THE WAR ON CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

CIVILIAN SUPPORT AND REBEL GROUPS’ RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

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# LIST OF FIGURE AND TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. THEORY</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Literature review of previous research</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Gap and research question</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Phenomena of interest and expected relationship</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Definition of variables</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Proposed theory for the relationship</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Arrow diagram of the causal mechanism and hypothesis</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RESEARCH DESIGN</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Case selection</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Structure of empirical analysis</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Sources of empirical material</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Contextual background</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Empirical observations</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2 Sudan Liberation Movement/Army</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Interpretation of the results</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Alternative explanations</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Future research and policy implications</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURE AND TABLES

Diagram 1: Possible causal mechanism…………………………………..12

Table 1: Possible cases from Sudan………………………………………...15

Table 2: Chosen cases and values on control variables……………………16
1. INTRODUCTION

The study of violations against children’s rights during conflict is today recognized as an important factor to enable peace and has thus gained the attention of scholars. This study attempts to contribute to this research by asking why do some rebel groups systematically recruit and use child soldiers, while others do not?

This research question is aimed towards the variation amongst the rebel groups who do systematically recruit and use child soldiers in relation to those who do not. Of specific interest is what could explain why rebel groups do not systematically recruit and use child soldiers, and child soldiers are to be understood as anyone under the age of 18 accompanying an armed group or force in any capacity. Any attempt to explain why rebel groups would not recruit and use child soldiers must consider the causes of child soldier recruitment and use. Previous research has provided explanations both for why there might be a bigger pool of potential child soldiers available to recruit as well as why child soldiers are appealing to rebel groups. Furthermore, there is also research on why children themselves would seek to join a rebel group. Scholars has shown that in situations of e.g. poverty, there are more children posed as potential recruits. However, this would also provide a bigger pool of potential adults available to recruit, which does not explain why children are targeted. Therefore, answering why rebel groups would prefer child soldiers is relevant. The most prominent explanation for this is that children are easier to mislead and indoctrinate, making them preferred recruits. Additional to this is also the finding that child soldiers increase a rebel groups’ fighting capacity.

These are important findings in order to understand rebel groups incentives for recruiting and using child soldiers in armed conflict. It is however not enough to explain the opposed situation, namely why rebel groups would not recruit and use child soldiers. I theorize that one factor that could affect rebel groups into being less likely of systematically recruiting and using child soldiers is if they are more dependent on civilian support, which is based upon a cost-benefit calculation by the rebel group. This would be because when a rebel group is more dependent on civilian support, the cost of losing that support increases and they are thus less likely to engage in disapproved behavior, such as the systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers.

The method used in order to find if the proposed theory is supported or not is a qualitative approach where two cases are strategically chosen through Mill’s method of difference. These
cases are the SLM/A and SPLM/A in Sudan, studied between the years of 2000 and 2011. In order to find information on which the analysis is based, a Structured Focused Comparison is conducted where the variables and the proposed causal path are subjected to relevant questions. The gathered empirical data on the two cases is then analyzed and compared so a conclusion can be drawn based on the identified conditions.

The proposed theory does find some support in this study. Based on the data used for the analysis, these cases correspond to the notion that when a rebel group is more dependent on civilian support, it is less likely to systematically recruit and use child soldiers. However, a comprehensive inference about the theory cannot be established as this study focus solely on this in relation to the cases of SLM/A and SPLM/A. The causal path of this relation would preferably be complemented with more information, but despite that, this study adds initial insight to how some circumstances can make rebel groups less likely to systematically recruit and use child soldiers. This is important for future research as the discovery of facilitating factors in the sake of children’s rights can provide knowledge on risk-assessment of contexts where there is a possibility of systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers. Moreover, the findings in this study can be useful in policies as community-based approaches could have real effect in preventative work.

The remainder of the study is structured as follows: next, the theory explaining why there would be a relationship between the variables is presented, including a literature review of previous research and definitions of the variables. This is followed by a description of the research method as well as the process of case selection and the operationalization of the variables. After that, the results from the Structured Focused Comparison are presented with a subsequent analysis and comparison of the cases. Finally, the last section concludes the findings and limitations of the study, and proposes how these findings can be related to future research and policy.
2. THEORY

2.1 Literature review of previous research

To date, four broad strands are generally identifiable in the academic literature regarding child soldiering. The first is the impact of societal factors, the second is investigating the supply side of child soldiers while the third investigates the demand side, and the fourth is the consequences of child soldiering (Haer, 2019: 75). To clarify, the supply side of child soldiering focus on “factors exogenous to the recruiters in the conflict”, with examples such as poverty and the presence of refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, which essentially describes situations where there would be a larger presence of potential child soldiers (Faulkner, Powell and Lasley, 2019: 1018). The demand side is, on the contrary, rather what characteristics of children which makes them desirable to recruit; for example, that they are easier to mislead and indoctrinate than adults and that they increase the groups fighting capacity (Faulkner, Powell and Lasley, 2019: 1018-1019; Beber and Blattman, 2013: 68; Haer and Böhmelt, 2016: 168). Additional to this, a new strand is emerging, namely that of how to effectively reintegrate child soldiers in post-conflict societies (Haer and Böhmelt, 2017: 334). Researching the subject of child soldiering is highly relevant for peace and conflict, especially considering that the recruitment and use of child soldiers heightens the risk of both conflict-lengthening and conflict recurrence (Haer and Böhmelt, 2017: 343; Haer and Böhmelt, 2015: 426).

The research on child soldiering has shown that the phenomenon is more common in situations where there are external supporters to an armed group. If the external supporter is a democratic country with many human rights organizations, it can constrain behavior of the receiver. However, external support generally increases violations against civilians (Salehyan, Siroky and Wood, 2014: 635), and these violations includes the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Furthermore, the exploitation of natural resources has the same effect as external support, and especially the exploitation of lootable resources are linked to forced child recruitment (Haer, Faulkner and Whitaker, 2019: 8; 20). On the contrary, the phenomenon of child soldiering is less common amongst rebel groups that are secessionist (Lasley and Thyne, 2015: 302).
Worth mentioning is also the categorization of push and pull factors which are directly linked to why children would voluntarily join armed groups. Even though the remainder of this study will focus on systematic recruitment and use performed by rebel groups, it is worth noting that not all cases of recruitment or engagement of children in armed ranks is a result of this recruitment pattern. The push and pull factors are however included in this literature review mainly because of two reasons: first, in order to not neglect the aspect of individual agency of children (Haer, 2019: 76) and second, because of the possible interplay between the push and pull factors with the supply side of child soldiering. Briefly described, push factors include traumatization, institutionalized violence and sociocultural aspects, while pull factors include patriotism, instilled military thinking and promises of benefits (Somasundaram, 2002: 1268-1269).

