect the future stability of the societies in which they live. For example, in a research paper on the causes of child recruitment, Achvarina and Reich (2006: 130) claims that “[I]t has long been understood that socialization into violence in youth creates a generation of violent adults, perpetuating a vicious cycle of instability within countries”. A Ugandan activist and former combatant similarly described how having grown up in violent communities, possessing weapons provides youth with self-esteem, and that “for a man who has carried a gun since childhood, it has become an essential part of who he is” (IRIN 2007). Statements like these are widely occurring and comes across as intuitive, but while the idea has a rich history, it has rarely been studied systematically. Scholars have only recently begun examining the phenomenon of child soldiering, and have thus far primarily focused on its causes rather than on its consequences. However, two recent quantitative studies by Haer and Böhmelt (2016a, 2017) have found positive correlations between child recruitment and risk of conflict recurrence, as well as increased duration of war. These findings suggest that recruitment of young people might indeed contribute to continued violence.

The termination of an armed conflict commonly does not mean the end of insecurity in a society. While a return to war arguably is the most severe outcome of post-conflict instability, many post-conflict societies see various forms of violence without eventually relapsing into full-scale war (Suhrke 2012: 1). It is here suggested that the across-case variation in post-conflict violence in part could be explained by child soldiers having fought in the previous conflict. Ex-combatants are commonly considered to pose a specific threat to a society coming out of war (see e.g. Themnér 2011) and here it will be argued that the threat of instability increases if the ex-combatants are young.

Researchers of post-conflict instability have commonly either focused on recurrence of conflict or on what has been termed ‘spoiler violence’, conceptualized as violent attempts by leaders and parties to undermine negotiations and the establishment of peace (see e.g. Stedman 1997, Nilsson & Söderberg-Kovacs 2011). This thesis is also concerned with such ‘strategic’ post-conflict violence, but following Boyle (2014), it will not only focus on violence directly aimed at overturning the peace settlement or restarting the war, but instead broaden the concept to also include acts of
violence indirectly linked to the settlement and to the power relations of the post-conflict society. This means that post-conflict strategic violence here concerns attacks not only aimed at the ‘macro-cleavage’ of the conflict, but also local disputes among former fighters around the post-war power balance (Boyle 2014: 9ff). Such violence largely occurs because of dissatisfaction with the peace agreement, but also because of dissatisfaction with the situation different actors of political factions and communities find themselves in after a settlement has been reached (ibid). This is a category of violence that commonly has been overlooked although these kinds of acts also affect power relations, and arguably provides a more complete account of the complex ways in which a society experience insecurity after a war (Boyle 2014: 8). By focusing on this, this thesis aims to not only contribute to the research on child soldiers, but also more broadly to our understanding of post-conflict societies. The thesis attempts to answer the following research question:

*How do child soldiers affect post-conflict strategic violence?*

This question is examined through a quantitative analysis of 47 post-conflict states between 1989-2007, as well as by a brief illustrative case study of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The hypothesis is not supported by the quantitative study, but the case study provides some interesting insights to the re-marginalization of young ex-combatants.

1.1 Disposition

This thesis will proceed as follows: first I will provide a brief background and definition of the concept of child soldiers, before a review of previous research and the research gap. This will be followed by the theoretical framework on which I base the thesis as well as develop the hypothesis. Subsequently, I will present and discuss the research design, after which the research question will be examined and analyzed quantitatively and, briefly, qualitatively. The thesis ends with a discussion of the results and a some concluding remarks.

1.2 Who are child soldiers?

The impact of war on children and the issue of child soldiering began reaching the agenda of policymakers around the end of the cold war (Brocklehurst 2009: 259). The first international efforts to legislate against recruitment of children had come in 1977, and the mandate against the practice has since gradually been strengthened through a number of protocols and conventions (Child Soldiers International n.d.a). Child soldiering is today more or less universally condemned and the military recruitment of children under 15 years of age is considered a war crime, yet child
soldiers can be found all across the world and in the vast majority of contemporary wars. Statistical findings by Tynes and Early (2014) indicate that child soldiers participated in about 85.3% of conflicts between 1987-2007, and recruitment is not limited to rebel groups; government troops were found to recruit minors in about 60.1% of the conflicts.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) 2007 defined a child soldier as follows:

“[A child soldier] refers to any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.” (UNICEF Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups 2007)

This widely acknowledged and used definition importantly discards the tendency to assume that child soldiers almost exclusively are boys used for combat purposes, and instead encompasses the fact that a large proportion are girls, and that they undertake various roles within armed groups1 (Child Soldiers International n.d.b). There are a few additional notions to consider regarding the concept of child soldiers. Firstly, childhood, youth, and adulthood are by no means clearly distinguished phases of a person’s life, and thus some analysts consider using age thresholds arbitrary for denoting these periods (IRIN, 2007). While the age of 18 is generally recognized by the international community to constitute the limit between childhood and adulthood, this must be problematized as it does not always translate to local understandings of age, where this passage instead may be considered to occur earlier, when a child is able to work, or fight (ibid). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that while many children end up in the armed groups by abduction, others join voluntarily. In interviews with former child soldier volunteers, they provide various descriptions of what made them choose military life, giving accounts of the complex context of coming of age in a society at war (see e.g. Brett & Specht 2004). Nevertheless, the background against which they become involved raises question of how free of a choice volunteering actually is, as they often join as their best perceived option of survival (ibid).

Most researchers agree that child soldiering hardly is a new phenomenon and have instead concluded that the recent upsurge in attention to the issue is largely a consequence of new understandings and conceptualizations of childhood and youth that has emerged along with human rights discourses (e.g. Faulkner, 2016: 213). In the words of Rosen (2007: 304), “the ‘child-soldier crisis’

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1 Because of this, UNICEF, among others, have sometimes argued that the term child soldier is inappropriate as it does not accurately reflect the role of the children and youth. Nonetheless, the usage of the term is widely accepted, largely in lack of better options.
is a modern political crisis which has little to do with whether there are more or fewer children in wars today than in previous eras”. Nonetheless, it is commonly argued that its practice has transformed along with the development of contemporary warfare, among other things pointing to the development and spread of small arms and light weapons that more easily can be maneuvered by children (Singer 2001: 158ff). Conclusively, while children historically to larger extent were viewed as complementary to adult combatants, they have increasingly become their substitutes, and the levels of child soldiers we have observed in recent times are unprecedented (ibid).

