BALLOTS AND BULLETS

Elections and violence against civilians in Colombia

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ABSTRACT

Non-combatants, even though they not participate directly in a conflict, are often targeted by armed groups. This study seeks to answer to the question why some areas are more affected by violence against civilians than others. Considering their importance in the contemporary world, electoral processes are used to explain the patterns of civilians’ victimization. This study focuses on irregular civil wars as the effects of elections on the distribution of violence against civilians in those wars is particularly understudied. Elections provide crucial information to armed groups about the preferences of the local population and therefore also the presence of potential collaborators or enemies. In addition, local political elites have incentives to favour or curb the violence against civilians, according to their electoral strength in a specific area. The thesis tests the implication with a quantitative study in the case of Colombia by analysing the long- and short-term effects of electoral results on the distribution of violence. Contrary to conventional civil wars, the findings suggest that civilians living in political strongholds in irregular civil wars, areas where a political party has strong support, are more likely to be targeted.

Keywords: Violence against Civilians, Elections, Colombia, Irregular Civil Wars, Political Stronghold, Political Elites.
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INTRODUCTION

“Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed”. This quote from Mao Tse-Tung (1967), an expert in this field, perfectly summarizes the close connection between politics and conflict. Another expert, Von Clausewitz (1940) states that “war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse carried on with other means”.

The main focus of this thesis will be to explain patterns of violence against civilians. In doing so, this paper will take into consideration what it is often considered to be the opposite of fighting: voting.

Voting and fighting have a historically strong relationship. In the Roman Republic, the violence between political factions was particularly common and often exploded in civil wars. The victory of Abraham Lincoln in the 1860 U.S. presidential elections was followed by the onset of the American Civil War. In the 20th century, the Spanish Civil War broke out immediately after the 1936 Spanish elections while the 1990 Algerian elections results were annulled by a military coup resulting in the Algerian Civil War. More recently, the most illustrious example is the Kenyan riots after the 2007 elections.

According to Mao’s quote, elections can be considered the civilized, generally harmless way to achieve power and their importance is growing. Today, democracy is the most common political regime in the world. According to the Democracy Index, in 2017, 66% of the world’s population live in a full democracy, a flawed democracy or a hybrid regime. The statistics are similar if we consider the number of nations that are characterised by one of above mentioned regimes (68,9%). While the last category cannot be defined as democracy, these three types of regimes share a common trait: elections. They may not be totally fair and free, but they take place and are the primary means to legitimize a ruler.

Considering the importance of elections in the contemporary world, I argue that it is particularly important to understand how they might help to trigger or curb violence against civilians. More specifically, this thesis argues that in order to understand the geographical distribution of violence against civilians, we need to take into account the geographical distribution of votes.

Irregular civil wars will be the type of conflict analysed in this paper. In this type of conflict, frontlines are not clear and guerrilla warfare is used by one of the warring factions. On the opposite, when frontlines are clear and major battle take place, a civil war is defined as conventional.

Relatively little is known about the relation between violence and elections in irregular civil wars. On the opposite, many studies have investigated this relationship in conventional civil wars.
(Balcells 2011; Chacón, Robinson & Torvik 2011). For this reason, the focus will be placed on irregular civil wars.

In addition, the literature on violence against civilians usually considers the role of armed groups and the civil population. Few studies on civil wars consider the role of local political elites, but their role is pointed out in other fields like electoral violence studies. One of the main objectives of this thesis is to strengthen the academic bridge between literature on civil wars and electoral violence by adding the role of local political networks to the causal mechanism. This aspect is important as the role of local political leaders cannot be reduced to powerless actors or mere executor of armed groups’ will. Having access to strategic resources, such as information and public money, makes them important players in the local dynamics.

Therefore, this thesis will try to answer to the question: how does geographical distribution of votes affect the geographical distribution of violence against civilians in irregular civil wars?

In conventional civil wars, previous literature seems to suggest that areas where political competition is high were also the most affected by the violence. On the opposite, areas with strong political support for a political party were more peaceful.

The theory that will be presented in this thesis suggests that it is the opposite for irregular civil wars. Armed groups, civilians and political networks face problems according to their main goals. More specifically armed groups face an “identification problem” (Kalyvas 2006), i.e. the difficulty to distinguish between enemies and friends among the civil population. At the same time, civilians face the “safety problem”, the fear that their collaboration with an armed group might be punished or to be target of indiscriminate violence. Local political networks face what I call the “accountability problem”, the fact that their behaviour will be judged by the voters and therefore influence the elections outcome. Elections provide information to these three actors and who change their behaviour accordingly to the results. By combining these incentives, the theory predicts that civilians living in political strongholds, i.e. areas where a political party has strong electoral support, are more likely to be targeted.

The implications of this thesis are broader in scope than just irregular civil wars. Electoral violence situations and all conflict settings where elections and violence might occur simultaneously, could be affected by the implications. As mentioned before, most of the world population lives under political regimes that have electoral processes in place. In order to prevent the onset and the escalation of armed conflicts it is particularly important to understand the incentives and deterrents political actors have in similar contexts.

The theory will be tested with the case of Colombia. The testing will be done through a quantitative study thanks to the presence of municipal-level refined data about violence against
civilians and elections. Two hypotheses will be tested, one focusing on the long-term effects and the other on short-term effect. Colombia was chosen for mainly three reasons. Firstly, it is a case of irregular civil war. Secondly, elections were regularly held during the conflict. Thirdly, it is a well-studied case with readily available information.

The findings suggest that both hypotheses are confirmed. In fact, political strongholds are positively correlated with higher levels of violence against civilians in both cases. Thus, in irregular civil wars the dynamics appear to be different from conventional civil wars.

This work is divided into four parts. After this introduction, the first part will focus on the research puzzle and the previous literature on violence against civilians, civil wars and elections. The second part will introduce the theory focusing on the actors in the model and different incentives they have according to the spatial distribution of votes. The third part will explain the research design I have chosen and the operationalization of my main variables. There will also be a section dedicated to the case study. The fourth part will analyse the results, presenting the findings, the limitations, alternative explanations and implications for future research. Finally, a conclusion will summarize the results of this work.
1. PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND RESEARCH GAPS

The main objective of this part is to present the previous literature on relevant topics for the development of the theory. It is made up of five sections where the first will focus on the main subject of this paper: violence against civilians. Here, the importance of the interaction between civilians and armed groups will be explained, followed by the second section which will discuss literature on democracy and violence. The third section will analyse patterns of violence related to elections in two types of civil wars: conventional and irregular. The fourth will provide some insights from literature about electoral violence. Lastly, a summary with the main research gaps that have been identified will be presented.

1.1 Violence against civilians

In this section, key concepts related to violence against civilians (also VAC) will be presented. Firstly, violence against civilians responds to strategic reasons and therefore cannot be considered random. More precisely, violence is important to control a group. As a consequence, a broad definition will be used in this thesis that includes all forms, lethal and non-lethal, of VAC. Secondly, the importance of non-combatants in a conflict, especially when armed groups seek territorial control, will be underlined.

Violence can be defined as “deliberate infliction of harm on people” (Kalyvas 2006: 19). Violence against civilians (or one-sided violence) is a social phenomenon where the use of violence is directed towards non-combatants.1

The ultimate goal of violence can be seen as striving to exterminate or control a specific group (Sémelin 2000). This thesis will focus on violence aimed to control a group. The other aim, extermination, is the main goal of genocide, an extreme type of violence that will not be discussed here (Straus 2000).

In this thesis, all forms of violence against civilians, lethal and non-lethal, will be taken into account. In fact, when the aim is to control a certain group, violence against civilians can be perpetrated in many ways. The most intuitive is homicide. Civilians casualties are often taken as a useful proxy but as Straus (2000: 7) underlines, homicide “is irreversible, direct, immediate and unambiguous method of annihilation”. In other words, it is an extreme act with extreme consequences. I argue that violence against civilians cannot be reduced just to homicide as many

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1 A more specific definition is used by the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP, 2018): “the use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organised group against civilians which results in at least 25 deaths in a calendar year”.

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other non-lethal forms take place in a conflict setting to control a certain group. Sexual violence, forced displacement, threats, torture, kidnappings or children abduction are all non-lethal forms of violence against civilians. Usually academic studies focus on one of these strategies, especially homicide (Eck & Hultman 2007; Wood 2010), displacement (Steele 2017) and sexual violence (Cohen 2013; Wood 2006). Coercive violence (not genocidal) might be tactical and strategic (Kalyvas 2006). To target an enemy’s supporter eliminates an immediate threat to the security of the armed group. Meanwhile, the same killing “makes an example in order to deter similar vocations” (Dupuy 1997: 161). In this way, the violence is seen as a strategic deterrent for further defections to the other side among the civil population. The same discourse can be applied to all forms of violence against civilians.

The ACLED project (Raleigh et al. 2010) is one of the few examples of datasets that take into consideration a variety of crimes against civilians. Still, non-physically harming violence (such as displacement) is coded as a “non-violent activity by a conflict actor”. Thus, except in the case of genocide, all forms of VAC have the same goal: to control and change the behaviour of a group. For this reason, they will all be taken into consideration.

Violence against civilians is usually seen as a result of a “joint process” (Kalyvas 2006: 173) between two main actors: armed groups and civilians. Even though the relationship is not balanced as the armed groups possess more leverage, the two actors can influence the behaviour of each other. Both have incentives and deterrents in the rational cost-benefit analysis.

The particular role of civilians during wartimes has long puzzled academics. In fact, by definition, non-combatants do not engage in armed actions (Steele 2017) and therefore they are not a direct threat to warring factions. Steele (ibid.) summarizes their role as “part-time collaborators”. In fact, their support is often necessary to win wars as they can provide many different resources to the armed groups.

Mao Tse-Tung (2000) summarized the importance of the civil population with a powerful image: “many people think it impossible for guerrillas to exist for long periods in the enemy's rear. Such a belief reveals lack of comprehension of the relationship that should exist between the people and the troops. The former may be likened to water the latter to the fish who inhabit it.”

The reasons that drive the use of violence against civilians are debated and many explanations, not mutually exclusive, have been provided.

Some of them link the occurrence of abuses on civilians to the internal structure of the armed groups. Internal indiscipline, translated into reality with internal lack of punishing systems for perpetrators or fragmentation of the group, has been suggested as one of the main factors that could explain variance in violence against civilians (Humphreys & Weinstein 2006). The need for internal
socialization has been identified as a reason for wartime rapes, especially in groups where recruitment is based on abduction (Cohen 2013). Other studies underline that the size of the insurgent group matters. In fact, weak and small insurgent groups, incapable of offering incentives in exchange for loyalty, resort more often to violence against civilians (Wood, 2010; Raleigh, 2012).

Even though the internal group factors are important, violence is often strategic (Kalyvas 2006). Downes (2006) identifies two additional factors along this line: desperation and territorial control.

In the first case, the warring factions desperately need to win as the costs of the war are increasing. An example are wars of attrition such as the First World War. For this reason, armed groups may attempt to coerce the enemy to quit the military confrontation by attacking their supporters (ibid.), thereby undermining their structure of support.

The second aspect, territorial control, deserves a greater focus as it will be central for the developing of this thesis’ argument. The violence against civilians in this case derives from the idea that to be able to totally control a territory the latter must be inhabited by loyal civilians. “What armed groups fear the most is disloyalty, not exit” (Gutiérrez Sanín 2003: 22). When inhabitants of a specific territory are identified as enemy’s supporters, their presence is a threat to the ruler. For example, disloyal non-combatants can provide food and shelter to enemies, share information about the location of troops or become combatants in the future. From the point of view of the armed actors, their main goal is to avoid defection to the enemy. The main problem they face is what Kalyvas (2006: 147) defines as “the identification problem”: the inability to separate between enemies and friends. For this reason, loyalty from the civilian population becomes central for the survival of the armed groups as it is the necessary condition for collaboration.

Loyalty and collaboration can be built through several mechanisms. An intuitive one is through sharing of common history and values. In other words, the local population shares values related to ethnicity, religion or ideology with the armed groups. For example, Gutiérrez Sanín and Wood (2014) explain how ideology, which in a broad definition also includes ethnic ties, can be used as tool to gain civilians’ support. Individual reasons, such as the need to feel part of something greater described by Wood (2003), can also explain collaboration.

The other option is to coerce collaboration. As said previously, the resort to violence is intended to modify the behaviour of civilians and their perception of future consequences. In some extreme situations, when the ideological or cultural distance between local populations and armed groups is too wide, violence remains the only tool armed groups have to control the non-combatants. Mkandawire (2002) underlines how the violence in liberation wars in Africa was linked to the fact that many rebels were from urban settings and did not understand the rural environments. Degregori
(2012) provides a similar example in Peru during the *Sendero Luminoso* insurgency in the 1980s. In this case, the local rural population in the Andean region was trapped between two groups (young Maoists and state troops from the Coast) where neither had anything in common with them.

Kalyvas (2006) underlines that violence against civilians must be selective to be effective, i.e. civilians must be punished for something they have done. In fact, indiscriminate violence, not related to any specific behaviour, could lead to a backlash among the civilians that would be more likely to support the enemy. Even Machiavelli (1975) states that “no ruler benefits by making himself odious”. It is worth mentioning that Kalyvas (2006) writes that indiscriminate violence “may be less prevalent than generally thought” as many cases of perceived indiscriminate violence experienced some degree of selection at the beginning. Following Kalyvas’ logic, the phenomenon likens more collective targeting as the punished behaviour is membership of a group (Steele 2017).