Before continuing, it should be noted that the terms child and childhood are subjected to some limitations. There are contrasting perceptions of what constitutes a child, and when childhood considers becoming adulthood. The idea of a child, the childhood and the innocence often associated with them both are essentially socially constructed and therefore a characteristic of an individual that can be deemed different depending on present norms and traditions (Wessells, 1998: 640, Haer and Böhmelt, 2018: 397). It is therefore needed to state that these challenges are acknowledged, but also to mention how the term ‘child soldier’ should be interpreted during the remainder of this study. Although further defined and operationalized in section 2.4 and 3.2, child soldier refers to any individual under the age of 18 who has been recruited and used by an armed group. This is done in accordance with the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (OPAC), which specifies children as being under the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2003: 14). To date, 170 states have ratified the OPAC, resulting in that a global majority accepts the age limit set by the protocol (UN, 2019) and it is thus considered to be suitable within this context.

As for the literature on civilian support, it is sometimes framed as if civilian agency is non-existent and that support towards armed groups is either due to ideological preferences or coerced (Arjona, 2014: 1380). This perception does not only neglect the agency of civilians but can also ignore the recognition of their possibilities to affect the behavior of armed

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1 Nota bene that this is a contested concept as some argue that children are not able to fully assess the consequences of the decision, while others argue that this view neglects the agency of the child (see Haer, 2017, for further discussion on the subject). In this study, the concept refers to a context where the child perceive enlistment in armed groups as a viable option as described by the push and pull factors.

2 As this observation is relevant for the theory, it is included in the operationalization and then described and analyzed in the context of later presented cases (see sections 3.2, 4.2.1, 4.2.2 and 4.3 respectively).
groups. As argued by various scholars, civilian support is an important determinant for both conflict outcome and conflict conduct. The term ‘support’ is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘collaboration’ and ‘participation’ and generally refers to “favorable attitudes toward armed groups or acts that help them” (Arjona, 2017: 755; 758).

A refined description of the dimensions indicated by the term ‘support’ is provided by Barter who has identified three options available to civilians in conflict: flight, support, and voice (2012: 545). It is upon this typology that the operationalization of the independent variable, dependence on civilian support, is based. A clarification of dependence on civilian support might be necessary, and it is to be understood here as when rebel groups obtain resources from a civilian support base, and therefore rely more on civilians to receive these (a notion that is recognized in the academic literature; see e.g. Haer et al, 2019: 5; 18).

According to Barter, civilians can provide support in various forms. These forms include provision of information, supplies, services and labor. Support can range from minimal levels to more concrete and direct forms. Examples of this is refusing the other side, symbolic support and attending rallies/meetings, then moving to providing goods, information and labor, and lastly joining organizations, serving as a spy and ferrying weapons (Barter, 2012: 559). Furthermore, the three options set out by Barter as available to civilians are also possible to combine. For example, civilians can combine flight and support. It might be that support towards one armed group causes the other side to punish the civilians, resulting in flight, or that support towards an armed group is a result of civilian flight (2012: 552; 561).

2.2 Gap and research question

Even though numbers are rare, and when existing also imprecise, it is estimated that around 250 million children are placed in situations of armed conflicts and circa 200,000-300,000 of these are used as child soldiers (Aptel, 2019: 515; Achvarina and Reich, 2006: 128). Based on these numbers alone it is of importance to focus on the effect of and on children both during and post conflict, but it is also important to note the disproportionate impact of war on children, making the issue even more prominent (CAAC, 2011: 17). The status of children, and the importance of recognizing them as active agents, has been considered in policies and laws already during the 20th century with the issuing of the Declaration for the Rights of the Child in 1924 (Hughes, 2000: 400) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 (OHCHR, 2019).
However, children were still considered a rather homogenous group and it was not until the relatively new phenomena of intrastate conflicts that children’s differing experiences was made an additional remark to conventions and laws. Through the two Additional Protocols to the Geneva Conventions in 1977 and especially by the first Optional Protocol to the CRC in 2000 (Hughes, 2000: 400; CAAC, 2019), the recruitment and use of child soldiers was recognized. The latter was primarily a result of Graça Machels study *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*. When presented to the United Nations General Assembly in 1996 it marked a new era where protection of children in armed conflict became a core issue and accepted as an important factor for peace and security (Aptel, 2019: 530).

This was subsequently followed by the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict (CAAC, 2018: 15). Ultimately, the focus yielded the creation of the Security Council Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict. The Working Group has since then presented the six grave violations against children during armed conflict which, apart from the 6th, works as a basis for parties listed in the annex of the UN Secretary-Generals Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. This is enabled through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism established by the Security Council (UN, 2017). The following study will focus on the first of these grave violations:

| 1. Recruitment or use of children during armed conflict (resolution 1612, 2005) |
| 2. Killing and maiming of children (resolution 1882, 2009) |
| 3. Rape or other sexual violence against children (resolution 1882, 2009) |
| 5. Abduction of children (resolution 2225, 2015) |
| 6. Denial of humanitarian access (not a trigger for listing) |

*Source: UN, 2017.*

The focus of this study is thus the systematic recruitment and use of children during armed conflict, specifically focusing on the recruitment patterns of rebel groups. As presented in the literature review, hereto conducted research has reviewed a number of aspects related to child soldiering; e.g. the risk of conflict lengthening and recurrence as well as the role of external support and natural resources. It is important to acknowledge the findings already made, but equally important to mention that most studies focus on why rebel groups do recruit and use child soldiers, instead of focusing on what makes rebel groups abstain from it. Even though e.g. high levels of poverty and the presence of IDP camps are used as explanations for
why rebel groups are motivated to recruit and use child soldiers, it does not explain the variation in why some rebel groups do not recruit and use child soldiers. An important finding relating to this is the one that secessionist rebel groups are less likely to recruit and use child soldiers than non-secessionist rebel groups, though this is a more of a rebel group characteristic than a contextual structure.

In order to thoroughly review recruitment tendencies of armed actors, other aspects than those mentioned can be included in order to gain a holistic view, which is needed when trying to overcome the issue. The various aspects included in the literature gives an indication of how multidimensional acts are needed, with mutual focus on proactive and retroactive work. The overarching purpose of this study is thus to contribute to the research regarding rebel groups recruitment patterns, and specifically if this behavior can be traced as a reaction to the dependence on civilian support. Furthermore, this will hopefully also contribute with an understanding about the impact of civilian agency in the context of armed conflict. This leads to the following research question: Why do some rebel groups systematically recruit and use child soldiers, while others do not?

2.3 Phenomena of interest and expected relationship

The phenomena of interest in this study is whether rebel groups with a greater dependence on civilian support are less likely to systematically recruit and use child soldiers, as opposed to rebel groups with less dependence on civilian support. The independent variable (IV) is thus dependence on civilian support and the dependent variable (DV) is systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers. The expected relationship between these variables is that rebel groups with a greater dependence on civilian support are less likely to systematically recruit or use child soldiers as compared to rebel groups with less dependence on civilian support. This is proposed to be because of when rebel groups are more dependent on civilian support, the perceived cost of opposing the norm against the recruitment and use of child soldiers increase, resulting in a decrease in likelihood of systematically recruiting and using child soldiers among these rebel groups.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>IV: Rebel groups with a greater dependence on civilian support</th>
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<tr>
<td>↓</td>
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<tr>
<td>DV: Decreased likelihood of systematically recruiting and using child soldiers</td>
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</table>
2.4 Definition of variables

The independent variable, dependence on civilian support, is here defined as relying on a civilian support base to provide resources in order to sustain or increase capabilities. A greater dependence on civilian support is then a result of rebel groups having fewer options of receiving these resources elsewhere, such as through extortion of natural resources or external support, meaning that their main basis of available resources is provided by a civilian support base (Haer et al., 2019: 5; Salehyan et al., 2014: 657). Building on the logic by Barter, the more tangible resources given to a rebel group includes the provision of goods, information and labor (2012: 559), and the concept of ‘resources’ will hereafter refer to these forms as well as be included in the operationalization in section 3.2.