2 PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Ever since the issue of child soldiering gained international focus the topic has generated an increasingly growing body of research by several academic fields. Initially, it was predominantly discussed by civil society actors and the policy sphere, but has now grown to concern scholars of fields such psychology, anthropology, and law, as well as the political sciences. But while important insights have been made, the research field remains young and understudied, largely because of methodological problems and paucity of reliable empirical evidence and data.

Within political science, most research has been devoted to the causes of child soldiering (see e.g. Gates & Reich 2014 for a contemporary overview of the field). Several structural factors have been highlighted, including poverty, lack of education, high orphan rates and lack of democratic governance, as well as the availability of light weapons (e.g. Goodwin-Gill & Cohn 1994, Singer 2001). Others have emphasized conflict characteristics, concluding that wars of higher intensity and longer duration are associated with recruitment of children (e.g. Tynes & Early 2014). In general, most research has been in terms of case studies, and while large cross-country datasets on child soldiers did not exist until recently, some scholars have used smaller samples to draw statistical inferences (Achvarina & Reich 2006, Beber & Blattman 2013). Tynes and Early (2014) compiled one of the first globally covering datasets on child soldiers and tested some of the most popular theories on causes of child recruitment quantitatively, finding support for that child soldiering is associated with low democracy and education levels, high rates of infant mortality, overall militarization levels, as well as conflict duration and intensity.

Although important to understand the contexts in which children are recruited, structural factors do a poor job in explaining the variation in child recruitment, which has led scholars to turn to group and individual level explanations. Here, refugee flows have been emphasized, and in particular the presence of unprotected refugee camps as recruiting sites (Achvarina & Reich 2006). In a case study of Uganda, Blattman and Beber (2013) approaches the issue by looking at under which circumstances children become more attractive recruits than adults, emphasizing factors such as them being easier to indoctrinate and more loyal to the group. In conclusion, they argue
that children will be recruited where these benefits outweigh the various costs of recruiting minors. This claim was further developed by Faulkner (2016) who have demonstrated that rebel groups with bad relations to the civilian population and who can act independently of local support are more prone to recruiting children.

In researching what causes rebel groups to refrain from child recruitment, some scholars have attempted to investigate the effect of stigmatization of the issue and compliance with international norms (e.g. Davis 2010). On the same topic, Lasley and Thyne (2015) and have found that child soldiers are more likely to be used in intrastate conflicts over government than in secessionist conflicts where the rebel group commonly strives to gain international recognition and thus do not want to be associated with such immoral practices.

Another set of research has instead focused on the consequences of child soldiering. A rather large amount of policy reports has dealt with issues of child soldier reintegration, but also academia has begun to provide insights to the issue. Here, Blattman and Annan (2010) have examined the consequences of child soldiering on labor market performance and economic recovery post-war, finding that former child soldiers have substantially less economic opportunities compared to non-combatant peers.

Haer and Böhmelt have compiled the so far largest most disaggregated dataset on child soldiers and have begun studying the consequences of child soldiering quantitatively. In their most recent article, they found support for the claim that child soldiers prolong civil war (Haer & Böhmelt 2017). Prior to that, they have found that child soldiers increase rebel groups’ fighting capacities (Haer & Böhmelt, 2016b) as well as the risk of conflict recurrence (Haer & Bohmelt, 2016a).

Scholars of psychology have provided much insight to the consequences of child soldiering on the individual level. Several studies have found higher levels of trauma-related suffering among former child soldiers compared to their non-combatant peers, as well as compared to their adult counterparts (see e.g. Dickson-Gómez 2002, Schauer & Elbert 2010, Hermenau et. al. 2013). This includes post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), increased levels of aggression, and feelings of guilt and shame. Betancourt et. al. (2010) have furthermore shown that the psychological difficulties can become exacerbated by effects of the high social stigma child soldier commonly face when returning to their communities.

While these findings paint a rather bleak picture of the future prospects for young ex-combatants, others have found children and youth to be highly resilient. Boothby et. al. (2006) shows this by following a group of young ex-combatants for an extended period of time after initiating rehabilitation. The results led the authors to emphasizes the importance of demilitarization, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs. However, other researchers
have found less support for a substantially positive effect of DDR programs, neither for the individuals nor the societal stability in general (see Humphreys & Weinstein 2007, Haer & Böhmelt 2016a).

Despite these advances in studying the causes and the consequences of child soldiering, several gaps in our knowledge remain. Although much has been written about individual level grievances among former child soldiers, we still know little about whether this has any accumulated destabilizing effects on the societal level, as sometimes suggested. We know that child soldiering increases the risk that a conflict will recur, but does it also affect the lower intensity types of violence that the post-conflict state experience? This constitutes an important research gap to address, for the sake of the militarized youths themselves as well as for the societies in which they live. In addressing this research gap, this thesis sets out to investigate the effect of child soldiering on post-conflict violence, both across cases, as well as by a brief within-case study.

3 THEORY
This section will construct a theoretical framework to explain the phenomenon of interest and develop a testable hypothesis. The framework will build on theories of post-conflict violence, as well as theories on the consequences of child soldiering. While these phenomena have received much discussion separately, they have rarely been studied in conjunction. Haer and Böhmelt’s (2016a) study of child soldiering and conflict recurrence is however an important exception, and following the theory outlined by them, I will draw on theories on youth marginalization to argue that child soldiering ultimately increases the risk of post-conflict violence because youth more easily become re-marginalized than other groups. First, however, some key concepts will be discussed.