According to Kalyvas’ theory (2006) on selective violence, civilians face a trade off when it comes to collaboration/defection. To become a collaborator or a defector, they must see incentives and especially need to feel safe enough to denounce or defect. As a result of his theory, Kalyvas provides a theoretical spatial distribution of violence. The author predicts that selective violence would happen in those areas where an armed group has enough control to push civilians to denounce, but not enough complete to stop defection.

Selective and indiscriminate violence have common traits with two categories proposed by Balcells (2011): indirect and direct violence against civilians. The differentiation is mainly based on military technology available for armed groups and the involvement of civilians. Indirect violence is usually perpetrated with heavy weapons (for example planes) while direct violence is perpetrated with small weapons. In the first case, the author underlines that the armed group does not need the civilians’ collaborations. Indirect violence is some ways more indiscriminate than direct violence. For example, in the case of an aerial or artillery bombing it is hard to imagine selected and precise targets. On the opposite, direct violence requires the assistance of the local population. The most interesting point underlined by Balcells (and which will be further discussed later on) is that the use of indirect or direct violence is related to the loyalties of the local population.

To conclude, some concepts exposed in this section will be fundamental for the development of the theory. The first is that violence against civilians mainly responds to strategies and it rarely is an irrational event (Kalyvas, 2006). Secondly, the role of civilians in war settings is important for armed actors, especially when territorial control is a main goal for the warring factions. Thirdly, selective violence is preferable than indiscriminate violence against civilians as it reduces the risk of backlash for perpetrators. Therefore, armed groups face an “identification problem” as selective
violence needs selective information about defectors. Lastly, all forms of violence against civilians will be considered as they all are tools that can be used to control the local population.

1.2 Democracy and violence

As stated in the introduction, democracy and its hybrids are the government regimes of most of the countries in the world. How then are democracy and violence related? The relationship between democracy and conflict is well studied, though with contradictory findings. For example, Hegre et al. (2001: 33) suggest that “semi-democracies are most prone to violence”. Semi-democracies also seem to be more prone to human rights violations (Fein 1995) and lethal political violence (Muller & Weede 1990). On the opposite, Eck and Hultman (2007) suggest that the highest levels of one-sided violence are present in democracies and authoritarian regimes.

Dunning (2011) underlines three main themes for the relationship between voting and fighting. Firstly, voting and fighting can be considered substitutes. In other words, a political actor can choose which pathway is more effective to reach its political goals. This field of research is particularly focused on when and where a political actor prefers an option over the other. Secondly, voting and fighting can be considered complements. Violence can be used to shape the results of the election. In this situation, violence becomes a tool in the hands of the political actors to reach its political goals. Thirdly, elections can be seen as a way to resolve political conflicts after a war. In this case, elections are a way to push the own political agenda over someone else’s.

The first topic described by Dunning (2011), voting and fighting as substitutes, will be particularly important for the development of the theory. In fact, the debate about electoral balance between political parties and onset of a conflict is central for this study. Previous literature on the topic has shown contradictory findings. For example, Chacón, Robinson, and Torvik (2011) suggest that groups may find it optimal to fight precisely when the strength is equal. More precisely, "democracy may only emerge as an equilibrium when support is asymmetric in the sense that one of the parties dominates the other. In contrast, when the support of parties is balanced, or in other words in circumstances when both parties have a good chance of winning power in democracy, fighting may occur" (Ibid.: 368).

On the other hand, Przeworski (1991) states that democracy can only exist when groups have a minimum probability of winning any given election and thus taking power in the future. Machado et al. (2011: 347) also argue that "actors who have little or no chance of having their interests taken into account in the formal decision-making process are more likely to take to the streets" in their work about street protests.
To conclude, it is important to bear in mind the debate about when parties have incentives to fight in relation to their electoral success. I argue that the second approach – that in situations of parity, political parties prefer voting over fighting – is more relevant for my study. This assumption will be better explained in the Theory part.

1.3 Elections in Irregular and Conventional Civil Wars

Not all civil wars are the same. Different types of conflicts display different patterns of violence against civilians. The election results might explain some of those patterns of violence. In fact, elections are not just a prize to be fought over, but they're also a source of information that highlights civilian loyalties that can be used by armed groups to perpetrate violence.

Firstly, as mentioned in the introduction, this work will focus on civil wars. Kalyvas (2006: 5) defines a civil war as “an armed combat within boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties, subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities”. It is important to note that many dynamics can be recognized in a civil war setting. In fact, intrastate conflict, non-state conflict and one-sided violence could take place simultaneously.2

The choice of focusing on civil war is strongly related to the electoral variable. In a civil war situation, elections, if still ongoing, are an important tool in the hands of political actors to control the common authority - and its resources - the warring parties are officially subject to. On the other hand, in interstate conflicts, even though elections can have an effect (Dafoe & Caughey 2016), the latter is limited to one of the warring factions.

Regarding civil wars, a further categorization is often discussed. Two main types of civil war have been identified: conventional and irregular (Kalyvas 2005; Kalyvas & Balcells 2010). In Conventional Civil Wars (hereafter also CCW), the frontlines are clear and important and decisive battles could decide the outcome of the conflict. Armed actors usually have total control of the portions under their rule and the disputed areas tend to coincide with the frontlines. In Irregular Civil Wars (ICW) the dynamics are different. Firstly, one side of the conflict is using guerrilla warfare. This choice is usually a consequence of a military asymmetry that is not evident in CCW. Considering the lack of clear frontlines, the control over territory is more fragmented and areas where an actor is

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2 The UCDP (2018) recognizes four types of conflicts: interstate conflict (a conflict between two states and their allies), intrastate conflict (a conflict between government and its allies and opposition organizations), non-state conflict, (armed clashes between two or more non-state actors) and one-sided violence (violence against civilians), which is the focus of this work.

3 Another type of civil war is also identified by the research: symmetric non-conventional civil wars. Those are “wars in which two irregular armies face each other across a frontline equivalent and they consist primarily of raids” (Balcells 2017: 10). This type of conflict is not treated in this paper.
in total control are scarce. In other words, irregular wars change the sovereignty in a substantial way (Kalyvas, 2006).

Valentino, Huth and Balch-Lindsay (2004) found evidence that violence against civilians is more likely to occur in irregular civil wars than conventional ones. The authors link this finding with the fact that in guerrilla warfare the support of the population is particularly important for the rebels. Consequently, the government has incentives to target guerrilla-friendly civilians and the rebels to influence civilians. This argument appears consistent with the findings showed in the previous section and it is particularly important as it outlines the relative greater importance of civilians in irregular wars than in conventional. In addition, it is worth remembering that the majority (53%) of civil wars between 1944 and 2004 were ICW (Balcells, 2017).

The different types of conflicts can display different spatial patterns of violence. In the literature, elections have been identified as one of the factors influencing the patterns. The literature on conventional civil wars and elections provide some insights on spatial distribution of violence against civilians and elections.

Balcells (2011) studied the Spanish Civil War in Aragon and Catalonia and suggest that direct violence against civilians, which requires the collaboration of the population as underlined in the previous part, was more concentrated in areas where the two groups had a similar share of political support while indirect violence (such as bombings) was more concentrated in areas where one of the contenders had strong political support.

In her more recent studies about Spain and Cote d’Ivoire, the same Balcells (2017) theorizes a model for violence against civilians that takes into consideration elections and local political elites. In her model, the violence against civilians in a conventional war is more likely to occur in politically disputed areas. The reason is rational and considers the role of local political elites that will discussed in the next section.

The evidence seems consistent with Chacón, Robinson, and Torvik (2011) and their studies about the civil war named La Violencia (The Violence, 1948-1958) in Colombia. Even though the focus of the study was not violence against civilians, the authors underline a similar pattern. The article claims that the violence was concentrated in areas that were politically disputed before the outbreak of the conflict. At the same time, strongholds of the political parties, Liberals and Conservatives, were relatively peaceful. This pattern is similar in conventional ethnic wars too. Costalli and Moro (2012) provide evidence that during the Bosnian War, municipalities located on politically and militarily relevant frontlines experience the highest levels of violence.

In other words, in conventional civil wars direct violence against civilians is more likely to occur in areas where the political parties were roughly evenly balanced.
In terms of irregular civil wars, the literature is scarcer. For example, Kalyvas and his model do not consider the election dynamics. Studies about “The Troubles” in Northern Ireland suggest that the violence was concentrated in the heartlands of the communities and not in ethnically balanced areas (Cunningham & Gregory 2014; Mueller, Rohner, & Schoenholzer 2013) but as well they do not consider the electoral variable. However, the election variable in irregular civil wars is present in Steele’s studies (2011, 2017). The author, using her studies on displacement in Colombia, argues that the violence in the country was mainly directed towards members of the Patriotic Union, the guerrilla-friendly political party and therefore areas where the local level support for this political party was higher were also the areas where more violence was registered.

Steele’s works underline why elections are so important in relation to patterns of violence. The results of the elections are not only a prize for the armed groups. More importantly, elections provide information to the armed groups about the population who live in a certain area. Through the election results, armed groups can understand the political preferences of the population. In this way, they can understand roughly how many friends or enemies have in the area and therefore behave accordingly.

To conclude, the distinction between conventional and irregular civil wars entails substantial differences about the frontlines and therefore the territorial control the warring factions hold. These differences might change substantially the dynamics of the conflict. To explain electoral patterns is important because some studies highlight the relation with patterns of violence in civil wars. Regarding these patterns, the first research gap can be identified. In fact, the relation between violence against civilians and elections in ICW is overlooked if compared with CCW. For this reason, the thesis will focus on irregular civil wars. The latter is interesting because they are more violent against civilians than conventional. The reason relies on the fact that civilians are more important in guerrilla warfare. For this reason, elections gain importance. In fact, they are a way to understand the preferences of the local population that can be used by armed groups.

1.4 Electoral violence

The focus of this thesis is on post-election violence. In other words, elections are used to explain patterns of violence. At the same time, violence can explain election results (pre-election violence) and it is usually defined as electoral violence. Even though it is not the focus, it is worth looking quickly at electoral violence literature for two reasons. Firstly, pre-election violence might affect post-election violence. It will be important throughout the thesis to bear in mind this possibility and try to isolate as much as possible this risk. Secondly, electoral violence provides interesting insights about a specific actor: political networks.
Fischer (2002: 3) provides a pragmatic definition of electoral violence: “any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced ‘protection,’ blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination”. The core of Fischer’s definition is that electoral violence seeks to influence the result of an election. In this sense, electoral violence corresponds to dynamics more similar to the second theme underlined by Dunning (2011): voting and fighting as complements.

Many studies recognize the importance of violence when used to coerce votes and win elections. Norton (2007) shows how Hezbollah has influenced Lebanese domestic politics while Collier and Vicente (2014) looked how intimidation and violence reduced voter turnout in Nigeria. More specifically to the case that has been chosen for this thesis, many studies (Sanchez 2010; Acemoglu et al. 2009; Valencia 2007) describe the importance of armed groups in shaping electoral preferences in Colombia.

Wilkinson (2004) and Wilkinson & Haid (2009) highlight the role of politicians in the outbreak of religious riots in India in 2002. In this case, the explosion of religious riots was part of an electoral strategy by Hindu politicians.

Kasara’s work (2009) is particularly interesting as it is a bridge between pre and post-election violence. In fact, the author highlights that the displacements in Kenya after the electoral crisis in 2007 (post-election violence) were linked to electoral incentives (pre-election violence) to win disputed parliamentary seats.

As these authors have underlined, politicians and their political network can have a determining role in conflict areas. In general, few studies about violence in civil wars and elections explicitly take into consideration the role of political elites with the exception of Balcells’ model (2017). The model assumes that a form of violence, for example an assassination, has benefits and costs (material but also emotional) for the perpetrators. Where two political groups are particularly close in terms of votes, the marginal benefits of using violence against the opponents are higher as the electoral balance can be radically modified in favour of the dominant political elite.

This interesting model is predominantly the case for CCW. Currently, there is no research that distinguishes the role of political networks in ICW which are, as mentioned previously, generally overlooked.

For this reason, a second research gap is identified: the lack of models that clearly takes into account incentives and goals of political elites in irregular civil wars.
1.5 Research gaps in the literature

This thesis aims at deepening the academic debate on elections and violence against civilians where two major research gaps have been identified.

Firstly, the relationship between violence against civilians and elections in irregular civil wars is understudied when compared with conventional civil wars. The two types of civil wars have substantial differences. Arguably, the fragmented sovereignty in ICW creates different dynamics when compared to CCW. When models of violence against civilians in irregular civil wars are present, like Kalyvas’, the electoral variable is not considered. Considering that elections can provide a lot of information about population’s loyalties, their presence should be investigated further.

Secondly, the strategic role of local political elites in civil wars is also understudied. Violence against civilians tends to be viewed as a “joint process” between armed groups and civilians. The only study about civil wars that clearly consider political networks as an important player is Balcells’(2017), and in this case is applied on conventional wars, not irregular ones.

For this reason, this thesis will try to respond to the question of how the distribution of votes affects the distribution of violence against civilians in irregular civil wars. In order to do so, political networks and their goals and incentives will be included in the causal mechanism that attempts to analyse the interaction between them, armed groups and civilians. My argument is that in irregular civil wars, civilians that live in areas with strong support for a political party are more likely to be targeted.
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This part will outline the theory behind this paper. As mentioned in the introduction, the theory is centred on the importance of political support in certain areas of a country. In the first section, it will be explained how the differences between conventional and irregular civil wars might affect electoral dynamics. The second section will discuss the role of elections. I will explain the different types of voting, the importance for information gathering and the definitions of political stronghold and politically disputed area. The third section will present the role and the incentives of the main actors involved in the process: armed groups, local political networks and civilians. The fourth section will present the causal mechanism that derives from the interaction between the actors the final section will summarise the entire part and present the hypothesis.

