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UNVEILING THE PROCESS BEHIND COUNTERINSURGENCY

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UNVEILING THE PROCESS BEHIND  
COUNTERINSURGENCY: THREE ESSAYS ON THE  
IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP, GROUP AND SOCIETAL  
DYNAMICS ON POLICYMAKING

A Ph.D. Dissertation

by  
BUSE DÜVEROĞLU

Department of  
International Relations  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University  
Ankara  
May 2024



*To Ece and Efe*



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The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences  
of  
İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University

by

BUSE DÜVEROĞLU

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By Buse Düveroğlu

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in International Relations.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **UNVEILING THE PROCESS BEHIND COUNTERINSURGENCY: THREE ESSAYS ON THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP, GROUP AND SOCIETAL DYNAMICS ON POLICYMAKING**

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May 2024

This dissertation endeavors to unravel the intricate dynamics influencing incumbent leaders' counterinsurgency strategies, particularly the determinants behind their choices between violent and non-violent approaches in combating insurgencies. By adopting a comprehensive approach, this research delves into domestic political processes, group-constituency dynamics, and government-society relations to elucidate the underlying patterns in counterinsurgency policymaking. Empirical investigation reveals that inexperienced leaders are prone to resorting to violence as a counterinsurgency tactic, whereas their experienced counterparts exhibit a propensity to eschew violent measures, opting instead for a blend of non-violent strategies. Furthermore, the influence of leader experience is contingent upon regime type, with short tenure leaders displaying nuanced responses depending on whether they govern within democratic or anocratic frameworks. Moreover, the study uncovers a trend wherein governments tend to

maintain non-responsiveness when confronted with terrorist groups possessing a positive reputation yet become more aggressive when facing those with a negative reputation. Notably, in societies characterized by heightened affective polarization, governments exhibit a heightened inclination toward resorting exclusively to violent means in addressing rebel threats. By shedding light on these intricate dynamics, this research makes a significant contribution to conflict studies, paving the way for a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between conflict dynamics at different levels and counterinsurgency efforts.

**Keywords:** Counterinsurgency, Decision-Making, Group Reputation, Leadership, Polarization

## ÖZET

### İSYANLA MÜCADELENİN ARKASINDAKİ SÜRECİ ORTAYA ÇIKARMAK: LİDERLİK, GRUP VE TOPLUMSAL DİNAMİKLERİN POLİTİKA OLUŞTURMA ÜZERİNDEKİ ETKİSİ ÜZERİNE ÜÇ MAKALE

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Mayıs 2024

Bu tez, mevcut liderlerin isyanla mücadele stratejilerini etkileyen karmaşık dinamikleri, özellikle de isyanla mücadelede şiddetli ve şiddetsiz yaklaşımlar arasındaki tercihlerini belirleyen unsurları çözümlemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Kapsamlı bir yaklaşım benimseyen bu araştırma, iç siyasi süreçler, grup-seçim bölgesi dinamikleri ve hükümet-toplum ilişkilerini inceleyerek isyanla mücadele politika yapımındaki temel kalıpları ortaya koymaktadır. Ampirik incelemeler, deneyimsiz liderlerin isyanla mücadelede şiddete başvurmaya yatkın olduğunu, buna karşın deneyimli liderlerin şiddet içeren yöntemlerden kaçınarak şiddet içermeyen stratejilerle bir karışım kullanma eğiliminde olduklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Ayrıca, lider deneyiminin etkisi rejim türüne bağlıdır; kısa görev süreli liderler, demokratik veya anokratik çerçeveler içinde yönetip yönetmediklerine bağlı olarak değişen tepkiler göstermektedir. Dahası, çalışma, hükümetlerin olumlu bir üne sahip terörist gruplarla karşı karşıya kaldıklarında

tepki vermeme eğiliminde olduklarını, ancak olumsuz bir üne sahip gruplarla karşı karşıya kaldıklarında daha agresif hale geldiklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Özellikle, yüksek düzeyde duygusal kutuplaşma ile karakterize edilen toplumlarda, hükümetler isyancı tehditleri ele alırken yalnızca şiddet kullanma eğiliminde artış göstermektedir. Bu karmaşık dinamikleri aydınlatarak, bu araştırma çatışma çalışmalarına önemli bir katkı sağlamakta ve farklı seviyelerdeki çatışma dinamikleri ile isyanla mücadele çabaları arasındaki etkileşimin daha nüanslı bir şekilde anlaşılmasına olanak tanımaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Grup İtibarı, İsyanla Mücadele, Karar Verme, Kutuplaşma  
Liderlik

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                               |      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| ABSTRACT.....                                                                                                                 | iii  |
| ÖZET.....                                                                                                                     | v    |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....                                                                                                        | vii  |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS .....                                                                                                       | ix   |
| LIST OF TABLES.....                                                                                                           | xii  |
| LIST OF FIGURES.....                                                                                                          | xiii |
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....                                                                                                 | 1    |
| 1.1 Introduction .....                                                                                                        | 1    |
| 1.2 Motivation of Research .....                                                                                              | 10   |
| 1.3 Relevance of Research .....                                                                                               | 18   |
| 1.4 Three Essays.....                                                                                                         | 31   |
| CHAPTER 2: TO BE EXPERIENCED OR NOT? UNPACKING THE<br>RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADER TENURE AND COUNTERTERRORISM<br>EFFORTS..... | 35   |
| 2.1 Introduction .....                                                                                                        | 35   |
| 2.2 Leader Tenure and Counterinsurgency .....                                                                                 | 38   |
| 2.3 Political Environment Conditioning Leader’s Counterinsurgency Strategies..                                                | 42   |
| 2.4 Research Design .....                                                                                                     | 48   |
| 2.5 Results .....                                                                                                             | 55   |
| 2.6 Conclusion.....                                                                                                           | 63   |

|                                                                                           |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER 3: THE IMPACT OF INSURGENT GROUP REPUTATION ON<br>COUNTERINSURGENCY POLICIES..... | 67  |
| 3.1 Introduction .....                                                                    | 67  |
| 3.2 Group-level Dynamics and Counterinsurgency .....                                      | 73  |
| 3.3 Group Reputation and Counterinsurgency .....                                          | 77  |
| 3.4 Research Design .....                                                                 | 85  |
| 3.5 Results .....                                                                         | 90  |
| CHAPTER 4: COUNTERINSURGENCY DECISION-MAKING IN POLARIZED<br>COUNTRIES .....              | 101 |
| 4.1 Introduction .....                                                                    | 101 |
| 4.2 Polarization Phenomenon, Decision-Making and Conflict Dynamics.....                   | 106 |
| 4.3 Affective Polarization and Counterinsurgency Strategies .....                         | 111 |
| 4.4 Research Design .....                                                                 | 115 |
| 4.5 Results .....                                                                         | 121 |
| 4.6 Robustness Check.....                                                                 | 127 |
| 4.7 Conclusion.....                                                                       | 128 |
| CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....                                                                | 132 |
| 5.1 Summary of Findings .....                                                             | 134 |
| 5.2 Implications of Findings.....                                                         | 138 |
| 5.3 Limitations and Future Studies.....                                                   | 144 |
| REFERENCES.....                                                                           | 148 |
| APPENDICES .....                                                                          | 184 |
| APPENDIX A. Correlation Table – Independent Variables.....                                | 184 |

|                                                                                                    |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| APPENDIX B. Marginal Impact of Upcoming Elections on Violent<br>Counterinsurgency Activities ..... | 185 |
| APPENDIX C. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results – Election Year<br>Interaction.....            | 186 |
| APPENDIX D. Controlling for Term Limit .....                                                       | 187 |
| APPENDIX E. Leader Clustered Standard Errors .....                                                 | 188 |
| APPENDIX F. Multinomial Regression Results – Additional Controls .....                             | 189 |
| APPENDIX G. Multinomial Regression Results.....                                                    | 190 |



## LIST OF TABLES

|                                                                                              |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Table 1.</b> Descriptive Statistics .....                                                 | 55  |
| <b>Table 2.</b> Multinomial Logistic Regression Result .....                                 | 57  |
| <b>Table 3.</b> Multinomial Logistic Regression Result Conditional on Years to Election..... | 59  |
| <b>Table 4.</b> Multinomial Logistic Regression Result Conditional on Regime Type .....      | 60  |
| <b>Table 5.</b> Descriptive Statistics .....                                                 | 89  |
| <b>Table 6.</b> Multinomial Logistic Regression Result .....                                 | 92  |
| <b>Table 7.</b> Logistic Regression Result .....                                             | 93  |
| <b>Table 8.</b> Multinomial Logistic Regression Result .....                                 | 94  |
| <b>Table 9.</b> Descriptive Statistics .....                                                 | 120 |
| <b>Table 10.</b> Multinomial Logistic Regression Results.....                                | 124 |
| <b>Table 11.</b> Multinomial Logistic Regression Results .....                               | 125 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|                                                                                        |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Figure 1.</b> Leader Tenure and Predicted Counterinsurgency Activities.....         | 58  |
| <b>Figure 2.</b> Counterinsurgency Strategies in Anocracies .....                      | 62  |
| <b>Figure 3.</b> Negative Constituency Reputation and Non-Responsiveness .....         | 95  |
| <b>Figure 4.</b> Negative Constituency Reputation and Direction of Responsiveness..... | 96  |
| <b>Figure 5.</b> Level of Affective Polarization and Government Responses .....        | 126 |

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

When Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer remarked on the British counterinsurgency approach to the Malayan conflict between 1948 and 1960, “The answer to the uprising lies not in pouring more troops into the jungle, but in the hearts and minds of the Malayan people” (Lapping, 1990; 224), he could not have known that he had popularized one of the most debated counterinsurgency strategies of the next century. In contrast to the use of more traditional violent strategies that employ excessive force and military tactics and are more willing to accept civilian casualties, this approach aims to win the hearts and minds of the people and use less coercive aims against rebels, thereby undermining the widespread support for rebels. However, contrary to expectations, strategies like hearts and minds do not consistently yield desired outcomes rather they become more costly. In fact, similar to many non-violent resistance tactics, this approach can undermine the government’s credibility and inadvertently validate conflict by showing that violence can achieve rebels’ goals. In Malaya, concessions by Britain in response to expectations for change intensified pressure for independence, aligning with broader movements toward autonomy and culminating in Malaya’s independence in 1957.

While Britain embraced a non-violent counterinsurgency strategy against the Malayan National Liberation Army (MNLA), the strategies employed in the Northern Ireland conflict were starkly different. The shift in Britain's approach to non-violent counterinsurgency was underscored by the emergence of one of the most comprehensive armed strategies in European history against the Irish Republican Army (IRA) during Operation Banner from the late 1960s to the late 1980s. Indeed, consecutive British governments have promised not to negotiate with Irish separatists. Conservative Labor Party leader Margaret Thatcher was also an ardent advocate of defeating, not pacifying, the Irish conflict when she took office (Kelly, 2021). However, unexpectedly, in 1985, six years into her tenure, the Iron Lady initiated negotiations with Irish representatives to address grievances related to policing, courts, and economic issues. This marked another shift in the country's counterinsurgency policies. The willingness to incur such a cost was unexpected for Thatcher, who sought to consolidate the conservative base with a focus on British nationalism.

In the struggle against the Viet Cong, a similarly lengthy conflict, American counterinsurgency policies also alternated between violent and non-violent approaches. By the time Lyndon B. Johnson took office, the US was already stuck in the Vietnam quagmire and seemed unlikely to only get out for a short time. Despite pledging not to expand military intervention in the region during his election campaign in 1963, Johnson, like his predecessors, decided to take a stand in Vietnam against further communist expansion in Southeast Asia. Thus, Johnson rapidly escalated the conflict by launching full-scale military combat, which resulted in the commitment of US ground forces and eventually the most extensive military personnel and advisors' deployment in Vietnam (Logevall, 2004). Nonetheless, one

month after American naval forces landed in North Vietnam in 1965, Johnson spoke at a dinner meeting: “So we must be ready in a fight in Vietnam” and also signaled the new counterterrorism strategy he planned to implement: “...but the ultimate victory will depend upon the hearts and the minds of the people who live there” (Hess, 2015; 112). Adopting violent measures in the first stage of the conflict, Johnson drew attention to the importance of non-violent actions to prevail in the bloody struggle, representing an unexpected U-turn taken in American counterinsurgency policies. Though Johnson popularized the phrase of winning hearts and minds during his term, he never let military intervention and guards down.

Johnson was not the only American president to change security policies and rhetoric as the conflict raged and brought the simultaneous use of violent and non-violent methods up the agenda. Following the September 11 attacks, George W. Bush defined counterterrorism efforts as a part of the global war against Al-Qaida, underlining that it would be fought on a larger and more intense scale with a more aggressive stance against ruthless enemies in the Middle East. Despite Bush’s non-concession and zero-tolerance policies for the five years after 9/11, a new US counterterrorism approach was introduced in 2006 with US Army Field Manual 3-24. It underlines that successful counterterrorism requires consent-winning and gratitude-seeking elements through restraining the use of force, focusing on development projects, and increasing awareness of local cultures. Thus, US counterterrorism policies gradually integrated military and civilian approaches.

As expected from a seemingly dovish president, when Barack Obama took office in 2009, he expressed his counterterrorism approach against terrorist groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan as a “campaign against extremism will not succeed with

bullets or bombs alone...” (White House Archives, 2009). He added that the new counterterrorism plan aims to provide resources to build schools, roads, and hospitals and strengthen democracy by directly supporting people in areas with a fight against terrorism. Although Obama emphasized the vitality of non-violent tactics and winning the consent of the local population to deal with terror, he acted in the opposite direction during his next term. In his second term, changing his counterterrorism roadmap, Obama began foregrounding extremely aggressive stances, such as controversial preemptive strikes using drones. Thus, American activities, which began to soften in the Middle East during the Bush administration, gradually increased in intensity once again during Obama’s term in office.

Turkish governments have also applied several different and integrated counterinsurgency measures in their struggle against the domestic terror group Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has been going on since the early 1970s. Over the next 20 years, the government tried to deal with the PKK conflict by adopting extremely violent measures. The country turned into a war zone with the highest civilian casualties in conflict during this period. However, from time to time, leaders are seen to take non-violent approaches to the group. Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel announced that they recognized the Kurdish reality during his visit to Diyarbakır in 1993, while the conflicts were continuing (Ensaroglu, 2013).

When Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan came to power in 2002, he followed a wavy path like the previous incumbents. Initially, he determined a road map that distinguished between rebellion and minority problems in order to gain the trust of the local people. The main reason behind this approach is to weaken the support given to the rebels while continuing the fight on the ground. In his speech in 2005,

Erdogan internalized the minority problem by saying, "... the Kurdish problem is my problem too" (Al-Jazeera, 2005). He continued that ethnic issues will not be solved through violence but by providing more democracy, freedom, and development. This led to structural reforms aimed at societal integration and grievance redressal. The crucial point here is that these activities are taken through burdening the cost of confronting public outcry and a popular base radicalized by years of turmoil. Then, despite the reactions, there was a phase of negotiations and ceasefire with the PKK, known as the Peace and Resolution Process, which started with the Oslo talks in 2009. However, this period of non-violent counterinsurgency was also short-lived. Following Erdogan's election as president in 2014, the resolution process abruptly ended, leading to renewed conflict and violence in the region.

As it turns out, states have used various strategies to deal with insurgencies, from giving concessions and starting peaceful negotiations to targeted killings. Indeed, considering the growing global experience in the fight against non-state violent actors, counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategies are analyzed under two categories: violent and non-violent. Conventional violent measures have a wide variety of tactics, including combating violent groups through aggressive methods such as killing group members, destroying resources, eliminating the group's safe haven, and curbing the bond with affiliate groups and sponsors (Arce & Sandler, 2005; Carter, 2012; Kaplan, 2015; Sandler, 2015). The non-violent strategies, conversely, include a diplomatic path such as starting a negotiation process with the members of an insurgent group and winning the population's hearts and minds tactics in which efforts focus on cutting off the insurgents' lifeblood and supply lines by meeting the populace's grievances (Findley & Young, 2015; Levine, 2010; Rineheart, 2010). Even though much thought has been given to what the strategies for

combating armed groups are, there is little emphasis on under what conditions leaders adopt certain counterinsurgency measures to deal with rebels. In this regard, Leib (2011), for instance, points out that substantially militarily more powerful states rely on resort to force, aiming to fundamentally eliminate the threat in no time or at any cost. Asal et al. (2020) display that larger insurgent groups and groups that hold certain territory are more likely to be treated with conciliatory measures by adding that organizational capability and strength shape government responses.

While increasing research such as these aforementioned examples primarily focuses on which counterinsurgency strategies should be implemented by actor-specific characters, they ignore the cost-benefit cycle of strategies. In other words, leaders sometimes choose to implement costly strategies that are not expected from them, and sometimes, they want to stay in their safe zone. If counterinsurgency measures were chosen based solely on the characters of the actors, then why did British leaders use non-violent heart-and-head tactics to deal with weaker terrorist groups during the Malayan conflict, when Northern Ireland had become like a battlefield? Why did Thatcher underline that there would be no concession on the Northern Ireland conflict when she took office but soon provided prerogatives and started the ceasefire process? Why did Bush not follow Johnson's Vietnam policy instead declaring a global war on terror? Why did Obama abandon the non-violent strategies that Bush applied later in his administration and increase the dose of military attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan?? Likewise, why did Erdogan end the ceasefire and peace process with the PKK, which he had been trying to build for many years, and give weight to military operations?

These instances significantly point out that governments do not stick to one type of counterinsurgency measures and often choose to implement costly ones. While violent activities can demand significant material and human resources, non-violent counterinsurgency strategies may pose even greater costs for several reasons. Many leaders staunchly oppose negotiating with rebels, viewing concessions as defeats that weaken the political authority and legitimize violence (Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2020; Cunningham, 2011). The possible commitment of non-state violent groups yields another cost for incumbents. If governments attempt to reach a peace agreement, they face the problem of commitment. Since rebel groups are not subject to public, legal, and institutional sanctions like states, their reliability in complying with an agreement is questioned (Abrahms, 2006). If such efforts fail or are exploited by insurgencies, governments may face criticism for perceived weakness or ineffectiveness, which can also have political repercussions. For this reason, leaders may not attempt to make a deal because they will doubt their commitment.

Other non-violent strategies may also involve costs for states. One of these is to provide the terrorist organization with the concessions they want. Granting concessions to rebels can set a precedent and incentivize further demands from other groups, potentially fueling radicalization. Moreover, making concessions to win hearts and minds entails complex interventions across multiple sectors, addressing deep-rooted socio-economic, political, and cultural issues (Arce & Sandler, 2010; Berman et al., 2011; Cronin, 2006; de Mesquita, 2005). Coordinating these efforts effectively is resource-intensive and time-consuming, often requiring years or decades to achieve tangible results in building trust, addressing grievances, and implementing reforms to undermine support for insurgent groups. This underscores the complex and enduring nature of non-violent counterinsurgency efforts.

While implementing non-violent counterinsurgency measures can incur significant costs, leaders often shift away from military strategies and accept this expenditure. Thus, the pivotal question arises: when do leaders decide to bear the costs associated with employing non-violent measures? To address this inquiry, the central research question of this dissertation investigates the circumstances under which leaders opt for either violent or non-violent counterinsurgency tactics when confronting insurgent organizations. Before delving into this investigation, it is essential to clarify key concepts analyzed in this study.

As the essential theoretical mechanism of this research primarily focuses on non-state armed actors who challenge the government's legitimacy and monopoly over the use of force, this research does not differentiate the government strategies against terrorist, rebel, or insurgent groups. There is already confusion in the literature about the differentiation of these terms. As Phillips (2015) underlines, it is not even clear what constitutes a terrorist organization or rebel group, and often, it is not even clear what scholars are studying. Nevertheless, there are various studies on the classification and definition of non-state actors that use violence. Some scholars define terrorist groups inclusively based on criteria such as subnational status, political motives, and use of terrorism (Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008; Enders & Sandler, 2012; Hoffman, 2017; Phillips, 2015). Others make exclusive distinctions based on organizational factors like territorial control. Terrorist groups do not hold territory they claimed; by contrast, groups that hold territory are classified as insurgent groups (de la Calle & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2011), suggesting that holding territory dictates behavior and tactical preferences (Phillips, 2015). Another exclusive distinction involves the primary use of terrorism versus other violent activities (Crenshaw, 1991). However, Fortna (2015) argues that terrorism is often not a particularly

effective tool for winning outright or obtaining larger political achievements; thus, rebels faced with this dilemma may not always use terrorism as a tactic.

Several other definitions explicitly specify that attacks target civilians, a point that also appears implicit in other definitions that emphasize spreading fear (Phillips, 2015). As can be understood, there is an ongoing discussion over the classification and definition of non-state armed actors. In this regard, Schmid and Jongman (1988) also put forth 109 different definitions of terrorism, while others like Rapoport (2001), Cronin (2006), and Laqueur (2003) view terrorism as an essentially contested concept resistant to precise definition. Given this confusion, this study does not touch this gray area in the literature. Therefore, this research examines insurgent organizations that employ politically motivated violence, irrespective of whether terrorism is used as a tactic. As terror is a tool to reach political aims, rebels may or may not use terror tactics to reach their goals and motivations.

Most specifically, this study follows the definition of Asal et al. (2020). In Asal et al.'s dataset, tailored to the specific operational needs of this research, each insurgent entity is defined according to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Battle Deaths dataset criteria. This definition encompasses groups that actively challenge state authority, participate in armed conflicts related to incompatibility over government or territorial aims, and are associated with incidents resulting in a minimum of 25 deaths annually due to this conflict.

The counterinsurgency phenomenon relates to the multiple practices, tactics, and strategies that governments use to combat or defeat rebels and insurgencies in which they struggle. As mentioned, the strategies used by states in combating non-state armed groups generally fall into two categories: those involving violence and those

that do not. In this study, violent strategies are typically understood as the use of military and police force against the group, while there are various non-violent methods, such as offering concessions, initiating peaceful negotiations, and winning the hearts and minds of the constituencies. Many studies focus on a single non-violent tactic like the ones mentioned in this context, but as indicated by the research question, this study does not focus on the implementation of a single strategy; rather, it focuses on whether there were any possible non-violent actions within a specific year that concede terrorist groups. In other words, this study considers any non-coercive approach adopted by the state as a year when the state employed non-violent strategies. For instance, if the state exhibited a strategy aimed at winning hearts and minds in a specific year, this study assumes that the state engaged in non-violent activities during that year. Similarly, if the state changed tactics and initiated negotiations in another period, it again assumes that the state resorted to non-violent methods during that year. Similarly, any military activity and use of force implemented by states is not specifically evaluated and is considered a violent action. The study also considers instances where violent and non-violent strategies may be used concurrently, as well as periods when states did not respond to the group. Therefore, this research delves into what factors influence leaders when making decisions to counter insurgencies.

## **1.2 Motivation of Research**

Leaders, the executives of the incumbent governments, are the dominant actors in decision-making processes. Even if the distribution of power between the executive and legislative bodies and the reflection of the endless struggle between them is

perceived as the basis for conducting foreign policy, leaders have primacy as a final authority in policymaking. The belief that leaders are uniquely exceptional and have personal qualities that distinguish them from non-leaders (Dobbins & Platz, 1986; Spector, 2015; Harrison, 2017), the ability to influence and persuade masses (Neustadr, 1960), a relationship with followers and public trust (Burns, 1978; Hetherington, 2005; Kamarck, 2009), approval ratings and electoral power (Bond & Fleisher, 1984; Brown, 1992; Canes-Wrone, 2004; Edwards, 1977; Reeves & Rogowski, 2015; Treisman, 2011; Stephanopoulos, 2021; Yates, 2002), veto and proposal power (Broughton, 2005; Tsebelis & Rizova, 2007; Watson, 1993), varying leadership styles (Fiedler & House, 1994; Khan et al., 2016), relationships with advisors (Hermann & Preston, 1994) and the need for practical necessity and bureaucratic efficiency (Handelman, 1981; Olsen, 2006) are the significant traits that empower the sovereignty of leaders in different types of regimes.

The leadership's pivotal role in public policy decision-making significantly shapes the outcomes of both low-level and high-level policy activities, ultimately influencing the state of the country. Low politics within public policy encompass the daily governance and administrative decisions that sustain a nation's functionality and integration within the globalized world. These decisions span a wide spectrum, from foreign economic policies and trade agreements to humanitarian aid, education, healthcare, environmental regulations, and beyond. In contrast, high politics represent critical decisions vital to the state's survival. This includes matters related to military strategy, national security, diplomatic initiatives, and crisis management, particularly during times of conflict or war. As a result, high-level political priorities often take precedence over low-level governance concerns (see Lake, 2001). In addition to the primacy of national security and responses to emergencies or warfare,

high political issues represent significant focal points for concentrated political action by leaders, driving key policy directions and resource allocations within the state.

If Clausewitz's definition of warfare is accepted as a political act within the scope of high politics, counterinsurgency could come closer to war than many other national security concerns. In extreme times when terrorism poses a threat, leaders who take the winds of promising better and achieving it in politics expand the presidential power in a matter of national emergency. For instance, during the ongoing struggle in Vietnam, Richard Nixon argued that the authority and responsibility to be a Commander in Chief of the army and navy given by the constitution allowed him to send American troops to invade Cambodia in 1970 to protect American forces from a possible North Vietnamese attack, using Cambodia as a base. Similarly, in the wake of 9/11, by declaring a national military emergency, George W. Bush became empowered to perform an action that incumbents would not typically have and immediately afterward implemented the policy called global war against terrorism.

The critical question is, then, how leaders with such broad powers and authorities decide what counterinsurgency policies to implement while dealing with non-state armed groups. The critical question is how leaders wield such extensive powers to decide on counterinsurgency policies when confronting non-state armed groups. The key focus here is the political repercussions of these policies, akin to other strategic decisions. Leaders must achieve tangible successes in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts to maintain political power and avert potential backlash. Given the complexities and duration of such processes, leaders are expected to

carefully weigh the cost-benefit balance when formulating and implementing counterinsurgency policies.

According to path dependency theory, leaders' policy decisions are heavily influenced by past decisions and institutional frameworks. This theory presents a plausible framework for understanding how leaders formulate counterinsurgency policies in two key respects. First of all, previous counterinsurgency policies provide valuable knowledge, intelligence, and insights into past decision-making failures and the impacts of policy measures, enabling leaders to chart a more successful course in future policymaking endeavors (Pierson, 2000). Moreover, leaders' policy choices are constrained by historical contingencies, reflecting rules and patterns shaped by prior decisions. This suggests that fundamentally overhauling a policy is often more resource-intensive and challenging than making incremental adjustments (Blanco & Cohen, 2014). Thus, understanding the path dependency of counterinsurgency policies underscores the importance of leveraging historical experiences and institutional legacies to inform and shape contemporary policymaking strategies in combating rebels.

Foley (2009), accordingly, supports that counterinsurgency decision-making often reflects pre-existing decisions and lessons learned, drawing from the theory of path dependency to explain how entrenched routines shaped the responses of France and Britain to the Islamist terrorism threat. However, this approach raises questions about the evolution of national stances over time. For instance, how did France shift from vehement opposition to the global war on terrorism narrative in the 2000s to declaring active participation in this war in 2015? Similarly, why did Tony Blair overlook Britain's complex history of conflict in Northern Ireland and the path to the

Belfast Agreement when aligning with Bush to declare war on Al Qaeda and the Taliban in 2001? Reflecting on the 9/11 context, Bush's decision to declare war without apparent consideration of America's previous military engagements, such as the prolonged Vietnam War, challenges the notion of strict adherence to past policy lessons. These examples highlight the dynamic and multifaceted nature of policymaking, suggesting that while historical legacies and institutional frameworks play a role, they do not exclusively determine leaders' decisions in response to evolving security threats. This underscores the complexity of counterinsurgency policy formulation and the interplay between historical context, geopolitical factors, and shifting international dynamics.

An alternative perspective on leaders' decision-making posits that policies cannot be viewed as purely consecutive due to the dynamic nature of changes occurring at varying frequencies. Major events, such as insurgent incidents, serve as focal points that draw attention to specific issues and prompt fundamental policy reassessments (Cairney, 2020). Crenshaw (2001) highlights that focus events often occur in clusters, making it challenging to develop a singular response to individual events. Argomaniz (2012) argues that rebel incidents play a pivotal role in driving counterterrorism policy changes in European countries, sparking critical policy innovations. Crelinsten (2009), for instance, contends that the 9/11 attacks radically altered the United States' counterinsurgency approach, ushering in a paradigm shift towards a wartime footing. These pivotal moments in counterinsurgency not only shape agenda setting but also influence how policymakers engage with security challenges, demonstrating the profound impact of focus events on policy evolution and adaptation.

Even though the focus event approach provides an understanding of policy dynamics and underscores the importance of flexibility and responsiveness in addressing complex security threats, it has limitations in comprehensively explaining the evolving counterinsurgency strategies adopted by leaders in response to singular incidents. As confirming Crelinsten's argument, the United States' counterterrorism measures evolved significantly following the 9/11 attacks. Initially, the policy was characterized by a global war on terrorism, symbolized by the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan under Bush's emphasis on military firepower. However, a shift occurred from 2004 onwards, marked by Bush's emphasis on transitioning towards a strategy focused on engaging the local population, aiming to win hearts and minds through increased service delivery, aid, and security measures. This shift highlights the dynamic nature of countering non-state armed actors, encompassing both violent and non-violent measures employed simultaneously and interchangeably. Subsequent administrations, including those of Obama and Trump, inheriting the legacy of terrorism, implemented distinct anti-terrorism policies that diverged over time. Therefore, analyzing the factors influencing a leaders' foreign policy decision-making processes in the context of terrorism is essential for understanding how counterterrorism policies are formulated, and their effectiveness assessed. This necessitates a nuanced exploration of causal mechanisms driving policy shifts and strategic adaptations in response to evolving security challenges posed by non-state armed groups.

In this dissertation, therefore, I argue that leaders' counterinsurgency policies and practices are shaped by a multifaceted policymaking environment, influenced by various factors that impact decision-making and necessitate grappling with policy consequences. The interplay of endogenous and exogenous elements beyond

policymakers' direct control shapes perceptions and preferences for policy choices. This research seeks to probe how specific dynamics, including domestic political processes, group-constituency relations, and government-society interactions, shape incumbent leaders' approaches to counterinsurgency. Firstly, the focus is on examining the influence of domestic political processes, particularly the impact of leadership-level factors on decision-making at the macro level. The tenure of leaders in office correlates with their experience, which in turn influences their security policy priorities. Experienced leaders with established political security are likely to prioritize counterinsurgency differently compared to newly elected leaders seeking to demonstrate competence.

Secondly, the state's response is influenced by the relationship between insurgent groups and their constituencies, affecting conflict dynamics at an intermediate level. This relationship reflects the group's reputation among the population. Insurgent organizations sustain themselves by meeting the needs of their constituencies, such as funding, personnel, and shelter. They can generate negative reputations by employing coercive methods to secure these resources, contrasting with tactics that aim to establish positive reputations by meeting public needs. Thus, the state's policies are expected to align with locals' perceptions of the group, with positive perceptions potentially reducing the cost of non-violent practices by states, while negative perceptions may justify more forceful state actions.

Lastly, the study explores the impact of polarization, particularly affective polarization, on leaders' decisions at the micro level. Affective polarization describes the phenomenon where individuals form strong loyalty and attachment to their own political group, alongside developing negative attitudes and hostility toward

members of opposing parties or groups. The public's emotional attachment to the leader influences their ability to consolidate public support behind their policies and, thus, the resonance of their security decisions. Thus, this dissertation adopts a holistic approach to uncover patterns in counterinsurgency policymaking, investigating the motivations behind leaders' choice of specific strategies or adaptations, be they violent or non-violent, in addressing insurgencies across multiple levels of analysis. The aim is to elucidate the intricate causal mechanisms driving counterinsurgency policies and practices in complex political environments.

