Revisiting One-sided Violence - A Global and Regional Analysis

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– A Global and Regional Analysis

RALPH SUNDBERG

Introduction
Since its launch in the late 1970s the Uppsala Conflict Data Program’s (UCDP) data collection endeavours have continued to grow in both scope and depth. Whilst the program at its early stages focused only what are referred to as state-based armed conflicts (i.e. civil wars and interstate wars) the program in its present form collects data not only on other forms of organised violence, but also on peacemaking and conflict prevention activities around the world.

In 2002 the scope of the data collection experienced its most significant expansion as two new categories of organised violence, non-state conflict and one-sided violence, were incorporated into the program’s annual updates. In addition, the program also began to collect more precise fatality estimates for all categories of organised violence in order to supply the academic community with more nuanced data.

The one-sided violence category especially has received much attention and has been used as the core data of several studies of modern-day warfare. The data have of course been interesting for scholars since it can capture insurgency strategies and tactics of a different kind than those pursued in ‘normal’ warfare and thus shed further light on the causes, dynamics and effects of organised violence.

The data available in the one-sided violence sphere now encompasses the years 1989-2008; a full 20 years of data. In earlier editions of the UCDP’s annual publication States in Armed Conflict the phenomenon of one-sided violence has been placed in the limelight through numerous different perspectives. Since then the data have been not only expanded to cover new years, but has also been revised on several occasions as new reports, books and analyses containing new information have become available. The UCDP thus feels that a new and fresh look at the global incidence of one-sided violence is called for.

The aim of this paper is to present the global and regional patterns of one-sided violence in the 1989-2007 period and also to analyse where and when one-sided violence takes place. This article will firstly briefly discuss definitions, operationalisations and data limitations and then present the global and regional

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1 Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University. The data collection on one-sided violence has mainly been funded by the Human Security Research Group, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. The author would like to thank Margareta Sollenberg and Lotta Harbom for their valuable input. Responsibility for the contents, however, rests solely with the author.


3 The data have been updated to 2008, but due to an embargo period on newly produced data the analysed time period stretches only until 2007.
trends of one-sided violence that can be discerned in the 1989-2007 period. The presentation will focus both on the global and regional arenas, outlining the trends visible in the world at large and analyse regional patterns and disparities. Next, the article will look closely at the countries affected by one-sided violence and more generally at how regime type and economic factors correlate with the incidence and scope of one-sided violence. Lastly, a short conclusion will sum up the main points of the exercise.

**Definitions, operationalisations and data limitations**

The UCDP defines one-sided violence for systematic data collection as:

“One-sided violence is the use of armed force by the government of a state or by a formally organised group against civilians which results in at least 25 deaths.”

In simpler terms this means that one-sided violence is – more or less – violence aimed directly at unarmed civilians that during one year reaches a certain level of intensity. It is thus separate from armed action between combatants causing deaths, something that the UCDP defines instead as being ‘battle-related deaths’. Civilian fatalities are at times viewed as being battle-related deaths, specifically in those instances where two opposing forces are targeting one another. What matters in deciding between these two categories is the intended target or intention of the attacking forces.

The dataset used for the analysis in this article is a somewhat modified version of the UCDP One-sided Violence Dataset v1.3-2008, in which the unit of analysis is the actor-year. Thus, if an actor – be it the government of a state or a non-state actor – kill 25 or more civilians in one calendar year the actor enters the dataset for that year.\(^5\)

It can sometimes be unclear to users of the data what parts of the definition actually entail, such as ‘government’ and what actually qualifies as a ‘civilian’. Below are therefore some clarifications to aid in the interpretation of the data.

‘Government of a state’ implies not only a state’s military forces, but in most cases any possible extension of its possibilities to exert armed force. A state’s police forces, paramilitary units and government-funded and run militias are all viewed as being part of the state’s machinery by the UCDP. What determines if an extension is viewed as part of the government is in essence who controls it, i.e. if its leadership is commanded by or answers to the government.

In the sphere of non-state actors, any member of a group’s organisation is viewed as a representative of that group. The group itself is thus, in most cases, held responsible for the actions of violence perpetrated by those classified as its members.

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4 Extrajudicial killings in custody are excluded and the data are aggregated to the calendar year level.
‘Civilians’ are any unarmed people that cannot be said to be part of either a government’s official or unofficial machinery or part of an armed non-state group. In terms of coding, not all unarmed people are thus viewed as being civilians. People that are employed by the government in a function of exerting government authority, as well as unarmed members of rebel movements, can at times be recorded not as one-sided deaths but as battle-related fatalities if they are killed in direct armed action.