A reservation to be made on this variable is that it does not intend to measure civilian loyalty to a rebel group. This is due to that support can be a result of force, and that the resources mentioned above are more concrete, and also indicates more direct, forms of support (Barter, 2012: 558-559). Even though civilian support can be a result of loyalty to a rebel groups’ cause and can result in e.g. symbolic support, this study focuses on the specific resources mentioned above that rebel groups are dependent on in order to sustain fighting.

The dependent variable consists of two main concepts which needs clarification: systematic recruitment and use and child soldier. The definition of what constitutes a child soldier derives here from the OPAC, which declares that:

A child soldier is ‘any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of regular or irregular armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to cooks, porters, messengers, and anyone accompanying such groups, other than family members. The definition includes girls recruited for sexual purposes and forced marriage.’ (UNICEF, 2003: 14)

To this end, the systematic recruitment and use refers to that the acts in the definition regarding child soldiers has to be “according to [the rebel groups’] agreed set of methods or organized plan” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019); meaning that occasional observations of recruitment and use, such as incidents of children stating a false age in order to enlist, will not be included as systematic recruitment and use. This is included in the dependent variable in

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3 A civilian is to be understood as an individual that is not part of an armed group, causing a blurred line when civilians engage in increasing rebel groups capabilities. Therefore, the definition set by the Geneva Convention is useful, which states that a civilian is a person “taking no active part in the hostilities (…)” (UN, 1949).
order to enable a comparison between how intentional the act of recruiting and using child soldiers has been by the rebel groups.

2.5 Proposed theory for the relationship

The theory driving this thesis is based on a cost-benefit analysis in relation to civilian support where different strategies are used by rebel groups to achieve their goals. A scope condition for the theory is that it is only applicable when concerning rebel groups. This is due to that rebel groups have differing incentives in comparison to governments which can affect their behavior. Furthermore, the type of support that rebel groups and governments are dependent on differs between them, and the definition of the independent variable concerns the forms of support relevant for rebel groups (Barter, 2012: 558).

An assumption for this theory is that rebel groups are to varying degrees indeed dependent on civilian support in order to sustain conflict. This assumption is recognized in the academic literature (see e.g. Beber and Blattman, 2013; Arjona, 2017; Haer and Böhmelt, 2015). The argument developed here is that a greater dependence on civilian support will shape their decisions in order to obtain the support. This is linked to that rebel groups are here considered as rational actors and therefore make decisions and act thereafter; more specifically, their recruitment patterns are a product of what is perceived as the least costly option.

This study suggests that dependence on civilian support and being recipients of resources from a civilian support base results in that the cost-benefit calculation made by rebel groups has an increase in cost of systematically recruiting and using child soldiers. This is proposed to be because of that opposing the norm against the recruitment and use of child soldiers leads to the possibility of losing resources acquired through civilian support. By being a rational actor, they would choose the least costly option that simultaneously yields the most benefits. As access to resources are more beneficial for a rebel groups’ fighting capacity than child soldiers are (Haer and Böhmelt, 2016: 167-168), obtaining resources from a civilian support base is both the least costly and most beneficial option. This results in that when rebel groups are observed to be more dependent on civilian support, they are theorized to also be less likely to systematically recruit and use child soldiers than rebel groups with less dependence on civilian support.

A potential objection to the theory is the argument that assessing whether a norm is strong or widespread enough to be considered as influential on group behavior is difficult. As
described by Lasley and Thyne, the norm against recruitment and use of child soldiers is an exception. Because of the wide international support against the recruitment and use of child soldiers, it sends a unilateral signal about the appropriate behavior in this regard. Even though non-state actors are not involved in the processes resulting in a global disapproval, they would still be affected by a potential condemnation and removal of support which leads to the perception of an increased cost (2015: 294-295). This wide-spread norm against child soldiering is why it is theorized that there would be an increased cost also for rebel groups dependent on a civilian support base. As mentioned in the literature review, the perception of what constitutes a child soldier can vary depending on norms and traditions. In order to establish whether the civilian support base actually oppose the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and thus if this behavior would increase the cost for rebel groups, it is included in the subsequent Structured Focused Comparison.

2.6 Arrow diagram of the causal mechanism and hypothesis

*Diagram 1: Possible causal mechanism.*

As seen in this arrow diagram, the IV leads to the DV through the proposed causal path. *Greater dependence on civilian support* (IV) means that when rebel groups do not have access to resources from elsewhere (delimited here to external support or extortion of natural resources), they are more dependent on civilian support in order to obtain these resources. This is proposed to cause a perception of an *increased cost of systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers* because of the possibility to lose civilian support and thus the resources that the rebel group is dependent on. The perceived costliness of the behavior then results in a *decreased likelihood of systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers* (DV).

Given the information presented above, the hypothesis tested in this thesis is thus the following: the more dependent a rebel group is on civilian support, the less likely they are to systematically recruit and use child soldiers.
3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of this thesis is an across-case comparison between two units, being rebel groups. These rebel groups will be selected using the method of difference, where the cases vary on the dependent variable. Control variables, that are potential influences on the outcome of the dependent variable, are thereto included and the values the cases display on these are held as constant as possible in order to trace if the independent variable is the probable explanatory variable for the variation. By identifying cases on the basis of variance on the dependent variable, it is easier to reject a spurious relationship (Bleijenbergh, 2010: 2).

In order to gain an understanding of the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, the theoretical framework will be tested by conducting a Structured Focused Comparison (SFC), where each variable will be examined by a set of standardized and general question. By doing this with focus on the theoretical application and the objective of this study, comparable data is gathered on each case (George and Bennett, 2005: 69).

In order to trace the variance on the dependent variable (i.e. whether a rebel group have or have not engaged in systematic recruitment and use), the Rebel Groups and International Laws (RGIL) dataset is used. The dataset provides data on child soldier usage mainly collected from the Global Reports published by the human rights group Child Soldiers International (Jo, 2015: 282). This is consistent with the definition of what constitutes a child soldier in this study, as Child Soldiers International (previously known as the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers) was involved with the process of setting 18 as the minimum age of recruitment or participation in conflict in the OPAC (Becker, 2013: 15). This variable is dichotomous in the RGIL dataset, stating whether rebel groups have or have not recruited and used child soldiers.