2.1 Differences between Conventional and Irregular Civil Wars regarding elections

In the previous part, the difference between conventional and irregular civil wars has been briefly explained. Balcells (2017) underlines that violence against civilians might show different patterns. In irregular wars, VAC is more often the result of the military competition to control territory than in conventional wars, where this violence is often perpetrated in areas far from the battlefield. The lack of clear frontlines in irregular civil wars has resulted in a fragmented sovereignty and control. I argue that this aspect has important effects on the election processes which in turn affects how these will influence patterns of violence against civilians.

Previous literature does not provide the implications of these differences on election processes. For this reason, I will try to identify some key implications on electoral processes using some examples.

In CCW, electoral processes might not take place at all, as the state may have collapsed like in the Spanish Civil War. Even if they do take place, they do not occur all over the country’s territory as it is likely that the opposite side would not recognize them at all. An example are the 1864 U.S. elections where the secessionist South did not participate. More recently, in 2014 in Ukraine, the presidential elections were not held in vast portions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts due to the total control by pro-Russian rebels in those areas4. (Walker & Luhn 2014). Moreover, according to the degree of military control, many of these elections cannot be considered free and fair. In fact, it is likely that local politicians are a direct expression of the controller of a certain territory leaving little space for substantial dissidence.

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4 Elections were not held also in Crimea that was unilaterally annexed by the Russian Federation.
On the other hand, in irregular civil wars, electoral processes would still exist and be held in the vast majority of the country as the areas where rebel control is total are scarce. Some examples can be Afghanistan, Iraq, Northern Ireland and Peru. Even with the war raging, the electoral booths are present. For example, in the 2009 Afghanistan election, 150 people could vote in Babiji municipality, even though the area was a battlefield for the two previous months (Boone 2009). In Peru, Sendero Luminoso’s strongholds, such as Ayacucho, continued to participate in the electoral processes even during the most violent years of the conflict (Infogob - Observatorio para la Gobernabilidad, 2018). At the same time, uncertainty is greater. Even though the government enjoys a military and technological advantage position, their control is more fragmented.

As total control is more difficult to achieve for both sides, I argue that the uncertainty affects the behaviour of all the actors involved in electoral processes. Also in this case, the literature is scarce and I will try to point out some possible dynamics.

Firstly, voters might be freer to express their political preferences. Even though the vote might not be completely free, voters would generally at least be able to participate in the elections, an opportunity that was denied to Donetsk and Luhansk’s voters in 2014 in Ukraine for example (Walker & Luhn 2014) but open for voters in Sendero Luminoso’s strongholds in Peru (Infogob - Observatorio para la Gobernabilidad, 2018).

Secondly, armed groups may attempt to influence the results and collect information about preferences of the population from its political behaviour (Valencia 2007; Steele 2011). In a conventional civil war, this is intuitively less likely as an armed group has less possibilities to influence behaviour of the civil population in the areas controlled by the enemy. As Balcells (2017) points out, their only option in enemy-controlled areas is to resort to indirect violence.

Thirdly, local politicians have a more independent role as they are not necessarily a simple expression of the ruler. Therefore, their personal legitimization originates from the elections and not necessarily from the relationship with the ruler. For this reason, they can pursue their own strategies (local, regional or national) and be an active actor of the local conflict dynamics.

It is important to repeat that there is no literature on this specific topic and all the implications presented are based on examples and logical sense derived from the definition of the two types of conflict.

To conclude, I argue that in irregular civil wars, electoral processes and electoral geography (i.e. the spatial distribution of electoral votes) have different dynamics than in conventional civil wars. As they are not a direct consequence of the frontlines of the conflict, the uncertainty provides more freedom to many actors to act and interact.
2.2 The role of elections

Elections hold a special role in the theory as they might use to collect information about the local population. So, how can this information be gathered? In the first section general characteristics of voting behaviour will be analysed while the second section will focus more on the different types of voting. The third section will explicitly discuss the role of elections as information provider. The last section will be focus on two keys concepts for the development of theory: political stronghold and politically disputed areas.

2.2.1 Voting behaviour

Considering that elections are a fundamental characteristic of a democracy (Sartori 2012), elections are one of the most common methods to choose a ruler.

Seven basic functions for elections have been identified: delegation of political representation; selection of the political elite; legitimisation of those in power; control over authorities; political accountability; creation of political programmes; recreation of public opinion image (Wojtasik 2013).

The latter, recreation of public image, is the most important for this paper. In fact, “they serve as a mechanism for translating public preferences into legitimation of power” (Ibid: 34). In other words, one of the main goals of the elections is to reveal preferences of the local population.

At the individual level, voting shows loyalty towards a political party, a candidate, a set of policies and an identity especially when it is repeated over time (Dalton 2006).

Even when the electoral process is not fair and free, some information is revealed. For example, the level of abstention in unfair elections signals the control the autocratic ruler exercises in that territory (Gimpel & Lay 2005; Sanchez 2010).

At the same time, voting cannot be conceptualized as a completely individual choice. “Voting behaviour is very much a habit” (Klass 2016) and it is shaped by the surrounding social environment. Studies like Glaser’s (1959) provide evidence of something that might appear quite intuitive: the individual voting behaviour, like turnout, is influenced by the voting pattern of the family. In general terms, social influence has significant impact in voting behaviour (Braha & de Aguiar 2017). The history and the values of the community have an important role in shaping voting preferences of the voter belonging to that environment.

For this reason, elections results can provide information about the local population and its loyalties (Steele 2011). Consequently, considering the importance for armed groups to have access to information about the local population, elections might be an important indicator for them.
2.2.2 Types of voting

Through the literature, it was possible to identify three main types of voting: evaluative, non-evaluative (Lindberg & Morrison 2008) and coerced (Valencia 2007).

Evaluative voting occurs when a person casts a vote for a party after a more-evaluating reasoning in respect to programs and performances (Lindberg & Morrison 2008). In other words, the voter shares values and policies with the party. In this thesis, this type of vote, that is common in full democracies, will also defined as ideological. The classical Western distinction Left/Right can be used as an example. The vote can still be defined by some personal characteristics like gender or economic wealth, but the voter puts the emphasis on the fact that he or she agrees with the ideological platform and consequent policies of the party.

Non-evaluative voting is not based on voters’ judgement of performances. Two types of votes are usually related to this attitude. The first one is proxy voting influenced and driven by ethnic, clan, or family ties; and the second is clientelist voting based on personal affective ties of patronage, family, or service (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008).

In the first case, the driver of the preferences are the ties with a specific group. The most evident example is ethnic voting. Voters might vote for a party because of their ties with a specific ethnic group. The most famous example are the political parties in Kenya, but also Western countries have some noted cases (Swedish People’s Party in Finland or the Scottish National Party in the U.K.).

Clientelist voting is based on the idea that the vote is exchanged with personal favours or gifts and takes its name from the Roman Republic. At the time, it was common for politicians to have personal networks based on a system of obligations and favours with their clientes. This practice is still common, especially in poorer countries, and it often takes the form of vote-buying (Vicente & Wantchekon 2009). The strategic provision of public goods, like electricity or sewers, might also be a form of clientelism.

Lastly, there is coerced voting. In this case, the voter does not have a choice. Voters are forced to vote for a party because their lives, families or goods are under threat (Valencia 2007). If the anonymity of the vote is not guaranteed, this type of voting becomes particularly common.

It is important to notice that these four categories of voting are not mutually exclusive. On the opposite, the act of casting a vote can be influenced by many dynamics. Belgium is a good example of how ideological and proxy voting are mixed. In fact, electors vote for ideological parties (like Socialists, Christian Democrats and Liberals) but on linguistic attributes (Flemish/Walloons). In other words, there is a Flemish Socialist Party and a Walloon Socialist Party. The same occurs for the other parties. In addition, clientelist practices can be present also in Western countries. Promises to extend a public service to a specific neighbourhood or to implement a policy for a specific social segment
could also be perceived as indirect clientelism. It is also intuitive how proxy and clientelist voting could easily overlap.

It is worth remembering that all four categories of voting reveal some information about the population: their loyalties to political parties, communities, clientelist networks or level of control of armed actors in a specific area.

2.2.3 Elections as a provider of information

As underlined by Steele (2017), elections can be useful sources of information for political actors. Firstly, the turnout itself is already valuable data about the local population. In full democracies, the turnout rate has been related to strength of social capital (Atkinson & Fowler 2012) or inequality (Bartle, Borch, & Skirmuntt 2016) in a given area. In wartimes that information is more difficult to collect as the conflict has an impact, but still other information is available.

Votes can be strong indicators of preferences. In some situations, political parties or candidates can be directly linked with armed groups. A good example was Batasuna in the Basque Country that had links to the terrorist organization ETA (Basque Country and Freedom). Even more well-known was the relationship between Sinn Féin and IRA (Irish Republican Army) in Northern Ireland. In other cases, political parties may be linked (directly or indirectly) to ethnic, religious, economic or ideological communities. For example, the HDP (People’s Democratic Party) in Turkey claims to have no ethnic lines but its votes are clearly concentrated in Kurdish areas (Ozen & Kalkan 2016). Social Democratic, Socialist and Communist parties have been historically linked with the working class and trade unions.

It is important to bear in mind that even if political parties have no evident ties with specific groups or no strong ideologies, information can still be deduced in other ways. On a local level, the profile of the single candidates can provide information that is difficult to obtain at a national level. In fact, political parties should not be considered to be monolithic structures (Novaes 2018).

Local members of a political party (members of parliament, governors, mayors, regional representatives, etc) have some degree of independence (Novaes 2018). For example, they might have different stances on some issues in respect to the national platform. These preferences are known through electoral campaigns, interviews, past declarations, votes in assemblies or through personal contacts with candidates and their staff. For example, in the U.S., Democrats from West Virginia (a Republican stronghold) are usually more conservative than their national colleagues (Foran 2017). Local politicians may choose different allies to those in national or regional elections. This behaviour is intuitively associated with developing countries and political systems with weak party loyalty and strong clientelist practices. Nevertheless, this could happen in a full democracy such as Sweden too.
An example is Överkalix, a stronghold of the Social Democrats but where they were excluded from the municipality government when the remaining parties (from the far-left to the centre-right) united (Nordman et al. 2014).

In conclusion, it is worth recalling that elections can in many ways provide information about local preferences. Identities like ideologies, religion, ethnicity, loyalty to a personal network or coercion by an armed group can be mirrored in the election results and therefore send signals to the political actors.

2.2.4 Distribution of votes: political strongholds and politically disputed areas

An important part of the theory is centred around the notion of political stronghold areas and politically disputed areas.

I define a political stronghold as an area where a political party, candidate or network obtain the overwhelming majority of the votes in several elections.

The main consequence of my assumption is that, in a stronghold area, the result of an election is basically known before the actual election takes place because a large number of voters would need to change their preference to be able to swing the election results. I am assuming that this swing cannot happen in the short term. In fact, the definition of a stronghold is not only based on the number of votes - time is an important factor as well. The fact that an area has voted similarly for a long period of time provides certainty that it will most likely continue doing so in the near future. To illustrate - it is no secret that California and New York will almost surely vote for a Democratic candidate in U.S. 2020 elections, no matter who this turns out to be. The same can be said for a Republican candidate in Alabama and Wyoming. How can we know this? Firstly, we know that Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump performed particularly well in the four above-mentioned states in 2016. In theory, these results could also have been a consequence of any specific characteristic of the 2016 election. However, what gives almost certainty to the assumption is the fact that these states have voted for the same political party in every election, respectively, since 1988, 1984, 1976 and 1964 (Federal Election Commission, 2018).

There are many other examples of well recognised stronghold around the world. In Italy, Tuscany is a stronghold of the centre-left while Sicily for the centre-right. In Sweden, Norrland is known for its historic loyalty to the centre-left parties while Bavaria, in Germany, usually votes for the Christian Democrats (Bale 2013).

To the contrary, disputed political areas are defined as an area where no political party has a clear majority of votes and where different political parties have won elections over time. Essentially, politically disputed areas are more fluid, and a small portion of swing voters maintains the power to
decisively influence the outcome of an election. For this reason, the result is unknown beforehand and small variations in the implemented policies can change the preferences and therefore also the result. Continuing with the U.S. example, Ohio is a recognised “swing state” (Silver 2017) which has always voted for the candidate who has also won the national elections in every single election since 1964 (Federal Election Commission, 2018). Another example is Western Sydney in Australia, identified as one of the decisive areas for the federal elections (Safi 2016).

To conclude, it is assumed that the classification of an area as a stronghold or politically disputed will have effects on the possibility to predict election results. In the next sections, I will analyse how this change might affect incentives and behaviours of the actors.

2.3 Actors

The main actors within the theory include armed groups, local political networks and the local population and they interact between each other. It is assumed that they are rational actors as they develop strategies to solve problems. However, they are not of equal importance. The primary actors are the armed groups as they are the ultimate perpetrators of organized violence. The secondary actors are the local political networks. While they do not have weapons, they have access to different sources of influence. The third and least important actor is the local population as they hold less resources than the other two actors. They are also more marginal than the first two since it is assumed that the local political networks already hold the information that could be provided by this third actor.

2.3.1 Primary actor: armed groups

The UCDP (2018) defines a warring party as “a government of a state or any opposition organisation or alliance of organisations that uses armed force to promote its position in the incompatibility in an intrastate or an interstate armed conflict.”