My contribution to this dissertation is three-fold. First of all, this study represents a pioneering effort in literature by quantitatively investigating the factors influencing the formulation and modification of counterinsurgency policies. Through a multi-level, cross-sectional design, this research aims to provide policymakers with valuable insights and a roadmap on how counterinsurgency policies, integral to foreign policymaking, are shaped under specific pressures and environmental contexts. It contributes to existing public policy literature by demonstrating that previous policies and focus events do not solely determine outcomes; rather, domestic dynamics such as political pressures and community relations significantly influence leadership decision-making. Second, this research expands beyond an agent-oriented perspective to consider group-level factors, specifically focusing on public perceptions of insurgency groups and societal dynamics within governments. These elements are critical in determining the trajectory of counterinsurgency policies. Third, by examining the efficacy of both violent and non-violent measures, this study aims to enrich conflict literature by assessing the alignment between counterinsurgency policies and practices. Specifically, this study sets an example for policymakers by revealing when leaders are in a position to make costly

counterinsurgency decisions. It seeks to identify which strategies yield more sustainable, long-term results in combating rebels, thereby contributing valuable insights to the field of conflict studies. Ultimately, this dissertation endeavors to shed light on the nuanced interplay of factors influencing counterinsurgency policymaking and its implications for effective security strategies.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will first express the major debates and focal points in the counterinsurgency literature and state the primary purpose of this dissertation and its contributions. Thus, this introductory chapter indicates the theoretical background of the research and its validity and relevance in the literature. This dissertation is written in a three-essay format. Hence, I will briefly present each essay's theoretical frameworks, arguments, and research methods separately. In short, this introduction aims to express the common curiosity and intention underlying the three separate papers branching out from the fundamental research question.

### **1.3 Relevance of Research**

The genesis of conflict studies, a nascent discipline among scholarly pursuits, traces back to the early 1970s. It burgeoned through deliberate endeavors by leading academics in the United States and Western Europe, aiming to delineate distinct research domains dedicated to scrutinizing the burgeoning phenomena of non-state armed actors, including rebels, insurgents, and terrorist groups, and political violence on a global scale. Over subsequent decades, it evolved into a modest yet influential sphere within the broader field of international relations (Burnett & Whyte, 2005; Reid, 1997). The seismic events of September 11, 2001, catalyzed a pronounced surge in scholarly attention towards terrorism and political violence. Consequently,

research endeavors witnessed a notable uptick in funding allocations, accompanied by substantial government support aimed at unraveling the intricacies of terrorism (Stampnitzky, 2013). This newfound impetus spawned a proliferation of research centers, think tanks, and specialized academic programs at both the master's and doctoral levels, alongside an array of state and privately funded research initiatives and international consortia. Collectively, these efforts have catalyzed an exponential expansion in the scale and breadth of scholarly engagement, propelling the field of conflict studies to the forefront of scientific inquiry (Gordon, 2010; Silke, 2018).

Looking at the literature from one step back, how conflict studies have expanded and developed in such a short period is seen. An extensive set of studies aim to define, conceptualize, and theorize the phenomenon of terrorism and insurgency (Crenshaw, 1981; Douglas, 2014; Primoratz, 1990; Miller, 2019), identify the underlying grievances and causes of radicalization (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Rapoport, 2013; Gleditsch et al, 2013; Lee, 2011; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004), examine anatomy and organizational structure of the non-state armed groups (Aydinli, 2013, Phillips, 2015; Wood, 2010; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2005), effects, success and evolution of terrorism as group tactics and strategies (Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2018; Gaibullov, & Sandler, 2013, Mehra, 2016; Pape, 2003), rebel relation with constituencies, recruitment strategy and collective action problem (Eck, 2014; Sawyer & Andrew, 2020; Hegghammer, 2013; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007), illustrate the relation between pros and cons of the regime type and the possibility of being exposed to radicalization and terror (Eubank & Weinberg, 1994; Gleditsch & Ruggeri, 2010; Findley & Young, 2011), and analyze specific rebels and cases, i.e. the one of the most focused case in the literature due the influence of 9/11 is Al-Qaeda (Abbott, 2011; Atwan, 2006; Burke, 2004; Hoffman, 2003, 2004, 2017; Miller, 2019;

Sageman, 2009). In addition, the empirical studies on terrorism and insurgency are generally based on event databases of terrorist incidents and activities such as International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events (ITERATE), Global Terrorism Data (GTD), Big, Allied and Dangerous (BAAD), and UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset.

Nevertheless, the examination of fundamental approaches to addressing terrorism and insurgency alongside analyses of its underlying causes remains imperative. Nonetheless, within conflict literature, the realm of countering non-state armed groups remains relatively limited. Despite the burgeoning interest in conflict research bolstered by established conceptual frameworks and burgeoning datasets for empirical analysis, a commensurate emphasis on counterinsurgency studies is notably lacking among scholars. This observation, though contentious, underscores the conspicuous absence of theoretical underpinnings in previous endeavors, thereby illuminating a critical bottleneck in the ongoing struggle against rebels.

Most existing studies on counterinsurgency attempt to define and conceptualize counterinsurgency discourses, operations, campaigns, and measures, mainly in the context of violence. There have been, for instance, several studies that analyze the counterinsurgency strategies implemented by states, categorizing them based on their inclusion of military actions and the degree of violence employed while seeking to gauge their efficacy through empirical assessments of their outcomes (Abrahams, 2008; Kilcullen, 2016; Sandler, 2015; Findley & Young, 2015; Hoffman & Shelby, 2017). While some scholars advocate for the development of typologies to systematize a broad spectrum of responses to rebels within defined conceptual frameworks, others contend that the concept of counterinsurgency is self-evident,

viewing it merely as a practical endeavor devoid of the need for extensive conceptual elucidation. However, this discourse does not resolve the fundamental question surrounding the nature and scope of counterinsurgency studies, which persistently remain constrained, subjugated, and conceptually underdeveloped.

Straddling between divergent approaches, it is incontrovertible that typological studies serve as an indispensable initial step in framing insurgency within scholarly discourse. However, extant research has been overly fixated on conceptualization, thereby failing to furnish the requisite theoretical scaffolding for elucidating the evolving contours and comprehensively understanding the drivers underpinning counterinsurgency policymaking. The conspicuous absence of theoretical underpinnings within academic inquiries into counterinsurgency becomes glaringly apparent when grappling with fundamental questions: how and why has counterinsurgency undergone transformational shifts from the past to the present? What unifies disparate elements within American security strategy post-9/11, spanning from military interventions in the Middle East to domestic socio-political initiatives aimed at thwarting radicalization? Despite insurgency persisting as a formidable challenge for over half a century, how do we account for the proliferation of counterinsurgency measures across European nations in the past two decades? Perhaps most crucially, why do counterinsurgency policies and strategies diverge markedly from one nation to another, even if they target the same groups?

While previous academic endeavors have fallen short in furnishing theory-driven elucidations to these inquiries, recent developments in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency studies evince a shift from conceptualization towards a more robust integration of public policy frameworks and the cultivation of theoretical

paradigms geared towards addressing such probing questions, which I will discuss in below.

Existing research underscores the absence of a singular determinant in delineating or evolving counterinsurgency policies; rather, it emerges from a confluence of diverse factors, encompassing party dynamics and the intricacies of conflict. One pivotal mechanism entails the influence of domestic political exigencies and constraints on the formulation of specific counterinsurgency rhetoric, policies, and actions.

Qualitative case studies elucidate how leaders prioritize their standing within the political milieu when confronted with challenges to their leadership (Bjorna, 2021; Myerson, 2011; Rhenson et al., 2018; Wu & Wolford, 2018). Given the multifaceted challenges posed by insurgency, including its potential to destabilize civil society, erode democratic norms, and undermine the legitimacy of the state, incumbent leaders are compelled to adopt a stringent stance against insurgency to safeguard their political stature as heads of state. For instance, Jackson (2005) delineates how various American leaders employ rhetoric laden with notions of evil, divergent from conventional liberal democratic discourse, to characterize encountered terrorist entities, thereby furnishing a political pretext for counterinsurgency strategies.

Consequently, by portraying themselves as defenders of virtue, they seek to rationalize rigorous security measures while bolstering their reputational capital. A quintessential manifestation of this argument, as posited by several scholars, is evident in the rhetoric espoused by Bush during the global war on terrorism and its continuity into the Obama era, which, despite differing political orientations, persists in employing narratives centered around combating malevolent forces through assertive means.

However, these assertions fail to provide a cohesive framework for elucidating the role of domestic political constraints in shaping security policymaking. National security policies in the US transcend the mere adoption of specific rhetoric or reactionary measures; rather, they mirror the intricacies of the domestic political landscape. In this regard, Crenshaw (2001) posits that while non-state armed groups' attacks may momentarily commandeer the national policy agenda, the underlying domestic policymaking process remains entrenched in the diffuse dynamics of power. This contention engenders contention in the formulation and execution of security policies, owing to inter-agency rivalries endemic to democratic governance structures. Congressional opposition, for instance, can impede leaders from crafting independent counterinsurgency policies, notwithstanding their substantive rationale for resorting to military intervention. Moreover, such decisions may encounter internal dissent within the executive branch, further complicating the policy-making landscape. Thus, democratic constraints pose formidable challenges in fostering consistency and coherence in security policies across successive administrations in the US.

Several other empirical studies display the significance of elections, inherent to democratic systems, as pivotal factors in shaping the national security decision-making process. Insurgent attacks inflict electoral setbacks upon incumbents, signaling perceived failure in violence prevention to the electorate (Bali, 2007; Gassebner et al., 2008; Montalvo, 2011). For instance, de Mesquita (2007) demonstrates that electoral imperatives impede leaders' capacity to devise optimal security strategies, compelling them to adopt a tougher stance on terror. However, notwithstanding the electoral pressures exerted, leaders must reconcile such concerns with their ideological predispositions in formulating policies within the electoral

cycle. Notably, extant empirical inquiries predominantly center on the Israeli context (Dugan & Chenoweth, 2012; Gill et al., 2016; Di Lonardo, 2017; Nanes, 2017). Di Lonardo (2017) reveals that rebel incidents bolster the reputation of right-wing leaders while tarnishing that of their left-wing counterparts in Israel. Therefore, as elections loom and the threat of non-state armed groups escalates, right-wing leaders are more likely to assume power, heralding the adoption of aggressive counterinsurgency measures, irrespective of partisan inclinations, if a left-wing leader holds office. However, Aksoy (2018) contends that this premise does not hold sway in Western European democracies, where only right-wing political figures pivot towards more stringent security policies as elections near.

Even though these studies have been trying to shed light on the effect of political constraints and requirements of leaders operating in the system on counterinsurgency policies, extant studies exhibit three primary shortcomings. First, their singular or clustered focus on specific cases precludes the formulation of a broadly applicable theoretical framework. For instance, how do varying political exigencies influence counterinsurgency strategies in Colombia, Turkey, Japan, or Eastern European nations? Furthermore, preceding discussions on the implementation of counterinsurgency measures within democratic systems necessitate a comprehensive understanding of the concept of democracy. Constructing a generalizable theory mandates consideration of the diverse manifestations of democracy and their implications for political and institutional structures alongside leaders' reputational concerns. Additionally, when assessing the effect of electoral pressure on leaders' policies vis-à-vis their ideological orientations, one must also account for the incumbents' confidence levels upon entering elections. It is unrealistic to expect

uniform policymaking processes among experienced leaders with extensive electoral successes compared to their counterparts with dissimilar experiences.

The second mechanism delves into how the characteristics and behaviors of insurgent groups attract states to implement counterinsurgency policies in specific ways. Several studies on this subject examine the size and influence of rebels. Primarily, insurgent organizations exercising control over or aspiring to control specific territories are inclined towards safeguarding their constituencies, prioritizing survival motives over inflicting harm upon them. Territorial dominance tends to elicit measured state responses, as contrasting group dynamics can reshape states' strategic calculus (Johnston, 2008; Weintraub, 2016; Wood, 2010). Moreover, when confronted with larger insurgent organizations, states are predisposed towards adopting conciliatory measures, recognizing that extreme strategies may precipitate adverse outcomes, potentially culminating in the state's capitulation to formidable groups. Berman et al. (2011) underscore that governments typically opt for the least costly actions to mitigate terror. Additionally, a plethora of studies, underpinned by incumbents' imperatives to retain power, bolster the notion that governments persist in combating such threats through successful strategies employed against specific insurgent factions. For instance, if states have engaged in negotiations with a non-state armed group in the past, they are more inclined to pursue similar approaches in the future. As posited by Gurr (1988), prior utilization of effective violent measures augments the likelihood of their recurrence in subsequent encounters.

In addition to the aforementioned quantitative and single-case studies, Asal et al. (2020) conducted a cross-national quantitative analysis to examine shifts in government policy choices concerning ideological motivations and alliances of

insurgent groups, as well as group size, lethality, and prior state policy decisions.

Consistent with prior research, their findings corroborate the influence of insurgent group size and previous state policies in shaping counterterrorism strategies.

Furthermore, scholars observe that insurgent groups with extensive alliances are more susceptible to violent measures or the adoption of mixed strategies, combining violent and non-violent tactics. Similarly, heightened casualties inflicted by insurgent groups in the preceding year prompted a similar response. With regard to ideological inclinations, scholars note that radical Islamist groups tend to provoke more aggressive measures than leftist and ethnic groups.

While many of these explanations aid in understanding the determinants of specific state tactics, they fall short in assessing the circumstances under which insurgent groups govern local populations. Recognizing that insurgents employ a range of tactics beyond violence to garner legitimacy and power, it is pertinent to argue that incumbents formulate counterinsurgency strategies by evaluating the dynamics between rebels and constituencies. This relationship, by and large, dictates whether leaders can garner support from local populations. However, as elucidated in the aforementioned studies, the relationship between rebels and constituencies is not solely contingent upon the size of the groups and their territorial control.

It is also important to consider various other factors to comprehend the relationship between terrorists and the public, as terrorist organizations that are relatively large or hold territory can establish negative bonds with locals such as the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, PKK, or ISIS. For example, Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu (2018) demonstrate that in addition to increased interaction due to territorial control, actions such as operating political wings, engaging with the media, sharing ethnic or identity affiliations,

justifying their struggle to the population, and providing security contribute to enhancing the rebels' reputation among locals. However, the heterogeneous nature of the group's population and their separatist aims present challenges in controlling the constituency. Despite this, receiving logistical support, financing, and safe havens discourages them from adopting non-violent policies. Thus, in this dissertation, I focus on group-constituency relations to examine how the activities of terrorist organizations, which establish relationships with local populations, impact counterinsurgency policymaking.

The third mechanism elucidating the underlying conditions shaping state counterinsurgency policies is polarization. In well-functioning democracies, elected leaders are anticipated to represent the will of the citizens, fostering a robust linkage between public opinion and policymaking endeavors. Numerous scholars investigating the nexus between public opinion and public policy in democratic contexts affirm that public opinion exerts considerable influence on policymaking activities, with the strength of this relationship often correlating with the salience of the issue to citizens (Burstein, 2003; Stimson et al., 1995; Smith, 2000).

Representation, however, is not a random occurrence; rather, it mirrors issues of political significance, even if pursued solely for political expediency. As citizens prioritize and engage with particular issues, public opinion evolves cyclically.

Consequently, citizens tend to scrutinize leaders' stances on pertinent matters more closely. In turn, leaders are inclined to heed relevant public sentiment, recognizing its alignment with their vested interests (Moniz & Wlezien, 2020; Soroka & Wlezien, 2021).

Populist policymaking also comes to the fore in the fight against rebels. Muller and Stewart (2018) contend that American public opinion serves as the primary impetus behind the extensive utilization of violent security measures post-9/11. The heightened sense of fear and insecurity among citizens propelled leaders to advocate for robust actions to address these concerns. Scholars further underscore that in this process, Americans endorsed exaggerated security measures, including sustained security checks and encroachments on civil liberties, bolstered police powers domestically, and supported militarized overseas raids, perceiving them as necessary state interventions to combat non-state armed groups. However, other studies have posited a disjunction between American public opinion and the leaders' policy implementation.

Contrary to previous research, Englund (2015) demonstrates that Americans endorse violent measures under specific conditions, internalizing aggressive measures particularly when insurgent incidents tarnish the country's reputation and diplomatic relations. Several other studies indicate that Americans have exhibited less bellicosity than their political leaders since the conclusion of the Second World War. For example, Holsti (2004) and Page and Bouton (2006) contend that Americans are generally disinclined to endorse the use of force, preferring it to be a last resort and utilized only as necessary, often in tandem with international cooperation. Their research focuses on elected leaders and theorizes that the structure of the political system is inherently unrepresentative or swiftly co-opted by private interests. They illustrate this through public reservations regarding events such as the Vietnam War, the 2003 Iraqi Invasion, the fight against Al-Qaida, and the purported Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Studies on another case, the United Kingdom-Northern Ireland conflict, also reveal a disjunction between polarization and the counterterrorism policies of political leaders. As demonstrated by Benets (2006) and Dixon (2009), while the British populace supported the withdrawal by ceasing military deployments in Northern Ireland, it did not signify sympathy towards the IRA; simultaneous opinion polls indicated backing for repressive security measures against rebels in the region. Contrary to the prevailing British public sentiment, the government managed to resist some popular demands for repression and instead implemented a strategy aimed at winning hearts and minds. This strategy, however, did not receive a favorable response from grassroots public opinion, which advocated for saving British taxpayers' money rather than expressing support for Irish unity. Rather than analyzing whether public opinion influences counterinsurgency policies, Tokdemir and Klein (2021) investigate whether states have implemented certain security policies to divert attention from issues of discontent. Scholars studying the Turkey-PKK conflict find that the government is more inclined to adopt aggressive policies to deflect citizens' attention from economic concerns and foster unity under the flag.

If the literature indeed discusses the influence of public opinion on the state's counterinsurgency policies, why were the American people disregarded by leaders who opposed the use of force during certain periods? Similarly, why did the British government consistently employ a hearts-and-minds approach with the Irish community despite public opinion being against it? Alternatively, could public opinion be shaped by counterterrorism measures? I propose narrowing the focus solely on public opinion regarding security measures, excluding considerations of the relationship between states and society.

At this juncture, instead of solely scrutinizing the prevailing sentiments of the majority, one should question the proximity of the majority to the incumbents. It is imperative to consider that in countries characterized by high political polarization, leaders are expected to be more inclined to heed public opinion in counterterrorism policymaking, given that actions contrary to public sentiment could yield electoral consequences. Furthermore, the inherent challenge within conflict studies, namely the inability to establish a generalizable theoretical framework by examining a singular country, is also evident in the aforementioned studies. This is because theorizing the influence of public opinion on counterinsurgency policies cannot be adequately conceptualized due to variations in the levels of political polarization across states and time periods under investigation. Hence, this dissertation endeavors to compare cases with similar characteristics to elucidate the impact of public opinion on counterinsurgency, considering the degree of polarization.

The main aim of this dissertation is to investigate which factors motivate leaders to determine violent or non-violent counterinsurgency policies to deal with certain insurgent groups. Operating within an inherently unstable environment, leaders are tasked with crafting and implementing public policies, including those concerning counterinsurgency. These policies, however, do not remain static; rather, they evolve in tandem with the ever-changing pressures faced by incumbents, the dynamics of citizen-incumbent relations, and the level of support extended to rebel groups by constituencies. Therefore, a failure to account for the shifting dynamics of domestic politics and conflict may lead to misinterpretations regarding the formulation of counterinsurgency policies and a limited understanding of the circumstances under which these policies undergo modification.

Henceforth, I will first relax the unitary actor assumption that threat states seek to maximize national interest as a single entity. This assumption dictates that states are anticipated to act in unison to safeguard their national interests, particularly in times of war and conflict. However, acknowledging the varying degrees of rationality, strength, and confidence among incumbents, I will refrain from viewing the state as a monolithic actor, opting instead to discern discrepancies in counterinsurgency policymaking across incumbent governments. Second, I will lose the assumption of the homogeneity of public opinion, recognizing the presence of societal polarization and, thereby, heterogeneous preferences among the populace. Lastly, I argue that the form of the group's relationship with the public affects the state's cost-benefit calculation, and thus, the group's reputation will influence the government's response. Given these assumptions, my model of influencing counterinsurgency policymaking will encompass multiple factors operating at various levels. Consequently, this dissertation endeavors to elucidate the concealed processes underlying alterations in counterinsurgency policymaking through three essays exploring the government's domestic policy priorities, government-citizen relations, and rebel-constituency relations.

#### **1.4 Three Essays**

As stated in previous sections, this dissertation is written in a three-essay format, with each article focusing on the overarching theme from distinct perspectives to delve into how states formulate counterinsurgency strategies. Thus, in this section, I provide a succinct overview of these essays, delineating their primary objectives and contributions to the existing literature.

The first article of this dissertation, titled “*To be Experienced or Not? Unpacking the Relationship between Leader Tenure and Counterinsurgency Efforts*”, examines the influence of leaders’ experience in duty on counterinsurgency policymaking in a large-N cross-national setting. I argue that inexperienced leaders tend to use violence, while experienced ones may adopt conciliatory tactics, as the former are more risk-prone to proving their strong leadership immediately. However, I also contend that institutional mechanisms could moderate this effect depending on the level of constraints they impose. Drawing on the Asal et al. (2020) dataset on governments’ counterterrorism activities, I find that short-tenured leaders are more likely to resort to violence as a counterterrorism strategy, whereas long-tenured ones are more likely to avoid solely violent measures and adopt non-violent ones, as well. In addition, the effect is conditional on regime type, as leaders’ acts vary depending on whether they maintain their duty in a democratic or anocratic regime. These findings contribute to conflict studies by opening the door to the examination of leader-level factors on counterinsurgency more explicitly.

The second article, titled “*The Impact of Insurgent Group Reputation on Counterinsurgency Policies*”, delves into the influence of the reputation of rebels using terror tactic on policymaking in counterinsurgency within a large-N setting. In the context of survival, terror groups strategically cultivate positive or negative reputations to secure crucial material and moral support from their constituency or target population. Governments, in response, navigate between conciliatory measures when dealing with both types of groups, considering the associated costs and benefits. In cases where groups have a positive reputation, governments may opt for non-violent security approaches, acknowledging them as representatives of their constituencies. Groups heavily reliant on violence may inadvertently foster weariness

of conflict, prompting governments to adopt conciliatory activities to break deadlocks. However, employing fear-based tactics while offering short-term advantages poses long-term costs, gradually weakening the non-state armed group. Governments, reluctant to be perceived as rewarding groups expected to decline, may resort to forceful efforts. Utilizing data from Asal et al.'s (2020) counterinsurgency dataset and Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu's (2016) terror group reputation dataset, this study unveils a discernible trend in government behavior. Findings indicate that governments are more inclined to be non-responsive when dealing with groups possessing a positive reputation but tend to be more responsive in the face of groups with a negative reputation. Crucially, the analysis reveals that governments are more likely to resort to violent measures than conciliatory actions when addressing groups with negative reputations.

The last article, titled "*Counterinsurgency Decision-Making in Polarized Countries*," explores the influence of affective political polarization on the formulation of counterinsurgency policies. Affective polarization manifests when societal attitudes towards political issues align neatly along party or politician lines, often escalating to extreme feelings of support for one's political camp and perceiving the opposing camp as a threat to one's way of life or the nation. In this study, I argue that governments, in determining their counterinsurgency policies, can be swayed by the direction of affective political polarization within society. The implied political polarization is gauged by the extent of public support or lack thereof for the leader through partisan sentiments. This polarization may fuel processes like demonization, dehumanization, and marginalization, potentially rendering violence more acceptable to polarized individuals. This pushes leaders to pursue attractive military measures rather than costly political ones to consolidate support behind

them. Therefore, leveraging the data from Asal et al.'s (2020) insurgency dataset and V-DEM dataset (2023) on affective polarization levels, this study aims to reveal the possible impact of leader-society dynamics on the security decision-making process. Findings indicate that the higher the affective polarization level in a country, the governments are less likely to use conciliatory and repressive measures simultaneously. Instead, governments are more inclined to resort to violence solely against insurgent groups if there is a higher affective polarization level in a country. The findings significantly contribute to the theory that governments are more prone to employ violence in counterinsurgency efforts when backed by partisan support. Governments characterized by internal divisions, polarization, ethical shortcomings, and strong partisan affiliations tend to garner substantial backing when resorting to violence. This support not only bolsters their counterinsurgency initiatives but also mitigates the likelihood of facing significant backlash.

In essence, all three essays endeavor to elucidate the covert mechanisms underlying counterinsurgency policymaking by scrutinizing the influence of actors involved in the state-terrorist conflict across various levels. The initial article delves into the ramifications of the domestic political process and constraints on the determination of counterinsurgency policies. Subsequently, the second article elucidates how the voice of public opinion in polarized societies steers approaches to dealing with rebel groups. Furthermore, the final paper delves into the impact of the reflection of in-group dynamics and the motivation of insurgent organizations on their relationship with a constituency, thereby shaping the government's response.

## **CHAPTER 2: TO BE EXPERIENCED OR NOT? UNPACKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADER TENURE AND COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Tansu Ciller, who served as Turkey's first female prime minister from 1993 to 1996, hoped to offer a non-patriarchal perspective into Turkish politics and the ongoing conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Considered a fresh face in politics at that time, Ciller pledged to address the social and economic issues that aggravated the "Kurdish problem". Acknowledging that poverty and lack of education were among the underlying causes, her pre-election rallies underscored her commitment to solving the root causes of violence and insurgency. Once in office, however, Ciller recanted her previous conciliatory rhetoric, downplaying the political-social dimensions of the Kurdish problem and even resorting to military measures. The Ciller government introduced the "Castle Plan" to enhance militarized tools against the PKK (Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, 2000). In the runoff to the 1995 general election, Ciller felt pressured to double down on her militaristic and authoritarian approach and proclaimed in her rallies that "Terrorism will either end or end" (Bildirici, 1998; 276).

Turkey's recent history above showcases plausible linkages between leader experience and counterinsurgency outcomes, necessitating strategic selection and timing of such activities contingent on the leader's duration in office. Previous research has shown that the length of leadership tenure influences the policymaking process (Bunce, 1980; Canes-Wrone, 2001; Tosun et al., 2022), including national security policies (Croco & Weeks, 2016; Horowitz & Stam, 2014; Uzonyi, 2021). Experienced leaders may be less vulnerable to political opposition and, therefore, can take bolder and more effective security measures (Gelpi et al., 2006; Chiozza & Goemans, 2004), while inexperienced ones may adopt aggressive strategies due to their vulnerability to political pressures and public opinion (Kertzer, & Brutger, 2018). Miller (2020) suggests that inexperienced leaders may be more likely to face security threats and prioritize hawkish security policies to appear strong and decisive. Despite a growing theoretical understanding of the possible connection between leader tenure and security policies, our understanding of the relationship between leaders' experience in office and preferences in counterinsurgency remains understudied.

Therefore, the primary aim is to explore the circumstances under which leaders opt for violent or non-violent counterinsurgency measures. Specifically, this study empirically examines the impact of leader-level factors on decision-making in counterinsurgency efforts. Counterinsurgency encompasses not only aggressive but also conciliatory approaches, with the latter can be potentially offering greater benefits that leaders can embrace. Nonetheless, non-violent counterinsurgency policies are often more challenging to implement than military approaches, as they require expertise, coordination among political entities, and public support (Arce & Sandler, 2010; de Mesquita, 2005; Cronin, 2006). Consequently, long-tenured leaders

are expected to pursue conciliatory counterinsurgency strategies regardless of political and public constraints due to having greater political security. However, this may prove particularly challenging for leaders facing pressure from constituents to adopt immediate and forceful responses to security threats.

The impact of leader experience on counterinsurgency cannot be isolated from political constraints, such as the electoral process and regime type. Leaders vying for re-election face survival risks, incentivizing them to persuade voters (Grimmer et al., 2012). Implementing visible policies near election dates enhances their winning chances. However, the electoral processes do not uniformly affect leaders' motivation. As leaders' tenure lengthens, their confidence and competence increase, reflecting electoral victories and popular support (Bienen & Walle, 1992). Short-tenured leaders, conversely, are more sensitive to voter costs and electoral concerns (Chiozza, 2017).

Regime type also influences leaders' security policy formulation. In democracies, adherence to norms and legislative veto power constrain the executive's policymaking (de Mesquita et al., 2000; Tsebelis, 2002). Anocracies offer more leeway in imposing extreme security measures due to weaker norms and political constraints (Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Walter, 1997). Leaders may find it challenging to use force and reactive measures in democracies, while the opposite is expected in anocracies.

Drawing on Asal et al.'s (2020) dataset on governments' counterinsurgency policies from 1998-2012, this article presents a cross-national empirical analysis of the factors determining the incumbents' counterinsurgency strategies. Findings reveal

that inexperienced leaders are more likely to use violent activities, while experienced ones adopt more conciliatory measures conditional on the democratization level.

The contribution of this article is threefold: First, despite the fact that there are multiple studies examining the impact of leadership tenure on foreign policy decision-making and interstate relations, to my knowledge, this article is one of the rare attempts to explain the leader-level dynamics in adopting appropriate counterinsurgency strategies. Second, following the road paved by Asal et al. (2020) dataset, I systematically analyze the determinants of various counterinsurgency policies; hence, we challenge the “one-fits-all package” in predicting how countries would respond to non-state armed actors. Third, the findings reveal that leaders in anocratic regimes may have greater incentives to avoid merely violent measures in dealing with ongoing conflicts contrary to the conventional wisdom arguing democratic leaders would be more likely to resolve the crises in piece.

The article proceeds with explaining how ruling experience determines leaders’ incentives to embrace various strategies in fighting against non-state armed actors. In the next step, we further theorize how electoral pressures and institutional constraints condition leaders’ decision-making regarding counterinsurgency. Then, I reveal the empirical strategy and test our theoretical claims. Finally, I discuss the results and conclude by summarizing our findings, possible limitations, and contributions.

## **2.2 Leader Tenure and Counterinsurgency**

A leader’s duration in office can significantly influence the policies and strategies they employ to achieve their goals. De Mesquita and Smith (2010), for example,

argue that experienced leaders who feel political confidence tend to adopt policies that are in the best interest of the country rather than politically expedient decisions. Leaders with shorter time horizons in the office are often more sensitive to the needs of their constituency and may feel pressure to demonstrate their capability (Tomz & Van Houweling, 2009; Uzonyi & Wells, 2016). In other words, politically insecure, short-tenured leaders desperate to retain power are putting pressure on the opposition to control the pressure. Secure units like experienced leaders are less likely to bow to the impacts of dissent (Conrad & Ritter, 2013; Young, 2012). This can motivate short-tenured leaders to prioritize short-term gains over long-term benefits as they seek to deliver tangible results within their limited time (Betts, 2021; Flores, 2019).

Similarly, the diversionary theory of war proposes that unpopular leaders often resort to aggressive policies against minority groups (Machain & Rosenberg, 2018; Klein & Tokdemir, 2019) and level up the counterinsurgency efforts to divert public attention from discontent and boost political fortunes through a rally around the flag effect (Tir & Jasinsky 2008, Tokdemir & Klein, 2021). For instance, President Donald Trump issued a hawkish anti-immigration policy that barred citizens of Muslim-majority countries just days after he took office to appeal to his political base and gain public support (CNN, 2017).

Incumbents' experience in office is also known to be relevant for national defense and security policies. The longer a ruling government stays in power, the more political security it tends to have, allowing for greater autonomy and freedom in decision-making. Experience provides more opportunities to develop deep, lasting relationships with key stakeholders, including political allies, interest groups, and bureaucrats (Henisz & Zelner, 2005). These solid political networks and support

bases can give leaders access to more information, resources, and expertise, enabling them to make more informed and effective policy decisions. Experienced leaders are also less likely to be influenced by domestic interest groups and public opinion and are more likely to focus on long-term strategic objectives (de Mesquita & Smith, 2010). This sense of security can also provide more leeway to implement optimal security policies without fear of political backlash or retaliation. In their empirical study of 112 conflicts between 1945 and 2004, Li and Schaub (2014) find that leaders with longer tenure are significantly more likely to initiate negotiations with opposing parties.

The length of a leader's tenure also reduces the information asymmetry between the government and the opposing party because longer tenures allow leaders to build a reputation for resolve and credibility, reducing the likelihood of bluffing and increasing reliability (Weeks, 2008). Stable leadership enables opposing parties to understand leaders' policies over time, reducing miscalculations and misunderstandings. Longer tenures also facilitate peaceful conflict resolution between opposing parties due to the leader's established reputation for resolve (Thyne, 2012). Smith and Spaniel (2019) investigate the relationship between leader tenure and the duration of militarized interstate disputes and find that transitioning from a newly elected to a tenured leader increases conflict resolution initiation, as experienced leaders can reduce information asymmetry and make credible commitments.