By using the RGIL dataset for the dependent variable, the possible cases to narrow down to are those included in that dataset, meaning that it is possible that other cases have not been identified even though suitable for the aim of this study. It must also be emphasized that the values on the dependent variable in the case selection is dichotomous and gathered from a dataset, thus subjected to some quantitative limitations. A qualitative approach, including the use of a SFC, allows for empirical data to illustrate nuances within the cases on both of the variables and the causal path. It is therefore possible that findings in qualitative material will contradict the data used for the dependent variable during the case selection, a point that is important to make.
3.1 Case selection

As the value of the independent variable is unknown, the case selection is based upon the dependent variable and the values on the chosen control variables. The study includes two cases with different values on the dependent variable. In order to find comparable cases, some restrictions are adopted to decrease the theoretical population of rebel groups.

The above-mentioned RGIL dataset provides information on a total of 251 rebel groups within its set timeframe (Jo, 2015: 89). The involvement of children in conflict is not limited to one area and child soldiers are present in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. However, as child soldiers are estimated to be most present in Africa with a total of circa 40% of all probable child soldiers worldwide (Achvarina and Reich, 2006: 129; 131) it is chosen as a first stage before narrowing down further (see first phase of case selection in appendix).

Continuing with composing a list of possible countries to choose from, a few guidelines are imposed. In order to make the context as similar as possible, the cases are preferably present in the same country. Therefore, the list is composed of countries who has at least two present rebel groups. Thereafter, there needs to be variation on the dependent variable in relation to the number of present rebel groups, meaning that if two rebel groups are present, one of them must have recruited and used child soldiers. If more than two rebel groups are present, it is preferred if the variation is close to a half-and-half divide between those groups who have and have not recruited and used child soldiers in order to strategically choose the best fit of comparable cases. Consequently, this also results in that countries where no rebel groups recruit and use child soldiers, and vice versa, will not be considered as possible cases. Some cases in the dataset does not have available data on the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and these will neither be included as possible cases. To summarize, the list (see second phase of case selection in appendix) is therefore composed of countries that has at least two present rebel groups which display variation on the dependent variable.

Thereafter, Sudan is chosen at the country-level from which rebel groups will be isolated as cases. Sudan is chosen because, as shown by the second phase of the case selection in the appendix, out of 8 present rebel groups, 4 of them do not recruit and use child soldiers. With a relatively high number of present rebel groups, the cases can be strategically selected with the method of difference, displaying as similar values as possible on the control variables.
Table 1: Possible cases from Sudan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rebel groups in Sudan</th>
<th>Acronym of rebel group</th>
<th>Recruited and used child soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forces of George Athor</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janjaweed</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice and Equality Movement</td>
<td>JEM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Redemption Front</td>
<td>NRF</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan Liberation Movement/Army</td>
<td>SLM/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SLM/ANAMMM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan Liberation Movement/Army - Unity</td>
<td>SLM/A-Unity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army</td>
<td>SPLM/A</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Jo, 2015: 285-286; 291; UCDP, 2018a; UCDP, 2018b; UCDP, 2018c; UCDP, 2018d; UCDP, 2018e.

After checking for data availability and short descriptions, Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) is the only case of those who has not recruited and used child soldiers that is deemed to be suitable to use in this study. Then, SLM/ANAMM is removed because of the inability to find data. The remaining cases therefore need to have as similar values on the control variables as possible in relation to SPLM/A in accordance with the method of difference. The chosen control variables included in this study are external support, extortion of natural resources, ability to procure arms and size of armed forces. These are included because of that they have been shown in previous academic literature to have influence on the likelihood of recruiting and using child soldiers.

The cases that are subjected to the last phase of the case selection, including control variables, are therefore the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A), Sudan Liberation Movement/Army – Unity (SLM/A Unity) and

4 The two factions SLM/A-al Nur and SLM/A-Minawi are not explicitly differentiated in the RGIL Dataset and therefore not distinguishable at this stage. For further discussion on this, see section 5.
The ultimate outcome when following Mill’s method of difference would be to have differing values on the independent variable and thereafter investigate whether the proposed causal mechanism is in function (Bleijenbergh, 2010: 2). However, the value on the independent variable will be unknown until after the SFC is conducted. After reviewing the values on the control variables (see third phase of case selection in appendix), the chosen cases for this study are the following:

**Table 2: Chosen cases and values on the control variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym of rebel group</th>
<th>CV1: External support</th>
<th>CV2: Extortion of natural resources</th>
<th>CV3: Ability to procure arms</th>
<th>CV4: Size of rebel armed forces</th>
<th>DV: Systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SLM/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPLM/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


3.2 Structure of empirical analysis

To operationalize the variables in this study, a set of standardized and general questions are asked in coherence with the theoretical focus of the study (George and Bennett, 2005: 69-70). The questions have to be comprehensive enough to identify nuances in the empirical findings of each case, as simultaneously narrow enough to filtrate the information that would hinder a comparison between the cases (Brosché, 2014: 54). These questions are asked in order to produce valid and reliable testing of the variables and the proposed causal mechanism. This means that the structure of the SFC helps with increasing validity by using narrow questions intended to operationalize the research objective specifically. In relation to reliability, the operationalization and data collection is done with highest possible transparency by clarifying the types of sources used and what the concepts in the questions refer to and how they are supposed to be interpreted (George and Bennett, 2005: 106).

The SFC enables comparison between the cases, especially as it allows for finding small but important distinctions in each case. This is due to that it is structured, meaning that the
questions are based upon the purpose of the study and that the same questions are asked to both cases, and focused, meaning that it only ask questions deemed as relevant for the cases (George and Bennett, 2005: 67). The operationalization of the independent variable, the causal path and the dependent variable is as follows:

⇒ Independent variable: Dependence on civilian support
   
   o Did the rebel group receive resources from civilians?
     • As set out by Barters potential forms of civilian support, resources refer to goods (e.g. food, money and shelter), information (about e.g. ambushes) and labor (e.g. engineering or nursing) (2012: 559).
   
   o Did the rebel group have access to these resources from elsewhere than through the civilian support base?
     • Other sources are narrowed down to external support and/or extortion of natural resources.
   
   o Did leaders or members of the rebel group express gratitude in forms of enabling survival (of the group) or winning (the conflict) towards the civilian support base?

⇒ Causal path: Cost of systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers
   
   o Did leaders or members of the rebel group perceive that civilians were opposed the involvement of children in armed groups?
     • Meaning that civilians expressed or acted to prevent or resolve the recruitment and use of child soldiers in relation to the rebel group.
   
   o Did leaders or members of the rebel group express that civilian support affected their conduct?
     • Meaning that the civilian support influenced their decisions and actions regarding systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers.

⇒ Dependent variable: Systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers
   
   o Are there observations of systematic recruitment and sue of child soldiers by the rebel group?
     • Child soldier meaning any person under the age of 18.
- Where there any code of conduct within the rebel group regarding the recruitment and use of child soldiers?
  - Code of conduct includes both written documents and reports of awareness of desired behavior.
- Were there any practices of accountability in place in case of discovering incidents of recruiting and using child soldiers?
  - Practices of accountability includes reprimands as well as reminders and updates of the code of conduct.

3.3 Sources of empirical material

The data used for this study is based on primary and secondary sources. Statements and interviews with members or leaders of the rebel groups are primary sources used in order to understand the decisions and acts of rebel groups. This is supplemented with information from secondary sources, such as academic literature and UN and NGO reports.