Armed groups may have varying goals and different types of armed groups also tend to have different goals. In this paper, only those groups that have a political agenda will be considered. This political agenda may be well-developed or very vague, but it is the characteristic that differentiates them from criminal groups.

As underlined by Steele (2011), elections are a useful tool to understand the loyalties of the population as important information can be gathered. Considering that armed groups have a political agenda, they may sometimes perceive themselves as within the political spectrum. Even in countries without a strong ideological party system, they might be closer to political candidates than others. In this way, they can gage if an area is receptive to their political agenda.
In general, I assume that the main goal of the armed groups is territorial control (Steele, 2017). Even though not all armed groups may have territorial control as main short-term goal, I would assume that at some point in the future, if they have a political agenda, they will need territorial control to expand their military and political operations to a new level. The territorial control does not mean to control the entire country but areas they are particularly interesting for them for some reasons, like in ethnic conflicts (Dulić & Hall 2014).

In relation to elections, I do not assume that the main goal is to influence the results. In fact, some degree of territorial control is a necessary condition to influence elections. The armed groups might be motivated by other objectives such as access to natural resources and trade routes, control of a strategic military position or control of social networks. Even though elections and territorial control are closely related (as one facilitates the implementation of the other and vice versa), the control of election results is not the main goal of the armed groups.

Most of the time, territorial control requires the support from the local population and the local elites. In terms of the relationship between armed groups and the local population, I assume they behave similarly as Kalyvas (2006) predicts. Considering that indiscriminate violence can be extremely dangerous and create a backlash against the armed group that is using it, selective violence is considered preferable. The problem of selective violence is to solve the “identification problem” and consequently the collaboration of the civil population is needed.

Normally, where there is access to extensive information thanks to the presence of collaborators, selective violence would be easier and preferable to perpetrate. In absence of information, the armed groups may choose to step back or resort to indiscriminate violence (Kalyvas 2006).

The relationship with local political networks is more complex and can vary substantially at the level of complicity (Matanock & Staniland 2017). The armed groups might need political networks for several reasons. Firstly, local politicians, thanks to their social position and networks, may be crucial collaborators. Thanks to their role, it is likely that they possess important information about the members of the community. Moreover, they may use their leverage to push the local population to collaborate. Secondly, local politicians have privileged access to many kinds of public resources.

In exchange for information and resources, armed groups can provide a service: violence. Local politicians can be tempted to use the armed groups for their personal or political gains creating an alliance with them (Staniland 2015). Unless there are some vital reasons, it is useless to upset a “friendly” politician for an armed group as he or she can be more useful in the future in other ways.
For example, to use violence in an area where the politician is strong without his or her permission can worsen the relationship with him or her.

As armed groups are the ultimate perpetrators of violence, a mention about the different forms of violence is needed. As said previously, when the goal is to control a certain group, violence might be tactical and strategic (Kalyvas, 2006). In fact, the violent act does not affect only the main target, but it is also a message to every member of the community. This aspect is true for every form of violence against civilians: homicide, displacement, torture, kidnappings, threats and others. In this thesis, the theory does not predict a relationship between votes and a type of crime. The only prediction is between votes and how a target is chosen (selective or indiscriminate).

2.3.2 Secondary actor: local political networks

The secondary actor are the political networks. As seen previously, a political network can be based on clientelism, ideology, ethnic ties, religion or any other characteristic. This means that they do not participate extensively in the production of violence, but they can influence it.

Generally, the main goal of local political networks is to be re-elected (or someone loyal from the same political network) and for this reason, they care about the fate of their voters (Balcells 2017). They can also have secondary goals and they are particularly important for this theory. Elimination of personal or political enemies, personal enrichment, specific favours to special constituents are examples of those secondary goals.

As briefly mentioned in the previous section, the local political networks are characterised by two principal leverages.

Firstly, thanks to their links with the local civil society (religious organization, trade unions, business, neighbourhood associations, etc.) they possess valuable information about the locals. Secondly, they have access to public resources. The latter must be considered to be very general as the definition can include a variety of resources. Public funding, policy-making or contacts with other branches of the state like judges and higher-level politicians are among the most important examples. Both are logically valuable and needed by the armed groups.

The relationship between armed groups and political networks is complex and can be defined by various degrees of collaboration (Matanock & Staniland 2017). Political networks can either completely collaborate or collaborate only on specific issues and they can have preferences over candidates and policies. It is extremely rare with politicians that never make declarations about the conflict and the armed groups with silence too being a signal to the armed groups. For this reason, even though they cannot be considered part of an armed group, they can still signal their preferences.
to the armed groups. Therefore, armed groups can distinguish between “friends” or “enemies”, according to the level of perceived threat in a game similar to signalling theories (Fearon 1994).

As it is assumed that political networks are rational actors, they face a classic dilemma of costs vs benefits. Every policy has political costs and benefits and the use of violence is not an exception.

I assume that their behaviour is strictly correlated with what in this paper is defined as the “accountability problem”. Accountability means being responsible for what you do and able to give a satisfactory reason for it, or the degree to which this happens. In other words, they must respond to the voters of their behaviour.

The level of accountability varies according to the political area. In political strongholds, where politicians know in advance whether they will be re-elected or not, their accountability is limited. This mechanism can also be seen in Western democracies where the ideological vote is stronger. In many cases, regions that are considered strongholds (for example, Tuscany or Lombardy in Italy respectively for the left and the right) will re-elect the same political parties even if these may have suffered scandals. Obviously, corruption scandals and violence are not comparable but illustrates the idea behind politicians’ accountability.

### 2.3.3 Tertiary actor: civilians

The local civilians are the target of the violence. At the same time, they play a role in its production. I assume that their main goal is to survive and protect their families. By definition, they do not participate in fights, but they can provide resources to the armed groups.

Even though their role is more limited than the other two as they have access to less resources, they are active player in two ways. Firstly, they express their preferences through voting. Their allegiance to a specific ideology or a personal network becomes evident when voters cast their votes. Secondly, they support, directly or indirectly a faction. As their main goal is to survive, a minimum involvement in the war is the best option. Their silence and the absence of rebellion is an indirect sign that the armed groups presence is tolerated. But their attitude towards the dominant armed group can change dramatically as a consequence of indiscriminate violence (Kalyvas 2006). If their optimal choice, silence, is not leading to more security the incentives to join the opposite side increase. Directly, they can participate in the production of violence becoming a collaborator of an armed group and denouncing defectors (Ibid.). They would only do so if they feel safe. If they fear retaliation, the incentive to denounce decreases.

In this situation, their behaviour is dictated by what I define as the “safety problem”.
2.4 Causal mechanism

All three above-mentioned actors face their own problems. Civilians face the “safety problem”. They want to be sure that when they denounce the risk of retaliation is minimum. At the same time, they would join the opposite if they are target of indiscriminate violence from the dominant armed group. Related to this, the armed group face the “identification problem”. In other words, to avoid indiscriminate violence, they need to be able to identify collaborators and defectors. Lastly, local political networks face the “accountability problem”, i.e. they respond of their behaviour to the voters. Their behaviour can change perception of the voters and therefore the election results.

The main argument of this thesis is that political strongholds are more vulnerable to violence because incentives for favouring violence are present in every actor’s cost vs benefit analysis.

In the next section, I will analyse how those problems and incentives interact with the political position (stronghold or disputed) of a certain area. The analysis will be focused specifically on armed groups and political networks as it is more complex.

In fact, civilians’ incentives are simpler. In politically disputed areas the risk of retaliation is too high and therefore collaboration is too risky. On the opposite, in friendly strongholds civilians feel protected by the community (that is voting similarly to them) or by the local political network they are loyal to. Therefore, collaboration is easier and less risky. The graphs below show the causal chain that links distribution of votes and distribution of violence for armed groups and political networks.

2.4.1 Primary actor: armed groups

**Enemy stronghold** If an area is close to political networks that opposes the armed group’s political project, the armed groups can consider almost every civilian a collaborator with the enemy. The “identification” problem is quickly resolved by labelling everyone as an enemy. For this reason, the armed group is not afraid of a backlash and can use indiscriminate violence. Massacres or massive displacement can be strategies used. In this case, there is also an incentive in using violence for a military reason. An attack in this area can undermine military, political, social and economic structures of support. Moreover, it can show the population whether the opposite side is able to defend them. If the armed group has the technology, they can also use indirect violence such as bombings.

**Friendly stronghold**: On the contrary, if an area is close to political networks that are not hostile to the armed group's political project, the same armed group can consider that area as full of potential collaborators. The main collaborator could potentially be the politician or “big man” who is politically controlling the area. Therefore, overcoming the “identification problem” is easier. Thanks to these
collaborators, to carry on selective violence against those members not aligned with the armed group is easier, and relatively cheap.

**Disputed areas:** if an area is politically disputed it is difficult for the armed groups to recognize who is with them or against them. Moreover, many potential collaborators might choose to step back as they fear a possible retaliation from the other side. In this case, solving the “identification problem” becomes extremely difficult. In a similar situation, where armed groups are almost too “blind”, any use of violence is dangerous for the group as selective violence can be perceived as indiscriminate and therefore motivate a backlash against the armed group.

2.4.2 Secondary actor: political networks

**Enemy stronghold:** in this area, political network A is dominant. In this case, political network B has no important politicians from that area and it does not care about the fate of the local population. There are no potential political benefits for political network B in operating in that area as the elections are already lost. Simultaneously there are no costs as very few political network B voters live in that area. The accountability problem basically does not exist as there is no interest in that area. For this reason, they would probably do nothing to protect this area as they simply do not care enough.

**Friendly stronghold:** in this area political network B is dominant. The cost/benefit analysis is particularly weak as well, as the elections are already won. If the vote is considered a fixed variable that does not change over time, the politicians are less reliant on the voters as they will support the politicians in all situations. As their political costs are basically null, the politicians are less accountable in their actions. In an area like this, the political costs of violent actions are extremely reduced, and politicians may try to channel the violence for their personal purposes. For this reason, dominant politicians might be tempted to use armed groups to inflict selective violence to segments of the society who are not completely aligned with the dominant political networks. This category can be broad and can include for example opposition party members, journalists, entrepreneurs, trade union leaders, activists or personal enemies.

**Disputed areas:** if an area is disputed, it means that the political competition is high, and the political costs of certain actions are bigger than in stronghold areas. As mentioned before, I assume that political parties prefer electoral competition over fighting as they have a chance to win the election in the future. In a politically disputed area, politicians are extremely vulnerable to the “accountability problem” as every political movement can swing voters. In this situation, it is dangerous for local
politicians to relate to perpetration of violence as the decisive swing voters could vote for the other political network. According to this, politicians who have contacts or collaborate with armed groups would probably try to curb the violence by pushing them to reduce it in the area. This argument is consistent with Przeworski (1991) who states that political parties prefer voting over fighting in a parity situation.

The tables below illustrate the different behaviours of each actor according to the political area in which they operate. The symbols plus (+) and minus (-) reflect whether incentives push towards more or less violence. The third table is a summary of the incentives the actors have according to the political area.

**Table 1. Incentives for armed groups according to the political area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRONGHOLD A</th>
<th>DISPUTED</th>
<th>STRONGHOLD B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARMED GROUP A</td>
<td>SITUATION</td>
<td>Friendly – Many Collaborators</td>
<td>Difficulty to Recognize Collaborators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONSEQUENCE</td>
<td>Limited Risk of Backlash</td>
<td>High Risk of Backlash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIOLENCE</td>
<td>Selective violence (+)</td>
<td>Limited violence (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARMED GROUP B</td>
<td>SITUATION</td>
<td>Enemy – No collaborators</td>
<td>Difficulty to Recognize Collaborators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONSEQUENCE</td>
<td>No Risk of Backlash</td>
<td>High Risk of Backlash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIOLENCE</td>
<td>Indiscriminate Violence (++)</td>
<td>Limited violence (0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2. Incentives for political networks according to the political area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRONGHOLD A</th>
<th>DISPUTED</th>
<th>STRONGHOLD B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL NETWORK A</td>
<td>SITUATION</td>
<td>Impossible to Lose</td>
<td>Possibility to Win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONSEQUENCE</td>
<td>Limited Accountability</td>
<td>High Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIOLENCE</td>
<td>Encourage Selective violence (+)</td>
<td>Curb violence (-)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL NETWORK B</td>
<td>SITUATION</td>
<td>Impossible to Win</td>
<td>Possibility to Win</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONSEQUENCE</td>
<td>Limited Accountability</td>
<td>High Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VIOLENCE</td>
<td>Area not important (0)</td>
<td>Curb violence (-)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Directions of the incentives for use of violence by actors and area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>STRONGHOLD A</th>
<th>DISPUTED</th>
<th>STRONGHOLD B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARMED GROUP A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARMED GROUP B</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL NETWORK A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL NETWORK B</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>+/-+/+-/+</td>
<td>-/-</td>
<td>+/-+/+-/+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When all incentives of all actors are summed, political strongholds appear to be more vulnerable to violence. In fact, it seems both main actors, armed groups and political networks, have incentive to perpetrate or encourage the violence in stronghold areas.

2.5 Hypothesis

The causal mechanism suggests that political strongholds, and the civilians living there, are more likely to be target of violence against civilians. Firstly, they can be a target of indiscriminate violence from the enemy armed group. Secondly, the armed groups and the political network that are strong in that area have incentives to use selective violence. Thirdly, the rival political network is indifferent about the area and it has no incentive in intervening.