**Fatality estimates**

The fatality estimates presented in this article have been arrived at following the UCDP’s general guidelines for coding, meaning that a variety of sources are scrutinised by human coders. Even though the best open-source information available is commonly used by the coders the figures given are still only estimates. They should be viewed as a representation of reality only, and not an attempt to reflect the true number of fatalities.

Fatality estimates are provided in three different categories, the ‘best’, ‘high’ and ‘low’ estimates. The UCDP’s so-called ‘best estimate’ contains the number of fatalities we are confident of. It is still a conservative one though, meaning that, in general, fatality numbers are likely to be higher, but are probably not lower than the given estimate. The ‘best’ figure should thus be viewed as a baseline figure. The ‘high’ and ‘low’ estimates are employed in situations where there is some ambiguity so as to the actual number of civilians killed in an incident of one-sided violence, or so as to the actual perpetrator.

The UCDP’s figures are likely to be viewed by many as being too low, but the data’s main strength lie in the fact that the data collection is systematic and thus makes data comparable over time and space. In the end, this provides users and observers of the data with the possibility to track trends and changes over time, more than an opportunity to state with full accuracy the actual number of civilians killed.

**Data limitations**

Other limitations to the data beyond the estimation procedure pertain to the sources used. The UCDP only has the resources to obtain free and open-source information, provided mainly by journalists, witnesses and human rights organisations. There are great country-by-country variations in terms of the presence of such actors and thus the data inevitably varies in quality.

Especially in severely autocratic regimes governments may be able to attack civilians without such information ever being available to outside parties such as the UCDP. Governments may also report attacks on civilians as being attacks against ‘rebels’, complicating the picture further. Further, the UCDP does not have the resources to track what types of violence take place behind close doors, such as in detention facilities or other holding places.6

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6 Obtaining such information is also already carried out, by organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.
Governments, however, appear eager to report atrocities committed by their enemies; commonly non-state actors. This may be one factor that affects the fact that more non-state groups than governments are represented in the dataset. Reports from governments of atrocities committed are, of course, not accepted at face value though, but are thoroughly scrutinised by the coders.

There is no easy way to get around the problems listed above and these biases are thus present in the data, something which users should be aware of.


**Global trends**

Globally, the UCDP’s data collection on one-sided violence has registered a total of 576 actor-years in the period between 1989 and 2007. Thus, on average, one calendar year experiences 30 active one-sided actors. During the same period a total of 166 separate actors have perpetrated one-sided violence, meaning that one actor on average perpetrates 3.47 years of activity.

Seeing that the universe of the possible number of actors per year is unlimited (since any state can, in theory, have an infinite number of non-state challengers) it is not possible to state if one-sided violence is a common phenomenon or not. However, from this universe we can at least draw the conclusion that one-sided violence is a constant phenomenon, which occurs to some extent during all of the years covered by the data. Comparisons within the time period are, however, also possible.

**Figure 1. One-sided actors by year, 1989-2007**

![Graph showing one-sided actors by year, 1989-2007](image)

The graph indicates the number of one-sided actors per year from 1989 to 2007, with a peak in 1996 and a notable decline after 2000.
Figure 1 shows the number of one-sided actors by year, during the 1989-2007 period. As was stated above, the average number of actors is 30 per year. The peak years in activity were 2002 and 2004, years in which a full 40 separate actors were recorded as active perpetrators of one-sided violence. These two peaks are mainly caused by an upsurge of activity in Asia and Africa.

In Africa activity, in terms of the number of actors, is highly influenced in 2002 by the crises in the Great Lakes region. Actors in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, account for 7 out of the 19 actors that were registered. During the same year in Asia, practically all one-sided actors were concentrated to India, Indonesia and the Philippines.

In 2004 it is again Africa and Asia as regions that stand for the bulk of activity. There was, however, also a hefty increase in activity in the Middle East; something mainly caused by the upsurge in the killing of civilians in Iraq following the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 and attacks by Islamist groups in the Middle East in general.

In Africa in 2004 one-sided activity is spread more evenly across the continent, but violence in the Great Lakes region still stands for a large share of the recorded activity. In Asia the activity is also spread across large tracts of the continent.