3.1 Central concepts
Post-conflict state. Of interest to this thesis is why states who have experienced a large-scale armed conflict continue to see violence although fighting formally has come to an end. Thus, a post-conflict state is here considered to be a state where a large-scale armed conflict has been officially terminated. The concept here partly relies on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) definitions of conflict and conflict termination, in that a post-conflict state must have experienced an armed conflict between at least two actors, of which at least one is government of state, resulting in minimum of 25 battle-related deaths per year (UCDP n.d.a). But while the UCDP regards a conflict as terminated any year battle-related deaths are below 25, a post-conflict state here also needs to have seen a formal settlement, either by some kind of agreement, or by a victory of one side over the other(s). Hence, cases of conflict with varying levels of violence or cases with temporary ceasefires are discarded.
Post-conflict strategic violence. According to Suhrke (2012: 7) it is possible to take two approaches in defining post-conflict violence. Either any and all violence occurring in a post-conflict society is regarded as post-conflict violence for the period immediately following the war (although inherently contextual, it is commonly considered a time period of about 5 to 10 years). Alternatively, any individual act of violence must be traced to the legacies of the conflict to be regarded post-conflict violence (ibid). In that sense, using Suhrke’s (2012: 7) own example, contemporary racial violence in the United States have roots in the civil war and is in that respect instances of post-conflict violence, although the war ended over 150 years ago. For this analysis, both of the conditions will be applied, by focusing on violence that can be traced to legacies of the war, but that happens in the immediate period following war. This is what Boyle (2014: 29f) have termed post-conflict strategic violence; violence that is linked to the conflict and the post-war power relations, either directly or indirectly. This includes, for instance, targeted killings, riots, symbolic attacks, reprisals, insurgent and terrorist attacks, and acts of genocide or ethnic cleansing (ibid). Strategic violence is politically motivated, carried out by those involved in the previous conflict (Boyle 2014: 11). This does however not mean that all violence along former battle lines can be considered strategic, nor that all violence committed by former fighters necessarily is strategic. For example, street crime can be directed at members of target groups but be unrelated to the armed conflict (Boyle 2014: 31).

Ex-combatant. An ex-combatant is here considered to be an individual who actively took part in the previous conflict as a member of an armed group.

Child soldier. A child soldier is here defined in accordance with the UNICEF (2007) definition, as stated on p. 5 in this thesis.

3.2 Why do countries experience post-conflict violence?

In broad terms, societies experience violence after wars for reasons stemming from the legacies of the war and the process of transitioning to peace (Suhrke 2012: 2). With overarching perspectives, post-conflict violence has largely been attributed to the weakness of post-conflict state institutions that fails to constrain such behavior, as well as that protracted periods of fighting have given rise to a ‘culture of violence’, where resolving disputes with violent means have become normalized at all levels of society (ibid). Others have claimed that during times of war, violence has come to serve a range of social, economic and political functions, and developed into a tool of acquiring various goals, and must thus be understood as a source of power inherent to the complex structures of the war itself (Suhrke 2012: 3).
In an attempt to disaggregate the various forms of violence that occurs in the post-conflict society, Boyle (2014) distinguishes between three types of violence based on the motivation behind the act. Besides the politically motivated strategic violence (as outlined above), post-conflict societies also see expressive violence and instrumental violence, where expressive is motivated by emotions, such as loss or suffering, and instrumental concerns criminal acts or similar violence aimed at acquiring personal gains (Boyle 2014: 25ff). Boyle (ibid) argues that all of these categories can be expected to increase post-war, and while theoretically easy to overstate the differences between these categories, they are all inherently interrelated and connected.

Essentially, societies coming out of war are highly vulnerable and exposed to many risks, which Suhrke (2012: 19) have summarized as ‘six points of vulnerability’: 1) issues concerning disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants 2) the illegal economy and criminal networks established during war 3) property and land disputes when wartime displaced persons return 4) lack of an accountable justice sector for committed atrocities which encourages continued impunity and vigilante justice 5) ‘aftershocks’ of violence along wartime divisions, and 6) people getting expectations that peace and prosperity will follow the end of the war, and when it does not arrive as hoped, generates frustration (ibid).

Post-conflict societies must take various measures to deal with these issues, including reform of the security sector, applying transitional justice for crimes committed, as well as implementing programs of demilitarization. In essence, wartime structures of insecurity, fear, and violence, into structures of security and trust (Themnér 2011: 11). Central to these processes are the former combatants, since they are key actors upholding them, and therefore often considered a threat to the post-conflict stability (ibid). Several reasons have been outlined as to why ex-combatants would threaten the peace, and Themnér (2011: 14) argues that the underlying cause of ex-combatant violence is if they become re-marginalized. Re-marginalization happens for much of the same reasons that get people involved in armed struggle in the first place: because of structural discriminations that create asymmetric relationships between societal groups (Themnér 2011: 14). But if ordinary citizens are likely to resort to violence when marginalized, ex-combatants should be even more inclined to do so, seeing as they have the skills and experience, and are accustomed to using violent means to resolve disputes (ibid: 16).

Themnér (2011: 14f) finds primarily three clusters of factors that spur re-marginalization. Firstly, ex-combatants can experience political re-marginalization if they are excluded from political decision-making in the conflict aftermaths (ibid). Secondly, ex-combatants are likely to experience economic re-marginalization since they commonly have few ways to sustain a living and providing for themselves and their families when returning to their communities (Themnér 2011: 18ff).
Lastly, former fighters are often exposed to physical threats when they return. They may be feared and hated for their wartime engagements, and subjected to threats from both the civilian population as well as from former opponents with whom they are expected to live side by side (ibid).

Although DDR programs are designed to mitigate these risks and provide a smooth transition back into society, the programs can generate new issues when large numbers of ex-fighters are released into societies that are ill-equipped to receive them (Themnér 2011: 11). Programs are commonly underfunded and poorly coordinated, and according to a report on war-to-peace transitions, a common cause of failure is due to that most funds go to the two D’s; disarming and demobilizing the fighters, but little efforts are made to reintegrate and make sure they are well off when returning to civilian life (Kemper 2005: 11). Yet this part is essential; failure to reintegrate increases risk of continued violence (ibid)

Nussio (forthcoming) however demonstrates how ex-combatant violence needs to be put in perspective, as it does not necessarily account for the preponderance of violence in a post-war society. He instead emphasizes that it commonly is marginalized youths who participate in post-conflict hostilities (ibid: 8). But what if a large proportion of the former fighters are young?