Inexperienced leaders may have greater incentives to increase national security actions. Newly elected leaders may feel pressure to demonstrate their credibility and toughness to differentiate themselves from their predecessors, particularly in national

security. These features can lead to more aggressive policies prioritizing military actions and signal assertiveness over diplomacy and negotiations (Gelpi & Griesdorf, 2001). As Kertzer and Brutger (2018) suggest, leaders who lack experience in office may also rely on their own competence and believe they can successfully use force to achieve their goals while downplaying the risks and costs of military action. They may also be more prone to cognitive biases, leading to flawed policymaking and a lack of consideration for alternative approaches. De Mesquita and Smith (2010) similarly argue that inexperienced leaders may face more significant constraints in their ability to adopt optimal policy options as they may be more beholden to public opinion and interest groups and may be more likely to face resistance from entrenched bureaucratic actors. President Barack Obama's otherwise dovish agenda was replaced with extreme national security actions in his first term despite his electoral campaign's criticism of the Bush administration's militarized approach (Bacevich, 2009).

Leaders who are new to the office could also be prone to attract disproportionate trouble from abroad. Short-term incumbents are more vulnerable to being targeted for using force because they have less familiarity with their country's security landscape and may be less effective at responding to emerging threats (Chiozza & Goemans, 2003; Gelpi & Grieco, 2001; Park & Bali, 2017). Inexperienced leaders may also be perceived as weak by adversaries looking for opportunities to test their resolve or exploit their limited term as executives (Betts, 2021; Horowitz, 2010). Inexperienced governments are, therefore, more willing to respond to militarized threats in kind to quickly resolve conflicts. For example, Gelpi and Grieco (2001) empirically study crisis initiation and show that the relatively short in the office are more likely to get of militarized challenges in democratic regimes.

Given the possible influence of the length of leader tenure on national security decision-making, I would expect incumbents' counterinsurgency actions to be susceptible to leadership experience. That is, I expect to observe that experienced leaders have substantial slack to implement optimal and conciliatory counterinsurgency measures when they have more political security and can build trust with rebels long-term, while newly elected leaders might place a higher value on aggressive measures to appear tough and decisive.

**Hypothesis 1:** *Short-tenured leaders are more likely to resort to violent counterinsurgency activities.*

### **2.3 Political Environment Conditioning Leader's Counterinsurgency Strategies**

It is important to note that this argument does not assume leaders to be ignorant of the pressure of the political environment in which they operate. There are few, if any, governments that have complete flexibility in implementing their preferred policies. Ruling leaders are bound by various structural factors, such as the electoral process and regime type. The electoral process allows citizens to assess leaders' performance by re-electing or removing them, incentivizing leaders seeking re-election to implement appealing policies (Fearon, 1999). Additionally, a country's regime type can shape leaders' policy preferences, with higher levels of democracy resulting in more political constraints on incumbents' decision-making power due to checks and balances from other branches of government or independent institutions (Linz, 2000). Therefore, I also analyze whether political constraints on the decision-making

process have an intervening impact on the relationship between leader experience and counterinsurgency measures.

### **2.3.1 Electoral Motivations**

Public support is essential for the survival of ruling governments in electoral regimes as the electorate has the right to reward governments by reinstating them or, conversely, to dismiss underperforming incumbents (Fearon, 1999; Berry & Gersen, 2010). Therefore, leaders seeking re-election are incentivized to demonstrate competence to the electorate by adopting attractive and observable policies (Grimmer et al., 2012). Nevertheless, the timing of the electoral cycle causes time-varying motivations and implicitly shapes a leader's policymaking preferences. When elections are distant, governments have greater flexibility in policymaking, as the incentive for credit-claiming from voters is diminished (Nanes, 2017). As elections draw near, conversely, incumbents are motivated to adopt more visible policies and ensure that voters recognize their performance in achieving those policies (Jervis, 2016; Lacatus & Meibauer, 2021).

Similar logic is acceptable to national security policymaking. Several theoretical and empirical studies of counterinsurgency display the influence of electoral motivations on change in counterinsurgency policies (Aksoy, 2018; de Mesquita, 2007; Siqueira & Sandler, 2008; Nanes, 2017). De Mesquita (2007) and Nanes (2017) show that, despite their positive implications, optimal counterinsurgency does not produce observable results in the eye of voters as there is, if often, predicated on secrecy preventing incumbents from advertising their competence and commitment.

Governments can enhance their electoral prospects by publicly claiming credit for counterinsurgency actions that are observable to the public. By doing so, they can signal their toughness and competence against security threats, potentially boosting their popularity among voters. Thus, leaders seeking re-election may opt for overspending on publicly observable security measures that may not be the most optimal action, even in the fight against NSAAs, to increase their popularity and gather the public around the flag (de Mesquita, 2007; Neumayer et al., 2014; Silke, 2010). As Marinov et al. (2015) show in their study of fifty electoral regimes, the timing of the next elections influences the willingness of leaders to commit troops to fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. As governments are motivated by electoral concerns to take more counterinsurgency actions, the volume of observable counterinsurgency actions is expected to increase as elections approach.

As noted earlier, experienced leaders with political confidence tend to prioritize optimal policies, while leaders with shorter terms may prioritize hawkish policies to demonstrate their abilities (Beck et al., 2001; Flores, 2019; Uzonyi & Wells, 2016). Accordingly, as electoral concerns leaders will also significantly depend on their experience in office, leaders are also expected to shape their counterinsurgency actions according to the proximity of elections. Experienced leaders, having already expanded their winning coalition, may have fewer electoral concerns (Besley & Persson, 2011; de Mesquita et al., 2000; Hicken & Stoll, 2008), therefore, more freedom to make unpopular but beneficial decisions on security measures leading up to elections.

Inexperienced leaders, still consolidating their role and seeking support, may be more sensitive to the electoral process (Fearon, 1999) and, therefore, have a stronger

motivation to adopt aggressive counterinsurgency measures. With a small winning coalition, they need more popular support, and upcoming elections provide a chance to assess their popularity and seek voter mandates (de Mesquita & Siverson, 1995; Wolford, 2007), leading to more observable policies to show progress and win re-election (de Mesquita, 2007). Moreover, while experienced leaders are expected to be less sensitive to electoral concerns, approaching elections amplify the increase in the volume of violent counterinsurgency by short-tenured leaders.

**Hypothesis 2a:** *Short-tenured leaders facing electoral pressure are more likely to resort to violent counterinsurgency activities.*

### **2.3.2 Regime Type**

Regime type reflects the domestic political system, impacting policymaking processes and leaders' ability to formulate security policies. Since the main focus is changing the political constraints of regimes, only democracies and anocracies are analyzed, while autocracies are not counted. Democratic norms, the rule of law, and a conciliatory approach in democracies are expected to limit the use of force (Arreguin-Toft, 2005; de Mesquita et al., 2000), while anocracies are expected to provide more flexibility to apply excessive security measures due to weaker norms and political constraints (Fearon & Laitin, 2003). However, the cost of political constraints on leaders also varies with what is expected of the outcome of the conflict. While newly elected leaders in democracies do not bear the cost of pursuing

the use of force, the opposite is expected for anocracies. Over time, the logic of this expectation differs for democratic and anocratic leaders.

Democracies are characterized by a system of governance where ruling parties are held accountable to the constituency through periodic elections and enabling decision-making to be more transparent and responsive with the check and balance mechanism (Dahl, 2007; Huntington, 1996; Woon, 2012). These political constraints placed on leaders, such as mass suffrage or separation of powers, prevent them from becoming too powerful and potentially abusing their power. Democratic leaders who internalize such domestic practices will be expected similar implementation within the international system (Cederman & Rao, 2001; Lake, 1992; Maoz & Russett, 1993). In other words, democratic leaders may risk relatively high political costs if they resist through use of force (de Mesquita & Siverson, 1995).

While democratic leaders are expected not to specifically fight other democracies because they are more politically constrained and more sensitive to the outcome of the conflict, do they really not use force when threatened? At this point, the question is when will democracies use force if they are to be used? Gelpi and Grieco (2001) argue that democratic leaders only benefit from aggressive security policies if they expect to win the conflict. Success in conflict allows leaders to signal competence and rally public support (Downs & Rocke, 1994; Hess & Orphanides, 1995; Gelpi, 1997). Consequently, democratic leaders may engage in conflict with the expectation of victory, as their position in office could be at stake based on the conflict's outcome.

As anticipated, newly elected leaders may refrain from using force if potential societal damage outweighs the benefit, jeopardizing their chances of retaining power.

The costs of aggressive actions can deter inexperienced leaders from maintaining a winning coalition after the conflict. On the other hand, experienced democratic leaders with larger and more stable winning coalitions can pursue ambitious policies without fearing significant political repercussions (de Mesquita & Smith, 2010; Henisz & Zelner, 2005). They possess the experience to consolidate power, suppress opposition, and accept the cost of using force even if the outcome is unexpected. Thus, the cost of using force against rebels is expected to decrease over time for democratic leaders.

Anocracies are political systems with both democratic and autocratic features (Bogaards, 2009). Power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or a small group of elites, leading to intense political competition (Levitsky & Way, 2002). Unlike newly elected democratic leaders, anocratic leaders are uncertain about retaining power after gaining it, making them vulnerable to challenges (Gelpi & Grieco, 2001). Thus, in anocracies, hostile political competition may result in rival leaders who do not hesitate to use force to consolidate and maintain power (Vreeland, 2008). Compared to democracies, the use of force is expected to have lower societal costs due to limited freedom of press, speech, and association, weak checks and balances, and manipulation of institutions and rules (Ottaway, 2003). Anocracies exert greater control over information flow, limiting civil society's influence and allowing regime co-optation to legitimize actions (Lorch & Bunk, 2017). Therefore, casualties and social hesitations are unlikely to significantly impact anocracies, as newly elected leaders maintain tight control over constituents and do not depend on satisfying large winning coalitions to remain in office.

Using force is not always without any cost for anocratic leaders. While they may be inclined to aggressive measures against international and non-state conflicts, pursuing such policies will be relatively costly over time as military actions require diverting military resources from defending the leader's stay in office from the opposition (Gelpi & Grieco, 2001). Thus, experienced leaders in anocracies may adopt a conciliatory approach against international challengers, although of relatively little value, considering the cost of rising domestic opposition. Once again, this logic leads us to the fact that experienced leaders in anocracies tend to be more likely to make conciliatory efforts, whereas more inexperienced leaders will prefer to use force. From the counterinsurgency perspective, comparing leaders' behaviors in democracies and anocracies shows that while experienced leaders in democracies are more likely to pursue aggressive counterinsurgency, the opposite is expected for anocracies.

**Hypothesis 2b:** *Compared to democracies, short-tenured leaders are more likely to resort to violent counterinsurgency activities in anocracies.*

## **2.4 Research Design**

In order to test these hypotheses, I employ four datasets. First, I use Asal et al.'s (2020) counterinsurgency dataset, which covers the governments' counterinsurgency policies implemented against the rebel groups coded on a yearly basis, to measure our dependent variable. I restricted the counterinsurgency policies of electoral regimes, aiming to investigate the robust influence of leader and structural-level

factors while excluding autocratic regimes. That said, the unit of analysis is conflict-year, and the total number of observations is 1,016, including counterinsurgency activities of 42 countries across various regions between 1998 and 2012. I also utilize the NELDA dataset (2021) to obtain cross-country data pertaining to electoral events, the Polity V Index (2018) to acquire countries' policy scores, and the Database of Political Institutions (DPI 2020) to extract leaders' years spent in office, which are all constituting our key explanatory variables.

**Dependent Variables:** The dependent variables are derived from Asal et al.'s (2020) counterinsurgency dataset. This event dataset covers the conflicts between states and rebel groups identified by the BAAD II Insurgency dataset (2018) yearly from 1998 to 2012 based on whether an insurgent group appears in the UCDP Battle-Related Deaths Dataset. To analyze state response, the dataset captures three counterinsurgency measures as: violent (stick), non-violent (carrot), and mixed. Repressive activities include police work, crime investigation, arresting members, and any other military actions against the rebels. Non-violent and conciliatory efforts include peace talks, negotiations, ceasefires, or any deals in which the government offers incentives for the group to end violence or concedes to the group in any way. If both types occur in one year, then it is coded as a mixed strategy for that year. All these separate variables are coded as 0 if no specific counterinsurgency strategy is present and 1 otherwise. We generate a categorical variable to account for the strategic selection of counterinsurgency policy by recoding these variables. Accordingly, I have coded 1 if a leader only employs non-violent, 2 if only violent, and 3 if both, in other words, mixed strategy. If none of these strategies are

employed, then we code it 0, which represents staying non-responsive against the insurgent group<sup>1</sup>.

**Independent Variables:** To begin with the leader tenure, I use the DPI dataset (2020), which records the number of years a chief executive or ruling party has been in office. Only the years in the office of executives who formally hold power are counted, hence. If a coup dismisses an executive and later returns to power within the same calendar year, the coup is considered a failure, and the executive's power is considered intact. However, if a parliamentary government resigns and is subsequently reappointed, it is considered a new ruling government. Incumbent leaders are deemed to be in office if they are re-elected and remain in office. Table 1 displays that the average number of years leaders have been in office in regimes is 7 years.

To measure electoral events, I use the NELDA dataset (2021), which includes information on the years of parliamentary and presidential elections held in countries. Hence, I am particularly focusing on leadership changes through elections. The dataset codes the years leading up to upcoming elections, starting from the year governments adopt specific counterinsurgency policies. There is an important point to clarify with respect to this variable. In constructing the variable, I have also considered snap elections and the failure to hold upcoming elections on the expected dates. For instance, Israel held presidential elections in 1999, which were later repeated in 2002. Subsequently, the country transitioned to a parliamentary system and held another early election in the same year. In such cases, even though the

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<sup>1</sup> Although it might be counter-intuitive, a government not responding to an insurgency, given some groups might be less active in their operations in some years, the governments might prefer nonengaging in a comprehensive action in response.

electoral periods are very close, each election is considered an upcoming new election. Angola presents another example of a borderline case, as the 1998 general elections planned after the 1992 elections could not be held due to the Angolan civil war. Despite the fact that the war officially ended in 2002, domestic challenges prevented the country from holding its next election until 2008. However, since 2008, Angola has held subsequent elections at the scheduled intervals. Hence, in cases like this, we only account for officially announced elections and do not consider the transition periods as a regular electoral schedule. As a result, due to the changes in the election calendar or the presence of ineligible intervals such as civil wars or regime changes, the number of observations for “Years to Election” has dropped to 949.

To measure regime type as an indicator of institutional constraints of leaders’ decision-making regarding counterinsurgency strategies, we use the Polity V Index (2018). The index captures the spectrum of authority on a scale ranging from -10 (hereditary autocracy) to +10 (consolidated democracy). While technically, autocracies can hold elections, such elections’ fairness and transparency are often questioned. The ruling party or individual in autocratic regimes holds significant power and control over the government, media, and society. This can allow them to manipulate the election outcome using tactics such as voter intimidation, vote rigging, or restricting access to opposition candidates or parties. Such actions can result in an election that does not reflect the will of the constituency. Since the main scope of the research is democracies and anocracies, I coded the countries as democracies if their score ranges from 6 to 10 and as anocracies from 5 to -5.

**Control Variables:** I control the impact of additional factors that may influence states' counterinsurgency strategies. Regime stability is critical in the decision-making process through the underlying predictable and stable political environment. In a stable regime, the government can establish and enforce policies over an extended period, enabling them to plan and implement long-term development strategies (Butkiewicz & Yanikkaya, 2007; Gates et al., 2006). Conversely, political instability can promote unpredictability in the eyes of citizens because it creates an environment where there is a lack of consistency and continuity in government policies and leadership. This, in turn, can lead to a lack of trust in the government and political institutions. Thus, I utilize a continuous political consistency measure, labeled as "System Tenure," from the DPI dataset (2020) to measure the stability of regimes.

Establishing the fundamental distinction between democracies and anocracies on political constraints, I control the level of political constraints on executive power, as well. Several studies assert that policy decisions, especially those involving violence and the use of military force, will be politically difficult when leaders are surrendered with institutional constraints (see Maoz & Russett, 1993; Risse-Kappen, 1991). Thus, I measure the impact of "Institutional Constraints" on executives using an ordered variable ranging from unlimited authority=1 to executive parity or subordination=7 from the Polity V Index (2018).

Opposition seats can impact decision-making in a legislative body. A significant number of opposition seats can create a balance of power that forces negotiation and compromise, resulting in moderate policies, whereas a small number can lead to hawkish policies. In a presidential system, opposition seats might be less relevant,

but a significant number in the legislature can block or delay the ruling party's proposed legislation (Fonck & Reykers, 2018). Therefore, I also account for the "Ratio of Opposition Seats" all opposition parties have drawn from the DPI dataset (2020).

Relatedly, different government systems (i.e., parliamentary vs. presidential) offer distinct incentives for shaping security policies. In parliamentary systems, policymaking is primarily controlled by the majority party or coalition in the legislature, limiting the executive's role. In contrast, presidential systems grant the leader more decision-making authority, allowing them to use executive orders to bypass the legislature (Cheibub, 2007; Lijphart, 1992, 2012). I obtained the political system variables (parliamentary, assembly-elected presidential, and presidential) from the DPI (2020) dataset. Assembly-elected presidential systems, resembling parliamentary systems, were merged into the parliamentarism variable due to functional similarities and outcomes. All variables are coded yearly in a binary way, and they are mutually exclusive.

Incumbent's ideological orientations are also known to be related to policymaking. A long list of studies supports that right-oriented governments tend to be more hawkish than others (Di Lonardo, 2017; Nanes, 2017; Palmer et al., 2004). This pattern is rooted in the expectation that left-wing incumbents may adopt softer approaches to national security and counterinsurgency. Therefore, I obtained the ideology of head of government variables (rightist, centrist, and leftist) from the Global Leader Ideology dataset (Herre, 2023). I have coded 1 if a leader pursues left-wing ideology; otherwise, 0. I also control the influence of the incumbents' militaristic attitudes. The debate over leaders' military attitudes supports the notion that military and civilian

elites may hold divergent perspectives on the use of force (Horowitz & Stam, 2014). Thus, I measured an executive military officer using a dummy variable from the DPI dataset (2020).

Regarding group-level factors, I control several variables related to NSAAs, including their goals, territorial control, alliance count, fatalities, and size. First, terror is a tool to reach political objectives. As the goals and motives of rebels may vary, effective counterstrategies are expected to vary accordingly (Abrahms, 2008). To control groups' objectives, I obtained "Incompatibility" variables from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (2023), which concerns whether the group has governmental or territorial or both types of aims. Second, organizations that hold or can hold a specific territory often establish a connection with the local population to maintain control rather than resort to violence. This unique feature of some groups is expected to result in different government reactions (Johnston, 2008). To control territorial control, I use a binary variable coded yearly in the BAAD II dataset (2018), indicating whether a group has controlled a particular region over a short period. Third, to account for their local and international alliances with others, which make them more lethal and innovative, extend their lifespan, and disrupt peace processes, I include alliance count as a control variable from the BAAD II dataset (2018).

Fourth, to examine group size, I employ an ordinal variable from the BAAD II dataset (2018) ranging from 1 to 4, which indicates the approximate number of members in the groups. Lastly, one can argue that the intensity of conflict can influence counterinsurgency measures, therefore, I also control the group's fatalities. I employed groups' number of fatalities from the Global Terrorism Database (2022).

Summary statistics for all independent variables are reported in Table 1, and we also report the correlations across them in Appendix A in the Appendices.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics

| Variable                  | Obs  | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Min | Max  |
|---------------------------|------|--------|-----------|-----|------|
| Nothing                   | 1016 | .268   | .443      | 0   | 1    |
| Carrot                    | 1016 | .035   | .185      | 0   | 1    |
| Stick                     | 1016 | .462   | .499      | 0   | 1    |
| Mixed                     | 1016 | .235   | .424      | 0   | 1    |
| Leader Tenure             | 1016 | 7.091  | 6.792     | 1   | 33   |
| Years to Election         | 949  | 4.017  | 1.542     | 0   | 6    |
| Democracy                 | 1016 | .548   | .498      | 0   | 1    |
| Anocracy                  | 1016 | .452   | .498      | 0   | 1    |
| System Tenure             | 1016 | 17.406 | 16.536    | 1   | 82   |
| Institutional Constraints | 1016 | 5.093  | 1.815     | 2   | 7    |
| Ratio of Opposition Seats | 1016 | .306   | .201      | 0   | .926 |
| Presidential System       | 1016 | .605   | .489      | 0   | 1    |
| Parliamentary System      | 1016 | .395   | .489      | 0   | 1    |
| Left-wing Ideology        | 1016 | .487   | .5        | 0   | 1    |
| Military Officer          | 1016 | .307   | .462      | 0   | 1    |
| Territorial Aim           | 1016 | .555   | .497      | 0   | 1    |
| Territorial Control       | 1016 | .196   | .397      | 0   | 1    |
| Alliance Degree           | 1016 | .834   | 1.655     | 0   | 15   |
| GTD Fatalities            | 1016 | 26.766 | 100.507   | 0   | 1252 |
| Group Size                | 1016 | 2.632  | .696      | 1   | 4    |

## 2.5 Results

Several points are important to note about the estimated models. First, this study employed multinomial logistic regression to analyze how leader tenure influences resorting to specific responses as part of a counterinsurgency strategy. As discussed above, I hypothesize that short-tenure leaders would be more likely to resort to drastic counterinsurgency measures. Thus, I have reported the log likelihoods of engaging violent, non-violent, and mixed strategies compared to not engaging any counterinsurgency strategies. Second, the findings are presented as both parsimonious and extended models, including control variables. In addition, each

figure is also drawn based on extended models. Third, the last two models include an interaction term between years to the election, regime type, and leader tenure to empirically test Hypotheses 2a and 2b. Hence, these interaction terms allow for examining the influence of intervening factors on counterinsurgency activities across governments with different leadership experiences. Lastly, robust standard errors are clustered in each model by the government-NSAA dyad since observations are not independent of the government's interaction with different rebels in a given year.

In both naïve and full models in Table 2, the coefficient for leader tenure influence on violent counterinsurgency measures is negative and significant. This suggests that the longer the leaders' experience in office, the less likely they are to resort to violent activities. Model 2 shows that accounting for the control variables, the results hold and, in fact, amplify the substantive impact. Among the control variables in Model 2, the country's regime stability, insurgency groups alliance degree, and number of fatalities in a given year are statistically significant in different specifications. For the substantive effects, Figure 1 illustrates the percentage change in the predicted number of four possible state actions when the length of leadership increases based on the extended model.

Figure 1 suggests that when leader tenure increases from minimum to maximum, the probability of governments' no response as a counterinsurgency strategy doubles.

Moreover, the probability of resorting to violent counterinsurgency measures decreases from 58% to 18%, comparing two leaders, one newly elected to office and the other highly experienced. This result displays that while short-tenured leaders are more eager to respond to insurgency, the opposite is valid as leaders gain experience in the office. Moreover, the longer the leader's tenure, the probability of employing

mixed measures increases, too. Hence, these results demonstrate that, consistent with Hypothesis 1, all else being equal, short-tenured leaders are more likely to resort to violent counterinsurgency activities. Plus, while inexperienced leaders are more likely to respond to insurgents, the experienced ones are more likely to avoid counterinsurgency strategies with merely violent components.

**Table 2.** Multinomial Logistic Regression Result

| Variables                 | Non-Violent      | Model 1<br>Violent | Mixed            | Non-Violent       | Model 2<br>Violent | Mixed           |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Leader Tenure             | -0.000<br>(.022) | -.079***<br>(.022) | -.048*<br>(.019) | -.067<br>(.041)   | -.085**<br>(.030)  | -.024<br>(.028) |
| System Tenure             |                  |                    |                  | .029<br>(.019)    | .043**<br>(.016)   | .027<br>(.016)  |
| Institutional Constraints |                  |                    |                  | -.277<br>(.244)   | -.156<br>(.145)    | .181<br>(.170)  |
| Ratio of Opposition Seats |                  |                    |                  | -.668<br>(1.427)  | -.011<br>(.823)    | .517<br>(.830)  |
| Presidential System       |                  |                    |                  | .369<br>(.825)    | -.374<br>(.495)    | .333<br>(.518)  |
| Left-wing Ideology        |                  |                    |                  | .829<br>(.561)    | .115<br>(.286)     | .285<br>(.316)  |
| Military Officer          |                  |                    |                  | .196<br>(.567)    | .059<br>(.466)     | .103<br>(.522)  |
| Territorial Aim           |                  |                    |                  | 1.570*<br>(.629)  | .332<br>(.366)     | .341<br>(.399)  |
| Territorial Control       |                  |                    |                  | 1.488**<br>(.454) | .337<br>(.343)     | .463<br>(.374)  |
| Alliance Degree           |                  |                    |                  | -.191<br>(.250)   | .157<br>(.082)     | .128<br>(.079)  |
| GTD Fatalities            |                  |                    |                  | .043*<br>(.021)   | .053**<br>(.019)   | .050*<br>(.019) |
| Group Size                |                  |                    |                  | .027<br>(.288)    | .004<br>(.142)     | .323*<br>(.155) |
| N                         | 1,016            | 1,016              | 1,016            | 1,016             | 1,016              | 1,016           |
| Log Likelihood            | -1161            | -1161              | -1161            | -1041             | -1041              | -1041           |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

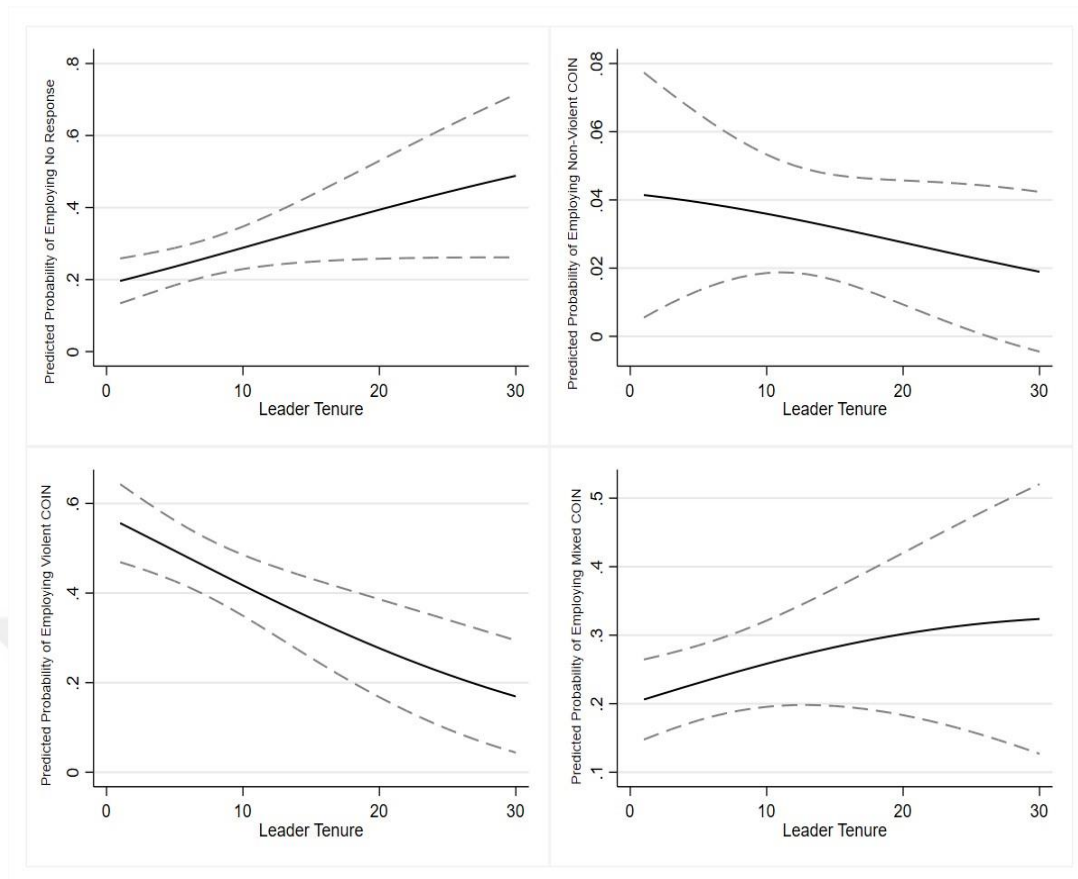


**Figure 1.** Leader Tenure and Predicted Counterinsurgency Activities

To continue with testing Hypothesis 2a, across both models presented in Table 3, the coefficient for the interaction between leader tenure and years to election is positive but not statistically significant. If Hypothesis 2a has merit, the coefficient for the interaction between leader tenure and years of the election should be negative and statistically significant in all models. However, the interaction between leader tenure and electoral concerns does not affect counterinsurgency decision-making. Thus, the empirical analysis does not provide empirical evidence in support of Hypothesis 2a. Approaching elections does not necessarily lead short-tenured leaders to invest more in violent counterinsurgency activities (see Appendix B in the Appendices). This suggests that counterinsurgency decisions are not aligned with leaders' electoral calculations.

**Table 3.** Multinomial Logistic Regression Result Conditional on Years to Election

| Variables                         | Non-Violent     | Model 1<br>Violent | Mixed           | Non-Violent      | Model 2<br>Violent | Mixed            |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Leader Tenure                     | -.009<br>(.072) | -.086*<br>(.038)   | -.054<br>(.039) | -.042<br>(.1)    | -.102*<br>(.04)    | -.051<br>(.045)  |
| Years to Election                 | -.211<br>(.226) | -.042<br>(.086)    | -.13<br>(.107)  | -.177<br>(.258)  | -.151<br>(.089)    | -.209<br>(.107)  |
| Leader Tenure X Years to Election | .0006<br>(.017) | .003<br>(.007)     | .002<br>(.009)  | -.002<br>(.022)  | .007<br>(.007)     | .005<br>(.01)    |
| System Tenure                     |                 |                    |                 | .028<br>(.019)   | .044**<br>(.016)   | .032*<br>(.015)  |
| Institutional Constraints         |                 |                    |                 | -.176<br>(.266)  | -.154<br>(.153)    | .131<br>(.195)   |
| Ratio of Opposition Seats         |                 |                    |                 | .326<br>(1.431)  | .120<br>(.837)     | .460<br>(.840)   |
| Presidential System               |                 |                    |                 | .175<br>(0.903)  | -.355<br>(0.498)   | .304<br>(0.536)  |
| Left-wing Ideology                |                 |                    |                 | .400<br>(.571)   | .065<br>(.300)     | .318<br>(.341)   |
| Military Officer                  |                 |                    |                 | .288<br>(.776)   | .018<br>(.501)     | .288<br>(.582)   |
| Territorial Aim                   |                 |                    |                 | 1.000<br>(.581)  | .369<br>(.392)     | 0.508<br>(0.446) |
| Territorial Control               |                 |                    |                 | 1.254*<br>(.605) | .202<br>(.339)     | .361<br>(.367)   |
| Alliance Degree                   |                 |                    |                 | -.220<br>(.296)  | .171*<br>(.081)    | .133<br>(.081)   |
| GTD Fatalities                    |                 |                    |                 | .044*<br>(.020)  | .051**<br>(.02)    | .048*<br>(.02)   |
| Group Size                        |                 |                    |                 | -.041<br>(.362)  | -.034<br>(.146)    | .314*<br>(.154)  |
| N                                 | 949             | 949                | 949             | 949              | 949                | 949              |
| Log Likelihood                    | -1054           | -1054              | -1054           | -954.7           | -954.7             | -954.7           |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05

To test Hypothesis 2b, I report the results in Table 4, the coefficient for the interaction between leader tenure and anocracies is negative and statistically significant for violent and mixed counterinsurgency strategies. Thus, the shorter the leader tenure in anocracies compared to democracies, they are likely more to adopt specific strategies. When inexperienced leaders focus on certain counterinsurgency measures against rebels, there is an increase in the number of violent measures. This is consistent with Hypothesis 2b.