On the opposite, the theory predicts that a politically disputed area would be more peaceful. Armed groups have problems in recognizing collaborators and defectors and therefore they might restrain their actions to avoid a backlash. At the same time, local politicians would try to curb the violence in the area to avoid that connections with violent groups reduce their possibility to win the elections.

Two hypotheses will be tested by analysing different time periods both for the distribution of violence and votes. The first is focuses on the long-term effects of the distribution of votes on long-term violence against civilians:

\( H1: \) Civilians who live in areas where the political support for a party is historically strong are more likely to be targeted by armed groups.

The second hypothesis will test the short-term effects of distribution of votes on short-term violence.

\( H2: \) Civilians who live in areas where the political support for a party is strong in a single election are more likely to be targeted in the years leading to the next election by armed groups.
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 The case: the armed conflict in Colombia

3.1.1 Selection of the case

The case that will be used to test the theory is the armed conflict in Colombia. Following the research question, the universe of cases is irregular civil wars. The case has been chosen for three main reasons.

Firstly, it is a good example of irregular civil war. For more than 50 years left-wing guerrillas have fought the Colombian government, aided by the physical geography of the Latin American country. In the last decades of the conflict (1990s-2000s), also paramilitary organizations joined the conflict. As said previously, irregular civil wars represented the 53% of the conflicts between 1946 and 2004 (Balcells 2017). Some examples are particularly famous like the Malayan Emergency (1948-60), the Vietnam War (1960-75), various phases of the Afghanistan conflict (1978-92 and 2001 – present), Iraq after the American invasion, Peru during the Sendero Luminoso insurgency (1980-96), the "Troubles" in Northern Ireland (1968-98) or the war in Chechnya. All these examples have in common guerrilla warfare and lack of clear frontlines. In fact, at the time of the conflict, there were guerrilla organizations fighting against the government. Even though secessionist irregular conflicts, like Chechnya, are not excluded in the theoretical framework, the fact they are usually localized in specific regions of the country caused me to exclude them. In fact, I argue that it would have been difficult to draw general conclusion from such cases.

Secondly, the country should be a semi-democracy or hybrid regime at the time of the conflict. In other words, there should be elections ongoing. For example, the Vietnam War or the first phase of Afghanistan war took place under authoritarian regimes where, intuitively, no elections were held. In this case, Colombia has been a democracy for the last sixty years and regular elections have always been held despite the conflict in basically every municipality of the country. In addition, in the Colombian political system is possible to notice all types of voting behaviours previously mentioned: evaluative, non-evaluative and coerced. Other contexts, where a voting behaviour might be particularly predominant (for example non-evaluative ethnic), would not be perfect for the testing of the general theory.

The third reason is based on a pragmatic choice. Availability of data is always a problematic aspect for every investigation. Considering the two main variables - violence against civilians and elections - there is no substantial lack of data for the Colombian conflict. In fact, reliable datasets with municipal-level data are available. Regarding elections data dating back to 1958 are available.
while those about violence against civilians date back to 1985. In addition, Colombia is a well-studied conflict and therefore also data for control variables were accessible.

To conclude, I argue that Colombia could be a suitable case to use for testing the theory. It is a famous example of irregular civil war, it was a democracy for the entire time of the conflict, its political system includes every type of voting behaviour and finally crucial data are available.

Before describing the research design, a background of the history of the conflict is needed.

3.1.2 Background

In Colombia politics and violence have unfortunately crossed their path several times. The Liberal Party, federalist and secularist, and the Conservative Party, centralist and catholic, are among the oldest still active political parties in the world, respectively founded in 1848 and 1849. Throughout the Colombian history, the two parties have clashed on the battlefield several times. In fact, only in the 19th century, six civil wars took place (1851, 1854, 1860-1862, 1976-1878, 1884-1885 and 1895).

One of the bloodiest most periods of Colombian history started in 1899 when the Liberals initiated a rebellion in the department of Santander that quickly spread in many more regions of the country. The war ended in 1902 with the Conservative victory and thereafter was named the “One Thousand Days War”. The conflict was particularly brutal, and troops from Venezuela and Ecuador participated, making the war international. One of the main consequence of the conflict was the separation of Panama from the Colombian state. The importance of this war in the Colombian collective imaginary is underlined by the fact that it is one of the historic facts narrated in Gabriel García Márquez’s masterpiece “One Hundred Years of Solitude” (1967). Moreover, one of the main characters of the book, Aureliano Buendía, was inspired by the Liberal general Rafael Uribe Uribe.

The following years were relatively peaceful for Colombia. Nonetheless, in 1928 the Colombian state brutally repressed a strike of the workers in the banana plantations owned by the United Fruit Company in Ciénaga, Magdalena. Hundreds of workers were killed, and the repression took the name of the “Banana Massacre”.

In 1948, a new event shook the country. Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, leader of the radical faction of the Liberal Party and presidential candidate, was killed in Bogotà. The murder triggered a new period of confrontation between the two political parties known as La Violencia (The Violence). The country has never enjoyed full peace since then.

The dictatorship of Rojas Pinilla (1953 – 1957) tried to stop the war but he was overthrown by a coup. The conflict ended in 1958 when the two parties reached a peace agreement and created

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3 This section is mainly based on (Zanatta(2017), Villegas (2015) the website VerdadAbierta.com and the author’s experience in Colombia working in a think tank with a special focus on the Colombian armed conflict.
the National Front. The latter was a power sharing alliance that foresaw alternation in power every four years between the two parties and the exclusion of third parties.

It is worth mentioning that the country was politically polarized in the years before the onset of *La Violencia*. According to De Lewin (1989), 78% of the Colombian municipalities always voted for the same political party between 1931 and 1947. In addition to that, 37% of the municipalities are considered “hegemonic”, meaning that a political party always scored more than 80% in the period 1931-1947. Some cases are extreme. For example, in Gramalote, Norte de Santander, the lowest result for the Conservatives in the seven elections between 1931-1947 was 97% (in two occasions it was 100%).

In the 1960s, due to the political exclusion for third parties and the revolutionary wave coming from Cuba, many left-wing guerrillas were established. The most powerful and famous of those was FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). The others left-wing guerrillas were the ELN (*Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* – National Liberation Army) and the EPL (*Ejercito Popular de Liberacion* – Popular Liberation Army). In 1970, after the alleged electoral fraud against the former dictator Rojas Pinilla, also the M-19 (*Movimiento 19 de Abril* – Movement 19th of April) joined the armed struggle.

In 1974 the National Front was dissolved, and the presidential elections became competitive again.

In the 1980s, peace talks between the government and the guerrillas started. To help the process, a guerrilla-friendly political party was created: *Union Patriotica* (Patriotic Union). The peace talks were not entirely successful but two groups, M-19 and EPL, demobilized and contributed to the drafting of a new Constitution. At the same time, it must not be overlooked that the 1980s were a period characterized by the rising of the drug cartels. The cartels of Medellin, Cali and Norte del Valle became among the most powerful crime organizations in the world thanks to the coca trade. Especially the Medellin cartel, along with paramilitaries and members of the Armed Forces, participated in “the political genocide” of Patriotic Union’s members at the end of the 1980s (VerdadAbierta.com, 2018). Their influence on the Colombian politics was immense. In the electoral campaign leading to the 1990 presidential elections, four presidential candidates were killed (two Patriotic Union, one Liberal and one M-19).

In the 1990s the armed conflict dramatically intensified. The collapse of the drug cartels opened the lucrative market of coca to the armed groups. In 1997, the paramilitary organizations, that used to be region-based, created a nation umbrella organization called AUC (*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* – United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia) led by the Castaño brothers. Their national
expansion was extremely rapid and their arrival in new regions often characterized by civilians’ massacres.

Coca was not the only natural resource the armed groups were fighting for. The presence of oil was a driver of the conflict in departments such as Arauca, Putumayo and Casanare while precious minerals were important in the conflict dynamics in Antioquia and Chocó (VerdadAbierta.com, 2018). Coal multinational companies like Glencore and Drummond have been accused of connections with paramilitaries in Cesar and La Guajira (Moor & van Sandt 2014). On the Caribbean Coast, paramilitaries often targeted members of the leftist banana trade unions (Steele, 2011).

The civilian victims of the conflict (in a broad definition that not include only homicides) increased from 86,965 in 1994 to 300,637 in 1997. The victims of homicides were 7,058 (33% of the total) in 1994 and 11,098 (15%) in 1997. The peak was reached in 2002 with 862,691 victims with 19,707 homicides (2%). As it is clear from this progression, the main strategy of victimization against civilians was not homicide but forced displacement. Today, more than 7 million people in Colombia are considered victims of forced displacement, representing around the 80% of the total (Unique Registry of Victims - RUV, 2018).

In 2002, for the first time since 1900 a president who was not a member of the two main political parties won the presidency: Álvaro Uribe Vélez, a former Liberal with right-wing positions. The massive investments in the defensive budget was part of a strategy of frontal clash with the guerrillas that started to lose strength. Under his presidency, the government implemented a demobilization process for paramilitaries that ended in 2006. The period between 1997 and 2006 has been defined as the “paramilitary era” of the conflict (Hristov 2009). After that date, many paramilitaries, even if officially demobilized, moved to or created organized crime structures. The relationship between politicians and paramilitary organizations has been particularly obscure. In 2012, 37 congressmen and 5 governors were convicted for “Parapolitics”, their links to paramilitary groups (Anselma 2012). Many more processes of this kind are still ongoing in Colombian tribunals. It is worth noting that there were also cases of “FARCpolitics” but the number of politicians involved is not comparable.

To conclude, FARC and the Colombian government led by Manuel Santos reached a peace agreement in 2016, ending a conflict longer than 50 years. Today, the only guerrilla organization that still continues the armed struggle is the ELN, plus some dissident factions of EPL and FARC.
Table 4. Spatial distribution of the Colombian conflict (1997-2002)

Source: Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (Cinep)

Yellow areas: Municipalities with occurrence of at least one event of Human Rights violation, Political Social Violence or War action.

Red areas: Municipalities with systematic presence of Human Rights violations, Political Social Violence or War actions.
3.2 Research design

The testing of the theory will be done through a quantitative study with an OLS (Ordinary Least Square) linear statistical regression. I argue that is the best option because, considering the amount of refined data available, it allows to establish general patterns to examine variations across a large number of cases.

The unit of analysis will be municipality. In Colombia, a municipality is the lowest level administrative division of the state (the intermediate is department). Nowadays there are 1122 municipalities in Colombia. Considering that some of them were created recently, data about the violence from municipalities created after the period taken into consideration have been aggregated to the municipalities they were belonging to.

The independent variable (IV) is political support for a party while the dependent variable (DV) is victimization rate.

Two hypotheses will be tested: one is focusing more on the relationship between the variables in a long-term period while the second on the short-term.

In addition, when the regression will be run the first model will be the bivariate regression between the IV and DV, the second will add control variables directly related to the conflict while the third will add socio-demographic variables.

3.2.1 First hypothesis

The first hypothesis focuses on longer periods of time. The periods are chosen in relation to a presence of a specific armed group: paramilitaries. As they were the non-state actors facing the guerrillas, their role was particularly important for violence against civilians. A report from the Historical Memory Center, underlines that paramilitaries were most violent group against civilians. They were responsible of the 60% of the massacres and 40% of selective assassinations (Sierra Restrepo 2018). For this reason, the focus will be on the “paramilitary era” of the Colombian conflict (Hristov 2009).

The support for political party is measured taking into consideration that to define a municipality as a stronghold, a political party needs strong support over a conspicuous amount of time. The period will be 1974-1994. If that support is present, the municipality is defined as an historic stronghold. The first date represents the first competitive election held in Colombia after The Violence and the National Front while 1994 was the last presidential election before the substantial intensification of the conflict and the expansion of paramilitaries.
Violence against civilians also focuses on a large period. In this hypothesis, the analysed period coincided with the most violent years of the conflict: 1995-2006. The first date is not only related to increase in number of victims. Historically, as said, it also coincides with the beginning of the expansion of a new actor with a political agenda: paramilitaries. The violence before that date is obviously important but it never reached the same level as in 1990s. For this reason, it will be used as a controlling variable. The period represents three full different presidencies: Samper (Liberal), Pastrana (Conservative) and Uribe’s first term (Colombia First). Even though, conflict continued after 2006, this date was chosen because it coincides with the complete demobilization of the paramilitary organizations. Even though, many of them joined organized crime groups, the political agenda was not present anymore.

With this specific research design, the main goal is to analyse the effects of being an historical political stronghold on the intensity of the violence during the subsequent conflict.

It is important to underline that this research design is similar to which Balcells (2001), Chacon, Robinson and Torvik (2011) used for their studies about conventional civil wars. It is also similar to Steele’s study (2017) about strategic displacement in Colombia.

3.2.2 Second hypothesis

The second hypothesis is focused on effects in the short term.

The unit of analysis is year/election. The definition of stronghold is not based on the historical results but on the single election results. It is a small deviation from the original definition of stronghold that includes also a long period of time. It is mainly used to test if the time variable matters or not. The 1994 and 1998 presidential election are taken into consideration. Regarding violence against civilians, every unit year/election will be matched with the violence in the municipality in the four following years, that correspond to the period between two presidential elections.

The two elections were chosen for mainly two reasons. Firstly, as mentioned above, they take place during the rising of the paramilitary groups and the intensification of the conflict. Considering that the 1990 election was held in a country with different levels of violence, this would have changed substantially the results. On the opposite, the 2002 election is excluded because is it temporarily located too deep into the conflict. In fact, many studies suggested that in those elections armed groups heavily influenced the results (Valencia 2007). In addition, the 2002 election was politically different from the previous as the winner, Alvaro Uribe Velez, was not a member of the two main parties. This aspect might have changed substantially the electoral map of the country.