3.3 Youth and (in)stability

All the issues that former combatants face when returning are here argued to be exacerbated for young ex-combatants, but perhaps especially issues regarding economical and physical security. Much has been written about the particularly vulnerable position that children and youth occupy in a society, particularly in an unstable society, and it has commonly been argued that large cohorts of young (and especially male) people make countries increasingly prone to instability, for reasons stemming from this vulnerability. Young populations are a common characteristic of poor societies, and while poverty makes nations prone to societal instability and violence for several reasons, the ‘youth bulge’ literature argues that insecurity in part stems from the demographic situation itself. Researchers have found that youth bulges spur non-violent protests and riots, but also that it increases the risk of civil war (Urdal 2006). In an economic perspective, Collier (2000) have argued that the reason why youth are more inclined to join rebellion than other groups stems from having low opportunity costs. Where unemployment is high and education is low, large groups of youth can be seen to constitute a high supply of individuals who have few alternatives to joining armed groups (Urdal 2006: 610). This resonates with the findings of Brett and Specht’s (2004) interview study, where children often express having low expectations of future prospects as reasons for joining armed groups.
According to Hilker and Fraser (2009: 17), underlying this argumentation is that young people suffer more from marginalization and relative deprivation than other groups, and are also more likely to use violence when aggrieved. Young people are likely to experience marginalization if they lack opportunities to start earning a living and creating an own household, and such inability to fulfill the ‘transition into adulthood’ generates powerlessness and frustration (Hilker & Fraser 2009: 19). If we expect youth to be extra vulnerable to marginalization, there is reason to believe they are extra vulnerable to re-marginalization, and that in contrast to their non-combatant counterparts, former child soldiers are more likely to take to violence.

Haer and Böhmelt (2016a: 412f) argues that there are specifically two avenues that link former child soldiers to increased risk of instability: lost economic and educational opportunities, and psychological harms. Firstly, children who have spent considerable time with an armed group have likely missed out on education and vocational training (Haer & Böhmelt 2016: 414). If one is to believe Singer (2001: 161f), children might emerge from war having “no skills other than killing and being able to fieldstrip weapons”. Having missed out on learning ‘normal’ skills has indeed been found to impede the chances of finding employment and earning a living for young ex-combatants. In a study of former child soldiers in Uganda, Blattman and Annan (2010: 883) find that schooling was on average a year lower compared to non-combatant children, and while no more likely to be unemployed, the former child soldiers were about half as likely to be involved in skilled employment and had on average earnings a third lower than their peers.

Secondly, child soldiering has been found to have severe impacts on the mental health of the children who have served. There are ample accounts of the horrors children commonly are subjected to during their time in the armed group, often being forced to commit brutal acts, sometimes against their own families (Beber & Blattman 2013: 86). Being inflicted such trauma during formative years can have long-lasting effects and implications for psychological and moral development (Schauer & Elbert 2010: 337). In comparison with adult combatants, child soldiers have been found to suffer more from trauma-related disorders, but also to exhibit a more positive inclination to violent behavior in general (Hermenau et. al. 2013). Studies have found such ‘appetitive aggression’ to be higher among those who join military networks at an early stage in life, which may make it likely that these individuals continue carrying out violent acts also after the conflict is over (Hermenau et. al. 2013, Weierstall et. al. 2013).

Blattman and Beber (2013) find that children are more easily indoctrinated and often more loyal to the group. Spending childhood and adolescence in an armed group have impact on self-
perception and identity, and Wessells and Jonah (2006: 38) find that in Sierra Leone, children who have grown up in an armed group more or less define themselves in terms of their military roles, values, and behavior patterns, and transitioning into a positive civilian role is one of the major issues they face. This is further made difficult by the stigmatization children face when returning (Betancourt et. al. 2010). Many communities are hostile to the returning youth, viewing them as ‘troublemakers’, which sometimes contradicts the views of the young combatants themselves who may perceive their time in the war as trying to protect their homes (Wessells & Jonah 2006: 38f). Additionally, a lot of children do not have any families to come home to, which may even be the reason they joined in the first place (World Health Organization, 2009). This might lead them to instead seek their way back to the armed groups and networks.

Importantly, many children, in particular those who were abducted, want to distance themselves from the armed groups as much as possible and take the first opportunity to flee (Blattman & Beber 2013: 81). A great deal of children express desire and aspiration to return to society and live normal lives, and show feelings of guilt and regret over their time in the groups (Thomason 2016). In their long-term follow-up study Boothby et. al. (2006) demonstrates the resilience of young people and that they indeed are fully capable of creating normal lives for themselves. In the article, the authors moreover emphasize the importance of child and youth support programs, and although most DDR programs today are being adapted also to the needs of former child soldiers, it has been estimated that, for various reasons, about 30% of all child soldiers never enter DDR programs (Nilsson 2005: 75).

3.4 Theoretical argument and hypothesis

In summary, post-conflict societies see violence for many reasons, and commonly, there is some levels of continued attacks by and between former combatants, especially if these are re-marginalized in the post-conflict context. Theoretically, young combatants may be particularly likely to be re-marginalized, and particularly likely to be inclined to respond with violent behavior. In part, they are more likely to suffer from further loss of future economic and educational prospects compared to adult combatants. Additionally, they are more vulnerable to psychological harm and to violent socialization. These two factors are mutually reinforcing, and consequently, we should expect former child soldiers to be more likely to act violently in a post-conflict society. From this reasoning, it is hypothesized that:

H: where child soldiers have participated in a previous conflict, the level of post-conflict strategic violence is expected to increase.
RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to test the hypothesis, the method of ordinary least squares regression (OLS) will be used on a dataset constructed for the purpose of this study. The dataset is primarily based on the Haer and Böhmelt Child Soldier data (2017b), and the Post-Conflict Strategic Violence data by Boyle (2014). Combining these two datasets resulted in a total N of 47, between the years of 1989-2007. Furthermore, I will conduct an illustrative case study of the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the objective to briefly test the hypothesized causal claim.