One problem in relation to the data collection has emerged and somewhat limited the study. A significant part of the empirical data is found in resolutions and reports on Children and Armed Conflict by the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the UN. However, these reports were not annually updated until 2000. This also has effects on other secondary material, such as reports by the International Commission and the Human Rights Council, as they act upon recommendations in the previously mentioned resolutions and reports.

Furthermore, other information is also restricted before the 21st century. For example, UNICEF’s press releases and news notes on children associated with armed conflict is only available from 2004 and forward (UNICEF, 2011). Therefore, 2000 is the starting year in the following analysis. Data regarding information before this year will only be included if it is necessary to explain the origin of certain circumstances within the time period of focus. The end year for this study is limited to 2011, with the formation of South Sudan, in order to ensure contextual similarities within the regions.

Another observed problem is the ambiguity regarding the cases. This problem is dual: first, it is sometimes unclear whether the acronyms of the cases (SPLM/A and SLM/A) refers to the

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5 Since this study focuses on the time period between 2000 and 2011, the Northern and Southern Sudan was still a unified state and it will therefore be referred to as Sudan. If aspects regarding the areas are deemed relevant for the understanding of the cases, they will however be included and specified.
correct rebel group (Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army and Sudan Liberation Movement/Army respectively). The second problem regarding the cases is the different factions, especially when considering that the data might not specify which faction it refers to or could treat them homogenous. The spelling of leaders also differs, affecting the acronym of the rebel group. To exemplify, the SLM/A faction led by Abdul Wahid Mohammad al-Nur is called SLM/A-al Nur, SLM/A-al Wahid, while the faction led by Minni Minawi is referred to as both SLM/A-MM or SLM/A-Minawi in the data. Furthermore, both of these factions are sometimes referred to as only SLM/A. Triangulating the information is therefore of utmost importance, and vague information will be treated carefully.
4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Contextual background

Regarding the use of child soldiers in Sudan, the OPAC was signed on the 9th of May 2002 and later ratified on the 26th of July 2005. The government declared that “(…) the Republic of Sudan is committed to maintain the minimum age for voluntary service in the Sudan armed forces at 18, and to maintain the prohibition of forced or voluntary conscription of any person under the age of 18 years.” (UN, 2019). Despite this, both the governmental armed forces and police forces as well as several rebel groups have been listed in the annex of the Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict by the Secretary-General (Watchlist, 2019).

Sudan has suffered from both interstate and intrastate conflicts and depicting the complex underlying factors for this will not be complete. This is both a result of the interplay between several conflicts and the establishment and dissolution of cooperation and competition between different rebel groups, factions of the rebel groups and external actors. After gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1956, violence has been conducted by both state and non-state actors. Sudan is a heterogeneous country with different ethnicities, languages and religions and even though there is a perception that the country has been divided between Muslims in the north and Christians in the south, this is a simplification of reality. Even so, the government in the capital Khartoum has been dominated by Northern elites. This has not only resulted in marginalization and grievances amongst the rest of the population, but also in competition between the elite when fighting for governmental power. This is a partial explanation to why Sudan has experienced unstable parliamentary governments and military regimes. The complexity for the conflicts and civil wars in Sudan are connected to the underlying factors of centralization of political and economic power as well as religious and cultural divisions and access to natural resources (UCDP, 2018f). Although the focus hereafter will be directed towards the years between 2000 and 2011, the conflicts in Sudan generally derive from these factors to varying degrees. To illustrate, a short description of the rebel groups’ cause for formation and general transformation through time is presented next.

The Second Sudan Civil War begun when John Garang formed the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army in 1983. The aim was not to separate the South from the North, but rather to develop a unified ‘New Sudan’ by fighting the regime in Khartoum in order to create a new central government without racism and tribalism. After organizational and
leadership difficulties, Garang held the SPLM/A National Convention which reimbursed legitimacy and organizational structures. Despite external threats and sometimes internal splinter groups, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed on the 9th of January 2005 with the aim to end the civil war. Even though the outspoken incompatibility of SPLM/A concerned governmental power, many did not agree with the vision of a ‘New Sudan’ (Collins, 2007: 1783; 1788; 1791). This resulted in a referendum regarding the future of South Sudan, and in 2011 it became independent and recognized as a new country (UCDP, 2018f). In order to settle over the CPA, one demand was that the SPLM/A transformed into a political party (Rolandsen, 2007: 6). As this process began, Garang was also appointed vice-president over Sudan and he is considered to represent the original SPLM/A (UCDP, 2018e), which is why this is the only acronym used for the group in this study.

The Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (previously named Darfur Liberation Front) was formed as an alliance between Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa tribes by head Abdul Wahid Mohammad al-Nur in 2003. The Secretary-General of the group, Minni Minawi, released the group’s Political Declaration, stating that they opposed the “policies of Arabization, political and economic marginalization, and ‘the brutal oppression, ethnic cleansing, and genocide sponsored by the Khartoum Government’” (Collins, 2007: 1896). The incompatibility regards governmental power and even though situated in Darfur, they fight for a national secular Sudan. SLM/A split into two factions in 2005 due to tribal differences, and Minawi became the leader of what is commonly referred to as SLM/A-MM or SLM/A-Minawi. Numerous factions within SLM/A has emerged since (UCDP, 2018c), but the original group led by al-Nur is today mostly referred to as only SLM/A which is also the faction of focus in this study. This is one of the factions of SLM/A that did not sign the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in 2006, partly because al-Nur was faced with the discontent by his supporters towards the signing (Brosché, 2008: 25).

4.2 Empirical observations
4.2.1 Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army

With the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army, the government benefited from the internal skirmish amongst the factions. The government was successful in recruiting people into militias, mainly on the basis of ethnical or communal identity, against the rebel group. As Garang was a Dinka, this became a narrative enforcing the “divide-and-rule strategy” used by
the government which concentrated the fighting between southern communities, lasting until the unification of the factions in 2002 (Brosché and Duursma, 2018: 563). However, after the death of Garang in 2005, the power struggle along ethnic lines in SPLM/A reappeared and the top leadership has turned to regional and ethnic constituencies for support (Rolandsen, Molteberg Glomnes, Manoeli, and Nicolaisen, 2015: 92).

In the 1990’s, the leadership of the group recognized their need of official renewal to affirm the vision about a New Sudan. The National Convention was held in 1994 with this purpose, where change and reform within the SPLM/A was of main focus. One reason for this was the attempt to win back the support from civilians in order to both secure provision of voluntary support to the group and ensure that they did not flee SPLM/A-governed areas. SPLM/A found themselves in a situation where they were more dependent on resources from within the Southern Sudan and hoped that if giving civilians the opportunities for surplus production, this would benefit the group as well. It is however unclear if this yielded results in forms of resources given to the SPLM/A by the civilian constituency. However, another aspect of the inclusion of civilians in the groups cause was the aspiration to improve the groups image internationally, especially amongst Western governments and foreign NGOs (Rolandsen, 2005: 14; 114-115).