**Table 4.** Multinomial Logistic Regression Result Conditional on Regime Type

| Variables                 | Non-Violent     | Model 1<br>Violent | Mixed           | Non-Violent        | Model 2<br>Violent | Mixed            |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| Leader Tenure             | .077<br>(.148)  | .025<br>(.052)     | .073<br>(.057)  | .045<br>(.143)     | .063<br>(.064)     | .104<br>(.058)   |
| Anocracy                  | 1.543<br>(.987) | .217<br>(.445)     | -.050<br>(.485) | 1.654<br>(1.532)   | 1.653**<br>(.551)  | 1.598*<br>(.739) |
| Leader Tenure X Anocracy  | -.113<br>(.152) | -.103<br>(.058)    | -.108<br>(.061) | -.132<br>(.153)    | -.171**<br>(.066)  | -.147*<br>(.064) |
| System Tenure             |                 |                    |                 | .039*<br>(.019)    | .052**<br>(.017)   | .036*<br>(.017)  |
| Institutional Constraints |                 |                    |                 | -.146<br>(.333)    | -.052<br>(.161)    | .294<br>(.200)   |
| Ratio of Opposition Seats |                 |                    |                 | -.208<br>(1.575)   | .509<br>(0.842)    | .963<br>(.846)   |
| Presidential System       |                 |                    |                 | .176<br>(.722)     | -.534<br>(.492)    | .165<br>(.522)   |
| Left-wing Ideology        |                 |                    |                 | .748<br>(.564)     | .04<br>(.281)      | .2<br>(.31)      |
| Military Officer          |                 |                    |                 | .157<br>(.56)      | .029<br>(.474)     | .032<br>(.513)   |
| Territorial Aim           |                 |                    |                 | 1.618**<br>(.628)  | .341<br>(.352)     | .36<br>(.407)    |
| Territorial Control       |                 |                    |                 | 1.535***<br>(.447) | .391<br>(.336)     | .521<br>(.359)   |
| Alliance Degree           |                 |                    |                 | -.214<br>(.253)    | .132<br>(.076)     | .104<br>(.075)   |
| GTD Fatalities            |                 |                    |                 | .044*<br>(.022)    | .054**<br>(.021)   | .051*<br>(.021)  |
| Group Size                |                 |                    |                 | .032<br>(.285)     | .014<br>(.145)     | .330*<br>(.155)  |
| N                         | 1,016           | 1,016              | 1,016           | 1,016              | 1,016              | 1,016            |
| Log Likelihood            | -1150           | -1150              | -1150           | -1031              | -1031              | -1031            |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p&lt;0.001, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \* p&lt;0.05

In Figure 2, I display the conditional impact of ruling in an anocratic regime by reporting the predicted probabilities of employing violent, non-violent, and mixed strategies as the leader tenure increases. I am solely reporting the predicted probabilities in anocratic regimes as I have null findings in democratic regimes. Accordingly, an increase in leader tenure does not result in any statistical and/or substantive change in the probability of employing various counterinsurgency strategies.

One of the reasons may be that democratic leaders have lesser tenure than anocracies<sup>2</sup>. Focusing back on the anocratic regimes, it is very clear that long-tenured leaders in anocracies are significantly less likely to employ violent counterinsurgency measures. For instance, for newly elected leaders in anocracies, the predicted number of adopting violent activities increases by 59% compared to democracies. The predicted number of violent counterinsurgency measures sharply decreases as leaders' tenure increases in anocracies. For the most experienced leader in anocracies, representing 33 years in office, the predicted number of violent actions decreases by 10%. Thus, in line with Hypothesis 2b, compared to democracies, in anocracies, the shorter the leader's duration in office, the more likely they are to resort to violent activities in the fight against rebels than do nothing.

While the large confident intervals fail to conclude that the anocratic regimes make experienced leaders to embrace non-violent strategies, or the mixed ones more, focusing on the left-hand side of the graphs where the majority of observation is located as reported by the embedded histograms, one can infer that it is more likely to adopt for experienced leaders to adopt non-violent components in their strategies. Lastly, given that the probabilities of employing four different strategies add up to one, I can confidently conclude that another statistically significant outcome to extract from our analysis is that the more experienced a leader is, the more they stay non-responsive in countering the insurgency.

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<sup>2</sup> Comparing the mean tenure time in anocracies (11.1 years) and democracies (5.4 years), I have a meaningful difference in our dataset.

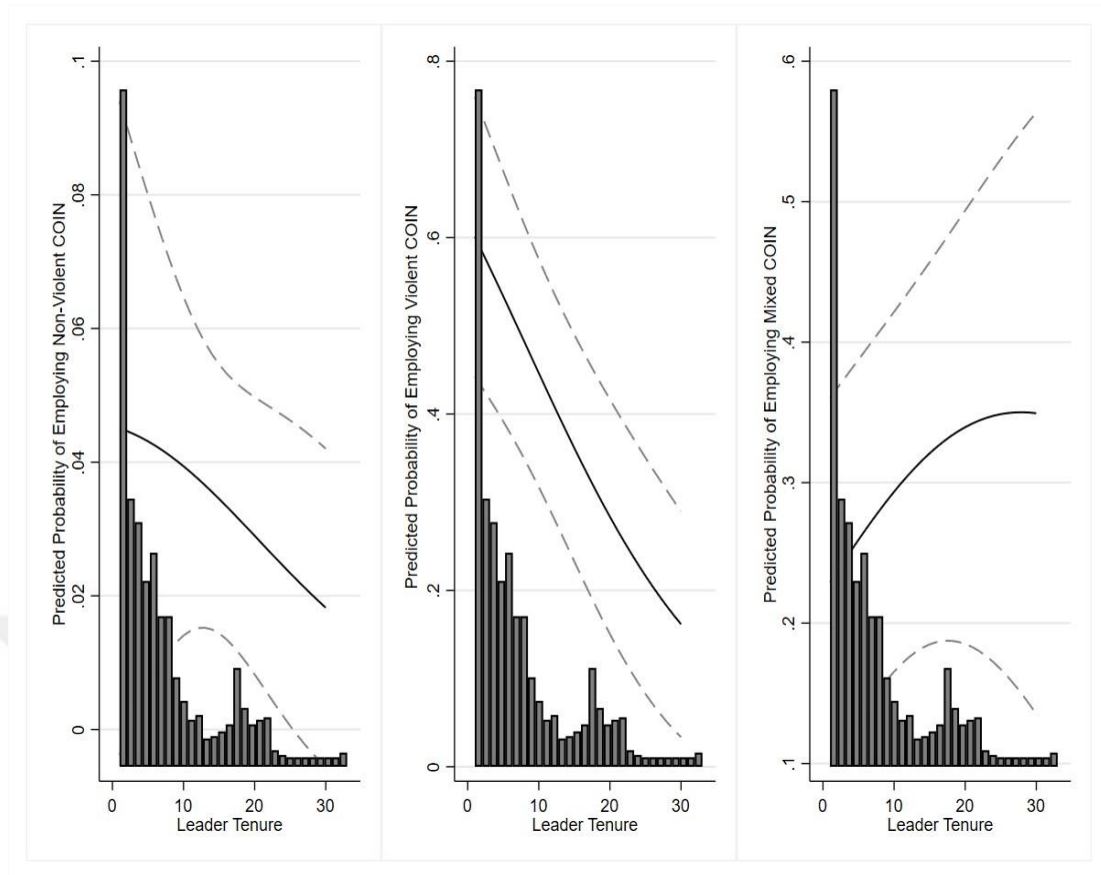


**Figure 2.** Counterinsurgency Strategies in Anocracies

One may claim that the decisions of leaders entering the electoral cycle may change radically, hence, the impact might not be gradual, but binary, instead. Therefore, I also control how incumbents in election year, specifically, are affected in the counterinsurgency policymaking process. I have interacted election year dummy variable with leader tenure in the extended models. Appendix C in the Appendices shows that the main results still hold.

Since the main focus of this study is leaders' tenure, I have also accounted for term limits within the system. As governed by the laws or constitutional provisions, term limits can vary globally, preventing indefinite power and encouraging leadership turnover. If leaders are facing any term limits, whether referred to the end of their

political career or will not be able to participate in future elections, this is expected to be reflected in their policymaking. Since this study is for the purpose of measuring experience, if leaders continue their duties for the second or more terms, tenure is not reset in our dataset. I utilize a binary term limit measure recoding the “Term Limit” variable from the DPI dataset (2020). I coded this variable as 1 if there is no limitation and 0 for all various types of limitations. I rerun the models controlling for term limit, and the result holds. Yet, as I have lost quite a number of observations due to the incompatibilities in merging datasets, I report the results in Appendix D in the Appendices, along with other robustness checks.

Lastly, leader-specific features might impact the counter-insurgency decisions of states. Unfortunately, due to the compatibility problems resulting from time coverage with the existing leader-level dataset, I cannot account for leader background, particularly if they have any military experience. Instead, I rerun all the models, clustering the standard errors around leader IDs. The results hold, as also reported in Appendix E in the Appendices.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The literature on leadership has established that experienced leaders who possess political confidence can make effective policy decisions prioritizing the country’s best interests over politically expedient ones (de Mesquita & Smith, 2010; Henisz & Zelner, 2005; Thyne, 2012). Inexperienced leaders, on the other hand, often feel pressure to prove their credibility, leading them to adopt hawkish policies and potentially overestimating the profit of such policies over alternative approaches (de Mesquita & Smith, 2010; Gelpi & Griesdorf, 2001; Kertzer & Brutger, 2018). Given

the influence of leaders' tenure in policymaking, one can expect counterinsurgency policymaking to be susceptible to leaders' experience in the office. However, there is no systemic cross-national empirical analysis of the possible relation between leader tenure and counterinsurgency. Thus, this study provides the first cross-national empirical analysis of the leadership style behind counterinsurgency efforts.

In this article, I try to close this gap in the literature by examining the connections between the leader tenure and the possibility of employing which of possible counterinsurgency strategies against insurgency organizations. I find empirical evidence that the shorter the leader's tenure, the governments have more incentives to resort to the use of force instead of no response. The longer the leader's experience in office, the more likely they are to adopt counterinsurgency policies with non-violent components. Indeed, the fluctuations in the counterinsurgency strategies adopted by Turkey in its fight against the PKK can be interpreted along those lines. Only after securing a strong support of Turkish public opinion in 2009 General Elections (46.6% of the votes), then Turkish PM Erdogan initiated the "Kurdish Opening Process" and took concrete steps in his third term following 2011 General elections (49.8% of the votes).

However, leader tenure does not affect all types of governments uniformly. The country's regime type also plays a crucial role in the dynamic between tenure and counterinsurgency. In democracies, the leader's tenure does not significantly affect the implementation of violent activities. Compared to democracies, inexperienced leaders in anocracies are incentivized to act tougher against rebels because this is in line with their willingness to prove themselves and remain in office. However, with

leaders gaining experience in anocracies, they become more courageous, not solely relying on violent measures but also embracing non-violent ones.

Overall, I believe this article makes an important contribution to the study of conflict by opening the door to examining the influence of leader-level factors on counterinsurgency more explicitly. The findings uncovered in this study further illustrate the need to move beyond the leader-level analysis in counterinsurgency studies. Indeed, I demonstrate that leaders' experiences vary in their ability to counterinsurgency decision-making. Our findings could also provide policymakers with practical suggestions. Accordingly, considering the theoretical mechanism I propose, in the regional and global fight against insurgency, leaders and policymakers must take their counterparts' experiences and priorities into account in developing a concerted effort. Similarly, in domestic politics, actors of the conflict must be aware of the fact that non-conflict dynamics such as leader tenure and election timing, might indeed determine how and under what circumstances conflict resolution attempts could pay off.

However, it is also important to highlight that this study does have some data limitations that further research could overcome. Accordingly, I use Asal et al.'s (2020) dataset on governments' actions against insurgencies between 1998 and 2012. The temporal scope of this study is, therefore, only fifteen years. Given the length of several conflicts exceeding the scope of the analysis, it is possible that a more extended period may influence how leaders respond to groups.

Lastly, following this line of research, future studies can explore public reactions to leaders' decision-making processes in determining counterinsurgency efforts. As ruling leaders prioritize their tenure in office, garnering public support for critical

decisions, such as counterinsurgency policymaking, becomes paramount. The backing of the public enhances leaders' legitimacy and fosters a sense of trust within society. Without public support, decisions may face increasing disapproval of the leader, lead to discontent and opposition, and even foster instability within society. For this reason, leaders expect their decisions and practices to be internalized by the public, otherwise there will be consequences. Taking this into account, scholars must further examine the role of public preferences in influencing leaders' decision-making regarding counterinsurgency strategies.



## **CHAPTER 3: THE IMPACT OF INSURGENT GROUP REPUTATION ON COUNTERINSURGENCY POLICIES**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The saying “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” underscores the subjective nature of political violence and armed conflict. While often used to highlight differing perceptions of certain actions, this phrase also reveals the complex relationship between armed actors and their constituencies. For example, Boko Haram, a Nigerian fundamentalist group, has gained notoriety for its brutal tactics, such as forcibly recruiting children and committing indiscriminate atrocities against civilians (Zenn, 2014). This reputation has made Boko Haram a symbol of brutality even within its own constituency (Agboga, 2013). Similarly, various rebel groups like the Sudan Liberation Movement in Darfur, the Liberation Front in Ethiopia, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines have been known for their brutality, even towards their own constituents, during prolonged conflicts (Haer et al., 2020).

Yet, violence against civilians is not the only strategy used by insurgents.

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), for instance, employed a distinct approach. Operating in remote rural areas where state presence was limited due to

geographical challenges and hostility from landowners, FARC sought to win the hearts and minds of the local population (Röhl, 2004; Gutiérrez, 2022). FARC aimed to win local support by providing services and assuming state-like roles, establishing a positive reputation and local hegemony. This reinforced the state's legitimacy and demonstrated citizens' best interests lay with the government. Public works in Colombia's rural areas since the mid-20th century were strategies against insurgency, winning civilian support away from armed groups (Voyvodic, 2024). Initially using violence against FARC, the state shifted towards compromise as the cost of nonviolent actions decreased. FARC transitioned into politics, founding a party for socioeconomic reforms (Brittain, 2010), leading to negotiations and concessions (Rochlin, 2011; Sabogal et al., 2019), ultimately resolving conflict in Colombia.

Such comparison among insurgent groups underscores how states strategically assess the unique characteristics and tactics that differentiate these organizations. The conventional argument against employing conciliatory approaches in countering insurgency revolves around the principle that governments should not capitulate to violence, nor should insurgents be rewarded for it. The use of force against violence is an expected state response, as the alternative often proves more costly.

Governments are hesitant to lend legitimacy or establish precedents by making long-term investments, such as allocating budgets and prioritizing spending in riot-affected areas, or by conceding to rebel groups, which may face opposition from specific societal or political segments perceiving such actions as appeasement (Arce & Sandler, 2010; Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2020; de Mesquita, 2005; Powell, 2015). Nevertheless, instances like the FARC conflict challenge this assumption, raising the key question of whether terrorist groups are receptive to conciliatory overtures.

Existing research on government responses to non-violent armed groups primarily delves into how distinct features of terrorist groups shape their relations with governments in terms of tactics, ideology, goals, and recruitment, aiming to identify which terror groups are more durable, successful, or lethal (Arce & Sandler, 2005; Asal et al., 2019, 2020; Byman, 2006; Cunningham, 2011; Masri & Phillips, 2021; Price, 2012; Stewart, 2018). Despite growing theoretical studies on group-level dynamics, the link between group-constituency relations and government reactions remains enigmatic. The aforementioned cases also demonstrate that non-state armed groups employ diverse strategies, some negative, some positive, to sustain recruitment, acquire material desired, or garner publicity (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016). Therefore, I contend that how a group relates to constituency support influences the cost-benefit calculus guiding government responses. This study aims to examine how an insurgent group's reputation among constituency influences governments' decisions to bear the cost and opt for conciliatory counterinsurgency measures over violent responses.

Type of group reputation plays a pivotal role in distinguishing insurgent groups as they adopt positive or negative approaches to secure vital material and moral support from their constituency or target population (Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2018). Insurgent groups with a positive reputation strive to win the hearts and minds of the locals, cultivating voluntary attachments, while those with a negative reputation resort to aggressive measures such as forced recruitment or extortion, sustaining their activities through violence (Tokdemir, 2021). Whether their bond with the constituencies is positive or negative, both types of groups manage to survive.

However, the group's reputation changes the state's approach. Groups with a positive reputation can reduce the possible costs associated with implementing non-violent measures, particularly the potential public backlash. Governments can address legitimacy concerns by internalizing and presenting these rebel groups as representative of their constituents. Another challenge in adopting conciliatory measures is the government's fear that insurgents may exploit any possible commitments without consequences if they sit at the table. However, a group with a positive reputation can demonstrate accountability, leveraging local support as an enforcement mechanism, enabling more flexibility for conciliatory actions.

Governments may also see constituency reforms as effective counterinsurgency strategies because they can weaken a group's support base with minimal concessions and without the reputational risks of direct appeasement.

By using fear-based tactics, groups with negative reputation creates support grounds and devote the group's material and human resources to consolidating support, which can lead to the gradual weakening of the group. This weakening can occur in a variety of ways, including loss of support, member departures, and resource depletion. Governments acting in their own self-interest may, therefore, choose to resort to less costly violent counterinsurgency measures when dealing with groups that have acquired a negative reputation. Why should the state bear the cost in the fight against a group that is currently expected to weaken? Moreover, since the groups rely on extensive use of violence, any possible conciliatory maneuver by the state could provoke strong domestic and international reactions. However, sometimes, groups with negative reputations may be in a strong position to both continue violent recruitment and challenge the state. This can cause the weariness of

conflict and stalemate. In such cases, although a conciliatory attitude is costly, states may have to bear this cost.

To analyze this complex interplay between insurgent reputation and government responses, I utilize two datasets. The first dataset, created by Asal et al. (2020), focuses on governments' counterinsurgency activities against targeted insurgent groups. The second dataset, compiled by Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu in 2016, includes the types of terror group reputation among constituents. As a note, in this research, governments' response to insurgent organizations using terror tactics is examined due to the dataset requirements and operationalization needs of analysis. Moreover, the possible costs of different non-violent counterinsurgency strategies depending on which reputable group states implement against are discussed, but the cost of various conciliatory methods to states is not differentiated in this research. The findings of this study highlight a discernible pattern in government responses. It appears that governments exhibit a heightened responsiveness towards groups with negative reputations within their local constituencies, often resulting in more assertive and forceful reactions.

Conversely, governments demonstrate a tendency towards a more passive approach when dealing with groups that possess a positive reputation. This research underscores the concept that governments may underestimate or downplay the threat posed by terrorist groups that enjoy local credibility while they are prone to confronting, sometimes aggressively, those groups that lack such credibility.

This article contributes to the field in three significant ways. First, it shifts the focus of conflict studies from merely examining the specific characteristics of terrorist groups to exploring the intricate impact of group-constituency dynamics on

counterinsurgency policies. Delving deeper into these dynamics broadens our understanding of how armed groups interact with their local communities, influencing policy outcomes beyond conventional approaches. Second, this study challenges prevailing assumptions in conflict studies by providing rare insights into the conciliatory aspects of conflict resolution, particularly through the lens of group-constituency dynamics. It offers a nuanced perspective that acknowledges the complexities of conflict resolution processes. By doing so, it contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted impacts of group-constituency relations on conflict dynamics.

Lastly, this research provides actionable insights for policymakers grappling with counterinsurgency tactics. It guides decision-makers in identifying which types of non-state armed organizations to engage with, based on their public support, and offers considerations for effectively managing conflicts without compromising legitimacy or damaging reputations. In essence, this study offers a holistic framework to empower policymakers in navigating the complex terrain of counterinsurgency, fostering informed decision-making and sustainable conflict resolution strategies.

The subsequent section of this article delves into the intricate impact of group-level dynamics, exploring how specific characteristics and distinct features of rebel organizations shape incumbents' perceptions and responses. This discourse also introduces a novel aspect within literature by examining the reputation of these organizations and its implications. Furthermore, the article delves into the nuanced relationship that insurgent organizations cultivate with the constituency, theorizing on how group reputation influences their rapport with the state. Subsequently, I

outline our empirical strategy, providing a detailed examination of the theoretical propositions and research methodology. Finally, the discussion section presents the empirical results, summarizes key findings, addresses potential limitations, and elucidates the substantive contributions of this study to the broader field of conflict studies. Through this comprehensive analysis, the article aims to deepen understanding of the complex interplay between armed groups, public perception, and state responses in conflict settings at the mezzo level.

### **3.2 Group-level Dynamics and Counterinsurgency**

In recent years, conflict studies have increasingly recognized the importance of comprehending group-level dynamics. Researchers have focused on potential connections between the characteristics of insurgent groups and government responses, delving into how factors like ideology, size, and the group's lethality shape governmental perceptions and reactions. These inquiries have also prompted questions about how organizational structure, leadership, alliances, regional control, and the presence of safe havens influence government attitudes and strategies (Arce & Sandler, 2005; Asal & Rethemeyer, 2008; Asal et al., 2020; Beck & Miner, 2013; Byman, 2006; Cunningham, 2011; Fortna, 2015; Lee & Tominaga, 2023). This study builds upon previous research that examines group-level dynamics but places particular emphasis on the reputation of non-state armed groups within their constituencies. The role of reputation, critical for the survival of rebels and insurgent organizations, has remained relatively unexplored in shaping counterinsurgency strategies. By addressing this gap, this study aims to provide deeper insights into the

nuanced interactions between non-state armed groups, public perception, and government responses in conflict environments.

Numerous studies in the literature have explored the impact of group characteristics on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency strategies. Beck and Miner (2013) highlight how governments often categorize violent groups with Islamic ideologies or those targeting civilians or aviation assets as rebels, typically prompting military responses. Lee and Tominaga (2023) emphasize that governments frequently label domestic or allied groups as insurgents based on the nature of the group's activities. Horowitz and Potter (2014) argue that forming alliances with stronger groups can significantly enhance a group's lethality, thereby triggering preemptive government actions. Moreover, several other studies examining post-agreement conflict resumption (Walter, 1999; Ishiyama & Batta, 2011) underscore the challenges associated with resolving ethnic conflicts compared to identity-based ones. This body of research collectively enriches our understanding of how various factors within and around insurgent organizations influence government responses and the dynamics of counterinsurgency efforts.

Other scholars suggest that employing violence as a method of agitation can prompt government concessions (Kydd & Walter, 2006). Cunningham et al. (2009) demonstrate that militarily strong terror groups capable of pursuing political alternatives are more likely to initiate negotiations with governments. Cunningham (2011) delves into the role of organizational structure, revealing that divided groups can secure government concessions. Access to looted resources and organizational cohesion also diminish the likelihood of renewed conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 2001; Weinstein, 2005). Another aspect under scrutiny is government concessions, often

explained by the influence of stake value and the relative capabilities of disputing parties (Bartkus 1999; Diehl 1999; Toft 2003). Governments tend to be more inclined to engage in conflicts over valuable territory, whether it is economically, strategically, or psychologically significant while being less eager to confront low-risk, low-cost opponents. The determination of government responses is significantly shaped by stake value and relative capabilities. These findings collectively shed light on the critical role of in-group dynamics in shaping government reactions to violent non-state groups, influencing their choice between violent and non-violent counterinsurgency strategies. This body of research underscores the intricate interplay between group dynamics, government behavior, and conflict outcomes, offering valuable insights into the strategic calculus behind counterinsurgency efforts.

While existing studies are crucial for understanding the internal dynamics of rebel and terrorist groups and potential government responses, the multifaceted nature of conflicts necessitates a more comprehensive perspective. To truly grasp the determination of counterinsurgency measures, one must consider the intricate dynamics between insurgent groups and their constituencies, along with how governments perceive and respond to these relations. For instance, upon examining cases such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Basque Homeland and Freedom (ETA), and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), striking differences in their interactions with opposing states emerge. Despite employing similar methods and strategies, their outcomes diverged significantly. The IRA successfully secured concessions and ended the conflict through a peace agreement following a protracted ceasefire and negotiation period. ETA never received concessions from the state, but Basque did and developed economically and politically with the governments'

winning hearts and minds strategy. Meanwhile, the PKK remains embroiled in a frozen conflict. The pivotal distinguishing factor among these groups lies in their relationships with their constituencies and the effectiveness of their engagement strategies in garnering public support and influencing government responses.

Previous studies have extensively explored the elements that constitute a violent non-state groups' reputation, shedding light on the nature of its relationship with its constituents and the factors influencing why some groups opt for positive reputation-building strategies instead of violence (Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2018; Gunning, 2007; Neumann & Smith, 2005; Stewart & Liou, 2017; Tokdemir, 2021). However, Akcinaroglu and Tokdemir (2020) have taken a distinctive approach by examining how governments implement concession policies to eliminate or weaken terrorist groups. Their research underscores that governments are more likely to provide concessions to the constituencies of stronger terrorist groups with higher levels of local support, in contrast to weaker groups. This nuanced perspective highlights the strategic calculus behind government decisions to engage with and potentially accommodate certain groups based on their perceived influence and constituency backing. However, these findings cannot be generalized because the research addresses a single conciliatory strategy mechanism, namely whether the state gives concessions to a group. However, it should be noted that states may implement several other non-violent efforts as well for certain groups in a given time.

While I agree with the notion that the group-constituency relationship is a critical determinant influencing government appeasement policies, I seek to extend this perspective by examining counterinsurgency policies from a more comprehensive vantage point. This study, therefore, makes a significant contribution to the existing

literature by investigating how a violent non-state group's reputation influences government counterinsurgency policymaking. Specifically, it delves into the selection of one policy over another and the underlying rationales for these choices. The study places particular emphasis on the consequences that arise from the strategic interactions between these groups and the public. By elucidating the intricate dynamics between insurgent organizations, their constituencies, and government responses at the mezzo level, this research seeks to enhance our understanding of the nuanced decision-making processes involved in counterinsurgency efforts. Moreover, it seeks to shed light on the strategic considerations that shape government policies toward violent non-state actors, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive framework for analyzing and addressing insurgency challenges.

### **3.3 Group Reputation and Counterinsurgency**

Insurgent activities incur significant costs, and the viability of these groups hinges on securing essential human and material resources, which may come from external or internal sources. During the Cold War, governments, particularly superpowers, sponsored terrorist and insurgent organizations to expand their influence in rival countries. However, with the decline of superpower motivations, domestic resources, and non-state actors gained greater significance in supporting the survival of violent non-state groups (Byman et al., 2001). Armed non-state organizations heavily reliant on their constituents for resources may adopt distinct strategies to bolster their financial, recruitment, and operational strength. Some opt to build a positive reputation by winning the hearts and minds of their constituency, fostering deep

loyalty and affection among the local population (Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2018). This approach minimizes the group's dependence on violence to obtain necessary resources (Tokdemir, 2021).

Conversely, other terrorist groups may choose to cultivate a negative reputation, using coercion and violence to secure essential resources and support (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016). Ultimately, the strategies that groups employ in their relations with constituents, whether positive or negative, are crucial for ensuring the survival and sustainability of their operations. Nevertheless, the relationship between rebels and their constituencies is also expected to influence whether governments incur costs in responding to these violent organizations. In other words, the reputation of non-state armed groups among their constituents plays a pivotal role in shaping governments' choices between implementing non-violent or violent counterinsurgency strategies.

Rebel groups often rely on voluntary support from their constituents for survival, making a positive reputation essential. They aim to gain support by winning hearts and minds or facilitating representation channels (see Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016). This involves investing in essential public goods like education, food, security, and healthcare, signaling commitment, and aiding recruitment (Berman & Laitin, 2008; Levitt, 2004, 2008). Addressing needs and grievances empowers groups to assume state-like roles, diverting loyalty and gaining grassroots support, thus enhancing legitimacy (Lyons, 2016). Providing such services hinges on territorial control, fostering strong connections, and reducing local resistance. Communities benefiting from these actions build trust, solidarity, and loyalty (Brown, 2020; Dugan et al., 2012).

For instance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka maintained control by offering education and healthcare, attracting voluntary recruits (Frerks, 2023). This illustrates how public goods strengthen group connections and enhance survival prospects. Similarly, the PKK effectively engages Kurdish youth by providing purpose and belonging through ideological indoctrination and promises of social change. This strategy attracts passionate recruits drawn to Kurdish nationalism and social justice, tapping into deep-seated sentiments of Kurdish identity in the region (Gurcan, 2016).

Given the positive reputation of insurgents, it has become difficult for governments to fight against such groups that establish strong mutual ties with their constituency. Hence, governments face a complex dilemma. Incumbents are hesitant to talk with rebel groups as they prioritize their own reputation and are concerned that doing so could inadvertently elevate the insurgents' status. Meanwhile, resorting to military operations in the region risks further solidifying the bond between the insurgents and their supporters. To navigate this challenging situation, states may find it more cost-effective to offer incentives directly to local supporters rather than to the insurgent organization itself. By positioning themselves as protectors and representatives of the constituency, governments demonstrate their commitment to safeguarding their interests, thereby undermining the claims of rebel groups. This approach seeks to shift public support away from the non-state armed organization and towards the government, ultimately weakening the bond between insurgents and their constituents. Thus, addressing the needs and concerns of the local population may emerge as the least costly strategy for states when countering insurgent organizations with positive reputations.

Insurgent and terrorist groups can also strategically establish political wings to bolster their positive reputation, expand legal outreach, and rehabilitate their image tarnished by violent activities (Azani, 2013; Neumann & Smith, 2005; Tokdemir, 2021). These political endeavors are vital for fostering loyalty, enhancing legitimacy, and bolstering grassroots support, thereby replenishing their ranks and sustaining operational capacity. For example, Sinn Féin, the IRA's political arm, mobilized community support through grassroots organizing, provision of social services, and advocacy for Irish nationalism and social equality in Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin also played a critical role in engaging in political negotiations and international lobbying (Whiting, 2016). Insurgent groups with positive reputations leverage media platforms to highlight operations and achievements, emphasizing sacrifices for their communities and cultivating support (Farnen, 2008; Pekgozlu et al., 2007). By utilizing political participation and media strategies aligned with their goals, these groups represent aggrieved citizens and provide alternatives to violence. Hence, violence emerges as the costliest strategy against organizations deeply embedded within the public sphere and enjoying positive reputations.

A positive reputation thus increases the cost of the use of force, while the power of representing locals makes it easier to use non-violent counterinsurgency methods by reducing the cost of commitment dilemmas and legitimacy questions. First of all, leaders typically harbor concerns that insurgents may renege on their commitments without facing consequences, thereby eroding trust and goodwill (Leeds, 1999). The challenge of enforcing agreements becomes particularly acute when governments choose to accommodate rebels, especially when these groups resort to violence that signals their extremist nature, making direct communication more difficult (Abrahams, 2006). Insurgent groups with a positive reputation, however, can address

this challenge by demonstrating accountability to their constituency, where public support functions as a mechanism for enforcement. The broad local support they enjoy signifies the group's organizational credibility, which alleviates government concerns about their dedication to peaceful engagement and can serve as a deterrent against potential spoiler attacks (Ogut-Fu, 2016). Therefore, insurgent and terror organizations with strong local backing can more effectively ensure their commitment to any type of interaction with governments, such as initiating talks, negotiations, or the peace process, aligning with incumbent expectations for compliance.

Governments are also often reluctant to resort to conciliatory measures for fear of legitimizing violence and being rewarded for it and because they are sensitive to the social backlash it may bring (Bapat, 2005; Chellany, 2001; Kirkpatrick, 2018). However, when insurgents have local support, political channels, and media visibility, they gain the ability to represent their community effectively, reducing opposition and thus lowering the costs associated with employing conciliatory strategies by governments. Take the IRA in the United Kingdom or the FARC in Colombia: such groups that managed to establish constructive constituency relations not only ended terror acts but also negotiated with the state and ensured that the demands of the people they represented were largely met. Therefore, I can conclude that insurgent efforts to cultivate a positive reputation may indeed influence incumbent responses. When governments use force against such groups with strong local support, they run the risk of inadvertently bolstering the groups' influence. Thus, a positive reputation prompts incumbents to opt for non-violent approaches. This leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** *Governments are more likely to employ non-violent counterinsurgency measures when dealing with groups that have established positive reputations within their constituencies.*

Rather than attracting constituency support, such as providing public goods, which is a more time-consuming effort, insurgent organizations prefer coercive tactics to quickly obtain the necessary resources, even if it damages their reputation among the locals. These groups prefer to resort to violence to secure recruits funding and consolidate their power. Such tactics include forcibly recruiting children and men, extorting investments, targeting vulnerable populations, and employing excessive force in their operations (Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016). In Afghanistan, for instance, the Taliban employed brutal tactics to secure internal support and recruit locals. These tactics mainly included public executions and forcibly conscripting young men into their ranks, often leveraging tribal and familial ties.

The climate of fear they created allowed them to impose their strict interpretation of Islamic law and control valuable natural resources, which, in turn, funded their activities (Weigand, 2017). Similarly, Boko Haram also generated income through criminal means such as kidnapping and drug smuggling and recruited children in the region forcefully (Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2020). The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) also used brutal methods to increase its power in Sierra Leone, forcibly arming children and men and training them to attack villages (Denov, 2010).