In constructing the dataset, each post-conflict period in the Post-Conflict Strategic Violence data had to be matched with the corresponding child soldier level. This was done by matching each case in the post-conflict violence data with the preceding conflict period, and aggregating the child soldier score for all groups active in that conflict episode. In some cases, the UCDP was consulted to assure that the armed groups found in the child soldier dataset corresponded correctly to the post-conflict period.

Below I will elaborate and evaluate the quantitative sample and scope conditions, how the variables were measured and coded, and the materials used. Lastly, I present the case study design.

4.1 Sample and scope conditions

For this thesis, the sample and time period was determined by the data available. Boyle’s (2014: 58) original sample includes 52 post-conflict states between 1989-2007, including cases from all major regions, with varying duration, outcomes, and characteristics. This sample was originally based on the UCDP Termination dataset, extracting all cases that ended prior to 1989 (Boyle 2014: 355).
accordance with the theoretical concept of post-conflict strategic violence, the cases had to have seen an explicit termination and a drop to less than 25 battle-related deaths, and that this lasted for at least one year (ibid). Moreover, Boyle excluded cases with fewer than 1000 battle-related deaths per year and cases where states had fought the war on another country’s territory (Boyle 2014: 355). This was done in order to ensure a focus on violence in states following major wars having been fought on their territory (ibid).

Additionally, following others who have studied child soldiers, I focus on intrastate conflicts, because, as Achvarina and Reich (2006: 141) asserts, child soldiers are almost exclusively found in internal struggles rather than fighting international wars. Moreover, although the theoretical implications of child soldiering apply to government as well as rebel groups, I only included child soldiering by rebel armed groups in the dataset because data on government child soldiering was deemed unreliable.

A total of five cases from Boyle’s dataset had to be excluded here, either because they were classified as interstate or because they could not be matched to the child soldier data. Finally, the sample resulted in 47 observations between 1989-2007.

4.2 Operationalization

4.2.1 Dependent variable

The Post-Conflict Strategic Violence dataset (Boyle 2014) is, to the best of my knowledge, the so far only cross-national dataset on the topic. Data on the dependent variable featured number of casualties resulting from post-conflict strategic violence per year up to five years after a settlement had been reached. These time periods varied across cases, as some cases saw relapse to war within this period. Additionally, in four cases some of the post-conflict years were unaccounted for as they laid outside of the dataset’s time period. Hence, for the analysis, I primarily used the mean number of casualties per year for each case.

Boyle (2014: 58f) gathered data on this by consulting news sources, both major and local ones, and coded an act as an instance of strategic violence if there was explicit evidence in the details of the act that it had been politically motivated and could be traced to the balance of power and resources stemming from the preceding conflict, and if it resulted in at least one casualty. Including only acts of violence that results in casualties does not necessarily capture the extent to which a post-conflict society is violent, as there are cases which see heavy use of non-lethal, yet highly destabilizing, strategic violence (Boyle 2014: 59). Excluding these attacks can sometimes be a

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3 Haer and Böhmelt do include a dummy variable for government child soldiering in their dataset, but the authors have discouraged use of it because of its unreliability.

significant omission, which can be considered to implicate the extent to which the measurement captures the phenomenon of interest. Nevertheless, measuring casualties by strategic violence is arguably a reasonable proxy measure for the overall level of post-conflict strategic violence (ibid).

As for the material, it is important to note that identifying and differentiating between motives behind acts of violence is inherently difficult, especially when relying on limited information, and some acts might have been included that in fact may not match the criteria. Since news sources are of secondary or sometimes tertiary nature, it is not entirely unlikely that some acts would have been included or excluded, had they been framed differently. Additionally, it is likely that some acts are missing since much violence that occurs in a society goes unreported.

4.2.2 Key independent variable: child soldiers

Data on the key independent variable, child soldiers, was acquired through the Haer and Böhmelt Child Soldier data (2017). The authors applied the UNICEF (2007) definition of a child soldier and measured presence of child soldiers on a three-point scale for rebel groups 1989-2003. Where no child soldiers were used, the armed group got a child soldier score of 0; where the armed group recruited some children (less than 50% of total group size), it got a score of 1; and where over 50% of the group consisted of children, the armed group got a score of 2 (Haer & Böhmelt 2017: 338).

Because the unit of analysis in this study is post-conflict violence on state level, child soldiers had to be aggregated from the dyad-level to conflict level. Following Haer and Böhmelt (2016a), I did this by adding up the scores in the child soldier index for all groups for the said conflict period, and calculating the mean by dividing the score by the number of groups. For example, the conflict in Sierra Leone 1991-2001 featured the three rebel groups RUF, AFRC and Kamajors. AFRC and RUF each had a 2 on Haer and Böhmelt’s child soldier index, while Kamajors had a score of 1. In total, the Sierra Leonean conflict received a child soldier score of 1,67. Although necessary in order to match the unit of analysis, this measurement is arguably flawed since rebel group size may vary. For example, there might be a conflict in which two rebel groups were active, having a 1 and a 2 child soldier score respectively, but where the first group is much larger than the second and thus features a larger number of child soldiers. Moreover, an entirely different conflict may feature a single group with a child soldier value of 2, and in an aggregated index, the second conflict gets a higher score, although there may in fact be more child soldiers in the first conflict. Using a dummy variable might then have been a more safe and fair measurement, but this generated almost no variation as the vast majority of the conflicts featured at least some child soldiers. Conclusively, although necessary to aggregate, this problem to some extent impedes the validity of the

5 In fact, only four cases could be coded having a child soldier score of 0.
measurement of child soldiers.

To code child soldier score, the authors relied on news articles and policy reports to collect data, and as discussed with regards to the dependent variable, such secondary and tertiary sources does not provide perfect information. Haer and Böhmelt (2017: 352f) state that in attempting to circumvent this, they triangulated information, used sources in several different languages, and pursued a conservative approach in the scoring. Nonetheless, there are important potential sources of bias to be aware of, and any reporting of child solider usage may be unreliable for a number of reasons. Obtaining information on armed groups is itself always difficult since they commonly do not provide first-hand information themselves. Regarding child soldiers in particular, the stigmatization of the issue makes underreporting likely as armed groups have incentives to downplay their recruitment of minors (Haer & Böhmelt 2017: 353). It should also be added that advocacy groups or similar have incentives to exaggerate numbers (ibid).