The approach towards human rights became successful, and since mid-1990’s SPLM/A has gained support from international donors (de Simone, 2018: 399). The most prominent external support has been given by neighboring countries Ethiopia, Uganda and Eritrea, but only one account of external support in the 21st century has been confirmed; namely from Eritrea in 2002 (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). There has however also been emergency aid directed at the Southern region, provided by Western states who wanted to destabilize the government of Sudan, and it is reported that “the emergence of the SPLM/A as the hegemonic actor on the Southern Sudanese scene was only made possible thanks to the support of the international donor community.” (de Simone, 2018: 399). There is also accounts of another strategy to extort funding to the rebel group. Even though access to and the uneven distribution of revenues from natural resources, especially oil, was an underlying factor for the conflict (UCDP, 2018e), oil is an un-lootable resource and the SPLM/A was not able to extort it. However, there are records of SPLM/A targeting the oil pipelines and workers, thus receiving money from Western oil companies who wished to protect the equipment (Tesfaye Haile, 2012).

The SPLM/A has also gotten financial support from e.g. UNICEF to end its continuous recruitment and use of child soldiers. Between 2001 and 2004, over 16,000 children were
claimed by the SPLA (i.e. the armed part of the group) to have been demobilized. The program of demobilization was implemented by a child soldiers task force within the SPLM (i.e. the political wing of the group) which was financially supported by UNICEF until early 2004 (Child Soldiers International, 2004). This demobilization was a result of a pledge given by the Chief of Staff of SPLM/A, Salva Kiir, to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Carol Bellamy (Child Soldiers International, 2001; UN, 2001). According to Bellamy, this was made possible because of hard work from several actors, including community leaders on the ground (UN, 2001).

Despite this, the recruitment and use of children continued even after the demobilization programme was initiated. In 2006, SPLA junior officers enticed 47 children with the promise of education in Southern Sudan, and these children were not released until July 2007. Another incident includes SPLA forces raiding a school in Nasir in October 2006, where 32 boys were abducted for recruitment and use, 30 of which were later released. The SPLA acknowledged its recruitment and use of child soldiers and are reported to have made high-level commitments to end their conduct (Child Soldiers International, 2008). 64 SPLA field commanders conducted a training programme on child protection in 2007 and during the last training session, the commanders made a commitment to end child recruitment (UN, 2007b: 11). The SPLM/A as a group – meaning both the political wing and the armed force – has been listed twice in the annex of the Annual Reports on Children and Armed Conflict by the Secretary-General, in 2003 and 2004. The SPLA alone has been listed five times, from 2006 to 2011 (Watchlist, 2019). SPLA has established a child protection unit, and in 2009 SPLM/A signed an UN action plan that stipulates concrete actions against the involvement of children in their group. In relation to the signing, the group ordered all of their units to release children by January 2010 and also revised their internal code of conduct (Jo, 2015: 161). It is on the basis of these acts, seen as abandoning the recruitment and use of child soldiers, that they are coded as non-users of child soldiers in the RGIL dataset (Jo, 2015: 32; 161).

There are several observations of civil reactions to violations performed by SPLM/A as well as work by the local population to enhance children’s rights in armed conflict. In 2009 two young women and a 17-year-old girl were attacked and allegedly raped by three SPLA soldiers, and the 17-year-old was abducted. Community members later captured one of the soldiers, beat him and took him to the police. Local community leaders tried to resolve the situation directly with commanders within SPLA, but there were no disciplinary actions taken against the soldier (UN, 2011: 8). Community leaders has also confirmed the widespread involvement of children in armed groups and are engaged in work on children associated with
fighting forces. For example, local officials, leaders and chiefs have requested copies of laws and policies in order to advocate against the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Willingness to approach local commanders “as brothers and uncles” was also expressed, but it was also emphasized that UNICEF had to facilitate the work of reaching out to e.g. high-level commanders. Local officials and leaders have asked UNICEF and international partners to “keep working on this problem [child recruitment] until we succeed” (UNICEF, 2004: 18; 21; 23).

4.2.2 Sudan Liberation Movement/Army

As mentioned, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army suffered from internal splits and power struggle among leaders. This was not a new phenomenon, but rather a tactic that the government of Sudan both took advantage of and intensified. By holding ethnicities against each other, supporting some factions to challenge other factions within the same umbrella-group, and deploying militias (collectively called Janjaweed), the government of Sudan could withstand the fighting in Darfur without having to decrease the size of the armed force who fought SPLM/A in the South (Brosché, 2008: 10; 35-36, U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Another reason for deploying the Janjaweed was that the government was faced with one problem within their armed forces, namely that it was largely composed of Darfurians, probable to be reluctant of fighting ‘their own’ people (UN, 2005: 24). The possibility of this governmental approach was acknowledged already during the formation of SLM/A, and as the main support base for the movement was the three major ethnicities in Darfur (Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa) (UCDP, 2018c), it was integrated in the leadership level of the group. This resulted in that the chairman of the movement should be Fur, that the chief of staff from Zaghawa and the deputy chair from the Masalit. Despite the effort to incorporate the majority of the ethnicities into leadership positions, the group subsequently split along these ethnic lines (Brosché, 2008: 13).

One of the founders of the movement, and subsequently the leader of what is commonly known as SLM/A today is Abdul Wahid Mohammad al-Nur (henceforth referred to as al-Nur). He is reported to have a support base primarily located in refugee camps and amongst IDPs. The views on his power are contradictive, with other rebel leaders stating that his influence has decreased while academics and aid-workers support the view that he is backed by a significant support base (Brosché, 2008: 24-25). Even though the type of support is unclear, SLM/A has received support from a Fur Diaspora (Högbladh, Pettersson and
Themnér, 2011), and it is estimated that al-Nur has support from hundreds of thousands of IDPs as well as amongst the Fur population which constitutes roughly 30% of Darfur’s population (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). The government armed-militia, Janjaweed, has performed coordinated military raids in Darfur, directed at the civilian support base (Brooks, 2008: 416). When studying attacks on villages in Darfur between 2001 and 2005, the Danish research group Bloodhound concluded that 97% of the attacks were conducted by the Janjaweed, governmental forces or a combination of them both, and that 3% of the attacks were carried out by rebels (Brosché, 2008: 39). In order to deprive SLM/A of support and resources, the attacks carried out by the Janjaweed include killings, rape, torture, destroying of crops, the forceful displacement of populations, etcetera. It is reported that these attacks were coordinated to deliberately target civilians who were suspected of providing support to SLM/A (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009; UN, 2007a: 12).

The resources available to civilian populations in Darfur have traditionally been scarce, and they have been governed by sharing water and land between nomadic herders and settled farmers. Because of drought and population growth the earlier customary rules have been violated (Kasfir, 2005: 197). Due to this, fighting over the scarce resources has become more intense and looting often occurs in situations of the above-mentioned attacks. There are some reports of looting by rebel forces in Darfur, however, the groups are not specified by name (UN, 2005: 21; 55). Even though resources are scarce and that the distribution of them is one aspect in the conflict (Grawert, 2008: 610), the extortion of natural resources by the rebel group has not been reported in the data. SLM/A enhanced their resources by acquiring most of its weapons through looting governmental installations, being mostly police stations and army barracks, in addition to the support provided by civilians. Foreign support has also been present from Chad and Eritrea (Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011). How important this foreign support was for the build-up of the forces within the SLM/A has however not been established (UN, 2005: 38).