The main goal of this hypothesis is to test if political support for a party in a single election has a short-term effect on the violence against civilians.
3.3 Dependent variable: violence against civilians

The DV variable is examined through a victimization rate.

The data are taken from the Colombian Unique Registry of Victims (RUV). The Registry is used by the Colombian state to give compensation to the victims of the armed conflict. The database is particularly useful to understand violence against civilians because it excludes combatants (Colombian Armed Forces, paramilitaries and guerrilla members) from the data except for child soldiers. The municipality taken into account is where the crime occurred.

The database is particularly well refined. In fact, it gives the opportunity to analyse data by year, by municipality, by gender and by crime.

I argue that the database is particularly reliable. State database usually suffer some bias related to the fact that victims of state-based violence are more reluctant to denounce. In the RUV this specific bias seems to be absent. Many of the crimes were perpetrated years ago and the level of registrations has been increasing since the peace process started. The peace negotiations and the peace agreement probably helped victims to feel more secure. The incentive of giving compensation might have helped victims to register themselves. The opposite problem, “fake victims” looking for money, seems to be limited as in 2017 only 22,000 cases over more than 8 million were suspected to be frauds (Gossain 2017).

The database does not provide information about the perpetrators of violence. This measure was probably chosen to guarantee anonymity to the victims and avoid retaliation. Even though some interesting data are lost, this measure helps the reliability of the database. Only victims of violence by political armed groups (guerrillas, paramilitaries and Armed Forces) are included in this database. The victims of non-political armed groups are registered in a different database. This bias will be discussed further in the analysis.

This thesis will use a broad definition of victim. Everyone who was affected by one of the crimes recognized by Registry will be considered a victim. Among those crimes the most common were: displacement, homicide (that includes also relatives of the killed person), sexual violence, threats, kidnappings, mines, terrorist acts, etc. Forced displacement was by far the most common war crime during the Colombian conflict. It accounted for the 79,2% of all the victims in the database. As said, every form of violence served had different specific purposes and this can be considered a limitation. Some of them might be more selective (like threats) and other more indiscriminate (like land mines). But the majority of them and the most important, like homicides and forced displacements, can be both. Nonetheless, all of them were aimed to control the local population. I argue that if the goal of the study is to understand the levels of violence, all of them should be included, as all of them inflict some kind of harm, physical or psychological, to non-combatants.
The victimization rate is a ratio of the total number of victims over the population of the same municipality. I argue that the use of a rate captures better the levels of violence against civilians than the use of absolute number of victims. In fact, the rate takes into consideration the population of the municipality. As shown by the table below, the municipalities of Florencia and Cartagena del Chairá have similar numbers of victims. At the same time, Florencia’s population is almost five times bigger than Cartagena del Chairá’s. Therefore, it is evident that the violence had a bigger impact in Cartagena del Chairá than Florencia. For the first hypothesis, it is calculated using the total number of victims in a municipality between 1995 and 2006 over the population of the same municipality in 1994. In the second hypothesis, the ratio uses the number of victims between the four years after the election (1995-1998 for 1994 election while 1999-2002 for the 1998 election) over the population of the year of the election (1994 and 1998).

Number of victims consider only single persons. In other words, even if a person was victimized in many ways (sexual violence and displacement for example) it is considered only once.

The population data are provided by the DANE, the statistical institute of Colombia. Unluckily, only projections based on the 1985 census are available for the years 1994 and 1998.

The table below provides an example of how victimization rate it was built.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florencia</td>
<td>18001</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>116,900</td>
<td>27,028</td>
<td>23,1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>18029</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>10,642</td>
<td>4,234</td>
<td>39,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartagena del Chairá</td>
<td>18150</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>24,276</td>
<td>25,887</td>
<td>106,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morelia</td>
<td>18479</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>4,075</td>
<td>2,713</td>
<td>66,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Vicente del Caguán</td>
<td>18753</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>39,679</td>
<td>24,466</td>
<td>61,7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As it can be noticed, that some municipalities have a victimization rate above 100%. This puzzling aspect might be present for two reasons. Firstly, the population data might suffer of inaccuracies. But in some cases, the rate is extreme, and the mistake should have been enormous. More likely, what the number is capturing is the effects of the extreme use of forced displacement. In other words, a person was displaced from a municipality, moved to another municipality (increasing the population but not being detected by the projections based on 1985) and victimized again by armed groups. It is hard to understand why some municipalities attracted displaced civilians. Usually displaced people moved to big cities. Another possibility is that politically active civilians moved to areas where they thought the friendly armed group could provide protection. An ulterior explanation
might be than the victimization did not occur where people lived. For example, many people were randomly kidnapped along roadways by the guerrillas (so called “miraculous catch”) to obtain a ransom (El Tiempo, 1998). Obviously, many of them were not living in the same municipality where they were kidnapped. Considering that a rate cannot be higher than 1 and those examples might change the results, every municipality with a rate above 100% was assigned a fixed rate of 100%.

3.4 Independent variable: distribution of votes

The IV is examined through a dummy variable. In other words, a municipality is defined as an area with strong political support for a party (hereafter called “stronghold”) or without (hereafter defined a politically disputed area). As mentioned before, a stronghold is defined as an area where a political party, candidate or network obtain the overwhelming majority of the votes in several elections.

The analysis is taking into consideration all the presidential elections between 1974 and 1994, that were six in total, one every four years (1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994) for the first hypothesis while only the 1994 and 1998 election for the second. I did not take in consideration the results from regional and local elections because they often do not respond to national dynamics. The local alliances can be very different and the voting less ideological. National parties can split in many candidates and create local lists just for those elections. At the same time, I argue that presidential elections are a good mix of ideological and clientelist voting and capture better the loyalties of the population. More precisely, political analysts from Colombia say that in presidential elections, around the 30% of the votes are moved by clientelist networks while 70% by opinion vote (La Silla Vacia, 2018).

The data are taken from the database CEDE (2017) of the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá D.C. The data at municipal level are provided for every election. The data is particularly reliable as it is taking the official results from the Colombian state. The only big data missing is the 1986 results for the department of Casanare.

For the first hypothesis, the operationalization is divided in two steps. First, I take the median of all the results of the presidential candidates of the Liberal Party, Conservative Party and third parties. In calculating the median, I also take into consideration blank votes that are recognized by the Colombian Constitution as a preference. In 1991 the Constitution was changed, and the electoral process was reformed. More specifically, a run-off between the two most voted candidates, if none of them took more than 50% of votes, was introduced. This change affected the 1994 election making it slightly different from the previous ones. In this case I took into consideration only the results of the first round as the political competition is more similar to the previous ones. In fact, in a run-off
only two candidates are present and third parties voters have to choose between them. Only in two occasions the two main parties were divided. The Liberal Party was divided in 1982 while the Conservative Party presented two candidates in 1990. In both cases, I summed the results of the official party candidate with the rebellious faction. Third parties are also considered a category. Even though in this category very different political parties may be present, I have chosen to group them. The main goal of this number is to capture areas where neither of the two main parties was strong.

I define a stronghold a municipality where the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party or third parties have a result median higher than 60%. The threshold is necessarily arbitrary, but I argue that 60% can be considered safe. First of all, in political analyses, 60% is considered an extremely good result for a political party even in two-parties system. In mathematical terms, it means that all the other parties together (and in this thesis also blank votes) reached a maximum of 40%. Regarding third parties, in the case the median is above 60%, it is still signalling that their loyalty is not connected with the main parties.

After calculating the median of the results for Liberals, Conservatives and third parties for every municipality, I create a dummy variable stronghold/disputed. To avoid situations where this number might have created third parties stronghold where they were not, I chose to check the results. Only two municipalities (Uribe in Meta and Fortul in Arauca) had a median result higher than 60% for third parties. A closer qualitative look confirmed that they were strongholds of the left parties.

Political stronghold municipalities will have assigned a 1 while politically disputed municipalities a 0.

In the table below, there are some example of how the variable was coded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Median LIB</th>
<th>Median CON</th>
<th>Median 3P</th>
<th>Stro LIB</th>
<th>Stro CON</th>
<th>Stro 3P</th>
<th>Stro GEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florencia</td>
<td>18001</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>48,73%</td>
<td>37,18%</td>
<td>14,09%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>18029</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>16,04%</td>
<td>71,37%</td>
<td>12,59%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cartagena del Chairá</td>
<td>18150</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>36,19%</td>
<td>16,88%</td>
<td>46,94%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morelia</td>
<td>18479</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>54,93%</td>
<td>33,50%</td>
<td>11,58%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Vicente del Caguán</td>
<td>18753</td>
<td>Caquetá</td>
<td>75,10%</td>
<td>7,45%</td>
<td>17,46%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The municipalities registered as stronghold in the first hypothesis are 691 (381 Liberals, 308 Conservatives, 2 third parties) representing around the 65% of the total. On the opposite, the politically disputed municipalities are 365 (35% of the total). The total observations are 1056.

In the second hypothesis, the total observations are 2144. The stronghold municipalities in the case are 1122, a bit more than 50% of the observations.

3.5 Control variables

In addition to the dependent and independent variables, the regression will control for more variables. According to the alternative arguments, the election results should not have a relationship with violence against civilians independent of other factors. To test for these possibilities, I include control variables. They are divided in two groups: those directly related with the conflict and those socio-demographic.

Control variables directly related to the conflict

**Previous Violence:** the general level of violence related to the armed conflict is an important explanation for the violence in a municipality. A previous high level of violence might affect the violence after because it might push actors to retaliation and civilians to feel threatened. It might also affect the election results as elections held in violent environment are likely to be less free. Also in this case, the violence is measured through a victimization rate. For the first hypothesis, it will consider all the victims before 1994 compared to the population in 1985, that is the first available data. As the dependent variable, data are provided by the Unique Registry of Victims and DANE.

**Natural resources:** this argument has been always strong in the literature (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004) to explain conflict onset and violence. Many dynamics of the Colombian conflict were connected to the control of natural resources. The natural resources taken into consideration are coal, oil, minerals, coca and opium. Considering the lack of data at municipal level for the 1990s, I will use a dummy variable at regional level. Departments with high presence of natural resources are coded with 1 and the others with 0. The choice of the departments is based on qualitative studies. Even though a municipality might not have had natural resources, the latter need a system of logistics that is likely affecting the entire department. Considering elections, the presence of natural resources can signal the presence of concentrated money that can be used for clientelist networks.

**Presence of Armed Actors:** obviously armed actors are fundamental for the perpetration of the violence. At the same time, they can also influence the election outcome. Based on Cubides, Olaya
and Ortiz (1998), I will code a municipality where an illegal armed group is present (paramilitaries or guerrillas) as 1 while the others with a 0.

**Third Parties**: third parties have been historically associated with armed groups in Colombia (Steele, 2017; Valencia, 2007). Before 1994, the biggest share of these third parties’ votes came from leftist parties, in many cases, associated with guerrilla movements while later, third parties have been associated with paramilitary organizations. This control variable will not be used in the second hypothesis as in 1998 there was a third candidate without links with armed groups. It will be measured as percentage obtained by third parties. The data is coming from the same database, CEDE, as the other electoral results.

**Socio-demographic control variables**

**Poverty**: this variable has always been associated with the onset of conflict as it is easier for armed groups to recruit new members (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Also grievances theories (Cederman, Gleditsch, & Buhaug, 2013) link poverty with the outbreak of conflict. At the same time, poverty has been associated with clientelism as it is easier to buy their votes. The variable is operationalized with a percentage of the population with Unsatisfied Basic Needs (UBN). The data are provided by the DANE based on 1993 census about poverty.

**Rural Population**: the Colombian conflict mainly affected the rural areas. Generally speaking, in rural areas the state is weakly present. The extreme geography of the country historically helped the guerrillas to hide in mountains and jungles. Rurality is also associated with isolation and poverty, all factors that might favour armed groups (Fearon & Laitin, 1999). Considering that in rural areas the state presence is weaker, it is also easier to build strong clientelist networks. In both hypotheses rural population is measured as a percentage of the population of the municipality living in rural areas. The data were obtained from DANE projections and are based on 1994 and 1998.
4. ANALYSIS

The goal of this chapter is to examine the relationship between strong political support for a political party and violence against civilians. It is found that political strongholds areas correlate positively with higher level of violence against civilians in both hypotheses. In the first part, the findings from the OLS regressions are analysed and discussed. The second part will be focused on the discussion of those results. The third part will underline some limitations of the study while the fourth will provide some alternative explanations. Finally, the fifth will discuss implications for future research.

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 First hypothesis

In Table 6, the main statistics of the first hypothesis are described. As said previously, the municipalities coded as strongholds represent the 65% of the total. The number is line with descriptive studies (De Lewin 1989) that suggest that Colombia is a politically polarized country at municipal level.