4.2.3 Control variables

In addition to the key independent variable, at least four additional variables are needed as controls. Firstly, conflict intensity will be controlled for, measured as total battle-related deaths in the preceding conflict, acquired through the UCDP Termination dataset (Kreutz 2010). More intensive conflicts have been established to correlate with child soldier recruitment, which is explained by that the more lives a conflict claims, the more the actors become desperate and willing to pursue tactics that earlier may have been deemed too costly or unethical (Tynes & Early 2014: 88). Child recruitment may even be deemed ‘necessary’ to fill the ranks when many lives are being claimed (ibid). Rather intuitively, Boyle (2014: 64) also draws the conclusion that deadlier conflicts also see higher levels of post-conflict violence.

Secondly, conflict duration is also correlated with child soldier recruitment (as well as the reversed relationship) much for the same reasons as for the intensity argument; protracted conflicts makes actors increasingly escalate their tactics (Tynes & Early 2014). Additionally, arguments have been made that in long-drawn-out conflicts, the war becomes normalized to the point that children join because they perceive it as a natural way of life (UNICEF, n.d.). Longer conflicts could further be expected to generate more post-conflict violence simply because resolving disputes by violent means has become legitimized over time. Here, conflict duration of the preceding conflict was retrieved from Kreutz (2010).

Conflict type will also be controlled for, measured by a dummy variable indicating if the incompatibility of the conflict concerned government power or rule over territory, acquired through UCDP Termination dataset (Kreutz 2010). Boyle (2014: 64) finds conflicts over
government to be associated with more post-conflict violence, likely because in such conflicts, the former opponents must live side by side in the post-conflict period whereas in a conflict over territory there is commonly a geographical division between the belligerents. Also child soldiering have been found to be more common in conflicts over government power, which has been explained by that the strive for international recognition is thought to discourage secessionist groups from recruiting minors (Lasley & Thyne 2015).

Lastly, a dummy variable controlling for conflict recurrence was also added. Besides conflict recurrence being associated with child soldiering (Haer & Böhmelt 2016a), it seems intuitive to assume violent post-conflict periods to be more likely to relapse, which Boyle (2014: 65) also finds statistical support for.

4.3 Illustrative case study

The purpose of this thesis is theory-testing rather than theory-building, as it builds on theory derived from existing literature. Thus, the aim here is not to provide a description of a specified causal path, but to provide an initial test to whether the hypothesized causal mechanism is present in a given case (Beach & Pedersen 2013: 3). The method of the illustrative case study will be to try find empirical information on a few selected causal process observations (CPOs); implications derived from the theory that should be observable if the suggested relationship should prove to be true (Brady et al. 2006: 355f). CPOs require descriptive answers, and are commonly set up as a sequence of several, so as to trace the suggested causal mechanism (ibid). This is the basis of most process-tracing methods, but while such approaches aim to carefully analyze the suggested causal mechanism and provide rich in-depth case descriptions, the approach here is rather to briefly illustrate a possible relationship.

The claim is that child soldiers go through a process of re-marginalization by which they are likely to respond to by resorting to violence. The derived causal process observations are:

1. Did child soldiers face issues to reintegrate effectively? Did they receive inadequate assistance in education/training?
2. Did the demobilized child soldiers commonly rejoin armed networks?
3. Did the armed groups continue to carry out violent acts? What did this violence look like?

The case selection strategy applied was that of a ‘crucial case’; a case that is most (or least) likely to fulfill a theoretical prediction (Gerring 2006: 115ff). Crucial cases are in essence ‘hard tests’ of the theory, as they suggest that if the mechanism cannot be found here, it likely cannot be found
anywhere (ibid). Given that the theory in question has not previously received extensive testing, I select a most-likely crucial case, with high levels of both variables of interest. The case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was hence chosen, as it saw both heavy use of child soldiers in the war of 1996-2003, and high levels of post-conflict violence. If support cannot be found for the link between these variables in this case, it is unlikely the theory has much generalizable explanatory power. Materials used will primarily be policy reports, as well as the Post-Conflict Violence coding data (Boyle 2014)6 for the case of the DRC.

5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Quantitative results

Before examining a possible correlation and presenting the results of the regression, it is useful to first examine the distribution of main variables, presented in Table 1. Regarding the dependent variable (DV), the mean and the median are strikingly low compared to the maximum value of the sample, indicating that the majority of the observations have a comparatively low value. In fact, the median of 25 indicates that half of the cases see less than 25 casualties per year from post-conflict violence, hence the highest value 3345 may represent an outlier.