These cases illustrate that rebel groups with negative reputations often resort to force to obtain resources despite alienating their constituencies. While forceful resource acquisition may seem expedient in the short term, it yields limited long-term

benefits. Survival through coercion and fear leads to disunity and indiscipline among recruits, ultimately alienating local populations and eroding ties over time. For example, forced recruitment, though effective in numbers, requires constant monitoring due to low adherence and frequent attempts to escape (Eck, 2015).

Additionally, violent groups acquiring resources through coercion often divert efforts toward member retention and resource protection, resulting in a gradual loss of focus and power over time. Given this weakening bond with constituents and inefficient resource management, governments face a critical question: why invest in costly non-violent counterinsurgency strategies against such groups? Rational actors, like governments, should not bear the costs for such groups whose power and focus are expected to decline due to aggressive tactics and diminishing local support. Thus, when confronting groups with antagonistic public relations, states find military measures more viable, anticipating these actions will further weaken them.

In their efforts to counterinsurgency, governments often resort to portraying insurgents as common criminals, bandits, or even subhuman, a tactic designed to garner broad public support for government actions against these groups (Bapat, 2005; Kirkpatrick, 2018; Rupesinghe & Anderlini, 1998). This labeling tactic serves to solidify public backing for robust, often militarized responses to insurgency, thereby discouraging the consideration of conciliatory measures. However, when insurgents or terror groups possess a positive reputation and are perceived as legitimate representatives of their constituencies, governments may approach them cautiously with non-violent methods to avoid negative public reactions. In contrast, when violent non-state groups have negative reputations and rely on fear and

violence for survival, governments may eventually face pressure to delegitimize them both domestically and internationally.

Since groups with negative reputation are more easily labeled adversely and perspectives are formed within this framework of labeling, applying non-violent methods in the fight against such groups is costly because the probability of encountering opposition is high. Consequently, rather than risking public disapproval by pursuing conciliatory approaches against terror tactics, governments may opt for military strategies and strategically harness public sentiments to their advantage. This intricate interplay underscores the nuanced dynamics between government responses, public perceptions, and the reputational status of terrorist organizations, highlighting the complexities inherent in counterterrorism strategies. Therefore, I propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2a:** *Governments are more likely to employ violent counterinsurgency measures when dealing with groups that have established negative reputations within their constituencies.*

Alternatively, states occasionally find themselves compelled to bear the costs associated with implementing non-violent strategies, even when dealing with groups that have negative reputations. Despite the challenges posed by insurgent groups with negative reputations, which may sustain violent recruitment and pose significant challenges to state authority, governments may opt for conciliatory measures as a means of navigating protracted conflicts. These measures can include initiatives

aimed at winning hearts and minds, offering concessions, or initiating negotiations, particularly when insurgent groups hold considerable sway over both the population and military balances. In protracted conflicts, a critical question emerges regarding when and how the cycle of violence can be halted. Prolonged conflicts tend to exhaust the resources of both rebels and governments (Zartman, 2001), leading to war-weariness on both sides. This weariness fosters a growing willingness to explore non-violent resolutions. Governments, recognizing the diminishing returns of sustained violence and the potential for encountering even more formidable adversaries in the future (Fearon, 1995), may increasingly lean towards non-violent alternatives as pragmatic solutions to protracted conflicts. Building on this discussion, I posit the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2b:** *Governments are more likely to employ non-violent counterinsurgency measures when dealing with groups that have established negative reputations within their constituencies.*

### **3.4 Research Design**

To examine hypotheses regarding the impact of whether groups have a positive or negative reputation on determining counterinsurgency strategies, I utilized two primary datasets. Firstly, I use Asal et al.'s (2020) comprehensive counterinsurgency datasets, which encompass data on 49 governments' strategic responses to 140 targeted insurgent organizations over a 15-year period. Additionally, I incorporated the Reputation of Terror Group (RTG) dataset, which includes information on 443

terror groups operating in 90 different countries over a span of 31 years. The resulting dataset is, however, limited in scope, focusing on the counterinsurgency strategies employed by 35 countries in their interactions with 67 active rebels during the time frame between 1998 and 2011. The unit of analysis in this study is the conflict-year, and the dataset comprises a total of 459 observations.

**Dependent Variables:** The dependent variables in this study are derived from Asal et al.'s (2020) counterinsurgency dataset, which categorizes government responses to rebels into three main types: non-violent (carrot), violent (stick), and mixed activities. Non-violent state actions encompass a range of peaceful measures, such as peace talks, negotiations, ceasefires, concessions, or any positive attempt to concede to violent non-state groups. On the other hand, violent measures include police work, investigations, arrests, and military actions. In cases where both types of responses are simultaneously used within a single year, they are coded as a mixed strategy for that year. While the scholars' dataset represents these variables in a binary fashion, this study focuses on examining the strategic usage of counterinsurgency measures and thus generates a categorical variable. Specifically, I have coded 1 if a leader only employs non-violent, 2 if only violent, and 3 if both, in other words, mixed strategy. If none of these strategies are employed, then we code it 0, which represents staying non-responsive against the terrorist group. In Table 5, it is evident that among the 35 countries included in the dataset, approximately 2% employed exclusively non-violent strategies, 63% predominantly relied on violent activities, 25% employed both non-violent and violent methods simultaneously, and 10% opted for a non-responsive approach, refraining from engaging with the insurgency.

**Independent Variables:** For assessing the positive and negative constituency reputation of rebels, two independent variables were drawn from the Reputation of Terror Group (RTG) dataset. This dataset initially identifies the constituents of each terror group and then encodes three positive and three negative group activities related to these constituents, thereby forming the basis for the positive and negative reputation variables. Positive actions undertaken by terror groups are generally aimed at bolstering their overall reputation, whereas negative actions tend to diminish public support. It is necessary to underline an important point here: while Asal et al.'s dataset includes rebel groups, whether they use terror tactics or not, RTG's dataset specifically includes violent non-state groups that use terror tactics. For this reason, as part of the operationalization of the research, the study focused on the reputation of rebel groups using terrorism as their strategy to challenge targeted governments. To construct these reputation variables, Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu (2016) utilized a factor analysis approach, grouping common indicators and variables together to explain each dimension of group reputation. Therefore, public goods provision, media influence, and the establishment of political affiliations emerged as factors correlated with a positive reputation. In contrast, factors related to forced funding, forced recruitment, and child recruitment were associated with a negative reputation. These two reputation variables are presented on an ordinal scale, ranging from 0 to 3, indicating the level of positive or negative constituency reputation attributed to each rebel group.

**Control Variables:** Several control variables have been integrated into the models to account for potential influences on government responses to insurgent organizations. At the group level, the degree of territorial control was considered, recognizing that

how rebels attempt to govern territories can significantly affect government reactions. Distinctions between foreign and domestic groups were also considered, as these can influence the treatment and legitimacy-building efforts of such groups (Stewart, 2018; Stewart & Liou, 2017). Furthermore, group ideology was considered, encompassing three variables for ethnic, religious, and leftist ideologies, recognizing that these categories are not mutually exclusive.

Larger rebel groups often possess a greater number of supporters, increased recruitment capacity, and a broader sphere of influence, which can lead to varied government responses (Johnston, 2008). To account for variations in the size of terror groups, group size was integrated as a control variable, categorically organized into four distinct groups. Specifically, groups with fewer than 100 members were coded as 1, those ranging from 100 to 999 members were assigned a code of 2, groups with a membership between 1,000 and 9,999 were designated as 3, and those comprising more than 10,000 members were coded as 4.

Insurgents' alliances within a given year with other insurgent groups were also considered, as having relationships with more groups can make them more lethal, innovative, resourceful, and long-lived (Phillips, 2018). Another control variable related to the group's organizational structure was included to determine whether the group's leadership structure was hierarchical. A hierarchical structure, where multiple leaders have a chain of command with the top leader having the final say, can influence government responses due to its role in maintaining internal discipline, member control, and recruitment tactics (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2006). These control variables were sourced from the BAAD II dataset (2018).

The intensity of the conflict was also accounted for in the analysis. This was achieved through control variables such as the number of fatalities caused by the rebel group in a single year, which was obtained from the Global Terrorism Database (2022). The age of the group was also considered, recognizing its role in reputation building and state sponsorship, as older groups tend to invest more in these aspects (Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2018). Additionally, a competition variable was included to address the influence of competing groups, as it can impact the available resources and strategies employed by different groups for survival (Young & Dugan, 2014). This competition variable reflects the number of terror groups active in the specific country where the group operates and is sourced from the GTD.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics

| Variable            | Obs | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Min    | Max    |
|---------------------|-----|--------|-----------|--------|--------|
| Non-Violent         | 459 | .017   | .131      | 0      | 1      |
| Violent             | 459 | .63    | .483      | 0      | 1      |
| Mixed               | 459 | .257   | .438      | 0      | 1      |
| No Response         | 459 | .096   | .295      | 0      | 1      |
| Positive Reputation | 459 | 1.697  | .994      | 0      | 3      |
| Negative Reputation | 459 | 2.179  | .908      | 0      | 3      |
| Territorial Control | 459 | .32    | .467      | 0      | 1      |
| Alliance Degree     | 459 | 1.157  | 1.573     | 0      | 7      |
| Fatalities          | 459 | 62.253 | 138.208   | 0      | 840    |
| Group Age           | 459 | 18.647 | 13.319    | 0      | 58     |
| Competition         | 459 | 6.002  | 6.408     | 1      | 24     |
| Group Size          | 459 | 2.71   | .703      | 1      | 4      |
| Leader Hierarchy    | 459 | .81    | .392      | 0      | 1      |
| Religious           | 459 | .368   | .483      | 0      | 1      |
| Ethnic              | 459 | .614   | .487      | 0      | 1      |
| Leftist             | 459 | .303   | .46       | 0      | 1      |
| Population (log)    | 459 | 17.879 | 1.786     | 13.315 | 20.947 |
| GDP (log)           | 459 | 7.027  | 1.078     | 4.151  | 10.791 |
| PolityIV            | 437 | 5.24   | 5.144     | -8     | 10     |

To capture state-level factors that may influence government responses, state-level control variables were introduced. These include the countries' polity score from

Polity IV (2018). As a note, cases of foreign interruption, interregnum, and transition were taken as missing.

Furthermore, I also added the country's logged GDP per capita and logged population from World Bank Datasets, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that may shape government responses to insurgent organizations that use terror tactics. These control variables collectively help to refine and enhance the analysis by considering a wide range of factors that can influence the implementation of counterinsurgency strategies.

### **3.5 Results**

This study employed a multinomial logistic regression to investigate how the reputation of rebel groups among their constituency influences the specific responses adopted by governments. As previously discussed, the primary hypothesis centers on the impact of the direction of a group's popularity on the government's inclination to opt for non-violent measures over violent ones. To facilitate this analysis, a categorical variable encompassing four response categories was utilized, with no response as the base category. The study presents results in both naïve models and full models, which include an array of control variables to account for various factors that might influence government responses. Each figure is based on the full models, which provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between the variables.

The final two models in the analysis focus on whether government response exclusively involves either violent actions or non-violent actions in a given year, respectively. It's also important to note that robust standard errors have been clustered in each model by the government-group dyad since the observations are not

independent; they are intertwined with the government's interactions with different rebel groups within a given year.

In a full model in Table 6, the coefficient for having a positive reputation influence on the employment of non-violent counterinsurgency is positive and significant. If there were enough observations about the non-violent practices in the dataset, it could be said that Hypothesis 1 has merit. As mentioned before, non-violent measures take up 2% of all other counterinsurgency strategies in this dataset. This scarcity of observations prompts us to explore alternative research methods to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play.

One logical approach within the confines of the dataset is to reclassify the variable as mixed. This entails creating a new categorical variable in which the implementation of mixed and non-violent measures is coded as 1, only violent measures as 2, and no response as 0. By doing so, I generate variables that provide insights into the strategies that exclusively involve either violent actions or non-violent actions. This alternative approach will be further examined in Table 7, offering a more nuanced perspective on the factors influencing government responses to insurgency.

In both naïve and full models presented in Table 6, the coefficient for having a negative constituency reputation has a positive and significant impact on the employment of non-violent, violent, and mixed measures when compared to the base category of no response. This unexpected finding suggests that governments are more inclined to respond to insurgent groups with negative reputations, whereas they tend to remain unresponsive to groups with positive popularity. To delve deeper into this intriguing scenario, a new dummy variable was created, coding governments'

non-responsiveness as 0 and responses, including non-violent, violent, and mixed activities, as 1.

**Table 6.** Multinomial Logistic Regression Result

| Variables           | Model 1         |                  |                   | Model 2              |                  |                   |
|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------------|
|                     | Non-Violent     | Violent          | Mixed             | Non-Violent          | Violent          | Mixed             |
| Positive Reputation | .163<br>(.479)  | -.224<br>(.317)  | -.088<br>(.320)   | 2.89**<br>(1.03)     | -.036<br>(.442)  | .126<br>(.454)    |
| Negative Reputation | 1.19*<br>(.534) | .642**<br>(.215) | 1.03***<br>(.266) | 3.75*<br>(1.628)     | .77**<br>(.276)  | .89**<br>(.280)   |
| Territorial Control |                 |                  |                   | 3.012*<br>(1.516)    | 1.823<br>(1.182) | 2.808*<br>(1.146) |
| Alliance Degree     |                 |                  |                   | -.307<br>(1.033)     | .647<br>(.405)   | .820*<br>(.375)   |
| Fatalities          |                 |                  |                   | -.026<br>(.015)      | .004<br>(.006)   | .001<br>(.006)    |
| Group Age           |                 |                  |                   | .033<br>(.067)       | .018<br>(.031)   | .001<br>(.032)    |
| Competition         |                 |                  |                   | -.188<br>(.470)      | .025<br>(.05)    | .061<br>(.058)    |
| Group Size          |                 |                  |                   | 1.574*<br>(.728)     | .158<br>(.477)   | .891<br>(.591)    |
| Leader Hierarchy    |                 |                  |                   | 1.725<br>(1.650)     | 1.108<br>(.747)  | 1.850*<br>(.859)  |
| Religious           |                 |                  |                   | 1.600<br>(1.675)     | -.956<br>(.953)  | -.595<br>(.882)   |
| Ethnic              |                 |                  |                   | -4.868<br>(2.949)    | .044<br>(.716)   | .523<br>(.752)    |
| Leftist             |                 |                  |                   | -21.15***<br>(4.768) | -1.385<br>(.963) | -.820<br>(.940)   |
| Population (log)    |                 |                  |                   | .075<br>(.442)       | .039<br>(.222)   | .065<br>(.22)     |
| GDP (log)           |                 |                  |                   | 1.324<br>(.816)      | .402<br>(.276)   | .138<br>(.331)    |
| PolityIV            |                 |                  |                   | -.478*<br>(.21)      | -.177*<br>(.08)  | -.152<br>(.089)   |
| N                   | 459             | 459              | 459               | 437                  | 437              | 437               |
| Log Likelihood      | -412.9          | -412.9           | -412.9            | -327.7               | -327.7           | -327.7            |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Subsequently, logistic regression was employed to estimate the influence of group reputation on governments' overall responsiveness to certain rebel groups. In both models presented in Table 7, the coefficient for having a negative reputation demonstrates a positive and significant impact on governments' responsiveness to terror. Model 2, which accounts for control variables, not only confirms these results but also amplifies this substantive impact. Especially, the governments' polity scores

in a given year exhibit a negative and statistically significant influence. This raises another pivotal question: if governments tend to be more responsive to groups with negative reputation, what type of response do they opt for?

**Table 7.** Logistic Regression Result

| Variables           | Model 1          | Model 2          |
|---------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                     | Response         |                  |
| Positive Reputation | -.187<br>(.308)  | .0083<br>(.422)  |
| Negative Reputation | .74***<br>(.206) | .83**<br>(.268)  |
| Territorial Control |                  | 2.081<br>(1.134) |
| Alliance Degree     |                  | .685<br>(.0391)  |
| Fatalities          |                  | .003<br>(.005)   |
| Group Age           |                  | .014<br>(.03)    |
| Competition         |                  | .034<br>(.049)   |
| Group Size          |                  | .322<br>(.467)   |
| Leader Hierarchy    |                  | 1.297<br>(.731)  |
| Religious           |                  | -.830<br>(.890)  |
| Ethnic              |                  | .175<br>(.674)   |
| Leftist             |                  | -1.23<br>(.928)  |
| Population (log)    |                  | .049<br>(.210)   |
| GDP (log)           |                  | .362<br>(.273)   |
| PolityIV            |                  | -.179*<br>(.081) |
| N                   | 459              | 437              |
| Log Likelihood      | -133.9           | -96.28           |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

As previously mentioned, a categorical variable was generated by combining the mixed and non-violent actions, named as non-violent deeds. This variable is designed to represent categories that encompass no response as a base category, the adoption of non-violent deeds, and the exclusive use of violent activities in a given year. In this way, it can be examined how governments tend to address insurgent

organizations to which they are responsive. Both models presented in Table 4 reveal that when the base category is no response, the coefficient for having a negative reputation exhibits a positive and significant impact on the propensity of governments to employ both non-violent and violent deeds.

Furthermore, Table 8 highlights once again that governments are more inclined to refrain from responding to groups with positive reputations. To offer a deeper understanding of these substantive effects on incumbents' policy preferences, Figures 3 and Figure 4 illustrate the percentage change in the predicted number of three potential government actions as the negative reputation of the group varies within the range from 0 to 3.

**Table 8.** Multinomial Logistic Regression Result

| Variables           | Model 1            |                  | Model 2           |                  |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------|
|                     | Non-Violent Deeds  | Violent Deeds    | Non-Violent Deeds | Violent Deeds    |
| Positive Reputation | -.072<br>(.317)    | -.224<br>(.316)  | .196<br>(.452)    | -.044<br>(.443)  |
| Negative Reputation | 1.036***<br>(.259) | .642**<br>(.216) | .916***<br>(.278) | .765**<br>(.278) |
| Territorial Control |                    |                  | 2.825*<br>(1.116) | 1.827<br>(1.175) |
| Alliance Degree     |                    |                  | .812*<br>(.379)   | .653<br>(.405)   |
| Fatalities          |                    |                  | -8.12<br>(.006)   | .004<br>(.006)   |
| Group Age           |                    |                  | .001<br>(.032)    | .018<br>(.031)   |
| Competition         |                    |                  | .061<br>(.058)    | .024<br>(.049)   |
| Group Size          |                    |                  | .881<br>(.584)    | .153<br>(.473)   |
| Leader Hierarchy    |                    |                  | 1.920*<br>(.860)  | 1.100<br>(.748)  |
| Religious           |                    |                  | -.529<br>(.882)   | -.955<br>(.957)  |
| Ethnic              |                    |                  | .431<br>(.748)    | .057<br>(.718)   |
| Leftist             |                    |                  | -.940<br>(.932)   | -1.365<br>(.961) |
| Population (log)    |                    |                  | .064<br>(.219)    | .0043<br>(.221)  |
| GDP (log)           |                    |                  | .165<br>(.326)    | .400<br>(.274)   |
| PolityIV            |                    |                  | -.163<br>(.088)   | -.178*<br>(.081) |
| N                   | 459                | 459              | 437               | 437              |
| Log Likelihood      | -383.4             | -383.4           | -314.0            | -314.0           |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Figures 3 and 4, therefore, depict the changes in the predicted number of governments' three counterinsurgency responses across different levels of negative reputation held by rebel groups. In Figure 3, even though the relatively large confidence intervals prevent us from definitively concluding that there is a significant relationship between government non-responsiveness and negative reputation, the direction of the solid black line offers valuable insights. It suggests that as the negative reputation of groups increases from 0 to 3, governments are more inclined to respond to rebels that use terror tactics. This interpretation aligns with previous findings, indicating a potentially nuanced relationship between group reputation and government responses.

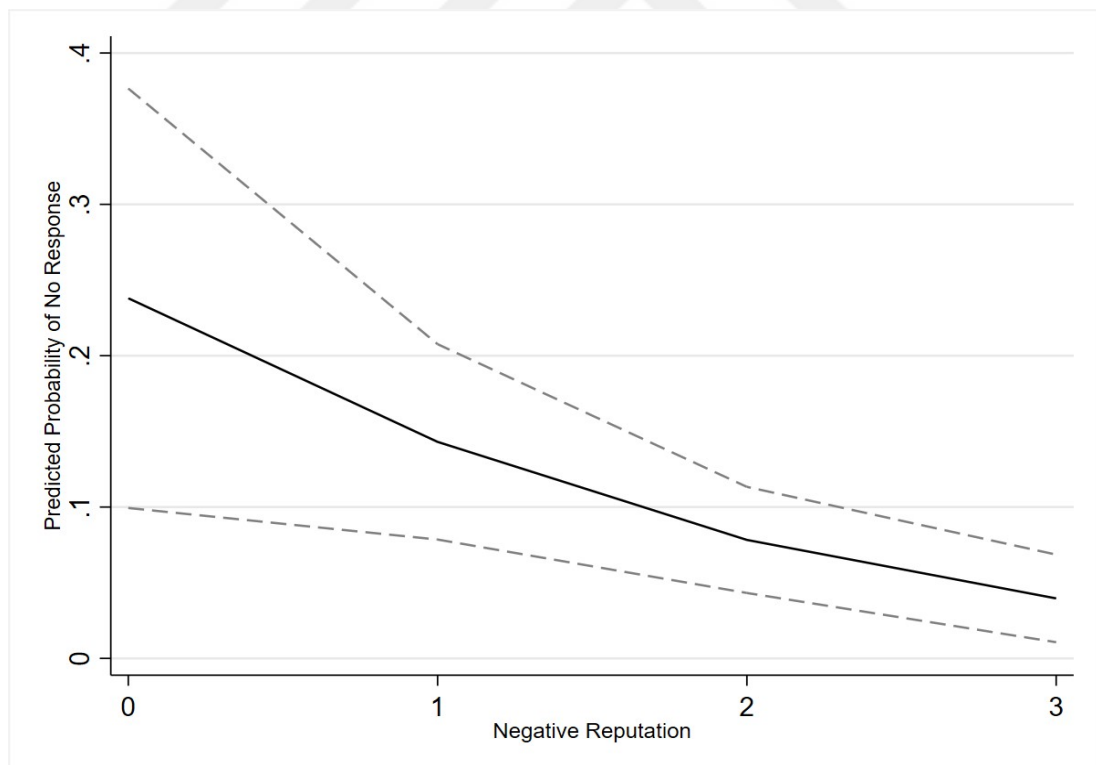


**Figure 3.** Negative Constituency Reputation and Non-Responsiveness

When considering the employment of non-violent and violent responses, Figure 4 provides insights into how these strategies are affected as non-state armed groups acquire a more negative reputation. A closer examination of the figure reveals that the increase in the use of these response types differs between the two strategies. Figure 4 indicates that as a rebel groups' negative reputation escalates from the minimum to the maximum, the predicted probability of employing non-violent counterinsurgency strategy nearly doubles. For instance, when a groups' negative reputation is at its lowest level, the predicted number of adopting non-violent strategies increases by 18%, reaching 30% at the highest level of negative reputation. In contrast, a negative reputation makes governments more likely to resort to solid violent measures in a given year when the baseline is no response.

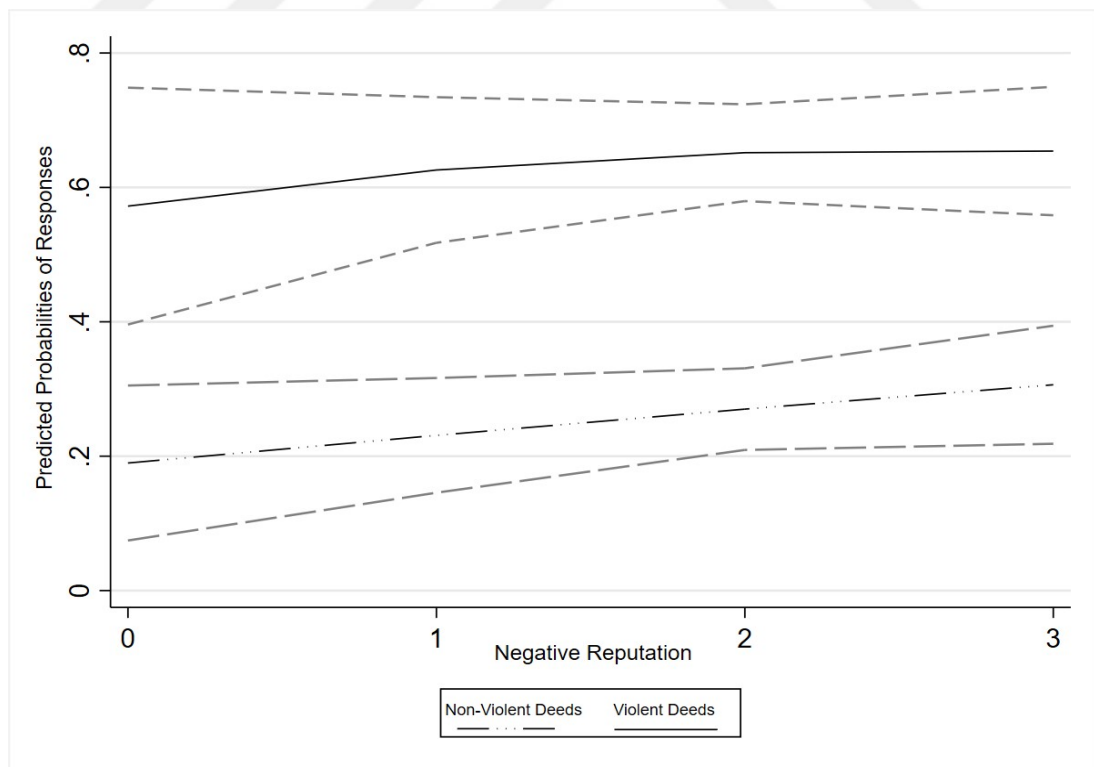


**Figure 4.** Negative Constituency Reputation and Direction of Responsiveness

More specifically, Figure 4 demonstrates that when terrorist groups' negative reputation is at its minimum level, the predicted number of exclusively adopting violent measures increases by 57%. However, when the negative reputation reaches its maximum, this number only increases by 6%. Overall, the disparities between government preferences for employing non-violent and violent responses underscore that, in accordance with Hypothesis 2a, governments are more inclined to employ violent counterinsurgency measures when dealing with groups that have established negative reputations within their constituencies.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Terrorism is an important tactic for many non-state actors, including rebels, but by implementing this tactic, groups must survive to achieve their political goals. For this, the group needs human and material resources, and these must mostly be provided from constituencies. Hence, insurgent groups employ positive or negative reputation building strategies to obtain their needs, resources, and support from their target audience. Various studies have explored groups' reputation-building strategies and the factors influencing why some groups opt for positive approaches (Akcinaroğlu & Tokdemir, 2018; Stewart and Liou, 2018; Tokdemir & Akcinaroglu, 2016). Other studies have delved into the implementation of concession policies by governments to weaken or eliminate terror groups' reputation (Akcinaroglu & Tokdemir, 2020). While acknowledging the importance of group-public relations in shaping appeasement policies such as concessions, this study argues that focusing on a single policy cannot provide generalization in understanding the impact of mezzo-

level factors on states' decision-making on counterterrorism policies. Although concession is a costly option for states, and its implementation is directly proportional to the prestige of the group, there are a variety of other non-violent strategies that states may or may not choose to undertake. Thus, this research aims to provide a more comprehensive explanation by considering all the costly strategies and military activities implemented by states in a given year.

The findings of this study indicate that governments are responsive to insurgents with negative reputation. In this regard, it is crucial to discern the direction of government responses. Notably, the analysis reveals that governments are more likely to employ violent counterinsurgency measures rather than bearing the cost of conciliatory actions when addressing groups with negative reputations. This preference reflects the perceived effectiveness of military force in addressing groups that have alienated their constituencies through violence. When insurgent groups fail to cultivate positive relations with their support base, incumbents hesitate to bear the cost of engaging in any possible non-violent measures, such as winning hearts and minds, engaging in political negotiations, or providing concessions that could facilitate the achievement of the organization's political goals. This highlights the perceived costs and risks associated with engaging in non-violent measures, including potential challenges in legitimizing violent actors through political engagement and the difficulty of garnering public support for conciliatory actions in the absence of positive relations with the constituency. Indeed, the Nigerian military and police forces, along with neighboring state forces in the region, ongoing struggle with brutal Boko Haram can be interpreted along those lines.

It is expected that the positive bond established between groups and the public strengthens the state's control in the region and provides the group with representation rights, thus reducing the cost of non-violent strategies and making them more attractive to states. Unexpectedly, the findings reveal that the governments tend to remain silent against insurgent groups with positive reputation. It was already expected that states would not use force on groups that create a positive impact.

However, according to the results of this research, states also do not apply conciliatory methods and choose not to respond to the group. Therefore, it is concluded that a good reputation is not enough for the group to obtain concessions, direct state interest to locals, or sit at the table to achieve its political goals. Even though the state does not use its military power, it does not open channels that will lead its rebels to their goals. This shows that, although the group has representative power and state-like functioning, states prioritize whether the group uses terrorism as a strategy. No matter how well the rebel group treats its supporters, as soon as it detonates bombs in the capital of the state, all channels are closed to the group. This is also the reason for many frozen conflicts and is one of the answers to why terrorism does not work.

Overall, this research constitutes a substantial contribution to conflict studies by providing a nuanced examination of the impact of group-level dynamics on counterinsurgency strategies. The findings underscore the imperative to transcend conventional mezzo-level analyses in counterinsurgency studies, advocating for a more comprehensive approach. Central to this research is the elucidation of how the symbiotic relationship between insurgents and the public shapes state responses to

insurgency suppression. Notably, the study highlights the persistence of violent strategies as a viable option for governments in combating terrorist groups with negative reputations, particularly when grievances remain unaddressed and public support is lacking. Conversely, efforts to cultivate a positive reputation may not yield substantial shifts in government perceptions, revealing complexities in the efficacy of such endeavors.

Consequently, policymakers are urged to judiciously assess the costs associated with non-violent approaches toward groups that exhibit ruthlessness toward civilians. Moreover, it is emphasized that gestures of goodwill by these groups should not be misconstrued as indicators of benign intent, as terrorism remains unequivocally reprehensible. This comprehensive analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of counterinsurgency efforts and offers strategic insights for navigating the intricate dynamics between states, insurgents, and civilian populations in conflict settings.

## **CHAPTER 4: COUNTERINSURGENCY DECISION-MAKING IN POLARIZED COUNTRIES**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In Colombia, a protracted conflict spanning decades witnessed President Alvaro Uribe Velez's steadfast commitment to eradicating the FARC through military means, fostering and consolidating an affectively charged and already polarized society. President Juan Manuel Santos later shifted to seeking conciliation through concessions and negotiations, further deepening political divisions. President Juan Manuel Santos of Colombia faced significant backlash from the public for his dual approach to advancing infrastructure projects and initiating peace negotiations. The River Amoyá dam project, which he declared in 2013 "had been built through fire and blood" against the FARC, symbolized the state's perseverance in conflict zones (see Voyvodic, 2024). While this project aimed to demonstrate government effectiveness and resilience, it also highlighted the ongoing struggles and violence associated with such undertakings.

Simultaneously, Santos' efforts to negotiate peace with the FARC, culminating in the 2016 peace agreement, exposed deep ideological divisions within Colombian society. The initial rejection of the peace agreement in a referendum underscored the

polarized views among the populace. Many Colombians viewed the negotiations as overly conciliatory, believing that the FARC should be dealt with more harshly rather than being given political concessions. This perception of leniency sparked resistance among those who felt justice was being compromised.

This case unveils the intricate interplay between political polarization and decision-making processes, often making conciliatory actions politically costly and reinforcing existing rifts. Polarization profoundly shapes the perception and impact of peace initiatives, often making conciliatory actions politically costly and reinforcing societal divisions. At its core, polarization entails grouping individuals by similar attributes while distinctly separating different clusters (Esteban & Ray, 1994). In political terms, it occurs when societal attitudes toward issues, policies, and politicians align strictly along partisan lines. This leads to heightened support for one's political camp and perceiving the opposition as a threat to their way of life (Hahm et al., 2022; Iyengar et al., 2019). The political polarization, therefore, can be understood as supporting the leader while marginalizing the opposition.