The mean of the dependent variable, measured with a victimization rate, is 22%. It is worth remembering that the victimization rate (number of victims over total population) at national level for the period 1995-2006 was 15%. Both numbers will be used during the analysis to understand if the coefficient is relevant or not. The intensification of the conflict can be seen comparing the means of two victimization rates. Before 1994 it was 3% while during the most violent years it reached 22%.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the first hypothesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronghold</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>.6543561</td>
<td>.4758031</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VictimizRate</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>.2188493</td>
<td>.2807248</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreviousVi~e</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>.031265</td>
<td>.0495628</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>.4607304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NatResour</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>.4545455</td>
<td>.4981655</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PresenceAA</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>.5653409</td>
<td>.4959471</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ThirdParties</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>.0814947</td>
<td>.0659704</td>
<td>.0055173</td>
<td>8772242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PovertyRate</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>.5362409</td>
<td>.1987007</td>
<td>.0915432</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RurPopRate</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>.634047</td>
<td>.233831</td>
<td>.0027476</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8. The effect of stronghold on victimization rate (first hypothesis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronghold</td>
<td>0.00875</td>
<td>0.0298***</td>
<td>0.0297**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0183]</td>
<td>[0.0145]</td>
<td>[0.0143]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreviousViolence</td>
<td>2.658***</td>
<td>2.359***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.338]</td>
<td>[0.330]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NatResour</td>
<td>0.126***</td>
<td>0.0893***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0156]</td>
<td>[0.0156]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PresenceAA</td>
<td>0.0377***</td>
<td>0.0299**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0140]</td>
<td>[0.0136]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ThirdParties</td>
<td>0.386**</td>
<td>0.382**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.159]</td>
<td>[0.158]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PovertyRate</td>
<td>0.408***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0443]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RurPopRate</td>
<td>-0.0890***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0310]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.213***</td>
<td>0.00616</td>
<td>-0.125***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0150]</td>
<td>[0.0179]</td>
<td>[0.0235]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>1,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.404</td>
<td>0.463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-squared</td>
<td>-0.000729</td>
<td>0.401</td>
<td>0.460</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in brackets
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

In Table 7, the results from the OLS linear regression are presented.

Firstly, the simple bivariate regression is not statistically significant. Furthermore, the R-squared is 0 showing that the variable “Stronghold” does not explain any variation in the dependent variable. The variable reaches statistically significance when control variables are added. In the second model, that introduces variables directly related to the conflict, “Stronghold” reaches the 95% confidence level. All other variables are statistically significant.

In the third model, when also socio-demographic variables are included, all the variables are statistically significant at 95% confidence level. The R-squared is 46% that considering the paper is analysing a social phenomenon is consider satisfactory.

The main correlation analysed by this paper is between being a political stronghold and the victimization rate in the municipality. In addition of being statistically significant, the coefficient of the variable “Stronghold” is positive. Specifically, when controlling for other variables, the model suggests that an historic political stronghold would have a victimization rate 3% higher than politically disputed areas when the conflict intensifies.
Among the control variables, not surprisingly, the strongest correlation is between the levels of violence before and after. In other words, a municipality with relative high levels of violence against civilians before 1994, also suffered high levels of violence during the intensification of the conflict.

The other variables showing a strong correlation, as expected, are poverty and share of votes for third parties that seem to confirm Steele’s (2017) intuitions. The presence of natural resources correlates positively with violence against civilians as well. Specifically, a municipality located in a department with natural resources is predicted to have a victimization rate 8% higher than those located in departments without.

As expected, the variable “Presence of armed actors” correlates positively as well. The variable “Rural Population” is probably the most surprising as it was expected to correlate positively but instead the coefficient is negative.

To capture regional dynamics, I tried to analyse geographical macro-regions in Colombia. In general, the variables lose statistical significance (and well below the 90% confidence level). The only macro-region that holds statistical significance is the Caribbean Coast\(^6\) and the results are interesting. As Table 8 below shows, the patterns seen in the general regression are followed also on the Caribbean Coast. The main difference is that in the bivariate regression, the variable “Stronghold” is statistically significant and positively correlated to the Victimization Rate. In the third model, the coefficient of the variable “Stronghold” still remains positive but it increases substantially reaching a 14%. This increase is also explained by the higher general level of violence in the macro-region in respect to the rest of the country. In fact, the mean of the victimization rate in the Caribbean Coast is 34% (national was 22%) and the regional victimization rate is 24% (compared to the 15% at national level). The only control variable losing statistical significance is “Presence of Armed Actors”.

---

\(^6\) The Caribbean Coast includes the departments of Atlántico, Magdalena, Bolívar, Sucre, Córdoba, Cesar and La Guajira.
Table 9. The effect of stronghold on victimization rate, Caribbean Coast (first hypothesis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) VictimizRate</th>
<th>(2) VictimizRate</th>
<th>(3) VictimizRate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronghold</td>
<td>0.129**</td>
<td>0.151**</td>
<td>0.143**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0546]</td>
<td>[0.0597]</td>
<td>[0.0580]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreviousViolence</td>
<td>3.041**</td>
<td>2.536**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[1.260]</td>
<td>[1.239]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NatResources</td>
<td>0.186***</td>
<td>0.175***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0487]</td>
<td>[0.0478]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PresenceAA</td>
<td>0.0348</td>
<td>0.0456</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0532]</td>
<td>[0.0523]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ThirdParties</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>1.468*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.706]</td>
<td>[0.746]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PovertyRate</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.711***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[0.198]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RurPopRate</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.261**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[0.110]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.276***</td>
<td>-0.00383</td>
<td>-0.374***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0380]</td>
<td>[0.0760]</td>
<td>[0.134]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td>0.383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-squared</td>
<td>0.0276</td>
<td>0.310</td>
<td>0.355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standard errors in brackets
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.1.2 Second hypothesis

The table below shows the main statistics for the second hypothesis. In this hypothesis, the municipalities coded as strongholds represent the 52% of the total. The “third parties” variable was excluded as in the Noémí Sanín’s results in the 1998 elections were not in line with theoretical reasons behind the choice of including third parties as control variable. The number of victims is collected over the four years after the elections. The mean of the victimization is obviously lower than the previous hypothesis and it is around 7%. The national rate for the same period is around 7% as well.
Table 10. Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the second hypothesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronghold</td>
<td>2144</td>
<td>.5233209</td>
<td>.4995724</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VictimizRate</td>
<td>2144</td>
<td>.0746679</td>
<td>.1544272</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreviousViol</td>
<td>2144</td>
<td>.0247596</td>
<td>.065175</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NatResources</td>
<td>2144</td>
<td>.457556</td>
<td>.4983115</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PresenceAA</td>
<td>2144</td>
<td>.5666978</td>
<td>.495647</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| PovertyRate    | 2144 | .5387646 | .1997239  | .0915432 | 1    |
| RurPopRate     | 2144 | .6251735 | .2346059  | .0025408 | 1    |

Table 11. The effect of stronghold on victimization rate (second hypothesis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) VictimizRate</th>
<th>(2) VictimizRate</th>
<th>(3) VictimizRate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronghold</td>
<td>0.0146**</td>
<td>0.0110**</td>
<td>0.0103*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.00744]</td>
<td>[0.00530]</td>
<td>[0.00533]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreviousViol</td>
<td>1.181***</td>
<td>1.124***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.147]</td>
<td>[0.143]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NatResources</td>
<td>0.0395***</td>
<td>0.0269***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.00629]</td>
<td>[0.00606]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PresenceAA</td>
<td>0.0212***</td>
<td>0.0166***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.00560]</td>
<td>[0.00547]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PovertyRate</td>
<td>0.129***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0191]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RurPopRate</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0409***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0124]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.0670***</td>
<td>0.00962**</td>
<td>-0.0242***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.00514]</td>
<td>[0.00432]</td>
<td>[0.00687]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations: 2,144
R-squared: 0.002 0.317 0.336
Adjusted R-squared: 0.00178 0.315 0.334

Standard errors in brackets
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The first thing to be noticed is that the statistical significance of the model remains. On the contrary of the first hypothesis, in the bivariate regression, the independent variable is statistically significant at 95% confidence level. The coefficient is still positive. The statistical significance is kept also in the second model.

In the third model, the only change is related to the main variable “Stronghold” that loses the 95% confidence interval but still reaches the 90%. The R-squared remains satisfactory explaining the 33% of the variability of the dependent variable.
The same patterns seen in the first hypothesis appear to be present also in the OLS for the second hypothesis. Firstly, the coefficient for “Stronghold” remains positive. More specifically, holding all else constant, a municipality coded as a stronghold would have a victimization rate higher around 1% in the years leading to the next election in respect to politically disputed municipalities.

The control variables follow the same pattern as the first hypothesis. The previous level of violence still strongly correlates with the dependant variable. Natural resources, poverty and presence of armed actors have a positive coefficient as well. As previously, the rural population rate still negatively correlates with the victimization rate.

Analysing the macro-regions, the only one where the variable “Stronghold” keeps statistical significance is the Pacific Coast. All the other variables, except previous levels of violence, lose their statistical significance.

Table 12. The effect of stronghold on victimization rate, Pacific Coast (second hypothesis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>(1) VictimizRate</th>
<th>(2) VictimizRate</th>
<th>(3) VictimizRate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stronghold</td>
<td>0.0459**</td>
<td>0.0363**</td>
<td>0.0328**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0205]</td>
<td>[0.0142]</td>
<td>[0.0134]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PreviousViolence</td>
<td>0.894***</td>
<td>0.883***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.155]</td>
<td>[0.158]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NatResources</td>
<td>0.0361***</td>
<td>0.0196</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.00950]</td>
<td>[0.0153]</td>
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Standard errors in brackets
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.2 Discussion of the results

The empirics, supported by statistical regression analysis, seem to support the two hypotheses. In fact, the variable “Stronghold”, when controlling for other factors, correlates positively with higher levels of violence against civilians in both cases.

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7 Pacific Coast includes the departments of Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca and Nariño
Considering the first hypothesis, even though at first sight it is not particularly high, I consider the coefficient (3%) of the variable “Stronghold” satisfactory. Considering that the mean of the variable is 22% and national victimization rate 15%, the coefficient shows a limited but interesting correlation.

The second hypothesis has similar findings. Taking into consideration that the mean and national victimization rate are around 7%, the coefficient (1%) is satisfactory. Even though the coefficient is not particularly strong, the correlation remains positive.

Leaving aside the coefficient, I consider the direction of the coefficients more important than the coefficient itself. In fact, in an extremely complex setting like the Colombian conflict, with many factors interacting, the direction shows that some dynamics favouring use violence against civilians in political strongholds were present.

In general, the control variables followed the expectations. Previous levels of violence were the variable showing the strongest relation with the dependant variable while also natural resources, poverty, presence of armed actors and votes for third parties (only in the first hypothesis) correlate positively with violence against civilians.

The unexpected result was the variable “Rural Population”. Considering that the Colombian conflict has been considered a war heavily centred on rural issues, like control and redistribution of land, the result is particularly interesting. The choice of the indicator might have affected the results. Probably an indicator taking into consideration the rural territory instead of the rural population might have given different results.

As it was showed, the Caribbean Coast and the Pacific Coast had some statistically significant results when the regression was run at macro-regional level.

I argue that the importance of these two examples is not related to their coefficient results. What these examples really show is that in a war-torn country regional differences matter on the dynamics of the conflict. For example, qualitative studies and political analyses underline the fact that the Colombian Caribbean Coast is one of the poorest macro-region in the country (DANE, 2018) and therefore clientelist practices are particularly common (Ardila Arrieta 2014). At the same time, the ideological polarization, as shown by the “Banana Massacre” in 1928, has been always considered particularly high in the region.

The Pacific Coast is a more complex example, as the macro-region was affected differently by the violence. More specifically, the department of Chocó was among the most affected departments in the country all over the country. The remaining three registered substantially lower levels of violence. The most interesting aspect is that Chocó has been historically identified as a Liberal stronghold (CEDE - Universidades de los Andes, 2017).
The analysis has showed that, when controlling for other variables, the correlation between strong political support for a party and violence against civilians is statistically significant and positive. The correlation was confirmed in both hypotheses, focusing on the long-term and short-term effects. Therefore, the OLS seems to suggest, as the hypotheses theorized, that civilians living political strongholds are more likely to be targeted.

Considering the similitudes of the hypotheses with previous studies on the same topic, it is worth to discuss the results in relation to those studies. What the findings seem to suggest is that irregular civil wars have different dynamics than conventional civil wars. In the latter category, violence in general and one-sided violence usually are concentrated in politically disputed areas. On the contrary, in irregular civil wars, politically disputed areas might enjoy lower levels of violence against civilians.

What makes the difference between the two types of civil war could be that elections should be seen in two different ways. In conventional civil wars, the elections might reflect pre-war cleavages that will translate into frontlines when the conflict outbreaks. Intuitively, the violence will be concentrated on the frontlines that coincide with the disputed areas during the pre-war elections. During the war, their importance decreases as they disappear or are used only in one of the two sides. In other words, elections should be imagined as a static element. On the opposite, in irregular civil wars, as the control is fragmented, elections are more dynamic as they interact with the dynamics of the conflict. The interaction creates different problems and incentives for armed groups. Considering that in civil wars based on guerrilla warfare, the importance of civilians is relatively bigger, elections become an instrument to understand the preferences of local population during the same conflict. On the opposite of conventional civil wars, perpetrate violence in the disputed areas is more dangerous as it is more difficult to identify potential collaborators and the risk of backlash high. In addition, local political elites, as it was assumed they prefer voting over fighting (Przeworski 1991), would try to use their leverage to push violence away from disputed areas but being tempted by favour selective violence against undesirable members in their strongholds.

To conclude, in conventional civil wars elections a static element, they might explain the frontlines, but they do not interact directly with the conflict dynamics. On the opposite, in irregular civil wars, elections are a dynamic element that interact directly with the conflict dynamics and can be used as tool by different actors to plan their strategies.
4.3 Limitations

Even though the theory was supported by the findings, some limitations need to be discussed. The four main limitations have been identified: methods, case, timing and definition of violence against civilians.

First of all, the choice to use quantitative methods necessarily sacrificed the causal mechanism. This is common challenge for every quantitative study.