As for the independent variable, the sample is more evenly spread, evident by the fact that both the mean and the median have a value of almost exactly 1 in a range of 0-2. The mean of 1.032 is just slightly above the middle value, which can be interpreted as the sample having a slight tendency to have child soldier score of 1 or above, but it seems relatively rare that conflicts feature over 50% child soldiers, as would be the case if the mean was closer to the maximum value of 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
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<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Std. dev.</th>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.032</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.576</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1 Distribution of main variables*

6 Replication materials and details on the coding for the Post-Conflict Strategic Violence data has not yet been officially published by Boyle (overall I rely on the data published in the book) but data on the coding on the DRC case was kindly provided by the author via email correspondence.
To examine a possible correlation between the variables, it can be useful to let a scatterplot illustrate how the values are distributed against each other. The scatterplot in Figure 2 does reveal that the maximum value of the DV, 3345, is somewhat of an outlier. Moreover, it does not display any clear relationship between child soldier level and post-conflict violence, although it seems that all cases with very high levels of casualties from post-conflict violence have a child soldier score of 1 or more. When running a bivariate regression (Model 1 in Table 2), child soldiers do not have a significant effect on the level of post-conflict violence. In Model 2, conflict recurrence is controlled for, and the variable is statistically significant at a p-value of 0.1, meaning it is roughly 90% likely that recurrence systematically correlates with post-conflict violence, which is to little surprise. Child soldiering however remains insignificant. In Model 3, all control variables are included, and p-value for conflict recurrence goes down to 0.2, or correspondingly about 80%. As a robustness check (see Appendix for tables), the dependent variable was changed to total number of post-conflict violence casualties. Here, the effect of conflict recurrence disappeared. When excluding the outlier, conflict intensity was the only variable to receive statistical significance, at a p-value of 0.05. Conflict recurrence was also here significant at 90% before introducing the rest of the controls, when it disappeared.

Concluding from this analysis, a higher value on child soldiering does not seem to have any effect on the post-conflict violence. The results and alternative explanations will be further discussed below, but first the illustrative case study will be presented.

Figure 2 Scatterplot of the main variables
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td>(133.19)</td>
<td>(160.4136)</td>
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<td>377.3333 (*)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(165.00)</td>
<td>(201.0787)</td>
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Ordinary least square regression. Figures are coefficients with standard error in parentheses. *** Significant at p < .01, ** p < .05, * p < .10, (*) p < .20

Table 2. Effect of child soldiers on post-conflict violence

5.2 Illustrative case study: Democratic Republic of Congo, 2003-2006

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has since independence from Belgium in 1960 seen a myriad of complex and intertwined conflicts between actors at various levels of society (UCDP n.d.b). Insurgencies characterized the large country throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, and in 1996 a rebellion broke out that developed into what has been called Africa’s First World War (ibid). The conflict involved at least seven different African countries and numerous armed groups, resulting in over 80,000 battle-related deaths (UCDP n.d.b). Years of negotiations finally led to a peace agreement in late 2002, but the post-war period continued to be characterized by various attacks and clashes (Boyle 2014). In 2006 the first democratic elections in over 40 years were held, which spurred tensions that eventually resulted in a new outbreak of war in the eastern parts of the country (UCDP n.d.b).
The war in DRC 1996-2002 saw many human rights violations, including substantial recruitment of children. Child Soldiers International (2004) report that all actors in the conflict recruited children, estimating about 30 000 children under the age of 18 to have been involved in armed groups. An organization working with child soldier DDR in eastern DRC report that the average enrollment age for children was 12 years (Jesuit Refugee Service 2007: 9), although some had been as young as six (Amnesty International 2006: 1). Following the peace accords, an official nationwide DDR program was launched in 2003 for an estimated 150 000 combatants from both rebel and government forces, including the about 30 000 children (Amnesty International 2006: 1). Additionally, a program unifying another 150 000 combatants from different groups into a new and unified national army was launched in parallel (ibid). The DRC government and most of the armed political groups had however begun demobilizing minors in 2001, but progress was slow and as of March 2004, the DRC Child Soldiers Coalition reported that 4 552 children had been demobilized, indicating that the vast majority were still with the armed groups or otherwise unaccounted for. (Child Soldiers International 2004).

1. Did child soldiers face issues to reintegrate effectively? Did they receive inadequate assistance in education/training?

The set-up of the DDR programs for child soldiers was to first place children in transitional care centers for up to three months, to receive education or vocational training, before returning to their home communities (Amnesty International 2006: 10). Some centers also provided psychosocial care and recreational activities (ibid). Amnesty International (2006: 11f) reports that the DDR programs were largely hampered by a lack of effective coordination between different actors, unspecific planning, as well as being generally underfunded. Several reports have stressed the need of long-term reintegration support for child soldiers, which requires cooperation between the transitional centers and local NGOs at the community level (Amnesty International 2006: 22). Such cooperation was however slow. For example, a local NGO activist in North-Kivu estimated that of the 4 000 demobilized children in the area, less than 200 had benefited from reintegration with support in the community (ibid). Many children attest of the difficulties of coming back to communities where there are few options of school or work, and many were afraid of becoming a burden for their already impoverished families (Brett & Specht 2004: 133f). In the words of one demobilized child soldier in DRC, “At least in the army, we had money, we received wages. But since we’re here, nothing” (ibid). In other cases, parents and communities would refuse reunification, fearing that the family would be subjected to stigmatization, and that the returning children would be violent,
spread diseases, and draw armed groups seeking to re-recruit to the area (Amnesty International 2006: 20f).

2. Did the demobilized child soldiers commonly rejoin armed networks?

The difficulties in reintegrating commonly made the children return to the armed groups and although no exact numbers exist, several advocacy groups have stated the severity of the extent of re-recruitments. According to Amnesty International (2006: 1), “[S]ome are re-recruited by force, others are effectively pushed back into the armed groups because the DRC government has not provided them with meaningful support once returned to their communities.” Child Soldiers International (2004) similarly reported that “In some cases, fighters who had grouped ready for demobilization, [...] returned to the forest when it became apparent that nothing was in place to assist them”. By the end of June 2006, 19 054 children had been demobilized, meaning about 11 000 were either still with the armed groups or had self-demobilized (Amnesty International 2006: 16). During this time, recruitment of children had continued in some places, and many had been re-recruited. Besides many being recruited by force, it seems a number of children returned more or less willingly under the difficult circumstances. As one child at a demobilization center said, “[...] In the army, I suffered, but I had a home, a place to stay [...] It’s not like where we are now… I would like to flee, you know, some children fled so as not to be demobilized… some stay a month here, and then they run away” (Brett & Specht 2004: 134).