Several studies indicate that the high level of polarization within societies significantly influences incumbents' priorities and policy formulation, particularly concerning security issues (see Foa & Mounk, 2016; Reiljan et al., 2023; Roberts, 2021; Somer & McCoy, 2018; Wagner, 2021). In polarized environments, political leaders tend to prioritize ideological consistency to appease their base, often resulting in extreme policy positions that exacerbate legislative gridlock and create policy inconsistency (Gerber & Schickler, 2016). This drive for ideological purity is frequently motivated by the necessity to maintain support from a deeply divided electorate, where deviations from partisan lines are seen as betrayals, further

entrenching partisan divides. Leaders are more likely to respond to polarized public opinion by tailoring their communication strategies and policy priorities to align closely with partisan sentiments, which can intensify societal divisions. This dynamic often leads to a political climate where consensus-building becomes exceedingly difficult (Layman et al., 2006). The entrenched ideological stances foster an environment where compromise is viewed with suspicion, if not outright hostility, making governance more complex and less effective, in line with the Colombian case.

Moreover, polarization can impede the implementation of policies that address the diverse needs of the population. The focus on appeasing a specific base can result in neglecting broader, more inclusive policy measures that would benefit the entire society. Instead, policies may cater to the more extreme elements of the political spectrum, marginalizing moderate and opposing views (Koch and Cranmer, 2007; Palmer et al., 2004; Piazza, 2023). Consequently, this environment hinders legislative progress and weakens democratic institutions, ultimately exacerbating public disillusionment and increasing social unrest.

In this study, therefore, I argue that societal polarization can significantly shape states' counterinsurgency policies. The concept of polarization here pertains to the extent of public support or lack thereof for leaders due to partisan and affective ties. Therefore, the primary focus of this research is to examine the potential impacts of affective polarization. Affective polarization fosters in-group and out-group divisions through processes such as demonization, dehumanization, and othering. These dynamics can potentially make the use of violence more acceptable among polarized individuals (see Piazza, 2023). Moreover, as political polarization increases out-

group hostility, it simultaneously facilitates the collective mobilization necessary for organized political violence while creating barriers to intergroup reconciliation (Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008; Kingzette et al., 2021). Therefore, it is expected that incumbents will adopt appealing policies to consolidate polarized individuals around them and ensure their political survival. In such contexts, the cost of implementing extreme and military strategies against insurgents decreases for leaders. However, the implementation of non-violent policies toward marginalized and targeted insurgents is costly.

Conversely, reduced levels of polarization provide states with greater flexibility in policy formulation, thereby lowering the cost of adopting non-violent policies. Leaders may perceive fewer constraints from entrenched ideological and affective positions (Torenvield & Haarhuis, 2008), allowing them to explore a broader range of alternative approaches without facing severe opposition or repercussions from a deeply divided political environment. Alternatively, in polarized nations, the trust and loyalty towards the leader may lead to public compliance with non-violent measures, as the populace may support whatever the leader advocates.

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of how the level of polarization in countries influences the implementation of security policies, this research draws upon two primary datasets. First, I utilized Asal et al.'s (2020) counterinsurgency dataset to examine countries' annual counterinsurgency activities against the rebel groups they confront. This dataset stands as the sole available source enabling the analysis of counterinsurgency measures across both temporal and geographical dimensions. Second, the Varieties of Democracy (V-DEM) Dataset is employed, which measures societal divisions into hostile political factions. The findings of this research affirm

that societal attitudes can indeed shape governmental behavior. It reveals that as affective polarization levels increase, governments become more ready to resort to force against insurgent groups instead of embracing non-violent approaches.

The contribution of this study is threefold. Firstly, while several studies have analyzed the impact of polarization on policy preferences, this research represents a rare attempt to examine the influence of societal-level dynamics on the implementation of counterinsurgency measures at the micro level. Secondly, this study transcends the traditional two-dimensional perspective of conflict studies, which often focus solely on government and rebel activities, by incorporating an analysis of societal influence on government responses. By doing so, it introduces the possibility of a third dimension in conflict analysis, thereby expanding the scope of inquiry and providing a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play in counterinsurgency efforts.

Lastly, this research serves as a practical tool for policymakers tasked with implementing counterterrorism actions. By providing a roadmap and foresight on appropriate counter actions based on the political environment and levels of polarization in the public, the study offers valuable guidance for decision-makers navigating the complexities of national security strategies. It enables leaders to implement effective strategies depending on the structure of the society they govern. This aspect underscores the practical relevance and applicability of the research findings in informing policy decisions and enhancing the effectiveness of counterinsurgency efforts.

In the remainder of this study, I will provide a concise overview of the key focal points in existing research on the phenomenon of polarization and discuss why the

focus should be on affective polarization. Additionally, I will delve into the potential ramifications of polarization on policymaking processes. Moreover, I will adopt a more targeted approach to scrutinize how polarization is addressed within the realm of conflict studies, elucidating any inherent limitations in current conceptualizations. Subsequently, I will explore the conceivable impacts of polarization, delineated as proximity to the leadership, on security policies, with a particular emphasis on counterinsurgency measures, and posit hypotheses accordingly. Finally, I will explain the findings, including a discourse on their implications for governmental policy formulation, and provide a roadmap for prospective research endeavors in this domain.

#### **4.2 Polarization Phenomenon, Decision-Making and Conflict Dynamics**

In one of his seminal works, Sartori (1976) defines political polarization as the ideological distance between candidates, parties, representatives, and voters. As this distance expands, political perspectives shift away from the center toward ideological extremes (Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008; DiMaggio et al., 1996). While this definition provides a comprehensive understanding of polarization, the phenomenon is often analyzed through theoretically and conceptually distinct lenses. Prior literature typically differentiates between ideological (mass) polarization and affective polarization. Mass polarization occurs when voters' attitudes toward political issues, policies, public figures, or other citizens become starkly divided along party lines (Layman et al., 2006). In contrast, affective polarization pertains to the positive feelings and support that citizens have for their own political party versus their aversion toward opposing political groups (Piazza, 2023). These distinctions are

crucial for understanding the multifaceted nature of political polarization and its implications for leaders' decision-making processes.

Studies on mass polarization primarily concentrated on quantifying political party system polarization to create comparative indices. Dalton (2008) emphasizes the ideological differences between parties in legislative contexts as perceived by voters, suggesting that these disparities shape voter alignments. Lupu (2015) further links mass polarization to elite polarization, indicating that as elites become more polarized, so do individual party affiliations. Pardos-Prado and Dinas (2010) examined both party system and mass ideological polarization across European nations by analyzing ideological stance variances, finding a weak correlation between party system polarization and mass ideological polarization. This indicates that party system polarization does not always translate directly into mass ideological polarization. Ladner (2014) enhances this analysis by measuring the dispersion of party positions relative to the average party system positions across multiple issues, subsequently averaging these scores to produce a political system polarization index. This method allows for a nuanced understanding of how party positions contribute to overall system polarization.

Contrary perspectives highlight that citizens can maintain strong partisan identities even without deeply internalizing ideological beliefs (Carpini & Keeter, 1993; Iyengar et al., 2012; Lauka et al., 2018). This suggests that partisan identity can be more about social affiliation than ideological agreement. McCoy et al. (2018) argue that mass polarization is driven by social identity, where party affiliates prioritize their group identity over ideological commitments. This form of polarization, known as affective polarization, is characterized by strong in-group loyalty and pronounced

biases against out-groups. Scholars have sought to expand the understanding of mass polarization by highlighting the role of emotion-driven social identity. Some that focus solely on partisan social identity fail to capture the full extent of political polarization, as they overlook the antagonism towards opposing political groups (Finkel et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Piazza, 2023). Therefore, many academics propose measuring affective polarization, referring to the difference between positive in-group biases towards one's own party and negative out-group biases towards rival parties to achieve a more comprehensive understanding.

Research on affective polarization has proliferated in the United States, mirroring the intensifying partisan conflicts. Increasing evidence indicates a substantial uptick in affective polarization within the US, fueled by a rising propensity among voters to harbor heightened disapproval towards parties and candidates they do not endorse. Studies show that while voters' evaluations of their own parties and candidates remain stable, there is a marked rise in their negative perceptions of adversaries over time (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016; Iyengar et al., 2012). Furthermore, Connors (2023) suggests that social pressures exacerbate affective polarization, indicating that societal influences may amplify negative partisan sentiments in the US. Finkel et al. (2000), who focus on underlying reasons, argue that transformations in the media landscape and social sorting are significant catalysts of this polarization phenomenon in the US.

Numerous studies examining the implications of affective polarization in the United States indicate that partisan identification and polarization are statistically significant predictors of support for political violence (Broockman et al., 2022; Piazza, 2023;

Lelkes & Westwood, 2017). Additionally, recent comparative research extends beyond the American context, revealing that while affective polarization is not uniquely pronounced in the United States, it is indeed more intense there than in other regions (Boxell et al., 2021; Garzia & Da Silva, 2021; Wagner, 2021).

Another focal point in the literature delves into how existing polarization within countries influences politicians' approaches and policymaking processes, transcending mere discussions on classification and measurement. Studies underscore that political parties and individual politicians align themselves with public sentiment, positing that politics is shaped by the extent of polarization among citizens (Adams et al., 2006; Esteban & Schneider, 2008; Garand, 2010). For instance, Cox and McCubbins (2001), in their examination of 32 cases of anti-corruption reforms, discover that public opinion polarization on reform issues detrimentally impacted the potential for policy reform implementation.

Several other studies indicate that citizens derive their political cues from parties, aligning their policy preferences with their preferred party (Abramowitz, 2010; Moral, 2017; Zaller, 1992). In this context, Moral & Best (2023) scrutinize the influence of citizen and party polarization on decision-making, utilizing aggregate survey data from 174 international and national election studies across 19 established democracies. Their findings suggest that citizen polarization mirrors party polarization, with politically interested and informed citizens displaying greater sensitivity to changes in party polarization compared to their less engaged and uninformed counterparts. This phenomenon is expected to exert a discernible impact on policy behavior.

The concept of polarization has also attracted considerable interest within conflict literature, albeit its application diverges somewhat in this context. Theoretical and empirical explorations in conflict studies investigate the role of income inequality, also referred to as economic polarization, in triggering conflicts. Empirical analyses examining the impact of economic polarization on conflict onset and political violence present mixed results, with studies reporting positive, negative, convex, concave, or negligible relationships (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Hegre et al., 2003; Lichbach, 1989). These divergent outcomes provoke significant questions concerning the existence and magnitude of the link between vertical economic polarization and conflict, and the potential effects of various forms of polarization. Some studies posit that socio-economic and ethnic polarization are significant contributors to political violence (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Duclos et al., 2004; Gurr, 2000; Zhang & Kanbur, 2001).

However, Østby (2008) challenges this view through an analysis of civil conflict onset in 39 countries, concluding that the effects of pure ethnic polarization, inter-individual inequalities, and economic polarization are statistically insignificant. Instead, Østby underscores the significance of horizontal inequalities—a composite measure encompassing both ethnic and socio-economic polarization—which show a positive correlation with the emergence of conflicts. This suggests that while individual disparities may not directly incite conflict, broader structural inequalities across different social groups are more likely to catalyze civil unrest.

While the aforementioned conflict studies face common critiques concerning theoretical limitations, a more fundamental conceptual issue in the conflict-polarization nexus warrants attention. Many of these studies predominantly

conceptualize polarization through the lens of equality, thereby constraining its analytical scope. Notably, the focus tends to be on the formation of distinct and opposing groups with minimal common ground, emphasizing political and ideological polarization as explored in political science literature. This perspective shifts the emphasis from merely dividing the populace on specific issues to examining how the creation of polarized groups, akin to societal inequalities, influences conflict dynamics. Moreover, the impact of political polarization on conflict remains a crucial dimension to consider. Just as polarization can foster dissatisfaction that contributes to conflict onset, it is also expected to influence the policies of governments engaged in conflicts. This study aims to introduce novel perspectives into conflict studies, specifically concentrating on the intricate dynamics of society-state relations and how the level of polarization, particularly affective polarization within society, shapes the security policies adopted by the state during conflict.

#### **4.3 Affective Polarization and Counterinsurgency Strategies**

Affective partisan political polarization, hereafter referred to as polarization, encompasses strong favoritism towards one's political party, leaders, and their policies, along with feelings of marginalization and intense hostility towards opposing groups (Finkel et al., 2020; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Empirical studies associate polarization with numerous negative outcomes within societies. Polarized individuals are prone to exclusion, discrimination, and punitive actions against out-groups. Moreover, they demonstrate a reluctance to participate in cooperative efforts with members of opposing groups to address collective challenges (Broockman et al.,

2022; Lekles & Westwood, 2017). The degree of affective polarization correlates with the increasing popularity of populism and authoritarianism in various countries (Piazza, 2023). Cross-national empirical data on democracies underscore a significant rise in political polarization globally, with the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) database recording nearly a 30% increase in polarization intensity within democracies over fifteen years. Consequently, multiple studies reveal that highly polarized nations are more susceptible to political violence, as their citizens are likelier to exhibit heightened partisanship and hostility towards opposing party members, thus being more tolerant of political violence (Crimston et al., 2022; LeBas, 2018). Thus, It is expected that the nature of partisan relations between governments and citizens significantly affects a country's internal dynamics, policy implementations, and particularly security decisions.

Building on Piazza's (2023) study, elucidating the connection between partisan polarization and political violence, three interlinked theoretical approaches can be proffered to comprehend why polarization facilitates states in employing militarized and violent counterinsurgency measures. First, extreme polarization leads to the demonization and dehumanization of opposing groups among partisans, normalizing violence. This phenomenon is supported by research demonstrating the correlation between partisanship and processes like demonization and denigration of opponents (see Ahler, 2014; Kalmoe & Mason, 2022; Martherus et al., 2021; Piazza, 2023).

Second, polarization instills a moralistic, zero-sum perspective in politics, fostering political violence and hindering interparty cooperation to resolve conflicts (Piazza, 2023). Moral polarization enables individuals to judge not only the political desires but also the moral integrity of opponents, leading to anger, blame, and heightened

hostility (Lekles & Westwood, 2017). Polarized individuals prefer social and physical distance from opposing groups and show intolerance toward their rights (Huber & Malhotra, 2017; Piazza, 2023).

Last, polarization amplifies in-group affinity and out-group hostility, hindering inter-group empathy and communication. Political elites, for instance, exploit identity-based conflicts for electoral advantage, intensifying divisions and sometimes inciting violence for mobilization and intimidation (Bliuc et al., 2021; Ott, 2023; Piazza, 2023; Mason & Wronski, 2018).

Accordingly, I expect increased affective polarization around the leader to reduce the cost of states adopting military methods to combat insurgents while increasing the cost of any nonviolent approach. The polarization that fuels in-group and out-group divisions can cause leaders to marginalize rebels and their constituency. Leaders who prioritize their own survival thus feel the need to foster hostility against marginalized and demonized rebels in order to consolidate their own power and support base while defending the needs of the people who form the in-group. Thus, as leaders gain power from individuals who prefer social and physical distance from polarized and opposing groups, leaders become hesitant to speak out, let alone grant concessions, to rebel groups, fearing possible public backlash.

Likewise, the state can also be reluctant to grant privileges or win the hearts and minds of the rebels' constituency because the constituents are also perceived as "others" in the eye of the public. These dynamics could contribute to a greater acceptance of violence among polarized individuals. Conversely, reduced polarization grants states more policy flexibility, thereby reducing the barriers to adopting nonviolent strategies. Diminished partisan divisions foster increased

cooperation and cross-party collaboration, enabling governments to engage with a more unified and understanding public (Lee, 2015; Santoro & Broockman, 2022). This environment allows leaders to operate with fewer constraints imposed by entrenched ideological and emotional positions (Torenviold and Haarhuis, 2008), facilitating the exploration of a broader range of policy alternatives without encountering significant opposition or the adverse consequences of a deeply divided political landscape. Therefore, these considerations lead to the first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1a:** *Incumbents serving in a country characterized by a higher level of affective polarization are more likely to implement violent counterinsurgency measures.*

Alternatively, in polarized societies, partisan groups aligned with the ruling government exhibit unwavering loyalty, firmly adhering to their respective parties and leaders with minimal questioning or dissent (Kalmoe & Mason, 2022; McCoy et al., 2018; Orhan, 2022). This allegiance, deeply rooted in the dynamics of affective polarization, can carry notable implications for the government's approach to security policymaking. The lack of internal opposition from these staunch partisan supporters provides the government with a foundation of political stability, enabling the sustained pursuit of non-violent security strategies (see Orhan, 2022; Orr, 2023). Thus, it is also expected that a high level of affective attachment to incumbents can diminish the cost of implementation of conciliatory measures against insurgencies, as well.

In Spain, for instance, the fight against insurgency has prominently involved dealing with the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), a Basque separatist group. During the tenure of Prime Minister José María Aznar, particularly from 2000 to 2004, Spain experienced significant political polarization. Aznar's conservative Popular Party (PP) maintained strong support from its base, which was characterized by unwavering loyalty and alignment with his policies, including preventing radicalization through community engagement and integration programs in the Basque region (Muro, 2008). By fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging, Spain aims to reduce the appeal of extremist ideologies. The political polarization of this period, with strong partisan support, provided Aznar with the stability needed to enforce these conciliatory counterinsurgency measures without substantial internal opposition, illustrating how a polarized environment can also facilitate the execution of a leader's full spectrum of policies. Thus, below, I hypothesize this alternative approach as follows:

**Hypothesis 1b:** *Incumbents serving in a country characterized by a higher level of affective polarization are more likely to implement non-violent counterinsurgency measures.*

#### **4.4 Research Design**

In order to test hypotheses, I employ two datasets. First, I use Asal et al.'s (2020) counterinsurgency dataset, which includes 49 countries' counterinsurgency actions against 140 different terrorist groups they fought against between 1998 and 2012.

This dataset is utilized to measure dependent variables. Second, to measure independent variables, I utilize the V-DEM Dataset (2023), which includes polarization levels in 202 countries between 1900 and 2022. The resulting dataset, therefore, focuses on 47 countries' counterinsurgency activities and their interaction with the public over a 15-year period. The unit of analysis of this research is the conflict-year, and the dataset covers a total of 1,380 observations.

**Dependent Variables:** The dependent variables stem from Asal et al.'s counterinsurgency dataset, encompassing three categories: violent, non-violent, and mixed strategies. Non-violent measures entail conciliatory approaches like winning hearts and minds, negotiations, ceasefires, peace talks, or concessions to concede rebels. Violent measures encompass aggressive stances such as police work and military actions against the group. The mixed strategy is assigned if both types are implemented in a given year. Each variable is coded as 0 if absent and 1 if present. In instances where no counterinsurgency measures are taken against a particular group in a given year (all three variables coded as 0), it indicates a lack of government strategy for that year, and I created a new no response option in this regard. Since the main focus is the analysis of the probability of using different strategies relative to each other, a new nominal dataset was created, categorizing the years into four groups: no response, violent, non-violent, and mixed.

**Independent Variables:** To examine the level of affective polarization level in countries, independent variables are drawn from V-DEM. In addition to several country-level variables, this dataset also includes the variable that measures the level of polarization based on an initial question of whether a society is divided into politically antagonistic camps. Here, the dataset predominantly focuses on the extent

to which political differences affect social relations beyond political debates, which provides us with comprehensive data to understand affective polarization specifically. Societies are highly polarized; for instance, if supporters of opposing political camps are reluctant to participate in friendly interactions, such as family activities, civic associations, leisure activities, and workplaces.

This variable is presented on an ordinal scale in the original dataset, ranging from 0 to 4, signifying the degree of polarization in a given country. Progressing from 0 to 4 on this scale corresponds to an escalation in the level of polarization. Specifically, each level denotes a distinct polarization degree. A score of 0 signifies “Not at all” indicating that supporters of opposing political camps generally interact in a friendly manner. A score of 1 represents “Mainly not” suggesting that supporters of opposing political camps are more likely to interact in a friendly than a hostile manner. A score of 2 indicates *Somewhat* reflecting that supporters of opposing political camps are equally likely to interact in a friendly or hostile manner. A score of 3 denotes “Yes, to a noticeable extent” signifying that supporters of opposing political camps are more likely to interact in a hostile than friendly manner. Lastly, a score of 4 represents “Yes, to a large extent” indicating that supporters of opposing political camps generally interact in a hostile manner.

**Control Variables:** Several control variables have been considered for potential impact on both leaders’ counterinsurgency activities and public perception. At the leader level, control variables are utilized from the V-Dem Dataset. First, to what extent is the executive portrayed as having outstanding personal characteristics or leadership is considered. The leader’s charisma, performance, and leadership perceptions have a significant impact on both the voting intention and the party

rallying behavior of voters and supporters (Pillai & Williams, 1998; Popa et al., 2011). As seen in Table 9, the variable “Leadership” skill is presented on an ordinal scale, ranging from 0 to 4, referring to what extent the executive’s leadership components are important for supporters. In this manner, I also consider to what degree executives rely on their performance in several issues (i.e., economic growth, non-corruption, security, etc.) to justify their place in a regime. Therefore, another ordinal variable ranging from 0 to 4, named “Performance legitimation” is also used.

The concentration of power in a leader over the legislature is crucial for efficient decision-making, effective policy implementation, and political stability. A strong executive allows for swift responses to crises, clear accountability, and the ability to enact consistent policies, contributing to overall governance effectiveness (Cheibub et al., 2002; Ferguson, 2003; Rockman, 1984). Thus, whether the legislature is considered to hold power to remove the executive in practice is also measured. “Removal by legislation” has an ordinal nature, ranging from 0 to 3, to display how likely the legislature has removal power. Additionally, I also control whether the executive has the power to dissolve the legislature, which refers to the ability to call new elections for the legislature. In this regard, “Dissolution the legislature” has ordinal nature, ranging from 0 to 4, in the V-DEM dataset. However, I turn this variable into a dummy variable. If the executive has no power or limited/restricted power to dissolution, coded as 0. If the executive has discretions without restrictions, it is coded as 1. Does the executive have the power to appoint cabinet ministers is also considered.

In the original dataset, “Appoint the cabinet” is coded as an ordinal variable. I use this variable as a dummy, which refers to executive appointing the cabinet without

any need for confirmation by the legislature or not. I also control leaders' "Veto power", referring to leaders' ability to veto a piece of legislation and coded as interval. Moreover, whether the executive has the ability to propose legislation is considered. In this regard, "Propose the legislation" refers to executive proposals in all policy areas, including some exclusive domains, or this power is shared with the legislature and perhaps with other bodies.

At this point, I would like to highlight an important point about the use of the V-DEM Dataset. In this dataset, countries' heads of state and heads of government are coded separately on a yearly basis, and each related variable is coded, of course, uniquely for both the head of state and the head of government in a given year. However, since this study examines security policies in terms of polarization level and partisanship, it aims to focus on the most important figure in the state. Therefore, I focus on the variable in the V-DEM created in response to the question of whether the head of government in the dataset has more power than the head of state. If the head of government's relative power is equal to or higher than the head of state, I take the head of government as a leader/executive of a particular country and use the information of the head of government.

Beyond these, leaders' ideological partisanship is also known to be related to their popularity and policymaking. Di Lonardo (2017) reveals that right-oriented governments tend to be more hawkish than others. Thus, I use the ideology of executive variable from the Global Leader Ideology dataset (2002), and I coded this variable as a dummy: 1 if a leader pursues leftist ideology, otherwise 0.

**Table 9.** Descriptive Statistics

| Variable                    | Obs  | Mean   | Std. Dev. | Min    | Max    |
|-----------------------------|------|--------|-----------|--------|--------|
| No Response                 | 1380 | .272   | .445      | 0      | 1      |
| Non-Violent                 | 1380 | .042   | .201      | 0      | 1      |
| Violent                     | 1380 | .451   | .498      | 0      | 1      |
| Mixed                       | 1380 | .236   | .424      | 0      | 1      |
| Polarization level          | 1380 | 2.748  | .931      | 0      | 4      |
| Leadership skill            | 1380 | 2.088  | 1.163     | 0      | 4      |
| Performance legitimization  | 1380 | 2.24   | .969      | 0      | 4      |
| Removal by legislation      | 1380 | 1.154  | 1.219     | 0      | 3      |
| Dissolution the legislation | 1380 | .222   | .416      | 0      | 1      |
| Appoint the cabinet         | 1380 | .301   | .459      | 0      | 1      |
| Veto Power                  | 1380 | 2.115  | 1.347     | .123   | 3.96   |
| Propose the legislation     | 1380 | .681   | .466      | 0      | 1      |
| Leftist leader              | 1380 | .48    | .5        | 0      | 1      |
| Polity IV II                | 1378 | 5.075  | 2.842     | .25    | 10     |
| Gdp (log)                   | 1380 | 6.726  | 1.1       | 4.151  | 10.791 |
| Population (log)            | 1380 | 17.718 | 1.627     | 13.431 | 20.959 |
| Territorial control         | 1380 | .246   | .431      | 0      | 1      |
| Alliance Degree             | 1380 | .822   | 1.599     | 0      | 15     |
| Religious                   | 1380 | .346   | .476      | 0      | 1      |
| Ethnic                      | 1380 | .544   | .498      | 0      | 1      |
| Leftists                    | 1380 | .213   | .41       | 0      | 1      |
| Number of fatalities        | 1380 | 35.555 | 156.991   | 0      | 2996   |
| Group Size                  | 1380 | 1.103  | 1.14      | 0      | 3      |

To incorporate state-level determinants influencing government responses, a set of control variables at the country level was incorporated. This encompassed the countries' polity score obtained from Polity IV (2018). Additionally, the analysis incorporated the country's logged GDP per capita and logged population from World Bank Datasets, providing a more nuanced perspective on contextual factors that might mold government strategies vis-a-vis insurgent organizations.

At the group level, since the insurgent groups' territorial control can change both groups' and governments' strategic concerns (Weintraub, 2016), I control whether the rebels have territorial power or not. In addition, groups' alliances with other groups may turn them into more lethal and powerful (Phillips, 2018); rebel groups' alliance relations within a certain year are also considered as a control variable. Furthermore, group ideology was considered, encompassing three variables for ethnic, religious,

and leftist ideologies, recognizing that these categories are not mutually exclusive. Size variations among terrorist groups are also considered, categorizing them into distinct tiers based on membership numbers. These control variables are sourced from the BAAD II dataset (2018). Finally, the conflict's intensity is factored in through variables such as the annual fatalities attributed to the insurgent group, obtained from the Global Terrorism Database (2022).

## 4.5 Results

This research employs multinomial logistic regression to examine how polarization levels in countries influence governments' response to insurgent groups. As discussed in the previous hypotheses part, the predominant approach of this study focuses on the influence of the direction of political popularity in a state on the government's tendency to favor non-violent over violent measures. Therefore, the ordinal dependent variable referring to four possible counterterrorism measures is used with no response as a base category. The results are presented in both naïve and full models, which include control variables. While in each table, Model 1 represents a naïve model, Model 2 includes only state-level control, and Model 3 includes only group-level controls. Moreover, Model 4 represents the full model. In addition, AIC and BIC results are also presented in the tables to show how well the models fit the data. Each figure is based on the full models, which provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between the variables.

In a naïve model in Table 10, the coefficient for the level of affective political polarization in countries the influence of employment of use of non-violent measures against rebel groups is positive and significant. Yet, this impact on the employment

of violent and mixed measures is significant but negative when the base is no response. If the null model is to be taken into consideration, Hypothesis 1b could be said to be valid. However, in a full model in Table 10, it is seen that these impacts diminish when the controls are added to the model.

In Model 4, the coefficient for the level of polarization impact on the usage of non-violent and violent measures simultaneously is negative and significant. In this manner, the crucial question to ask is if the possibility of using violent and non-violent counterterrorism measures together in a given year decreases as the level of polarization increases, then which strategy is predominantly used compared to others? Since non-violent measures in the datasets represent only 58 observations, to answer the mentioned question, it is necessary to create a new variable.

A methodologically sound strategy, given the dataset limitations, involves the reclassification of the variable. This entails the creation of a new categorical variable where the implementation of mixed and non-violent measures is coded as 1, exclusive violent measures as 2, and no response as 0. Through this approach, variables are generated, offering nuanced insights into strategies exclusively involving violent activities or not. This alternative methodology will undergo further scrutiny in Table 11.

A naïve model presented in Table 11 shows that when the base category is no response, the coefficient for having a polarized society's impact on employment of both non-violent approach and solely violent approach is negative and significant. However, in Model 4, which refers to the full model, it is seen that the control variable decreases the impact on violent measures, while the coefficient for adopting non-violent measures in a given year is still negative and significant when the base is

unresponsive. Therefore, to offer a deeper analysis and understanding of these substantive effects, Figure 5 shows the percentage change in the predicted number of governments' usage of conciliatory approach or violent approach solely as the level of polarization increases within the range from 0 to 4.