Looking at the period as a whole it can be discerned that there are no huge fluctuations from the average number of actors (30). At the most, such as during the peak years of 2002 and 2004, the number of actors deviates by 10 from the average. The bottom year of 1989, which had 24 active perpetrators, deviates from the average by only -6.

**Regional trends**
Turning to regional activity Figure 2 shows the number of one-sided actors per region (with stacked fields).

**Figure 2. One-sided activity by region, 1989-2007**
During the entire period under scrutiny Asia and Africa stand out as the regions that have been the most affected by one-sided violence in terms of the number of actors. Throughout the entire period Africa stands for the largest proportion. Towards the end of the studied time period Asia, however, gains ground and from 2003 and onwards there is almost complete parity between these two regions’ proportions of the world’s actors.

The increase of actors in Asia and the decrease in Africa corresponds relatively well to trends reported in armed conflicts in these region. In other words, Asia has become more violent whilst Africa has become less so, both in the one-sided and state-based categories. These changes are, however, relatively small and may not be indicative of any major trends being in motion.

In terms of actors Europe and the Americas stand out as being the regions that have been the least affected by one-sided violence.

Since 2004 Europe has not experienced any one-sided activity of scale. In 2007 one-sided violence in the Americas also dropped to zero. The drop in activity in Europe can mainly be attributed to two factors; first of all the end of conflict activity in the Balkans and secondly to the decrease in intensity in the conflicts in the Russian parts of the Caucasus (Chechnya, Dagestan etc.). In general, one-sided violence in Europe is only committed in the context of armed conflicts.

One-sided activity in the Middle East increased relatively steeply between the years 2000 and 2007. Most of this increase, especially from 2003 and onwards, is caused by the many actors that became active in Iraq following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

The war in Iraq was and is an intensive one, but attacks on civilians have perhaps been the most lethal in the past few years’ sectarian violence. Data for the Middle East are also heavily influenced by activity concerning conflict with Israel; both suicide bombings in the early 2000s as well as Israeli retaliatory action, especially in Lebanon in 2006.

One-sided activity in the Americas has taken place mostly within the context of the armed conflict in Colombia. As that conflict has lessened in activity in the past few years so has one-sided violence.

**Fatalities from one-sided violence**

Although looking purely at the number of actors that have perpetrated one-sided violence around the globe is interesting and reveals certain characteristics about the phenomenon, it is perhaps more interesting to look at the actual number of fatalities caused by one-sided activity.

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7 In the past years there have, however, been high levels of violence in Mexico, mostly related to drug cartels. This type of violence is difficult to capture and also mainly takes the form of non-state conflicts. Many of those executed in these drug wars are members of the cartels and are thus not viewed by the UCDP as being civilians.
As is clear from the definition given at the beginning of this paper activity in the one-sided category means only that at least 25 deaths have been registered as having been perpetrated by one actor in a specific calendar year. In theory an actor can kill an almost infinite number of civilians, and registering activity does thus not yield the entire picture of the intensity of the phenomenon. Below follows a glance at the one-sided data from the perspective of the number of fatalities.\textsuperscript{8}

Between 1989 and 2007 the UCDP has registered a span of some 174,100 – 1,113,791 civilian deaths, with a best estimate of 635,050. Thus, a total of 33,423 people are killed, on average, every year in one-sided violence. Figure 3 below outlines the global fatalities per year.

**Figure 3. One-sided fatalities, 1989-2007**

As is visible in the above graph, the line that denotes the number of fatalities jumps off the chart in 1994. This huge bump in the graph is caused by the genocide in Rwanda, perpetrated by the government of that state supported by government-controlled militias. The UCDP’s best estimate for this genocide is 500,000, and the high estimate 800,000.

Removing this genocide from the equation – as it may be defined as an extreme exception from the normal doing and dealings of governments – of course significantly lowers the average number of deaths per year, making the average 7107 civilians killed per year in one-sided violence. Adding the average of 30 actors per year to this equation yields an average of the number of civilians killed per year by each actor of 236,9.

Figure 3 clearly reveals that the 1990s were much bloodier in terms of one-sided violence than were the years of the 2000s that have passed so far. These numbers might seem counterintuitive, especially in light of the atrocities committed against civilians in Darfur and in Iraq. A few words on the cases of Darfur and Iraq are thus in order.