3. Did the armed groups continue to carry out violent acts? What did this violence look like?

Hundreds of attacks between different rebel groups have been recorded in DRC each year in the post-war period, of which the majority were in terms of rebel attacks on civilians or ethnic clashes, as well as attacks against security personnel and aid workers (Boyle 2014). The level of attacks was the most intense the first year of the post-conflict period, with 2661 casualties from strategic violence. The following years were comparatively lower, but strategic violence remained high until the second outbreak with 847 strategic violence casualties in 2004, 682 in 2005 and 348 in 2006 (ibid). All years saw roughly the same number of acts (Boyle 2014).

The persisting insecurities were the highest in the eastern regions of the country. Here, several armed groups resisted the peace process and the DDR plans and continued to be active (Amnesty International 2006: 14). Some of these groups are believed to have featured up to 50% child soldiers, and it was documented that children took part in the widespread hostilities, including random killings, rapes, looting and arson (Child Soldier International 2004).
5.3 Discussion

The results presented by on the one hand the quantitative study, and the case study on the other, appears ambiguous at first. While the case of DRC makes evident the effective re-marginalization and the inclination of former child soldiers to rejoin armed networks, this does not seem to have any general effect on the extent to which a post-conflict society see strategic violence, and the hypothesis cannot be supported.

It seems reasonable to draw the conclusion that the continued activity by rebel groups (and later outbreak of conflict) in DRC was to some extent made possible by the ease with which the groups continued recruitment and re-recruitment of children and youths. Arguably, the continued hostilities also contributed to children having a harder time returning and settling in their communities, but the difficulties child soldiers faced to reintegrate can in turn very well have contributed to continued violence. But while children and youths may be more likely to be recruited, they are not more likely to carry out acts of violence. Many children express willingness, albeit under few other options, to rejoin the militias, but a great deal of children fear the armed groups, escape and do their best to hide from re-recruitment.

Some issues in the research design may have implicated the statistical results. Because of the relatively small sample size, the results must be viewed with caution, and this study should not be considered as anything else than an initial test to this particular theory, although there is no particular reason to believe the sample to be biased. Moreover, child soldiers could arguably have been measured in a better way. An ideal option would perhaps be to measure proportion of child soldiers to the total number of combatants in a country, something that would require work well beyond the scope of this paper but might be worth looking into in future studies.

5.3.1 Alternative explanations

Previous writings on post-war violence have to large extend found group characteristics and conflict outcome to be imperative for ex-combatant violence, and the more general patterns post-conflict violence across societies. Themnér (2011: 161f) holds that re-marginalization indeed causes the ‘readiness’ to engage in violence, but it is ultimately the structure of the group and its networks that is determinant. Boyle (2014) similarly uses group dynamics to explain the difference in patterns of post-conflict violence, both level and type. In large, this can be considered to support the wider consensus within the causes of war literature; that although grievances are prerequisites for conflict, it commonly is not the decisive factors.

Suhrke and Berdal (2012: 321) moreover emphasize the outcome of the conflict as highly influential for the post-war (in)stability, and concludes their study by highlighting how contextual
the phenomenon of post-conflict violence is and that general theories of it should always be treated with caution. This resonates with the more general findings of this paper, since almost none of the control variables showed any relationship with post-conflict violence level. Regarding the findings of re-marginalization in the case study, perhaps youth are more inclined to resort to violent networks, but not necessarily to armed groups and strategic violence, which rather depends on the power dynamics. Youth are perhaps then more likely to be re-marginalized, but if the power relations in large do not spur post-conflict strategic violence, then post-conflict strategic violence will not be widespread simply because a lot of young people are marginalized.

6 CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to investigate if child soldiers having fought in a previous conflict have any effect on post-conflict strategic violence. Based on notions of that the youth is the future of a society, academia and the policy sphere alike are full of predictions that when young people are socialized into violence, this will inevitably bring about future insecurity. Are child soldiers then, as in sometimes claimed, a ‘lost generation’?

This thesis looked at the specific implication child soldiers would have on the magnitude of continued political, or strategic, violence within post-conflict states. The analysis was in part quantitative on a sample of 47 observations, and in part qualitative, studying the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The study, in large, did not find support for the hypothesized relationship. These findings do however not contradict the previous findings that child soldiers increase the risk of conflict recurrence. Indeed, this study did find that children were likely to be re-marginalized and re-recruited by armed groups, thus likely contributing to further cycles of violence. But if we rely on the results of this thesis, child soldiers do not contribute to more violent post-conflict societies, at least not the kind of violence that is tied to the armed groups and the legacies of the conflict.

In interpreting the findings from this study, it must however be considered that the sample size was relatively small, as well as that the measurement of child soldiers was somewhat vague. One cannot help but wonder if more disaggregated data would have produced different results, and one of the primary conclusions from this study must be that the future of this research field would greatly benefit from better and more detailed data. Future studies within the field may want to examine if child soldiers are more likely to engage in other types of violence than political or strategic, perhaps criminal or economical, or alternatively examine under which circumstances child soldiers are unlikely to re-join violent networks. Moreover, more studies are needed on the topic of how to prevent child soldiering in the first place.
The findings of this thesis should not be considered strong material for policy implications, but if anything, it would be wrong to assume that the results presented here would call for less attention to young people in war on the grounds that they do not seem to pose a specific threat to the post-conflict society. Importantly, the results here do not discard previous findings of the traumas and difficulties that former child soldiers have to deal with, and the overall likelihood of conflict relapse. Rather, this study helps illustrating the complexity of the issue, and calls for a better understanding of the situation of children and youth in order to prevent recruitment, and re-recruitment.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

Descriptive statistics DV without outlier

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>N</th>
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Effect of child soldiers on post conflict violence, without outlier

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<th>Model 3</th>
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<td>Child soldiers</td>
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Ordinary least square regression. Figures are coefficients with standard error in parentheses. *** Significant at p < .01, ** p < .05, * p < .10, (*) p < .20
Effect of child soldiers on post-conflict violence, robustness check

DV: total post-conflict violence casualties

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Variable</th>
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Ordinary least square regression. Figures are coefficients with standard error in parentheses. *** Significant at p < .01, ** p < .05, * p < .10, (*) p < .20