**Table 10.** Multinomial Logistic Regression Results

| Variables                   | Model 1        |                 |                    | Model 2           |                   |                    | Model 3            |                    |                    | Model 4            |                   |                    |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
|                             | Non-Violent    | Violent         | Mixed              | Non-Violent       | Violent           | Mixed              | Non-Violent        | Violent            | Mixed              | Non-Violent        | Violent           | Mixed              |
| Polarization level          | .5**<br>(.181) | -.24**<br>(.07) | -.028***<br>(.083) | .149<br>(.228)    | .019<br>(.093)    | -.130<br>(.111)    | .255<br>(.206)     | -.124<br>(.082)    | -.373***<br>(.096) | -.271<br>(.264)    | .037<br>(.109)    | -.446***<br>(.127) |
| Leadership skill            |                |                 |                    | -.169<br>(.194)   | -.230**<br>(.079) | -.315***<br>(.095) |                    |                    |                    | .103<br>(.228)     | -.198*<br>(.087)  | -.242*<br>(.102)   |
| Performance legitimization  |                |                 |                    | .208<br>(.210)    | .159<br>(.097)    | -.02<br>(.114)     |                    |                    |                    | -.064<br>(.237)    | .087<br>(.110)    | -.256*<br>(.127)   |
| Removal by legislation      |                |                 |                    | -.390<br>(.267)   | .171<br>(.105)    | -.232<br>(.120)    |                    |                    |                    | -.134<br>(.276)    | .218<br>(.118)    | -.126<br>(.134)    |
| Dissolution the legislation |                |                 |                    | 1.394**<br>(.526) | -.383<br>(.221)   | -.198<br>(.263)    |                    |                    |                    | 1.401*<br>(.617)   | -.434<br>(.236)   | -.333<br>(.286)    |
| Appoint the cabinet         |                |                 |                    | -.618<br>(.435)   | .062<br>(.218)    | -.001<br>(.250)    |                    |                    |                    | -.634<br>(.462)    | .148<br>(.238)    | -.176<br>(.269)    |
| Veto Power                  |                |                 |                    | -.327<br>(.239)   | .091<br>(.095)    | -.0189<br>(.111)   |                    |                    |                    | -.128<br>(.275)    | .276**<br>(.106)  | .162<br>(.124)     |
| Propose the legislation     |                |                 |                    | .581<br>(.376)    | .089<br>(.161)    | .722***<br>(.200)  |                    |                    |                    | .620<br>(.403)     | .195<br>(.173)    | .829***<br>(.214)  |
| Leftist leader              |                |                 |                    | .305<br>(.373)    | -.116<br>(.153)   | .236<br>(.176)     |                    |                    |                    | .335<br>(.395)     | .052<br>(.168)    | .305<br>(.193)     |
| Polity IV II                |                |                 |                    | -.186*<br>(.092)  | -.021<br>(.039)   | .013<br>(.046)     |                    |                    |                    | -.128<br>(.103)    | -.044<br>(.044)   | -.056<br>(.052)    |
| GDP                         |                |                 |                    | -.150<br>(.201)   | .131<br>(.076)    | .013<br>(.095)     |                    |                    |                    | -.210<br>(.202)    | .097<br>(.082)    | -.0132<br>(.1)     |
| Population                  |                |                 |                    | .095<br>(.158)    | .107<br>(.057)    | .121<br>(.065)     |                    |                    |                    | .012<br>(.167)     | .142*<br>(.062)   | .094<br>(.069)     |
| Territorial Control         |                |                 |                    |                   |                   |                    | 2.373***<br>(.338) | .586**<br>(.207)   | 1.265***<br>(.220) | 2.508***<br>(.372) | .684**<br>(.218)  | 1.338***<br>(.233) |
| Alliance Degree             |                |                 |                    |                   |                   |                    | -.170<br>(.252)    | .605***<br>(.098)  | .529***<br>(.103)  | .015<br>(.254)     | .576***<br>(.099) | .536***<br>(.105)  |
| Religious                   |                |                 |                    |                   |                   |                    | .349<br>(.398)     | -.147<br>(.181)    | -.869***<br>(.221) | .323<br>(.445)     | -.07<br>(.209)    | -.947***<br>(.248) |
| Ethnic                      |                |                 |                    |                   |                   |                    | 1.730***<br>(.356) | 1.027***<br>(.160) | .952***<br>(.185)  | 1.855***<br>(.426) | .924***<br>(.177) | 1.073***<br>(.205) |
| Leftist                     |                |                 |                    |                   |                   |                    | 1.107**<br>(.394)  | .973***<br>(.206)  | .959***<br>(.228)  | 1.311**<br>(.461)  | .991***<br>(.232) | 1.260***<br>(.259) |
| Fatalities                  |                |                 |                    |                   |                   |                    | .007<br>(.013)     | .029***<br>(.007)  | .028***<br>(.007)  | .014<br>(.011)     | .029***<br>(.007) | .029***<br>(.007)  |
| Group Size                  |                |                 |                    |                   |                   |                    | -.034<br>(.132)    | .105<br>(.067)     | .019<br>(.074)     | -.097<br>(.139)    | .120<br>(.069)    | .017<br>(.077)     |
| N                           | 1,380          | 1,380           | 1,380              | 1,378             | 1,378             | 1,378              | 1,380              | 1,380              | 1,380              | 1,378              | 1,378             | 1,378              |
| Log Likelihood              | -1622          | -1622           | -1622              | -1541             | -1541             | -1541              | -1433              | -1433              | -1433              | -1371              | -1371             | -1371              |
| AIC                         | 3256.338       | 3256.338        | 3256.338           | 3159.371          | 3159.371          | 3159.371           | 2919.712           | 2919.712           | 2919.712           | 2861.451           | 2861.451          | 2861.451           |
| BIC                         | 3287.717       | 3287.717        | 3287.717           | 3363.279          | 3363.279          | 3363.279           | 3060.918           | 3060.918           | 3060.918           | 3175.154           | 3175.154          | 3175.154           |

Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

**Table 11. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results**

| Variables                   | Model 1          |                   | Model 2            |                   | Model 3            |                    | Model 4             |                   |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
|                             | Non-Violent App. | Violent App.      | Non-Violent App.   | Violent App.      | Non-Violent App.   | Violent App.       | Non-Violent App.    | Violent App.      |
| Polarization level          | -.175*<br>(.079) | -.233**<br>(.072) | -.078<br>(.106)    | .022<br>(.093)    | -.291**<br>(.093)  | -.119<br>(.082)    | -.419***<br>(.122)  | .039<br>(.108)    |
| Leadership skill            |                  |                   | -.316***<br>(.089) | -.230**<br>(.079) |                    |                    | -.226*<br>(.099)    | -.193*<br>(.087)  |
| Performance legitimation    |                  |                   | .025<br>(.108)     | .162<br>(.097)    |                    |                    | -.221<br>(.122)     | .084<br>(.110)    |
| Removal by legislation      |                  |                   | -.273*<br>(.116)   | .171<br>(.105)    |                    |                    | -.144<br>(.130)     | .219<br>(.118)    |
| Dissolution the legislation |                  |                   | .116<br>(.246)     | -.388<br>(.222)   |                    |                    | -.047<br>(.271)     | -.447<br>(.236)   |
| Appoint the cabinet         |                  |                   | -.132<br>(.234)    | .065<br>(.218)    |                    |                    | -.276<br>(.256)     | .153<br>(.237)    |
| Veto Power                  |                  |                   | -.059<br>(.106)    | .091<br>(.095)    |                    |                    | .134<br>(.119)      | .277**<br>(.106)  |
| Propose the legislation     |                  |                   | .680***<br>(.187)  | .089<br>(.161)    |                    |                    | .785***<br>(.203)   | .198<br>(.173)    |
| Leftist leader              |                  |                   | .241<br>(.169)     | -.118<br>(.153)   |                    |                    | .330<br>(.187)      | .0517<br>(.167)   |
| Polity IV II                |                  |                   | -.013<br>(.044)    | -.022<br>(.039)   |                    |                    | -.069<br>(.049)     | -.043<br>(.044)   |
| GDP                         |                  |                   | -.013<br>(.091)    | .129<br>(.076)    |                    |                    | -.05<br>(.096)      | .093<br>(.082)    |
| Population                  |                  |                   | .123<br>(.064)     | .109<br>(.057)    |                    |                    | .087<br>(.068)      | .143*<br>(.061)   |
| Territorial Control         |                  |                   |                    |                   | 1.462***<br>(.211) | .624**<br>(.205)   | 1.527***<br>(.225)  | .715***<br>(.217) |
| Alliance Degree             |                  |                   |                    |                   | .473***<br>(.102)  | .589***<br>(.097)  | .498***<br>(.104)   | .563***<br>(.099) |
| Religious                   |                  |                   |                    |                   | -.703***<br>(.209) | -.120<br>(.179)    | -.0781***<br>(.236) | -0.0490<br>(.208) |
| Ethnic                      |                  |                   |                    |                   | 1.073***<br>(.178) | 1.039***<br>(.160) | 1.202***<br>(.198)  | .935***<br>(.177) |
| Leftist                     |                  |                   |                    |                   | .997***<br>(.221)  | .984***<br>(.206)  | 1.332***<br>(.232)  | .998***<br>(.232) |
| Fatalities                  |                  |                   |                    |                   | .027***<br>(.007)  | .028***<br>(.007)  | .029***<br>(.007)   | .029***<br>(.007) |
| Group Size                  |                  |                   |                    |                   | .004<br>(.072)     | .105<br>(.067)     | .000<br>(.075)      | .121<br>(.0696)   |
| N                           | 1,380            | 1,380             | 1,378              | 1,378             | 1,380              | 1,380              | 1,378               | 1,378             |
| Log Likelihood              | -1470            | -1470             | -1408              | -1408             | -1301              | -1301              | -1251               | -1251             |
| AIC                         | 2947.558         | 2947.558          | 2868.022           | 2868.022          | 2637.401           | 2637.401           | 2581.069            | 2581.069          |
| BIC                         | 2968.477         | 2968.477          | 3003.96            | 3003.96           | 2731.539           | 2731.539           | 2790.205            | 2790.205          |

Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Figure 5 displays the changes in the predicted number of government resort only to violence or pursue alternative approaches in a given year against terrorist groups across different levels of affective polarization level. First of all, Figure 1 suggests that as the affective polarization increases from 0 “Not at all” to 4 “Yes, to a large extent”, governments are less inclined to respond to insurgency with non-violent strategies. When the affective polarization level is at its lowest level, the predicted number of usages of non-violent measures in that year is 52% and drops to 19% at the highest level of polarization.

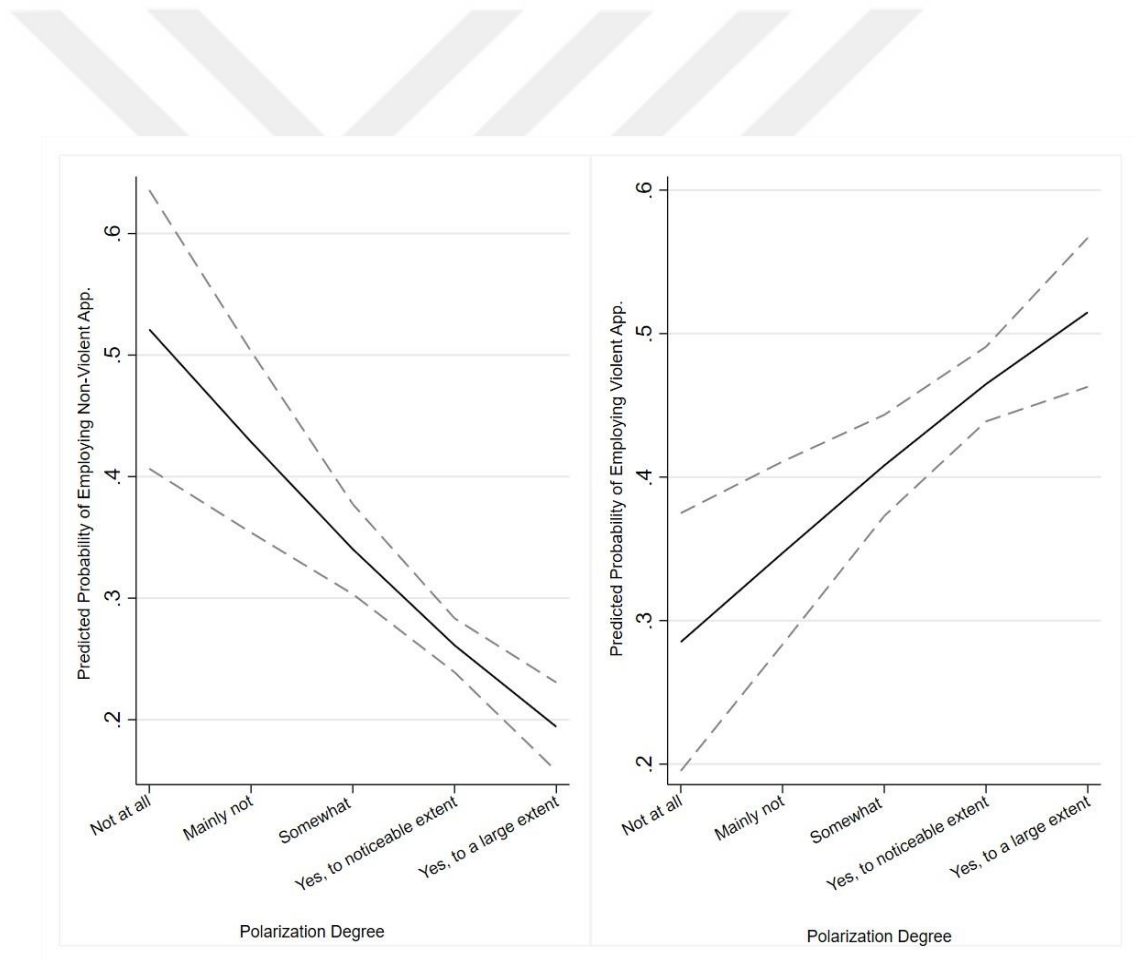


**Figure 5.** Level of Affective Polarization and Government Responses

However, the opposite occurs for the employment of violent measures. Figure 5 demonstrates that when affective polarization is at its minimum level, the predicted probability of exclusively adopting violent measures is 28%. When the affective polarization reaches its maximum on the scale, this number is almost doubled and increases to 51%. Overall, these results are in accordance with Hypothesis 1a; governments are more likely to resort to violence when dealing with insurgent groups if the countries have a high level of affective polarization.

#### **4.6 Robustness Check**

The full models support the argument that leaders who serve in a country characterized by a high level of affective polarization are more likely to employ violent counterinsurgency compared to doing nothing against rebel groups. Nevertheless, one may claim that leader-specific characteristics may change the relationship between public support and incumbents' security preferences. Therefore, I also control how leaders' age and gender influence counterinsurgency preferences.

In addition, I also control whether the leader is directly elected by people or not, and whether the leader will face any term limit or not. All of these variables are utilized from the V-DEM Dataset. I use these control variables in both parsimonious and full models of the previous two multinomial logistic regression models. Thus, Appendix F and Appendix G in Appendices show that the main results still hold.

## 4.7 Conclusion

Various studies suggest that in societies characterized by high levels of affective polarization, the prevalence of political violence and support for violent actions can increase (Huber & Malhotra, 2017; Kingzette et al., 2021; Piazza, 2023; Reiljan et al., 2023). Specifically, Piazza's (2023) comprehensive study, which synthesizes and tests previous research on polarization, demonstrates that heightened affective polarization often makes violent responses a cost-effective decision for the state. This analysis focuses on three primary citizen behaviors resulting from high affective polarization: the dehumanization of opposing groups, the adoption of a zero-sum moral perspective, and increased partisan solidarity. Piazza's findings illuminate the intricate ways in which affective polarization fuels political violence. The dehumanization of opposing groups can lead to moral disengagement, where violence against these groups is justified and even encouraged. This is compounded by a zero-sum mentality, where any gain by the out-group is perceived as a loss to the in-group, heightening tensions and justifying extreme measures.

Increased partisan solidarity further exacerbates these dynamics as individuals become more entrenched in their ideological positions and less willing to compromise, viewing political adversaries as existential threats. Such dynamics between leaders and their supporters are expected to influence numerous government decisions. Thus, this study anticipates that counterinsurgency efforts, as part of the state's security policy, emerge by considering both in-group and out-group dynamics resulting from heightened affective polarization.

As it turns out that, governments need to navigate complex scenarios and make strategic decisions to garner public support even amidst significant challenges.

However, there is a notable gap in theoretical and empirical research on the potential

interaction between leader-society relations and counterinsurgency decision-making at both national and international levels. This gap largely stems from the prevailing perception in conflict studies that polarization is primarily interpreted in terms of economic inequalities and class differences rather than as a political phenomenon or partisan loyalty. Consequently, this study offers a comprehensive perspective by conducting cross-empirical analyses to assess the impact of affective polarization on policy-making processes surrounding counterinsurgency efforts.

To address this gap, this study examines the impact of increasing polarization on whether leaders are prepared to bear the costs when determining counterinsurgency policy strategies. By integrating both qualitative and quantitative data from diverse geopolitical contexts, the research aims to elucidate the multifaceted ways in which polarization influences public opinion, government legitimacy, and policy outcomes. This approach underscores the importance of considering socio-political dynamics in the formulation and implementation of counterinsurgency measures. The findings highlight the necessity for policymakers to adopt a nuanced understanding of polarization, recognizing its broader implications beyond economic and class-based interpretations. By doing so, the study provides valuable insights for developing more effective and sustainable counterinsurgency strategies that are responsive to the complex realities of polarized societies.

Empirical analysis indicates that in countries characterized by high levels of affective polarization, leaders are less inclined to simultaneously employ both conciliatory and repressive measures in their counterinsurgency strategies. In other words, states that need to consolidate support from their base are unlikely to adopt a dual approach in combating insurgency. This is particularly evident in situations where the government and its leadership enjoy strong public backing, leading to a noticeable

preference for specific counterinsurgency approaches. This raises the question of which specific strategies governments are predisposed to implement to effectively combat insurgency. The findings of this study reveal that in societies with high affective polarization, governments are more prone to resort exclusively to violent methods when confronting insurgent groups. Essentially, in highly polarized contexts where the survival of the state depends on the unwavering support of their group, governments are reluctant to bear the costs of any conciliatory scenarios.

Indeed, the trajectory of the counterinsurgency process in Colombia and Turkey is intricately intertwined with the dynamics of affective polarization within their respective socio-political landscapes. In Colombia, the rejection of a peace agreement in a 2016 referendum and public backlash against winning the hearts and minds of locals living in regions where FARC plays an active role coincided with increased polarization and created significant obstacles to the launch of peace efforts. The conciliation process gained momentum only when President Santos adopted integrative policies aimed at bridging social divisions rather than exacerbating them.

In the case of Turkey, it is also seen that increasing polarization eliminates the adoption of conciliatory policies. In the first years of his rule as prime minister, President Erdoğan courted Kurdish voters and made various concessions on language rights. The emotional toll has led to a marked divide in public opinion, with increasing calls for a diplomatic and societal solution. Despite a ceasefire in 2013 that signaled potential peace, the following years witnessed renewed hostilities as polarization in society increased. The 2015 general elections highlighted Turkey's deep-rooted social divisions, and this has affected not only the discourse on the peace process but also the government's willingness to engage in substantive negotiations and make concessions (Ozen et al., 2021; Zalewski, 2015). These nuanced cases,

once again, underscore the pivotal role of affective polarization in shaping the trajectory and feasibility of counterinsurgency efforts within distinct geopolitical contexts.

This research makes a significant contribution to the field of conflict studies by examining the influence of the dynamics between leaders and their constituencies on counterinsurgency policymaking. A particularly noteworthy aspect of this study is its exploration of the potential impact of the leader-society relationship on conflict, thereby moving beyond the conventional dichotomous approach that typically focuses solely on the government versus insurgents. Instead, this study introduces a third dimension to the discourse, emphasizing the interplay between leadership and societal support. The findings provide evidence for previous arguments that governments are more likely to resort to violence when backed by partisan support. This support reduces the political cost of aggression while increasing the cost of conciliatory measures.

Consequently, governments marked by factionalism, polarization, diminished ethical standards, and strong partisan affiliations are more likely to receive substantial backing when employing violent measures in counterinsurgency efforts.

Simultaneously, these governments face reduced prospects of encountering significant opposition. By providing a nuanced understanding of how polarization and partisan support influence counterinsurgency strategies, this study underscores the importance of considering the broader socio-political context in conflict resolution efforts. The insights gained highlight the complex interdependencies between leadership, public support, and policy decisions, thereby offering a more comprehensive framework for analyzing and addressing conflicts.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The main focus of this thesis is the dynamics that guide leaders' decision-making processes in formulating and implementing counterinsurgency policies. Leaders, seen as the primary decision-makers in states, have significant power and authority in the fight against rebellion and have used a wide range of tactics, from military intervention to diplomacy and social concession. According to the basis of this dissertation, each of the implemented strategies involves different costs for governments. In this context, implementing non-violent security policies is often more difficult than adopting a military approach, requiring experience, inter-institutional cooperation, and strong public support. At the same time, potential commitment, reputation, and unpredictability issues also make non-violent practices costly for states. While implementing non-violent counterinsurgency measures can incur significant costs, leaders can sometimes move away from military strategies and accept this expense.

To this end, I have developed arguments to explain why leaders have chosen particular conflict resolution and national security policies at different times. Focusing on micro, mezzo, and macro-level explanations, I argue that domestic political processes, government-society relations, and insurgent-constituency dynamics can shape leaders' counterinsurgency practices. Consequently, the thesis is

structured in three articles, each concentrating on various factors influencing leaders' counterinsurgency policy formation. Although each major chapter focuses on the multifaceted factors that drive leaders' counterinsurgency policymaking, the common underlying theme suggests that the main actors of the conflict and the dynamics between them influence counterinsurgency efforts. Despite the diverse focus of each main section, the underlying theme remains the assertion that the primary actors in the conflict and the dynamics between them significantly impact counterinsurgency efforts.

In the second chapter, I delve into the impact of leadership experience on handling insurgent groups. By examining a leader's tenure, I argue that experienced leaders are more inclined to pursue conciliatory approaches, whereas less experienced leaders are prone to employ violent measures to demonstrate their capabilities. Additionally, I posit that the political and institutional frameworks within countries can significantly modify these tendencies by constraining the decision-making authority of executives.

In the third chapter of this dissertation, I investigate how the relationship between insurgent groups and their constituencies influences counterinsurgency policies. I contend that if insurgent groups are perceived positively and viewed as legitimate representatives of their supporters, governments might favor non-violent strategies. However, while fear tactics might yield short-term benefits, they can have long-term adverse effects, gradually undermining the insurgent group. Consequently, governments, wary of legitimizing groups expected to decline, may resort to forceful counterinsurgency actions. Alternatively, groups that rely heavily on violence against their constituency may prompt governments to adopt conciliatory measures to address conflict stalemate.

In the fourth chapter, I explore the role of affective political polarization in shaping counterinsurgency strategies. Affective polarization arises when societal attitudes toward political issues become strongly aligned with party affiliations, leading to intense support for one's own faction and viewing the opposition as a threat to national interests. In such environments, incumbents are likely to implement policies that resonate with polarized individuals to secure their political survival. This polarization can drive processes such as demonization, dehumanization, and marginalization, making violence more acceptable to polarized individuals. As a result, leaders may find it less costly to adopt extreme and military strategies against insurgents. Conversely, non-violent policies towards marginalized insurgents are often deemed more expensive and less politically viable. Alternatively, in polarized nations, public trust and loyalty towards the leader may lead to compliance with non-violent measures, as the populace tends to support whatever the leader advocates.

In the following parts of the conclusion chapter, I will commence by providing a concise summary of the empirical findings presented in the main chapters. Following this, I will delve into the implications of this project, which offer valuable insights for scholars and policymakers alike, highlighting the challenging journey involved in engaging with foreign publics. Lastly, I will draw conclusions by outlining the theoretical and empirical limitations of this research and propose directions for future inquiry.

## **5.1 Summary of Findings**

In Chapter 2, the findings elucidate the significant influence of leaders' tenure on counterinsurgency decision-making processes. Utilizing Asal et al.'s (2020)

comprehensive dataset on counterinsurgency activities, I conducted a cross-national analysis of 42 countries spanning from 1998 to 2012. Consistent with theoretical predictions, shorter tenures among leaders correlate with a higher propensity to employ violent strategies, whereas longer tenures are associated with a greater likelihood of adopting non-violent policy measures. Interestingly, the interaction between leader tenure and electoral concerns does not significantly impact counterinsurgency decision-making, suggesting a decoupling of leaders' strategies from immediate electoral pressures. However, the type of political regime emerges as a critical institutional constraint that shapes these dynamics. In democratic regimes, leaders' tenure does not significantly influence the implementation of militarized measures.

In contrast, in anocratic regimes, inexperienced leaders are more inclined to adopt aggressive counterinsurgency approaches, driven by their need to assert authority and secure their position. As leaders gain experience in these regimes, they exhibit a growing propensity to diversify their counterinsurgency strategies, incorporating non-violent tactics alongside violent measures. Thus, this study reveals that leaders with shorter tenures tend to resort to militaristic methods to reinforce their authority, driven by insecurity. Conversely, the nature of the political regime mitigates this tendency, as institutional constraints influence decision-making processes, encouraging a broader spectrum of counterinsurgency strategies.

In Chapter 3, I explore the complex interplay between insurgent groups that use terror tactics and their constituencies, emphasizing how the reputation of these groups, whether positive or negative, significantly influences governmental attitudes and responses. Utilizing data from Asal et al.'s (2020) counterinsurgency dataset and Tokdemir and Akcinaroglu's (2016) terror group reputation dataset, the analysis

spans the interactions involving 67 rebel groups from 1998 to 2011. This comprehensive examination reveals that governments tend to become non-responsive towards rebel groups with a positive reputation among their constituencies, recognizing their legitimacy and potential support base. Conversely, when dealing with insurgent groups characterized by negative reputations, governmental responsiveness markedly increases, often resulting in the implementation of violent counterinsurgency measures. This reaction underscores a critical insight: the reputation of a terrorist group fundamentally shapes the strategic calculus of government responses. Governments appear more inclined to suppress and eliminate groups viewed unfavorably by their constituencies, likely perceiving them as less legitimate and more dangerous threats to national security and stability. This finding highlights the importance of understanding the social and political context in which insurgent groups operate, as the reputational dynamics between these groups and their constituencies can profoundly impact the formulation and execution of counterinsurgency policies.

In Chapter 4, the analysis investigates the profound impact of societal polarization on governmental strategies for combating insurgency. This study conceptualizes affective polarization as the partisan divisions behind leaders deeply ingrained within society. Utilizing Asal et al.'s (2020) counterinsurgency dataset and the V-DEM dataset (2023), which measures affective polarization levels on an ordinal scale, the analysis encompasses 47 countries. The findings reveal a significant correlation, such as heightened levels of affective polarization, which correspond with a governmental tendency to forgo the simultaneous use of conciliatory and repressive measures. Instead, governments are more likely to resort exclusively to violent strategies when addressing terrorist threats in nations with high levels of affective polarization. These results substantively contribute to existing theories, suggesting that governments

with strong partisan backing are more prone to adopt violent tactics, unable to bear the costs of conciliatory actions. Elevated polarization fosters societal divisions, which are exacerbated through processes such as demonization, dehumanization, and marginalization, presenting significant challenges in bridging ideological rifts. Consequently, the findings imply that reducing political polarization could provide governments with greater flexibility in policymaking. A less polarized political environment would enable leaders to consider a broader array of counterterrorism strategies without facing substantial opposition or repercussions from a divided society. This chapter underscores the critical link between affective polarization and security approaches, highlighting the necessity for nuanced strategies that account for the societal landscape's complexities. Ultimately, diminished polarization not only facilitates more comprehensive and multifaceted policy responses but also contributes to a more cohesive and resilient society capable of effectively addressing the multifaceted nature of insurgency.

Overall, his research aims to advance the field of conflict studies by moving beyond traditional studies that focus solely on insurgent organizations, offering instead a novel perspective on the actions of state actors engaged in dynamic conflict processes. It highlights the variable nature of state counterinsurgency strategies and emphasizes how states prioritize the costs associated with these strategies. To this end, the study examines various factors influencing the development of state counterinsurgency policies at macro, mezzo, and micro levels. It specifically elucidates how factors such as the tenure of leaders, the relationships between insurgent groups and their constituencies, and the degree of societal polarization play critical roles in shaping policy choices. This study underscores the importance of considering a range of influences on policymaking, demonstrating that the strategies employed by states are not only a reaction to immediate threats but also a reflection

of broader, more complex socio-political landscapes. Through this multifaceted analysis, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of nuanced interactions between state actors and the broader socio-political environment on security considerations. Ultimately, the research aims to foster a deeper insight into the intricate balance between state power, insurgent activities, and the societal context in which these interactions unfold. By doing so, it contributes to a more refined comprehension of conflict dynamics and counterinsurgency efforts.

## **5.2 Implications of Findings**

It is crucial to highlight the direct and comprehensive inferences derived from the research findings. This study seeks to transcend the predominant action-reaction paradigm prevalent in conflict studies. Traditionally, scientific research has focused on analyzing the provocative actions of actors, typically terrorist or insurgent groups, to unravel the complexities of conflict dynamics. Significant emphasis has been placed on examining the diverse characteristics and attributes of insurgent organizations. However, understanding counterinsurgency requires more than focusing solely on group-level dynamics, as states make decisions within complex political and social environments.

As this research illustrates, the characteristics and interactions of leaders, irrespective of initial actions, significantly influence the implementation of counterinsurgency measures. The formulation of counterinsurgency strategies is contingent upon various factors operating at macro levels, such as leadership structures and institutional frameworks, at mezzo levels, including insurgent-constituency dynamics, and at micro levels, such as individual polarization. Through this holistic

perspective, the study underscores the nuanced interactions between the diverse actors and factors shaping the conflict environment, thereby enriching our understanding of the multifaceted dynamics involved in counterinsurgency efforts.

Another significant implication derived from this research is the understanding that leaders prioritize their political positioning and survival when confronting insurgent threats. By adopting the unitary actor assumption, this study highlights the significant influence of macro-level factors on leaders' decision-making processes concerning the adoption of both violent and non-violent measures. Specifically, it investigates whether the temporary nature of leaders' political security impacts their propensity to resort to violent actions against insurgent groups. Additionally, this research underscores the dynamic nature of security-related decision-making among leaders, emphasizing how various factors, including perceived tenure security, the degree of opposition influence, and the scope of domestic constraints, shift according to different governance structures.

Overall, this study is poised to make a substantial contribution to the field of conflict studies by illuminating the critical role that leader-level factors play in shaping counterinsurgency strategies. This approach not only enhances our understanding of the complex interplay between leadership and counterinsurgency but also addresses a significant gap in the existing literature that often overlooks the importance of leaders' priorities.

Considering the theoretical framework of this study, the findings offer valuable insights for policymakers engaged in regional and global counterinsurgency efforts with their counterparts. The findings reveal that experienced leaders are better equipped to endure the costs associated with non-violent methods, whereas inexperienced leaders, prioritizing their political survival, tend to resort to violence to

appear appealing to voters. This dynamic also sheds light on the global war on terror. Numerous countries responded to the United States' call to combat insurgent groups in the Middle East. However, President Bush's early propensity for violent measures shifted to a more conciliatory approach as his political position stabilized. When President Obama first took office, contrary to being a dove, he preferred violent methods instead of non-violent approaches due to political costs, which was in line with the predictions of the study. However, as his term in office progressed and his political security increased, he turned to strategies focused on winning hearts and minds and making concessions. This raises an intriguing question: would the nations that supported America's counterinsurgency efforts have embraced the initial aggressive stance had they anticipated a subsequent softening of the approach?

Therefore, this study provides a crucial perspective on how leaders' priorities and the internal dynamics of their countries influence counterinsurgency policies, offering strategic foresight to policymakers. Additionally, it underscores the importance for local institutions and organizations to understand the impact of leaders' tenure and domestic political dynamics on counterinsurgency strategies. This comprehensive understanding can guide the formulation of more effective and contextually appropriate counterinsurgency measures.

This dissertation also seeks to transcend the one-dimensional, group-focused perspective in conflict studies by elucidating how the relationship between group and constituency can shape government perceptions and, accordingly, government response to insurgent groups. Insurgents can use tactics such as terrorism to extract resources from their constituency, or they can employ conciliatory methods to build a positive reputation among the populace. While existing literature explores the reasons behind such reputation-building tactics, this research robustly supports

reputation theory by identifying the most likely types of groups to elicit specific governmental responses. Groups that invest in creating a positive reputation establish enduring connections with the public, leading governments to adopt a non-responsive stance that neither escalates violence nor concedes the group. Conversely, governments tend to engage with groups perceived as more threatening; particularly those focused on extracting resources from the public via aggressive measures, as these groups tend to weaken over time, making them vulnerable to state intervention. Consequently, while governments aim to protect the public from groups with a negative reputation, they may view insurgents with a positive reputation as legitimate representatives of the people.

The study's findings also lead to significant policy implications. The results suggest that strategies such as winning hearts and minds, engaging in diplomacy, or offering concessions to insurgent groups that use terror tactics to consolidate local support are not viable options. Instead, policymakers should recognize that the most cost-effective approach to dealing with groups that employ aggressive methods against insurgent groups that terrorize their own populace. This interpretation aligns with the harsh state responses observed against groups like Boko Haram, the Sudan Liberation Movement, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. The study also shows that governments tend to remain passive towards insurgent groups with positive public reputations. This result underlines that despite such groups' favorable actions towards the public, they will not achieve their political goals if they continue to employ terror tactics against the state. States combating insurgency may use many different strategies. Thus, this study shows that before policymakers make sharp U-turns in their strategies, they should know that it will always be costly to engage in non-violent measures against groups that employ terrorist tactics, regardless of whether they have a positive or negative reputation.

The research provides robust empirical evidence by critically examining Piazza's (2023) argument on the intricate relationship between political polarization and the deployment of political violence within the framework of counter-insurgency efforts. Affective polarization fosters processes such as demonization, dehumanization, and marginalization, thereby potentially normalizing violence for polarized individuals. Consequently, leaders aiming to consolidate their own groups and ensure their survival feel compelled to adopt aggressive policies against perceived out-groups. The findings demonstrate that in societies characterized by high levels of polarization, where individuals coalesce around a central leader, the state predominantly resorts to military methods against insurgents, who are designated as out-groups. These outcomes robustly corroborate Piazza's theoretical framework. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the pivotal role of social dynamics, presenting them as a critical third dimension in the interplay between states and insurgent groups. This perspective is essential for addressing gaps in the existing literature on conflict studies and contributes significantly to the understanding of the complexities inherent in state-rebel interactions.

The research findings also suggest crucial policy recommendations for leaders who prioritize survival and require robust public support. It is evident that leaders must consider socio-political dynamics when formulating and implementing measures to suppress insurgencies. In affectively polarized societies, leaders rely on the support they receive to maintain their position. Therefore, they are compelled to enact policies that resonate with their electorate. Consequently, leaders are expected to act in accordance with the needs of their in-group. This necessitates the use of aggressive methods against insurgents, deemed the out-group, which are perceived as the most cost-effective and appealing options. Conversely, reduced polarization within a society diminishes the tension between in-groups and out-groups, thereby creating a

broader scope for non-violent methods. The evolving strategies in Colombia's conflict with FARC and Turkey's struggle with the PKK can be interpreted in this context. Ultimately, this study provides policymakers who prioritize political survival with insights on how to shape counterinsurgency strategies based on societal dynamics.

Lastly, this research addresses significant gaps in the conflict literature, offering comprehensive findings across macro, mezzo, and micro levels of analysis. Beyond its academic contributions, it provides policymakers with critical insights on when should incumbents turn to cost-effective or cost-free policies in the fight against insurgency. At the macro level, the study explores the experiences of leaders, highlighting crucial differences between experienced elected and inexperienced leaders, thereby guiding policymakers on how to maintain their positions and effectively counterinsurgency. In addition, this study provides insight for leaders to evaluate their colleagues based on their experience in duty when they decide to act together against insurgency. At the mezzo level, this research examines the relationship between rebel organizations and their constituencies, elucidating how states evaluate the reputations of insurgent organizations and decide on responses based on reputational factors. Therefore, this study reveals the cost of states resorting to conciliatory methods as long as they employ terror tactics, regardless of the group's reputation. At the micro level, the study focuses on public sentiment, particularly affective polarization, which is of paramount importance to policymakers. It suggests that in order to survive, governments must implement counterinsurgency methods that alleviate public dissent.