The SLM/A have been listed once in the annex of the Annual Reports on Children and Armed Conflict by the Secretary-General, namely in 2005 (Watchlist, 2019). The recruitment and use of child soldiers were partly recognized because community leaders communicated that ‘all sides to the conflict in Darfur recruited child soldiers’ (U.S. Department of State, 2006: 519). It was stated by leaders of SLM/A that these children, while indeed living in some of their camps, did not take any part in armed hostilities. It was explained that these children were orphans and that the rebel group took care of them. However, the children had been seen in uniforms and carrying weapons in and around the rebel camps (UN, 2005: 106-107). In
later talks by the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) and UNICEF with representatives of SLM/A, it was indicated that the rebel group was willing to collaborate with the international community towards releasing children from their ranks, but at the end of June 2007 there was no signs of this being implemented (UN, 2007b: 11). In 2010, after talks with African Union-UN Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and UNICEF, commanders pledged their full commitment to continue the dialogue with the UN as well as considering implementing an action plan for demobilization and reintegration of child soldiers (UN, 2011: 15). Subsequently, the General Commander of SLM/A renewed an issuing of prohibiting the use and recruitment of child soldiers (ReliefWeb, 2011).

Local representatives of communities within Darfur are documented to help UN staff with identifying child soldiers in armed groups (UN, 2006: 7), but the reports refers to “allegations of the use of child soldiers by the rebels” (UN, 2005: 55), “recruitment continued in 2007 by (…) factions of the SLA which had not signed the DPA” (Child Soldiers International, 2008), etcetera. Although there are several reports and observations of children being associated with the specific al-Nur faction of SLM/A, this results in scarcity in terms of absolute numbers of children recruited and used by SLM/A-al Nur.

4.3 Interpretation of the results

One initial difference that became apparent in the empirical observation of the cases is the availability of resources to the groups. Even though both received external support, SLM/A additionally received support from a Fur Diaspora which is probable to have improved their capabilities. Even though the type of support has not been mapped, the Fur Diaspora indicates that the ethnic group provides resources as a result of their support towards SLM/A. It is worth mentioning that this might also be a result of that al-Nur is also Fur and that there is a possibility that the provided support is a result of the shared ethnicity, especially as Sudan suffers from ethnic divisions. However, as the type of resource provided by the support is not explicitly stated, it does not disclose how dependent the rebel group was on the support from the Fur Diaspora. This is also the case with support from other civilians, as it is not indicated whether these provide support in the forms of resources outlined in this study. The attacks conducted by the Janjaweed against civilians suspected of supporting the SLM/A, as well as their attempt to terminate the support and resources given to SLM/A, suggests that the support was nevertheless significant. Despite the Fur Diaspora, which can add insight to SLM/A’s
dependence on civilian support, the external support to the rebel group cannot be proven to have had big impact on their capabilities at the time of growth. Conversely, SPLM/A had strong international relations, not only amongst neighboring countries but also with Western states and foreign NGOs which strengthened the group. Furthermore, no data alleges or confirms that neither SLM/A nor SPLM/A extorted natural resources; however, the SPLM/A managed extorting money from Western oil companies through the attacks on oil pipelines and workers which they could then invest in the group.

Regarding the recruitment and use of child soldiers, there are no absolute numbers of cases reported in regard to SLM/A. The data is imprecise in this regard, but the allegations are confirmed by SLM/A themselves even though they state that this is a result of children’s association to their units and not of systematic recruitment. This statement is however not deemed reliable, as it is shown by the empirical data that the group have been asked to demobilize the children without result. Even though no available data on absolute numbers does not mean that they are necessarily lower than in cases where the absolute numbers are known, it can be a sign of it. As the threshold for child soldiers within SPLM/A is 16,000, it is likely that the numbers of child soldiers within SLM/A is lower. This is related to that the awareness of recruitment and use of child soldiers within SLM/A was a result of community leaders communicating the information and that they also helped UN staff with identifying child soldiers within armed groups in Darfur, instead of the UN establishing data on absolute numbers provided by the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism.

This presents a reality different from the one of SPLM/A. Even though the quantitative data on the dependent variable is contradicted by the interpretations made of later found qualitative data, the empirical observations presents an interesting finding. Arguably, the SPLM/A systematically recruit and use child soldiers with data referring to as many as 16,000 children being demobilized. As this number does not account for the actual number of child soldiers within their group during the given years, meaning that it is possible that not all children were demobilized or that not all were identified, this is still an indication.

Even though this large-scale number of child soldiers is consistent with the theory, the information gathered in relation to the proposed causal path is interesting. This is related to the contradictory behavior by SPLM/A regarding the confirmed child soldier usage, with several instances of unpredictable acts. During the given years in this study, the SPLM/A has made several commitments – both verbal and practical – in order to end the recruitment and use of child soldiers within their group. Despite that, instances of recruitment and use has recurred. There are explanations in the academic literature to why this would happen, as for
example if needing to strengthen fighting capabilities. This does however not explain why the SPLM/A committed to a demobilization and underwent it between 2001 and 2004. It is a possibility that this was a result of civilian agency performed by local communities who engaged in talks and the spreading of information about child soldiering. In both cases, the civilian constituencies have been reported to be against the recruitment and use of child soldiers as well as engaged in seeking solutions with the SLM/A or SPLM/A and external actors. However, all of the commitments and acts against the systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers by SPLM/A has been in relation to external actors, which suggests that SPLM/A are more responsive to international actors than to the local population. This is also recognized by local leaders, as they seek the facilitation by the UNICEF to succumb the issue.

This could in turn imply that the SPLM/A is more dependent on the international community and therefore wish to seek approval from them, as opposed to SLM/A who are more likely to be dependent on the civilian support base and therefore seek their approval instead. The most apparent difference between the two cases is that the initial levels of child soldiers are probable to be lower in the case of SLM/A while SPLM/A had higher initial levels of child soldiers but made high-level commitments to change the behavior in relation to external actors. Even though these two approaches by the rebel groups are different, it can in the end result in similar behavior – not engaging in systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers – if the actors on the providing end of the support has expectations on preferred conduct.

To summarize, the purpose of this study was to explain why some rebel groups refrain from recruiting and using child soldiers, even though research has shown that child soldiers are e.g. easier to mislead and indoctrinate than adults and that they can increase a groups’ fighting capacities. This study was conducted with the focus directed on the aspect of dependence on civilian support as a potential explanation for why rebel groups would be less likely to systematically recruit and use child soldiers. What has been found is that SLM/A has a broad support base who are documented to provide resources; the type of which has unfortunately not been clarified. Nevertheless, it seems as if the civilian support base provided enough resources to result in the government perceiving it as a problem, subsequently trying to undermine it. Additionally, there are few accounts of other resources available to SLM/A, which strengthens the perception of them being dependent on civilian support.