\textsuperscript{8} If nothing else is stated the civilian deaths analysed are the ones found in the UCDP’s ‘best estimate’ category. This denotes that they are deaths that we know with certainty took place and who perpetrated them. The ‘high estimate’ includes deaths that the UCDP has not been able to verify for a specific actor, whilst the ‘low estimate’ contains lower numbers than the best, but for verified events.
In Darfur there have been great problems in establishing the exact number of civilians killed by the Government of Sudan and the Janjaweed (the primary perpetrators of one-sided violence in this region) due to poor reporting. Also, it would appear that the many hundreds of thousands of people that have been reported as perishing in the conflict there have mainly died due to starvation and disease.

Most of these deaths are without a doubt caused by the war (generally referred to as ‘war deaths’), but fatalities caused by such ‘structural violence’ are not recorded as one-sided violence by the UCDP. In Iraq the UCDP has faced great difficulties in assigning many civilian deaths to specific actors; something which means that those deaths cannot be recorded. As was noted in the section on definitions and operationalisations this renders the estimates very conservative.

Still, this is also the case in the years preceding these two conflicts, which should make the data comparable.

The relatively high peaks in the 1992-1995 period are mainly caused (when excluding the Rwandan genocide) by one-sided activity in Sudan, Bosnia, Liberia and Burundi. In the period that follows (1996-1997) the mainstay of activity takes place in the Great Lakes region, where actors in Burundi, Rwanda, the DRC and the Republic of Congo wreak havoc in the wake of the Rwandan genocide and the chaos that followed in the region.

The same hotspot continues to be active in 1998, a year that also includes widespread killings perpetrated in Afghanistan by the Taliban-led Government of Afghanistan.

In 1999 the number of civilians killed drops significantly and continues to stay at a comparatively low level, although bumps occur in 2003 and 2004, caused by the Government of Sudan and the Janjaweed. From thereon the trend is again a downward one, reaching in 2005-2007 the lowest levels recorded since the time period’s start.

As the above paragraphs reveal, one-sided violence has been spread around most parts of the globe. Map 1 on the next page shows the dispersion of fatalities globally between 1989 and 2007.
Regional comparisons
As the above short global overview has clearly shown with its examples of when and where fatalities occur, Africa is the region that has been worst hit in terms of fatalities. The following section outlines regional comparisons, with Figure 4 showing the dispersion of fatalities by region.

Figure 4. One-sided violence fatalities by region, 1989-2007

The figure on the left-hand side shows the dispersion of one-sided fatalities across regions when including the Rwandan genocide, whilst the right-hand side figure shows the same dispersion but without the aforementioned genocide.

No matter which one of these figures one chooses to interpret it is clear that the African continent stands for the majority (and on the left-hand side the vast majority) of one-sided fatalities. Africa is followed by Asia, then Europe, then the Americas and finally by the Middle East in terms of the number of fatalities incurred.

That Africa and Asia see the highest proportions of one-sided violence is no surprise, seeing that these continents also have the highest number of armed conflicts. These regions can also be classified as having the highest number of weak or failed states, which in turn is likely to cause non-state actors to be able to exert force against civilians unhindered.

That Europe places third in the category of fatalities might seem counterintuitive, but in reality the fatalities in this region are caused only by a handful of cases, such as the events in former Yugoslavia and in Russia’s conflicts in the Caucasus.

Focus on Africa
Since Africa is the region that has been the worst hit by one-sided violence, and since the continent shows some interesting patterns, it is worthwhile to study this case more in depth. The map below shows the spread of one-sided violence across the region throughout the entire time period under study, with countries coloured according to the intensity of the violence perpetrated within them.
Of particular note is of course the way activity clusters around certain areas, with the focal hotspot being along the Equator’s intersection with central Africa. Clustered around this point are the five countries that have been worst affected by one-sided violence; Sudan, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi.

In general, these five countries can be classified as belonging to two separate clusters of conflicts, the first being the Great Lakes crisis and the second being the conflicts that involve Sudan and its’ neighbours. The factor that is shared between these two clusters of conflicts is the tendency of both governments and non-state groups to intervene across borders in its neighbours conflicts.
The extremely porous borders of the states mentioned above (and also including Chad) have allowed both governments and rebels groups to engage in combat and one-sided violence across their own borders as well as within them. In the Great Lakes region the governments and rebel groups in the conflicts active there have not only attacked their own civilians, but also seen Rwandan troops, Rwandan rebel groups and Burundian rebel groups enter into the Democratic Republic of Congo to pursue extremely violent strategies.