In relation to this point, it was not possible to completely catch the nuances that support the suggested dynamics of the causal mechanism. More specifically, the explicit role of political networks cannot be fully understood with a quantitative approach. Moreover, the use of selective or indiscriminate violence by different perpetrators is challenging to identify. In other words, it is not possible to confirm that the relation exists as a consequence of the dynamics described in the theory.

But as said before, the main goal of this paper was to extend existing literature on the topic and propose a possible explanation. The quantitative method was chosen as a first step in this process. I argue that to understand if political strongholds were more violent than politically disputed areas or the opposite, as suggested in conventional civil wars, was the first necessary step to take. Consequently, the quantitative method was identified as the best option to use.

In the future, it would be interesting to extend the research using a different method. Mixed methods or a qualitative study would be important to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon.

The quantitative study method could be expanded as well. For example, instead of using a victimization rate, it could be focus on absolute number of victims. In this case, a negative binomial regression analysis would have been the best option.

The characteristics of the Colombian case lead the discussion towards another limitation of the thesis: the case itself. Even though I argued that Colombia is a suitable case of irregular civil war to be used to test the theory, some limitations about it should be discussed.

Firstly, the Colombian conflict can be seen as a “leftover” of the Cold War. Even though in 1990s the armed groups moved towards criminal dynamics, the ideology played an important role in the conflict. Today, ideological conflicts are not that common anymore especially if compared with conflicts based on ethnical, religious or secessionist incompatibilities. In addition, Colombia is a special case in relation to the political system. In fact, the two main political parties, Liberal and Conservative, have been in the centre of the Colombian conflicts since their creation more than 150 years ago. No other country has had this strong connection between political parties and violence over a such a long period of time. Probably only Northern Ireland might be considered similar.

Thirdly, in Colombia the presence of the non-political armed groups, specifically organized crime organizations, has been historically strong. Even though the importance of criminal networks has
been important in some areas, like the Balkans, or is rising in others, like the Sahel, few examples can reach the organization and power the Colombian drug cartels held. Probably only Afghanistan, Mexico and Central America have some similarities. This aspect will be further discussed in the alternative explanations.

The last discussion about limitations should be about timing. With the two hypotheses, I tried to capture effects on the long-term and short-term. In the first case, the extension of time for both variables might create problems to strength of the correlation as many more factors could have influenced the outcomes. Although I am aware of this problem, I still argue that the first hypothesis tried to establish more general patterns. Moreover, the second hypothesis, based on the short-term and therefore the more effective in establish correlation, seems to confirm the findings from the first hypothesis.

Both temporal aspects could be deepened more. The main problem can be identified with the different geographical intensification of the conflict. In fact, the time periods chosen for the two hypotheses were based on qualitative studies. Therefore, they necessarily hold a level of arbitrariness. But the levels of violence were not the same everywhere simultaneously. It would be interesting to develop a research design where the intensification of the conflict can be detected at municipal level. Such design could provide more useful information to understand why violence against civilians was concentrated in a specific moment in a specific municipality. Moreover, the second hypothesis can be extended to different types of elections such as local and regional.

Finally, the broad definition of violence against civilians that was used is another limitation. Even though I argue that every form of violence was useful to enforce territorial control, the different crimes have different purposes. Different crimes were usually associated with different perpetrators. The guerrillas were famous for kidnappings while paramilitaries for massacres and massive forced displacements (Sierra Restrepo, 2018). Even though displacement was the main form of violence, the distribution was not exactly reflecting the totals. In big cities, homicides were more common than in rural areas. For example, a quick look to the data shows that in Medellín the 50% of the victims were related to homicides (direct victims or relatives of assassinated people), a lot more than the 10% of the total. For this reason, the different forms of victimization of civilians might have different effects in different areas. It would be interesting to see if some crimes do not follow the patterns suggested in this thesis.
4.4 Alternative explanations

In this section, three main alternative explanations to the results will be discussed. They are not mutually exclusive rather interconnected.

The first alternative explanation is connected to the political system. Colombia is a country were clientelist practices are common and ideological loyalty weak. It is not uncommon that regional and local alliances are built based on personal networks and interests. Extremely local dynamics might be an explanation for the findings of this thesis. The geographical isolation of some municipalities or even entire departments, strengthens the local dynamics. Even though the theory accounts for this possibility, the use of presidential elections in the research design might have marginalized those dynamics. It is worth repeating, future qualitative studies might help to catch the local nuances more than a quantitative study.

The role of the armed groups expands the main alternative explanation to the results. As it was explained previously, Colombia has always been a politically polarized country. At the same time, it has always been a violence-torn country. It cannot be excluded that the existence of political strongholds is strictly connected to the high levels of violence historically present in the country. A possibility is that the necessity of defending the community from violence pushed those communities towards specific political networks that, in their perceptions, could grant the security. In other words, the endemic violence in the Colombian society could have shaped electoral preferences since the independence of the country. In the model presented in this thesis, the presence of the variable “Previous Violence” was included exactly for this reason but it cannot be excluded that this study was not able to capture those longstanding dynamics.

Continuing on the same topic, the “elephant in the room” for every study about elections and violence in Colombia are the powerful drug cartels. Their role was not taken into consideration in this thesis because they do not have a clear political agenda. They were perpetrators of violence that was excluded in this paper but with possible effects on the results. Their influence on the Colombian politics was extremely important. It is not difficult to imagine that they shaped electoral preferences in many municipalities favouring, through intimidations and money, the existence of political strongholds. The intensification of the Colombian conflict coincided with the collapse of the cartels and the opening of the coca trade to new actors. In addition, their collapse left areas of the country politically and military empty. Those areas might have been targeted by armed groups in the following years with the goal to fill that political void and control natural resources in the area. To summarize, municipalities that were strongholds thanks to organized crime, became suddenly politically empty and easy targets for armed groups expansion and consequent rise of violence against civilians.
I argue that the role of drug cartels might be the most important alternative explanation to the results of this thesis. Even though the theory partially accounts for this possibility, as it focuses on local political networks and organized crime can be seen a constituency giving support to candidates, it cannot be excluded that the results were driven by factors not explicitly included in the theory.

4.5 Implications for future research

This research might help to provide some interesting implications for further research in this specific field. Some of the implications were briefly mentioned in the previous sections but it worth repeating them.

Generally speaking, the findings seem to suggest that irregular civil wars have different dynamics in respect to conventional civil wars. More specifically, civilians living in political stronghold are more likely to be targeted than those living in politically disputed areas. These results contradict the findings from conventional civil wars literature. This is probably the most important implication.

How elections and conflicts interact in ICW differently than CCW is the first area where further research is needed. I have tried to suggest some mechanisms that might explain that variation, but it would be important to have more substantial findings.

The second implication is related to the choice of the case. The universe of cases was irregular civil wars with the simultaneous presence of elections. In this case, it is important to understand if the Colombian case is influencing too much the findings. Even though I argue that Colombia was a good case, further research should be expanding the analysis to different irregular civil wars with different incompatibilities.

More specifically, the theory should be tested on ethnic and secessionist conflicts. It cannot be excluded that those different dynamics result in different outcomes. For example, ethnicity is a more static individual identity that cannot be changed (at least, not in a short amount of time) while individual political ideology can be silenced or change. In other words, political ideology is expressed with a behaviour (voting, protesting, participating, etc.) that can be hidden when while ethnicity is less related to individual behaviour. This consideration might lead to different patterns of violence against civilians as armed groups could perceive an individual as a threat by definition because of his/her ethnicity and not because of his/her behaviour. Moreover, irregular civil wars with different electoral and political systems should investigated to understand if those variables affect the results. Norther Ireland, Afghanistan and Iraq are some examples that were recurring during my research.

An interesting expansion could be related to a specific type of non-state conflicts: wars between organized crime organizations. As underlined, the Colombian case already needs further
investigation about this issue, but other cases could be analysed like for example Mexico and Central America. Considering that theory suggest that political loyalty is providing information to armed groups, votes for politicians linked with specific drug cartels or gangs might trigger similar dynamics. A general collateral implication for the future could be that every armed group, not only those with a political agenda as it was done in this thesis, should be included in the theoretical framework and analysis.

Unfortunately, it is also worth remembering that the Colombian case is well-studied and access to data is not particularly difficult. Data availability problems, both on elections and violence, might be a big obstacle for investigations about other cases.

The third more general implication is related to the methods used. In order to deepen the understanding of the causal mechanism, mixed methods or qualitative studies should be used. Their use would help to understand better if the causal mechanism and its implications are confirmed. Specifically, qualitative studies could focus on the role of political networks in fuelling or curbing the violence, following the literature on electoral violence. An additional line that qualitative studies could expand is related to the use of indiscriminate and selective violence. It would be particularly interesting to develop an indicator that could measure the two types of violence. Following this consideration, different types of forms of violence against civilians would also deserve more than attention. The broad definition of violence against civilians used in this paper, should be narrow it down to analyse which forms of violence are more related to electoral processes and why.

Further research on local dynamics would be also important. More specifically a focus on the differences between perpetrators might be interesting. The most intuitive difference would be between types of armed groups: guerrillas, paramilitaries and state Armed Forces. Even though in this thesis they were all grouped in the same category, differences in the political agenda might lead to different strategies. Additionally, local intragroup dynamics might also provide interesting insights. For example, some local FARC and AUC local leaders had different local agendas from their national organizations. As it was explained above, some macro-regions of Colombia had some characteristics that might influence the conflict dynamics. All these aspects should be investigated further, and qualitative studies might be the right methods to use.

The fourth focus for future research is more related to the case and the specific tools we have at our disposition. For example, the Colombian Unique Registry of Victims and its refined data offer the possibility to extend the investigation about violence against civilians during the Colombian conflict. For example, thanks to the available data about gender, future research could include new variables that might help to understand better some variations.
The electoral database from CEDE also could potentially provide additional information that were not taken into consideration in this paper. For example, the addition of Congress, regional and local elections could capture some dynamics that were not foreseen in the theory.

To conclude, further research is needed to confirm the relation established in this thesis. Different cases of irregular civil wars should be investigated and all armed groups, political or not, included. In addition, different methods, quantitative, mixed and qualitative, should be used in order to support the theory and the causal mechanism presented. A special focus on timing and geographical location of the municipalities might help to capture the nuances of complex phenomena such politics and violence against civilians. The influence of other factors, such as local elections, type of armed group, local military leaders, the presence of crime networks, type of crimes and gender can be investigated further to extend the implications of the theory.
CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to seek an answer to the research question: how geographical distribution of votes affects the geographical distribution of violence against civilians in irregular civil wars? It has done so through a quantitative study of electoral results and violence against civilians using municipal level data in Colombia.

Results revealed that civilians living in political strongholds were more likely to be targeted by armed groups than those living in politically disputed areas. The two main hypotheses showed a positive correlation between strongholds and the violence perpetrated against civilians at a municipal level. In the first case, historical strongholds, municipalities where a political party consistently receives strong electoral support over a long period of time, were more likely to have higher rates of violence against civilians during the most violent years of the conflict. In the second hypothesis, municipalities where a political party received a high level of support in one election were more likely to suffer higher levels of violence during the following years leading to the next election. I attribute this to the differing incentives offered to the actors involved through the distribution of votes. Firstly, in a political stronghold, it is easier for armed groups to understand if the civilians are friends or enemies and therefore which type of violence (selective or indiscriminate) they can use. Secondly, political networks are less accountable in a political stronghold as they know in advance if they will win or lose. Consequently, the use of selective violence against undesirable members of the community is less expansive as opposed to risk losing the elections.

This thesis has contributed to the study of the relation between elections and violence by concentrating its focus on irregular civil wars, a category of civil wars which is understudied in this specific field. The findings suggest that irregular civil wars have different dynamics to conventional civil wars when it comes to the relationship between elections and violence.

In addition, while classic studies on violence against civilians focus their attention on armed groups and civilians, the theory has added the role of local political networks to the causal mechanism. Even though it was not possible to completely deepen the dynamics proposed in the causal mechanism due to the quantitative research design, the theory attempts to demonstrate that not only armed groups, but also political networks, have incentives to use violence in strongholds and restrain it in politically disputed areas. For this reason, the thesis has not only tried to expand on the knowledge on elections and violence in irregular wars, but also contributed to a bridge with electoral violence studies, where the role of politicians has been further investigated.

The thesis has provided interesting insights and opened doors for future research. Qualitative studies appear particularly important for further developments as they can help to verify the accuracy
of the causal mechanism. In particular, the role of political networks and when armed groups choose selective or indiscriminate violence are aspects of the theory that deserves more understanding.

Regional and local dynamics and the way they affect the distribution of violence against civilians should be investigated further. The role of local political and military elites could be understood better if the specific characteristics of the region where they operate were to be included in the analysis. In the Colombian case, the role of drug cartels in relation to elections and armed conflict should be deepened as their presence was identified as the main alternative explanation.

Future research can benefit from including more cases in order to expand the external generalizability of the findings. In other words, different cases should be tested to understand if the dynamics described are common in irregular civil wars. Ethnic and secessionist conflicts that are more common than the ideological conflicts of Colombia, should be the foremost focus for case studies.

In conclusion, this thesis shows that the distribution of votes might affect the distribution of violence. Therefore, the literature on violence against civilians and its relationship to elections should be broadened. It is crucial to improve the understanding of the incentives that armed groups and especially local political leaders have when deciding to fuel or curb violence an area. In fact, a more thorough understanding of these dynamics could help reduce violence by offering different incentives to local leaders. Considering the important role of elections in the majority of the countries of the world, the strengthened knowledge about their effect on the distribution of violence against civilians could be crucial in preventing atrocities against non-combatants.
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