On the contrary, SPLM/A had support from civilians but there is no clear evidence that they received resources from them. Rather, SPLM/A seems to have been able to channel
resources through other means, e.g. through external support. This is also indicated by the behavior of the group, as SPLM/A changed their conduct as a response to the international community, of which it is more dependent on. The two groups vary on the dependent variable, where SLM/A are probable to have been systematically recruiting and using child soldiers to a smaller extent than SPLM/A. Even though this is consistent with the theory, that a greater dependence on civilian support results in a decreased likelihood of systematically recruiting and using child soldiers, the support for the proposed relationship and causal path is weak and needs to be supplemented with further information in order to be fully assessed.

4.4 Alternative explanations

One factor worth discussing here is the possible influence of the rebel group size on the behavior of the actors. The SLM/A is reported to have had an armed force size consisting of 6000, as opposed to 30,000 for SPLM/A.

Regarding the SPLM/A, the rebel group size can have a dual affect. If being large enough, a rebel group might not possess the necessary organizational structure and control over the behavior of all members of the group as it wishes, leading to that child soldiers are included in the group without the consent of leaders. However, groups that have many members does not need to fill their ranks with child soldiers as they are not faced with troop shortfalls (Faulkner et al., 2019: 1024), and the systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers should thus be less likely. The likelihood of 16,000 children being recruited and used by the rebel group as a result of opportunistic members is however small, and these explanations does not fit the empirical observations of the rebel group’s behavior.

As for SLM/A, the size of the rebel group has implications for the theory as smaller rebel groups are more sensitive to losing any supporters (Haer and Böhmelt, 2018: 399). This does not necessarily contradict the proposed theory, but it is neither clarified why this would be and how this could affect the differing results of SLM/A and SPLM/A in this study. Despite this, the sizes of the rebel groups still pose a difference between the cases. This is a difference that could be subjected to some further examination in order to discard it as an alternative explanation for the differing behaviors between the rebel groups.
5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to answer the research question *why do some rebel groups systematically recruit and use child soldiers, while others do not?*

The purpose of this research question was to contribute to the research on child soldier usage with the perspective of what conditions it is that makes rebel groups refrain from systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers, instead of the more common perspective of investigating why rebel groups do engage in systematic recruitment and use. This was done by examining the role of dependence on civilian support as an eventual explanation for the variance shown on child soldier usage amongst rebel groups, with a cost-benefit analysis as a proposed causal path.

This qualitative analysis of two cases in Sudan during 2000-2011 has shown that the case that had a greater dependence on civilian support is also displaying a decreased likelihood of systematically recruiting and using child soldiers in relation to the other case, which was less dependent on civilian support and demonstrated a higher likelihood of systematically recruiting and using child soldiers. Furthermore, the investigation on the proposed causal path showed that the civilian constituencies, represented especially by local leaders, was engaged in the prevention of child soldier recruitment and use as well as in demobilization and reintroduction. Additionally, the study has provided some evidence for that the SPLM/A changed their conduct on systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers as a result of the dependence on external support. The differing values on the control variable of rebel group size does however serve as an alternative explanation, although that it is unclear whether SLM/A being a smaller group contradicts the findings. As the purpose was aimed to add insight on why rebel groups refrain from recruitment and use of child soldiers, the findings related to the impact of civilian support serves as the main contribution of this study. The support for the theory is however limited to the cases included in this study and the external validity of it is low. Therefore, examining the theory in relation to other cases would be favorable in this regard.

A limitation to the study was the aspect of time. More information would have been beneficial both in order to enable the Structured Focused Comparison to reach its full potential, and to elaborate on the dynamics within the rebel groups and between the factions. This would not only have deepened the empirical understanding of the cases, but also facilitated the case selection. In the early stages, when the bases of information for the case
selection was gathered, quantitative data from the RGIL dataset was used in the interest of limiting time consumption. It was later realized that even though for example some factions of SLM/A were explicitly included in the dataset, the general reference to SLM/A was not distinguished between leaders. This was problematic as a homogenous treatment of a group can hinder observations of behavior related to specific sub-groups, which in turn can lead to incorrect assumptions about group behavior. This is why this study focused solely on the faction led by al-Nur and did not treat the SLM/A-al Nur and SLM/A-Minawi as a unified group. If treating SLM/A as a single entity, valuable information about specific leaders and behaviors can go unrecognized. Furthermore, the values used for the dependent variable during the case selection was later contradicted. Even though the reasoning for some values in the RGIL dataset was presented, it did not correlate with my interpretation of the data.

5.1 Future research and policy implications

The main purpose of this study was to shed light towards the issue of child soldiering in armed conflicts and the factors that can facilitate the end of this grave violation of children’s rights. Civilian agency is potentially one factor that can decrease the risks posed to children during armed conflict, especially coupled with assistance provided from the international community. Two factors to mention is the insufficiency in both finding disaggregated data, especially regarding the type of resources provided to SLM/A by the civilian support base, and data estimating a rough number of child soldiers within SLM/A. Even though this does not serve as evidence against the proposed theory, a more exhaustive study could deepen the examination of dependence on and provision of civilian support. Future research should therefore trace the precise forms of resources provided, and could include more forms of civilian support than those included in this study. Should future research provide more support for the relationship between a greater dependence on civilian support and the decreased likelihood of systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers by rebel groups, it serves as an implication for future policies regarding children’s rights in armed conflict.

Currently, policy suggestions on the subject has focused on preventative work and demobilization and reintegration programmes. The importance for this cannot be understated; however, the results in this study can be interesting in terms of possible strategies to use in order to pressure rebel groups to restrain from the recruitment and use of child soldiers. By including the civilian population, education can spread and the consultations with rebel
groups can be multidimensional with awareness ranging from the leadership on top of the hierarchy to the lower ranks. As proven in previous research as well as identified in this study, external supporters can too affect rebel groups’ behavior in relation to human rights – including those of children – and by focusing on community-based approaches and solutions, the civilian population and international actors can work together, hopefully resulting in a decreased likelihood of the recruitment and use of child soldiers generally.
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APPENDIX

First stage of case selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African countries with presence of rebel groups</th>
<th>Number of rebel groups</th>
<th>Number of rebel groups who recruited and used child soldiers</th>
<th>Percentage of rebel groups who recruited and used child soldiers (rounded to integers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comoros</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djibouti</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 + 1 NA</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea-Bissau</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niger</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 NA</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Second stage of case selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>African countries with presence of rebel groups</th>
<th>Number of rebel groups</th>
<th>Number of rebel groups who recruited and used child soldiers</th>
<th>Percentage of rebel groups who recruited and used child soldiers (rounded to integers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Côte d’Ivoire</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>71 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>67 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Third stage of case selection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym of rebel group</th>
<th>CV1: External support</th>
<th>CV2: Extortion of natural resources</th>
<th>CV3: Ability to procure arms</th>
<th>CV4: Size of rebel armed forces</th>
<th>DV: Systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JEM</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLM/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLM/A-Unity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPLM/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Högbladh, Pettersson and Themnér, 2011; Walsh, Conrad, Whitaker and Hudak, 2018; Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan, 2013; Jo, 2015: 286; 291.