In the Sudan cluster the same has happened, as the Ugandan group LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army), the Janjaweed and Sudanese rebel groups have crossed freely across borders to carry out the same type of activities in support of their general goals. Conflicts in these clusters are intrinsically intertwined, with governments supporting rebel movements against neighbouring governments, prolonging conflicts. In the end this causes much suffering for the civilian populations on all sides of the borders.

A second interesting fact is that all of the abovementioned countries (including Ethiopia) have experienced high levels of one-sided violence carried out not only by non-state actors but also by governments. In this way they are dissimilar to many other countries in Africa that have experienced high levels of one-sided violence, such as Algeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Angola, in which the non-state actors are by far the worst perpetrators.

There are of course also certain similarities, such as the fact that almost all of the countries that have been worst hit by one-sided violence in Africa have been locked in extremely bloody state-based conflicts.

These dissimilarities and similarities raise the need for scrutinising what actors carry out one-sided violence and when they do it.

When is one-sided violence perpetrated?

*One-sided violence and armed conflict*

Comparing the fluctuations in one-sided activity with the number of armed conflicts (See Figure 5 below) shows that one-sided violence as a phenomenon fluctuates in occurrence more from year to year than does state-based armed conflict.

Whilst armed conflicts from 1989-2007 reveals clear trends, such as an increase up until 1992, a decrease to 2003 and then an increase between 2004 to 2008, the number of actors in one-sided violence shows no such clear pattern beyond a relatively stable trend around the 30 actor per year average.

Interestingly, the peak years of 2002 and 2004 in terms of one-sided violence coincide with years with comparably small numbers of armed conflicts. It is thus probable that the factors that initiate one-sided violence are at the least
somewhat dissimilar from those that cause the onset and continuation of armed conflicts.

**Figure 5. One-sided activity and armed conflicts, 1989-2007**

Nevertheless, the data also show a strong link between the existence of armed conflict in a country and the existence in the same country of high levels of one-sided violence. Figure 6 (next page) shows the percentage of one-sided activity (counted as an active non-state or government actor) that takes place the same year as an armed conflict in one specific country.

**Figure 6. One-sided activity and armed conflict, 1989-2007**

(t=0 denotes that the one-sided activity and the armed conflict activity occurred during the same calendar year)

Figure 6 also shows that, on average, one-sided activity and armed conflicts take place during the same calendar year in 87.7% of the cases recorded. Thus, although armed conflicts and one-sided violence do not always overlap in time, there is a clear temporal link between these two phenomena. Africa has the lowest level of one-sided activity at armed conflict t=0, with almost 20% of one-sided violence taking place in a country that is at peace, showing once again this region’s special propensity to deviate from the rest of the world.
Still, in general armed conflicts are not only problems for human security in themselves, but also indirectly through spawning one-sided violence.

Turning to one-sided fatalities during armed conflicts, as a way to measure the intensity of one-sided violence at such points in time, produces Figure 7. Yet again sorted by regions and armed conflicts at t=0.

**Figure 7. One-sided fatalities and armed conflict, 1989-2007**

Looking at the fatalities from one-sided violence and when they are caused the picture becomes even clearer. In the world as a whole, 98.6% of all one-sided fatalities are incurred when there is an armed conflict ongoing. The African case, in this graph including the Rwandan genocide, produces a corresponding percentage of 99.9% of deaths during armed conflicts.

Without the Rwandan genocide that percentage stands at 83%. Under circumstances that exclude such rare events as full-blown genocide Africa thus still stands out as the region where one-sided violence is, comparatively speaking, more common in peacetime.

In sum, there is without a doubt a very strong link between armed conflicts and one-sided violence, something which only further strengthens the need to battle the spread and initiation of armed conflicts.

Armed conflict can, however, include both government actors and non-state actors. What type of actors perpetrate one-sided violence against civilians? We now turn to the second part of this section, focusing on the actors themselves.
Who perpetrates one-sided violence?
*A closer look at the perpetrators of one-sided violence*

As is made clear by the definition of one-sided violence, both governments of independent states and non-state actors can perpetrate one-sided violence, just as these can engage in armed conflict. Figure 8 shows the number of state and non-state actors that perpetrated one-sided violence in the 1989-2007 period.