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Studies

Notwithstanding its aforementioned contributions, this dissertation also suffers from some methodological and practical limitations. The subsequent sections will delineate the specific limitations and weaknesses inherent to each chapter. In addressing these issues, I will propose potential enhancements within the scope of this dissertation and explore avenues for future research endeavors. By critically analyzing these aspects, the goal is to provide a comprehensive framework for improving the robustness and reliability of the research findings.

Before addressing chapter-specific limitations, I would like to begin by discussing a general limitation. As previously mentioned, this study does not focus on a single non-violent tactic due to the nature of the research question and operationalization requirement. Instead, it considers all non-violent strategies employed by states within a given year to induce insurgent surrender, such as offering concessions, initiating peaceful negotiations, and winning the hearts and minds of the constituency.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that different non-violent strategies entail varying costs for states. For instance, implementing a hearts and minds strategy requires not only community support but also robust political, economic, and social infrastructure. Additionally, the outcomes of such strategies are often realized in the long term. Nevertheless, for states to engage in negotiations with insurgent groups, they must possess strong diplomatic capabilities. Furthermore, incumbents must be able to bear the reputational costs associated with such negotiations. Similarly, when offering concessions to insurgent groups, states must do so in a balanced manner, as otherwise, challenging state actors may be perceived as a legitimate means to achieve political goals. Thus, distinguishing between different non-violent counterinsurgency methods could provide a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play. This

deeper perspective could be valuable for future research into the complexities of counterinsurgency.

In the first main chapter, I believe that a more detailed dataset could facilitate a more exhaustive examination of leaders' evolving counterinsurgency strategies. Given the nascent state of counterinsurgency research, there's a noticeable scarcity of datasets capturing state counterinsurgency endeavors, exacerbated by the limited use of quantitative methodologies in this realm. Therefore, I turned to the dataset curated by Asal et al. (2020), which I deem highly relevant for this investigation, offering a comprehensive array of state counterinsurgency actions. However, this dataset exclusively covers governmental responses to insurgent factions from 1998 to 2012, a mere 15-year window. Considering the prolonged nature of many conflicts surpassing this timeframe, it's conceivable that an extended duration could significantly mold leaders' reactions to insurgents. For example, analyzing the enduring Turkey-PKK conflict illustrates that confining the analysis to 15 years overlooks the conflict's extensive scope dating back to the 1970s. Consequently, it becomes imperative to scrutinize the state's actions preceding 1998 and post-2012. Accomplishing this demands a broader dataset, enhancing the understanding of leader-specific attributes and offering more robust insights into the influence of leader experience on counterinsurgency strategies. At this point, I would like to underline that since I used the same data set in all articles, this limitation also applies to other studies. Through comprehensive temporal analysis, we can ascertain whether turbulence abated and identify which counterinsurgency approaches proved effective.

In the second main chapter, akin to the first, methodological constraints introduce some limitations. The dependent variables in this study comprise datasets from Asal et al.'s (2020) dataset, categorizing government responses to insurgents into non-

violent, violent, and mixed measures, and Tokdemir and Akçınaroğlu's (2016) RTG dataset examining the positive and negative reputations of terror groups among their constituency. Consequently, the focus of this study is directed towards insurgent groups employing terror tactics. Thus, utilizing these datasets unveils a significant constraint due to the decrease in observations owing to diverse dynamics. While the overall number of observations suffices for analysis, non-violent strategies, a fundamental dependent variable, represent a mere 2% of the dataset. This limitation necessitated a shift in the analytical approach. A categorical variable was designed, amalgamating mixed and non-violent actions and juxtaposing scenarios containing non-violent activities with those comprising solely violent endeavors to depict categories where no response predominates. Solutions to overcome this constraint emerge, including the creation of a comprehensive, longitudinal dataset encompassing insurgent organizations' reputation dynamics and states' responses. Although not exhaustive, case analysis can provide an alternative tool for hypothesis testing. Particularly, juxtaposing state reactions in similar cases regarding structural attributes and public relations of rebels offers a promising avenue for research.

In the third main chapter, I posit that the implications regarding the impact of affective polarization levels on counterinsurgency strategies are intricately intertwined with securitization theory. This theoretical framework suggests that political issues can morph into urgent security imperatives when identified as hazardous, menacing, or alarming by a securitizing actor vested with both social and institutional authority, thereby transcending typical political discourse. Within this construct, scenarios may emerge where heightened affective polarization prevails, yet the populace fails to recognize the insurgent groups as a paramount security threat. Alternatively, the state might prioritize disparate concerns, thus diverting public attention from the perceived threat posed by insurgent entities. Conversely,

even amidst moderate affective polarization levels, the state could depict rebel organizations as imminent and significant threats, fostering a rallying effect among the populace. It's paramount to highlight that the study's outcomes could be significantly influenced by these scenarios, accentuating the intricate interplay between affective polarization and securitization dynamics.

In addition to addressing chapter-specific limitations and their proposed solutions, this dissertation underscores the indispensable role of longitudinal analysis in advancing the field of counterinsurgency studies. By employing meticulously curated datasets, researchers can shed light on future investigations into counterinsurgency strategies and the policymaking process. Furthermore, delving into in-depth case studies and conducting comparative analyses has the potential to enhance empirical findings by offering a nuanced understanding of their real-world implications. Exploring a diverse array of variables at the leadership level, including the influence of economic and military development, as well as international relations, alliances, and the reputation of leaders, could provide invaluable insights into the dynamics of counterinsurgency efforts. Moreover, future research initiatives could delve deeper into individual-level factors, such as public perceptions of insurgent organizations, to elucidate the decision-making processes to elucidate the conditions under which leaders opt for military interventions over nonviolent counterinsurgency strategies. These multifaceted approaches promise to enrich our understanding of the complexities inherent in counterinsurgency operations and contribute to more effective strategies in combating insurgent threats.

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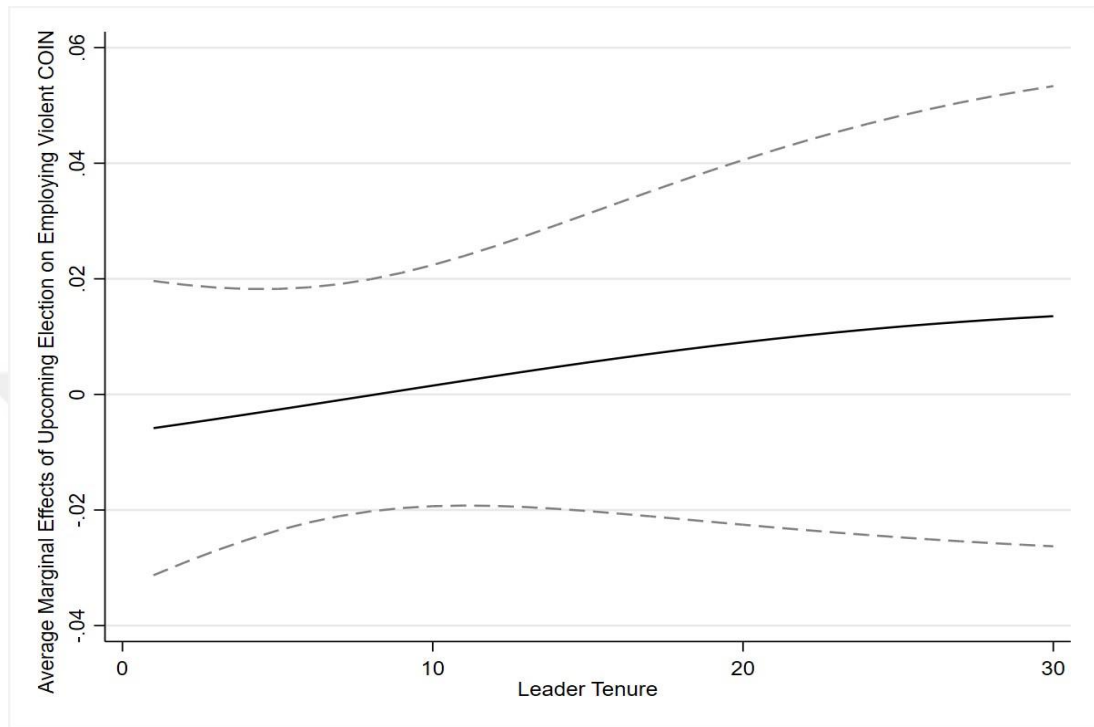
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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A. Correlation Table – Independent Variables

| Variables                 | Leader Ten. | Years to Election | Dem.   | Anoc. | System Ten. | Inst. Const. | Ratio Opp. Seats | Pres. System | Par. System | Leftist Leader | Mil. Off. | Terr. Aim | Terr. Cont. | All. Deg. | GTD Fat. | Gr. Size | Elect. Year | No Term Limit |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------|--------|-------|-------------|--------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|----------|----------|-------------|---------------|
| Leader Tenure             | 1.000       |                   |        |       |             |              |                  |              |             |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Years to Election         | .037        | 1.000             |        |       |             |              |                  |              |             |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Democracy                 | -.530       | .056              | 1.000  |       |             |              |                  |              |             |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Anocracy                  | .530        | -.056             | -1.000 | 1.000 |             |              |                  |              |             |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| System Tenure             | -.030       | .173              | .386   | -.386 | 1.000       |              |                  |              |             |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Institutional Constraints | -.620       | .088              | .852   | -.852 | .385        | 1.000        |                  |              |             |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Ratio of Opposition Seats | -.442       | .068              | .543   | -.543 | .230        | .626         | 1.000            |              |             |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Presidential System       | .393        | -.037             | -.549  | .549  | -.239       | -.621        | -.497            | 1.000        |             |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Parliamentary System      | -.393       | .037              | .549   | -.549 | .239        | .621         | .497             | -1.000       | 1.000       |                |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Leftist leader            | .128        | -.104             | -.163  | .163  | -.216       | -.065        | .150             | -.037        | 0.037       | 1.000          |           |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Military Officer          | .537        | -.019             | -.638  | .638  | -.279       | -.674        | -.396            | .479         | -.479       | .033           | 1.000     |           |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Territorial Aim           | -.172       | .043              | .439   | -.439 | .325        | .448         | .348             | -.393        | .393        | -.129          | -.367     | 1.000     |             |           |          |          |             |               |
| Territorial Control       | .007        | -.042             | -.013  | .013  | -.017       | -.054        | -.050            | .082         | -.082       | -.081          | .101      | -.053     | 1.000       |           |          |          |             |               |
| Alliance Degree           | -.164       | .106              | .132   | -.132 | .202        | .163         | .185             | -.227        | .227        | -.093          | -.080     | .155      | .022        | 1.000     |          |          |             |               |
| GTD Fatalities            | -.067       | -.004             | -.029  | .029  | -.046       | .002         | .033             | .002         | -.002       | .014           | -.070     | -.118     | .054        | .038      | 1.000    |          |             |               |
| Group Size                | -.011       | -.021             | -.020  | .020  | -.104       | -.025        | -.088            | .104         | -.104       | -.157          | .095      | -.068     | .141        | -.024     | .082     | 1.000    |             |               |
| Election Year             | .064        | .695              | -.010  | .010  | .052        | .020         | -.017            | .035         | -.035       | -.090          | .023      | -.011     | -.043       | .029      | -.017    | .010     | 1.000       |               |
| No Term Limit             | .139        | .024              | .177   | -.177 | .369        | .186         | .184             | -.577        | .577        | -.006          | -.093     | .251      | -.117       | -.003     | -.091    | -.138    | .023        | 1.000         |

## APPENDIX B. Marginal Impact of Upcoming Elections on Violent Counterinsurgency Activities



## APPENDIX C. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results – Election Year Interaction

| Variables                     | Non-Violent       | Model 3<br>Violent | Mixed           | Non-Violent       | Model 4<br>Violent | Mixed            | Non-Violent        | Model 5<br>Violent | Mixed             |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Leader Tenure                 | -.067<br>(.042)   | -.084**<br>(.031)  | -.023<br>(.028) | -.056<br>(.041)   | -.085**<br>(.030)  | -.024<br>(.028)  | .052<br>(.148)     | .074<br>(.069)     | .113<br>(.062)    |
| Election Year                 |                   |                    |                 | .623<br>(.865)    | -.234<br>(.269)    | -.185<br>(.290)  |                    |                    |                   |
| Leader Tenure X Election Year |                   |                    |                 | -.081<br>(.1)     | .006<br>(.024)     | .006<br>(.029)   |                    |                    |                   |
| Anocracy                      |                   |                    |                 |                   |                    |                  | 1.692<br>(1.542)   | 1.727**<br>(.562)  | 1.656*<br>(.751)  |
| Leader Tenure X Anocracy      |                   |                    |                 |                   |                    |                  | -.138<br>(.156)    | -.181**<br>(.069)  | -0.156*<br>(.067) |
| System Tenure                 | .029<br>(.019)    | .043**<br>(.016)   | .027<br>(.016)  | .028<br>(.019)    | .043**<br>(.016)   | .027<br>(.016)   | .039*<br>(.019)    | .052**<br>(.017)   | .036*<br>(.017)   |
| Institutional Constraints     | -.271<br>(.247)   | -.146<br>(.146)    | .189<br>(.173)  | -.288<br>(.248)   | -.145<br>(.148)    | .190<br>(.173)   | -.136<br>(.336)    | -.033<br>(.162)    | .309<br>(.202)    |
| Ratio of Opposition Seats     | -.683<br>(1.417)  | -.025<br>(.822)    | .497<br>(.831)  | -.684<br>(1.384)  | -.024<br>(.823)    | .498<br>(.832)   | -.213<br>(1.566)   | .514<br>(.844)     | .954<br>(.846)    |
| Presidential system           | .371<br>(.825)    | -.369<br>(.495)    | .336<br>(.520)  | .361<br>(.830)    | -.369<br>(.496)    | .336<br>(.521)   | .168<br>(.722)     | -.537<br>(.490)    | .158<br>(.523)    |
| Left-wing Ideology            | .820<br>(.553)    | .097<br>(.289)     | .273<br>(.319)  | .815<br>(.549)    | .095<br>(.290)     | .270<br>(.320)   | .730<br>(.555)     | .008<br>(.286)     | .177<br>(.309)    |
| Military Officer              | .201<br>(.569)    | .071<br>(.468)     | .111<br>(.522)  | .170<br>(.565)    | .074<br>(.468)     | .115<br>(.524)   | .167<br>(.563)     | .048<br>(.479)     | .046<br>(.516)    |
| Territorial Aim               | 1.562*<br>(.636)  | .318<br>(.366)     | .329<br>(.398)  | 1.557*<br>(.629)  | .318<br>(.366)     | .330<br>(.398)   | 1.601*<br>(.633)   | .317<br>(.351)     | .338<br>(.405)    |
| Territorial Control           | 1.482**<br>(.452) | .327<br>(.342)     | .455<br>(.373)  | 1.509**<br>(.459) | .327<br>(.342)     | .455<br>(.373)   | 1.527***<br>(.445) | .378<br>(.335)     | .510<br>(.358)    |
| Alliance Degree               | -.190<br>(.250)   | .159<br>(.082)     | .129<br>(.079)  | -.189<br>(.250)   | .159<br>(.082)     | .129<br>(.079)   | -.213<br>(.253)    | .133<br>(.0754)    | .105<br>(.074)    |
| GTD Fatalities                | .043*<br>(.021)   | .053**<br>(.019)   | .050*<br>(.019) | .0424*<br>(.021)  | .053**<br>(.019)   | .050*<br>(.0195) | .043*<br>(.021)    | .053**<br>(.02)    | .051*<br>(.020)   |
| Group size                    | .026<br>(.286)    | .001<br>(.142)     | .320*<br>(.155) | .021<br>(.288)    | -.001<br>(.141)    | .318*<br>(.154)  | .0291<br>(.283)    | .009<br>(.145)     | .325*<br>(.155)   |
| N                             | 1,016             | 1,016              | 1,016           | 1,016             | 1,016              | 1,016            | 1,016              | 1,016              | 1,016             |
| Log Likelihood                | -1040             | -1040              | -1040           | -1039             | -1039              | -1039            | -1030              | -1030              | -1030             |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## APPENDIX D. Controlling for Term Limit

| Variables                         | Non-Violent      | Model 6<br>Violent | Mixed            | Non-Violent       | Model 7<br>Violent | Mixed            | Non-Violent      | Model 8<br>Violent | Mixed             |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Leader Tenure                     | -.053<br>(.047)  | -.103**<br>(.033)  | -.065*<br>(.032) | -.029<br>(.106)   | -.118**<br>(.039)  | -.106*<br>(.047) | .066<br>(.144)   | .054<br>(.063)     | .096<br>(.059)    |
| Years to Election                 |                  |                    |                  | -.161<br>(.264)   | -.154<br>(.09)     | -.238*<br>(.108) |                  |                    |                   |
| Leader Tenure X Years to Election |                  |                    |                  | -.006<br>(.022)   | .008<br>(.007)     | .012<br>(.009)   |                  |                    |                   |
| Anocracy                          |                  |                    |                  |                   |                    |                  | 1.931<br>(1.493) | 1.616**<br>(0.556) | 1.581*<br>(0.724) |
| Leader Tenure X Anocracy          |                  |                    |                  |                   |                    |                  | -.134<br>(.154)  | -.181**<br>(.067)  | -.187**<br>(.065) |
| No Term Limit                     | .379<br>(.731)   | .316<br>(.459)     | .716<br>(.458)   | -.267<br>(.808)   | .249<br>(.469)     | .655<br>(.476)   | .419<br>(.728)   | .433<br>(.469)     | .844<br>(.469)    |
| System Tenure                     | .020<br>(.022)   | .041**<br>(.016)   | .022<br>(.016)   | .033<br>(.019)    | .041**<br>(.015)   | .024<br>(.016)   | .029<br>(.021)   | .047**<br>(.017)   | .029<br>(.018)    |
| Institutional Constraints         | -.149<br>(.263)  | -.169<br>(.151)    | .123<br>(.186)   | -.218<br>(.240)   | -.154<br>(.155)    | .150<br>(.197)   | .054<br>(.347)   | -.067<br>(.172)    | .199<br>(.217)    |
| Ratio of Opposition Seats         | -.452<br>(1.402) | -.214<br>(.860)    | .274<br>(.760)   | -.145<br>(1.545)  | -.026<br>(.871)    | .470<br>(.786)   | .130<br>(1.485)  | .396<br>(.884)     | .880<br>(.767)    |
| Presidential System               | .692<br>(1.068)  | -.099<br>(.615)    | .885<br>(.638)   | -.0429<br>(1.101) | -.145<br>(.643)    | .815<br>(.668)   | .515<br>(.996)   | -.154<br>(.619)    | .829<br>(.635)    |
| Left-wing Ideology                | .580<br>(.553)   | .160<br>(.292)     | .368<br>(.338)   | .507<br>(.612)    | .085<br>(.303)     | .276<br>(.347)   | .414<br>(.544)   | .075<br>(.283)     | .284<br>(.323)    |
| Military Officer                  | .029<br>(.634)   | .075<br>(.48)      | .101<br>(.538)   | .426<br>(.719)    | .017<br>(.505)     | .238<br>(.588)   | -.08<br>(.601)   | .011<br>(.481)     | .034<br>(.528)    |
| Territorial Aim                   | 1.240*<br>(.539) | .360<br>(.407)     | .440<br>(.452)   | 1.121*<br>(.558)  | .350<br>(.401)     | .411<br>(.455)   | 1.223*<br>(.528) | .326<br>(.394)     | .407<br>(.454)    |
| Territorial Control               | 1.366*<br>(.595) | .159<br>(.329)     | .382<br>(.349)   | 1.195<br>(.619)   | .137<br>(.321)     | .351<br>(.348)   | 1.433*<br>(.580) | .225<br>(.317)     | .441<br>(.333)    |
| Alliance Degree                   | -.215<br>(.298)  | .212**<br>(.08)    | .194*<br>(.085)  | -.198<br>(.284)   | .219**<br>(.08)    | .203*<br>(.086)  | -.239<br>(.298)  | .191*<br>(.074)    | .172*<br>(.082)   |
| GTD Fatalities                    | .043*<br>(.021)  | .053**<br>(.02)    | .05*<br>(.02)    | .043*<br>(.020)   | .051**<br>(.019)   | .048*<br>(.02)   | .043*<br>(.021)  | .052**<br>(.02)    | .05*<br>(.020)    |
| Group Size                        | .023<br>(.341)   | .002<br>(.144)     | .344*<br>(.159)  | -.045<br>(.351)   | -.021<br>(.144)    | .329*<br>(.159)  | .016<br>(.336)   | .008<br>(.148)     | .349*<br>(.159)   |
| N                                 | 960              | 960                | 960              | 933               | 933                | 933              | 960              | 960                | 960               |
| Log Likelihood                    | -970.2           | -970.2             | -970.2           | -935.0            | -935.0             | -935.0           | -960.5           | -960.5             | -960.5            |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## APPENDIX E. Leader Clustered Standard Errors

| Variables                         | Non-Violent        | Model 9<br>Violent | Mixed            | Non-Violent      | Model 10<br>Violent | Mixed            | Non-Violent        | Model 11<br>Violent | Mixed             |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Leader Tenure                     | -.067<br>(.036)    | -.085*<br>(.034)   | -.024<br>(.039)  | -.042<br>(.103)  | -.102*<br>(.041)    | -.051<br>(.051)  | .045<br>(.140)     | .063<br>(.058)      | .104<br>(.067)    |
| Years to Election                 |                    |                    |                  | -.177<br>(.258)  | -.151<br>(.079)     | -.209*<br>(.096) |                    |                     |                   |
| Leader Tenure X Years to Election |                    |                    |                  | -.02<br>(.022)   | .007<br>(.008)      | .005<br>(.009)   |                    |                     |                   |
| Anocracy                          |                    |                    |                  |                  |                     |                  | 1.654<br>(1.430)   | 1.653***<br>(.487)  | 1.598**<br>(.581) |
| Leader Tenure X Anocracy          |                    |                    |                  |                  |                     |                  | -.132<br>(.149)    | -.171*<br>(.069)    | -.147<br>(.079)   |
| System Tenure                     | .029<br>(.018)     | .043***<br>(.01)   | .027**<br>(.011) | .028<br>(.02)    | .044***<br>(.01)    | .032**<br>(.010) | .039*<br>(.019)    | .052***<br>(.011)   | .036**<br>(.012)  |
| Institutional Constraints         | -.277<br>(.180)    | -.156<br>(.1)      | .181<br>(.179)   | -.176<br>(.226)  | -.154<br>(.104)     | .131<br>(.192)   | -.146<br>(.228)    | -.052<br>(.122)     | .294<br>(.178)    |
| Ratio of Opposition Seats         | -.668<br>(1.448)   | -.011<br>(.645)    | .517<br>(.881)   | .326<br>(1.488)  | .120<br>(.709)      | .460<br>(.943)   | -.208<br>(1.631)   | .509<br>(.615)      | .963<br>(.895)    |
| Presidential System               | .369<br>(.797)     | -.374<br>(.351)    | .333<br>(.350)   | .175<br>(.856)   | -.355<br>(.351)     | .304<br>(.359)   | .176<br>(.721)     | -.534<br>(.341)     | .165<br>(.347)    |
| Left-wing Ideology                | .829<br>(.453)     | .115<br>(.296)     | .285<br>(.338)   | .400<br>(.482)   | .065<br>(.299)      | .318<br>(.333)   | .748<br>(.479)     | .04<br>(.299)       | .199<br>(.346)    |
| Military Officer                  | .196<br>(.510)     | .059<br>(0.461)    | .103<br>(.448)   | .288<br>(.758)   | .018<br>(.482)      | .288<br>(.518)   | 0.157<br>(0.525)   | .029<br>(.474)      | .032<br>(.456)    |
| Territorial Aim                   | 1.570***<br>(.444) | .332<br>(.224)     | .341<br>(.317)   | 1.000<br>(.527)  | .369<br>(.256)      | .508<br>(.373)   | 1.618***<br>(.474) | .341<br>(.219)      | .359<br>(.312)    |
| Territorial Control               | 1.488***<br>(.451) | .337<br>(.305)     | .463<br>(.313)   | 1.254*<br>(.632) | .202<br>(.296)      | .361<br>(.308)   | 1.535***<br>(.445) | .391<br>(.295)      | .521<br>(.298)    |
| Alliance Degree                   | -.191<br>(.222)    | .157*<br>(.067)    | .128<br>(.066)   | -.220<br>(.262)  | .171*<br>(.072)     | .133<br>(.069)   | -.214<br>(.232)    | .132*<br>(.057)     | .104<br>(.057)    |
| GTD Fatalities                    | .043*<br>(.021)    | .053**<br>(.021)   | .050*<br>(.021)  | .043*<br>(.021)  | .051*<br>(.02)      | .049*<br>(.020)  | .043*<br>(.021)    | .054**<br>(.021)    | .051*<br>(.021)   |
| Group Size                        | .027<br>(.239)     | .004<br>(.118)     | .323*<br>(.145)  | -.041<br>(.325)  | -.034<br>(.116)     | .314*<br>(.142)  | .032<br>(.233)     | .014<br>(.124)      | .330*<br>(.149)   |
| N                                 | 1,016              | 1,016              | 1,016            | 949              | 949                 | 949              | 1,016              | 1,016               | 1,016             |
| Log Likelihood                    | -1041              | -1041              | -1041            | -954.7           | -954.7              | -954.7           | -1031              | -1031               | -1031             |

Robust standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## APPENDIX F. Multinomial Regression Results – Additional Controls

| Variables                   | Non-Violent | Model 5<br>Violent | Mixed    | Non-Violent | Model 6<br>Violent | Mixed     |
|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------------|----------|-------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Polarization level          | .374*       | -.224**            | -.263**  | -.357       | .041               | -.445***  |
|                             | (.185)      | (.075)             | (.087)   | (.262)      | (.110)             | (.129)    |
| Leadership skill            |             |                    |          | -.019       | -.252**            | -.285**   |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.229)      | (.093)             | (.107)    |
| Performance legitimization  |             |                    |          | -.043       | .065               | -.275*    |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.264)      | (.115)             | (.132)    |
| Removal by legislation      |             |                    |          | .065        | .320*              | -.051     |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.320)      | (.131)             | (.150)    |
| Dissolution the legislation |             |                    |          | 1.012       | -.427              | -.301     |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.687)      | (.277)             | (.323)    |
| Appoint the cabinet         |             |                    |          | .053        | .130               | -.200     |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.581)      | (.262)             | (.291)    |
| Veto Power                  |             |                    |          | -.080       | .249*              | .131      |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.278)      | (.115)             | (.132)    |
| Propose the legislation     |             |                    |          | .873*       | .111               | .767***   |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.433)      | (.186)             | (.225)    |
| Leftist leader              |             |                    |          | .405        | .183               | .419*     |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.429)      | (.174)             | (.200)    |
| Polity IV II                |             |                    |          | -.265*      | -.104*             | -.104     |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.122)      | (.049)             | (.057)    |
| GDP                         |             |                    |          | -.208       | .095               | -.019     |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.207)      | (.084)             | (.101)    |
| Population                  |             |                    |          | -.058       | .132*              | .086      |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.184)      | (.063)             | (.072)    |
| Territorial Control         |             |                    |          | 2.512***    | .689**             | 1.341***  |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.378)      | (.221)             | (.235)    |
| Alliance Degree             |             |                    |          | .019        | .626***            | .581***   |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.257)      | (.104)             | (.110)    |
| Religious                   |             |                    |          | .478        | -.185              | -1.026*** |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.492)      | (.217)             | (.253)    |
| Ethnic                      |             |                    |          | 2.026***    | 1.064***           | 1.203***  |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.446)      | (.185)             | (.212)    |
| Leftist                     |             |                    |          | 1.415**     | 1.26***            | 1.287***  |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.482)      | (.233)             | (.259)    |
| Fatalities                  |             |                    |          | .012        | .029***            | .028***   |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.012)      | (.007)             | (.007)    |
| Group Size                  |             |                    |          | -.013       | .130               | .021      |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.146)      | (.072)             | (.078)    |
| Leader born year            |             |                    |          | .016        | -.001              | .001      |
|                             |             |                    |          | (.019)      | (.001)             | (.002)    |
| Directly elected            | -1.099**    | .122               | .089     | -.655       | .578*              | .510      |
|                             | (.370)      | (.183)             | (.211)   | (.552)      | (.253)             | (.287)    |
| Female                      | 1.174*      | -.039              | .280     | 2.478**     | .944*              | .712      |
|                             | (.552)      | (.322)             | (.347)   | (.796)      | (.441)             | (.476)    |
| Term Limit                  | .851*       | -.157              | .113     | .062        | -.268              | -.242     |
|                             | (.351)      | (.186)             | (.218)   | (.52)       | (.272)             | (.315)    |
| N                           | 1,380       | 1,380              | 1,380    | 1,378       | 1,378              | 1,378     |
| Log Likelihood              | -1612       | -1612              | -1612    | -1360       | -1360              | -1360     |
| AIC                         | 3253.626    | 3253.626           | 3253.626 | 2863.453    | 2863.453           | 2863.453  |
| BIC                         | 3332.074    | 3332.074           | 3332.074 | 3239.897    | 3239.897           | 3239.897  |

Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

## APPENDIX G. Multinomial Regression Results

| Variables                   | Model 7          |                   | Model 8            |                    |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                             | Non-Violent App. | Violent App.      | Non-Violent App.   | Violent App.       |
| Polarization level          | -.177*<br>(.084) | -.222**<br>(.075) | -.420***<br>(.124) | .042<br>(.110)     |
| Leadership skill            |                  |                   | -.276**<br>(.103)  | -.246**<br>(.093)  |
| Performance legitimization  |                  |                   | -.240<br>(.127)    | .059<br>(.115)     |
| Removal by legislation      |                  |                   | -.061<br>(.145)    | .323*<br>(.130)    |
| Dissolution the legislation |                  |                   | -.061<br>(.309)    | -.444<br>(.277)    |
| Appoint the cabinet         |                  |                   | -.242<br>(.279)    | .148<br>(.261)     |
| Veto Power                  |                  |                   | .110<br>(.127)     | .249*<br>(.115)    |
| Propose the legislation     |                  |                   | .754***<br>(.214)  | .120<br>(.186)     |
| Leftist leader              |                  |                   | .439*<br>(.194)    | .180<br>(.174)     |
| Polity IV II                |                  |                   | -.123*<br>(.055)   | -.102*<br>(.049)   |
| GDP                         |                  |                   | -0.0497<br>(.097)  | .093<br>(.083)     |
| Population                  |                  |                   | 0.077<br>(.069)    | .133*<br>(.064)    |
| Territorial Control         |                  |                   | 1.518***<br>(.226) | .722***<br>(.219)  |
| Alliance Degree             |                  |                   | .538***<br>(.108)  | .607***<br>(.103)  |
| Religious                   |                  |                   | -.855***<br>(.242) | -.152<br>(.216)    |
| Ethnic                      |                  |                   | 1.316***<br>(.206) | 1.074***<br>(.185) |
| Leftist                     |                  |                   | 1.354***<br>(.252) | 1.031***<br>(.232) |
| Fatalities                  |                  |                   | .027***<br>(.007)  | .028***<br>(.007)  |
| Group Size                  |                  |                   | .012<br>(.076)     | .134<br>(.071)     |
| Leader born year            | .002<br>(.003)   | -.001<br>(.001)   | .001<br>(.002)     | -.001<br>(.001)    |
| Directly elected            | -.149<br>(.197)  | .126<br>(.183)    | .372<br>(.275)     | .555*<br>(.253)    |
| Female                      | .434<br>(.331)   | -.033<br>(.322)   | .911*<br>(.461)    | .971*<br>(.441)    |
| Term Limit                  | .282<br>(.203)   | -.159<br>(.186)   | -.177<br>(.296)    | -.247<br>(.272)    |
| N                           | 1,380            | 1,380             | 1,378              | 1,378              |
| Log Likelihood              | -1465            | -1465             | -1244              | -1244              |
| AIC                         | 2953.525         | 2953.525          | 2584.976           | 2584.976           |
| BIC                         | 3016.283         | 3016.283          | 2835.939           | 2835.939           |

Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05