**Figure 8. Government and non-state actors, 1989-2007**

[Graph showing the number of government and non-state actors per year from 1989 to 2007.]

Scrutinising the data closely shows that out of the 166 separate actors recorded during the time period, 49 actors have been governments of states, whilst 117 have been non-state actors.

In terms of perpetrators non-state actors are thus the most frequent miscreants. This is true also on a year-by-year basis, as non-state and state actors only have parity in the number of active campaigns of one-sided violence in 1990, before and after which activity is tilted in favour of the non-state groups.

The above implies that non-state actors are the worst perpetrators of one-sided violence, at least in terms of the number of actors (note of course that the possible universe of actors is, in theory, infinite in the non-state actor category).

Turning instead to fatalities the data reveal that although the non-state actors are more numerous, governments have in fact, when including the Rwandan genocide, killed more civilians than non-state actors. A total of 556,418 civilians were, from 1989-2007, killed by governments, whilst 78,362 were killed by non-state actors.

Excluding the Rwandan genocide however yields a different picture, as government actors are then responsible for 56,418 deaths as compared to the non-state actors’ 78,362. Still, that a government has a capability for destruction that surpasses that of a non-state group is clearly shown by the Rwandan example.
This also becomes clear when looking at precisely what actors have been the worst in terms of killing civilians. Although a “top 10”-list covering all years of activity shows that governments and non-state groups are equally bad in terms of the number of civilians killed (five actors each on the list), looking at the top 10 worst actor-years governments occupy six out of ten spots and state-like entities (the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina) an additional two.

These observations are the topic of Table 1.

**Table 1. Top 10 worst actors by actor-year, 1989-2007**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Civilians killed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government of Rwanda</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>504,484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>8360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFDL (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Kinshasa)</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>6316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government of Afghanistan</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>5799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government of Rwanda</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government of the DRC</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>3363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Qaida (the Base)</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government of China</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>2600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government of Sudan</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2593</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table clearly shows that governments and non-state actors that are so organised as to resemble a state clearly have the highest capacity for destruction, even when excluding the Rwandan example.

I.e., even if states are surpassed by non-state actors in terms of the number of perpetrators, states commonly have a higher capacity for carrying out mass killings. Also, if we were to include the high estimates of civilians killed in the above, this trend would become even clearer.

**Regional comparisons**

The data underlying Table 1 also shows that governments and non-state actors that have perpetrated one-sided violence from all of the world’s regions are represented. Is there then any difference between how governments and non-state actors perpetrate one-sided violence when comparing the different regions?
Figure 9 shows the dispersion of fatalities by actor-type and region. Some interesting variations can be discerned. Europe, the Middle East and the Americas display more or less the same characteristics, with fatalities incurred being mainly the result of attacks by non-state actors.

In Africa and Asia the picture is different, with governments being the worst perpetrators. In Africa governments account for almost 93% of the recorded fatalities; something which is of course caused by the Rwandan genocide. If one, yet again, excludes that genocide the percentages yielded are 55.5% for non-state actors and a corresponding 44.5% for governments.

No matter what percentages are used it is clear from the data that governments in Asia and Africa are more violent towards their civilians, on average, than are European, American and Middle Eastern governments.

Presumably there are either special characteristics in the African and Asian regions and/or countries, or special characteristics of the actors themselves in these two continents.

**Regime types and one-sided violence**

It has long been thought – and also proven in some studies – that democratic states are more peaceful than are autocratic governments in terms of interstate wars (Maoz and Abdoladi, 1989, Ray, 1989). This has been shown not to be the case in terms of intrastate armed conflicts, i.e. civil wars. Instead, influential studies have shown the relationship between regime type and intrastate conflict to be in the form of an inverted U-shape (Hegre et al 2001).

In other words, democracies and autocracies see less armed conflicts than do regimes that can be termed as ‘anocracies’ in that they are not fully democratic nor fully autocratic. It is in general argued that such a regime type lacks the possibilities of repression held by autocracies and also lack the conflict-mitigating mechanisms of democracies; both factors that are thought to lower the risks of an initiation of armed insurrection.
Kreutz (2006) has applied a similar logic of regime type influence on one-sided violence, arguing that democracies are unlikely to attack civilians since they are the constituency of the elected leaders, that autocratic regimes are likely to attack civilians to repress potential opposition, and that anocracies should be somewhere in the middle due to their dual regime characteristics.

Kreutz’s (2006) initial descriptive statistics also support this notion and are here replicated with the latest UCDP dataset in Figure 10.9

**Figure 10. Regime type and one-sided activity**

![Regime type and one-sided activity](image)

The yellow bars represent the percentage each type of regime attacks civilians, in a universe of cases made up of all possible country-years in the world between 1989 and 2007.10 The graph shows that out of a possible universe of 1242 years democratic governments have attacked civilians in only 2.4% of the years available. The corresponding figures for anocracies (middle of the graph) is 9% out of 1243 years and for autocracies 11% out of a universe of 525 years.

Thus, democracies are least probable to attack civilians, followed by anocracies and lastly by autocracies, supporting both the notion of the propensity for violence being at least partly enshrined in regime type and Kreutz’s theoretical expectations.

The red bars show the percentages that non-state groups attack civilians in countries with the three different regime types. The statistics here support other theoretical claims made in the literature on one-sided violence, armed conflict and terrorism.

First of all, the relationship shows the same inverted U-shape characteristics as has been found to predict the outbreak of armed conflict; in other words that attacks are the most common in anocracies, something which may be related to

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9 Note that this is not a true test of a theoretical hypothesis, but only the application of descriptive statistics.

10 The dataset used for analysing regime type is based on the Polity IV dataset (Marshall and Jaggers 2000). In the dataset used a score of 7 or above (the most democratic) is categorized as a ‘democracy’, a score of -7 and below (the least democratic) as an ‘autocracy’, and anything in between as an ‘anocracy’.
the phenomenon of weak states, where the governments cannot protect (or do not wish to protect) their civilians (Dupont et al, 2003, Holsti, 1996).

Secondly, non-state groups attack the least number of civilians in autocracies, which can probably be linked to the same difficulties of initiating armed action as are pointed out regarding armed conflict. Finally, democratic states see fewer attacks on civilians by non-state actors than do anocracies, but more than do autocracies.

It has been suggested that democratic states are more prone to suffer terrorism than are autocracies, and even though the many definitions of terrorism and the UCDP’s definition of one-sided violence do not overlap, the statistics appear to support this notion of vulnerability (Eubanks and Weinberg, 2001, Ivanova and Sandler, 2006, Hultman, 2007).

Democracies suffer more frequent attacks on civilians by non-state actors than do autocratic regimes. Something which can, perhaps, be related to both the openness of these societies, but also the power constituencies have in dethroning unpopular regimes that they deem not to be competent to protect them. Such strategic incentives for targeting civilians have been noted by several scholars (see, for instance, Lake, 2002 and Azam and Hoeffler, 2002, to be mention but a few).

Finally, looking at both government and non-state actors put together, as is visible in the black bars in the graph, it becomes clear that democracies still suffer the least number of attacks on civilians, whilst anocracies suffer the most. Interestingly this observation is in line with the theory on the outbreak of armed conflict being of an inverted U-shape form.

The above observations on regime types and one-sided violence can be related to the earlier query on the special characteristics of the Asian and African continents/countries, seeing that these regions are the ones that stand out, in comparison with Europe, Oceania and the Americas, in having non-democratic regimes. Regime type thus appears to be important not only for armed conflict, but also for the frequency of one-sided violence.

Africa and Asia however also share other traits that appear to be related to instances of one-sided violence, namely economic development. It is thus called for to also investigate if economic development is linked to one-sided violence.

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11 Worthy of note for this ‘finding’ is what has been pointed out by Kreutz (2006), i.e. that democratic states are much more likely to report openly on terrorist incidents than are autocratic states. This might cause data to be flawed.

12 For example, in Freedomhouse.org’s 2007 ranking of democracy only 16 out of 39 countries in Asia were deemed to be ‘Free’ with the corresponding numbers for Africa being 11 out of 52. As a point of comparison, the Americas had 25 ‘Free’ countries out of a possible 35. See Freedomhouse.org’s “Country ratings and status by region FIW, 1972-2009”, http://www.freedomhouse.org.
Economic development and one-sided violence

Not only are Africa and Asia the regions with the dominant number of anocracies and autocracies, but these regions are also – on average – the worst performers in many economic development indicators. So as to study the link between a country’s economic development and incidents of one-sided violence a second dataset on economic indicators has been created using the Expanded Trade and GDP Data (Gleditsch 2002), which contains each country’s GDP per capita.

The GDP per capita data has then been organised into four categories; lower income, lower middle income, higher middle income and high income, following the World Bank’s definitions of economic development. The dataset for analysis contains a universe of 409 country-year cases of lower income, 948 cases of lower middle income, 984 cases of upper middle income and 664 cases of high income.

Figure 11. One-sided violence and economic development

In Figure 11 the red bars represent the percentage of country-years one-sided violence has been perpetrated in a country with a certain level of economic development, measured as the percentage of the possible universe of cases.

From the graph it is blatantly clear that the lower the level of income, the more attacks on civilians are carried out (by governments and non-state actors put together). A stunning 43.7% of the possible country-years for lower income countries have experienced one-sided violence being perpetrated. The percentage of country-years experiencing one-sided violence then drops linearly as the level of income increases, with only 3.6% of the high income countries experiencing such activity.

Thus, both regime type and economic development appear to matter for when a country experiences one-sided violence, and may be part of the special characteristics of the African and Asian regions. Of course, that Africa and Asia

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also experience the highest numbers of armed conflicts presumably also plays a role.  

Low levels of income are also likely to correlate with the issue of weak states, previously discussed above. It is likely that governments in countries that have low incomes are too weak to be able to protect their civilians from marauding non-state actors, and also that the governments themselves oftentimes become involved in one-sided violence in order to suppress the many grievances that poor countries may induce in the populace. At the least, the above shows that poverty is yet another risk factor for one-sided violence.

Summary
This paper has given an overview of the incidence of one-sided violence from 1989-2007, focusing on its location, scope, timing and perpetrators. Firstly, the analysis showed that there neither has been or now exists either a downward or upward trend in the incidence of one-sided violence in terms of the number of actors. The number of actors instead fluctuates from one year to the next within a relatively small radius.

Secondly, it was shown that although no trends are visible in terms of the number of actors the number of fatalities from one-sided violence has dropped significantly, with global fatalities between 2005 and 2007 being the lowest since the start of the recorded time period. Before that the years 1993 to 1998 stand out as the bloodiest, with the Rwandan genocide of course being the peak year of activity.

Thirdly, it has been shown that Asia and Africa are the regions worst hit by one-sided violence, with Africa being the absolute worst in terms of fatalities; with or without counting the Rwandan genocide. Even when removing the Rwandan genocide Africa has experience 53% of the total number of one-sided fatalities. One-sided violence in Africa has clustered on Central Africa, where countries such as the DRC, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and Sudan have experience extremely high levels of violence against civilians.

Fourthly, it was shown that the vast bulk of all one-sided violence is carried out in countries that are also experiencing armed conflicts. On average, 98% of all fatalities from one-sided violence take place during country-years that see armed conflict. Once again Africa stands out; when excluding the Rwandan genocide 83% of fatalities take place during years of armed conflict. This figure shows that attacks on civilians in Africa are more likely to take place outside the context of armed conflict than in other regions.

Fifthly, in terms of the number of actors non-state groups are the most numerous ones, whilst government actors and government-like actors have a higher capacity to carry out killings on a massive scale. In terms of the lethality of

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14 Note, however, that there is likely a severe collinearity problem concerning the low income, anocratic and autocratic governments, and armed conflict variables.
actors, non-state groups are the worst in all regions but Africa and Asia. Due to the Rwandan genocide Africa, especially, stands out. Removing that mass killing from the analysis shows that in both Africa and Asia the number of fatalities caused by governments and non-state actors is split almost fifty-fifty.

Sixthly, the paper analysed if the Asian and African exceptions from the rule are caused by regime type and/or poverty; two factors that stand out in these two regions. It was subsequently shown that regime types matter for the incidence of one-sided violence, with anocratic states experiencing the highest percentage of one-sided attacks from non-state actors, and autocratic governments being the ones most prone to attacking civilians. Democracies very rarely attack civilians, but are in turn targeted by one-sided violence actors more frequently than are autocracies.

Lastly, it was illustrated that poverty also matters for the incidence of one-sided violence. Countries that have low levels of income, as measured by GDP per capita, have experienced a significantly higher number of incidences of one-sided violence than have richer countries.

In sum, one-sided violence continues to be a daunting problem for human security, especially so in Asia and Africa. The above analyses imply that steps to lower the frequency of one-sided violence should include not only measures to prevent armed conflicts, but also steps to democratise governments and alleviate poverty.
References


