Untangling Dynamics in Civil Conflict: Explaining Changes in Insurgent Targeting of Women

by

Tara Chandra

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Political Science

and the Designated Emphasis

in

Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Professor Susan Hyde, Chair
Professor Mel Chen
Professor Ron Hassner
Professor Meredith Loken
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Fall 2023

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Abstract

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What explains variation in insurgent targeting of women within a conflict? What explains variation in insurgent targeting of women by insurgents of the same ideology between conflicts? This project examines the puzzle of inconsistency in rebel group targeting of women during insurgency operations. Using qualitative methods including comparative case selection, process tracing, and collecting novel data from original interviews I conducted, I find that targeting women can be a means of undermining and extracting concessions from the counterinsurgent, but that the efficacy of this strategy varies depending on the type of actor carrying out the counterinsurgency. Specifically, domestic counterinsurgents are more likely to be undermined by sex-selective targeting than are the other two types of actors I consider: foreign counterinsurgents or regional counterinsurgents. In addition, if targeting women is a means of undermining the counterinsurgent, I argue it operates through three mechanisms: (1) preventing information sharing between civilians and counterinsurgents; (2) emasculating male counterinsurgents for failing to protect "innocent" civilians; and (3) using violence against women as a bargaining tool to extract concessions from the counterinsurgent.

This dedication is split three ways:

For Mom, who taught me the importance of feminism from my earliest memories, and whose values have shaped me into the person – and scholar – that I am today.

For Joe, who never stopped believing in me, and whose acts of love and support – big and small – made this project possible.

And finally, this project was written amidst horrific violence and anguish worldwide, including the wars in Ukraine, Ethiopia, and others, and ongoing hate and political violence unfolding elsewhere. I dedicate this work to any woman anywhere in the world who has suffered from political violence of any kind. It is my hope that this project sheds light on your important and often hidden stories and helps decision-makers to more successfully mitigate violence and address the many ways that women suffer during conflict.

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Preface/Trigger Warning

This project investigates why insurgents use violence against women. Although I have tried to refrain from detailing the most graphic content, there are nonetheless descriptions of specific events in which violence was perpetrated against female-identifying victims. These stories are critical to understanding the importance of the overall project, and the goal of this project is not to brush away important details about ways that people suffer during times of conflict – most often at the hands of all combatants, even if in different ways – but rather, to bring these phenomena to light so that we can work to mitigate them. As a result, this book may be upsetting to anyone who has personal experience with any sort of violence, be it gender-based or political. Where possible, I have generalized some of the specifics so as to mitigate secondary trauma for the reader; however, there are some descriptions of violence that are more graphic. Please take seriously this warning and make sure that you are taking care of yourself as you read this document.

Acknowledgments

Ever since I was the research assistant on a book, and realized how much effort a book project takes, and how many people are critical to it along the way, I have loved reading the acknowledgments of every book I read – academic and nonacademic alike. I imagine all the people who served as pillars of support for the author. I can imagine them typing the whole manuscript, and the moments of angst in which they turned to someone who helped them traverse that moment of existential dread that the project would never be completed.

So, it's pretty incredible that, more than a decade after I was lucky enough to see my own name in the acknowledgments section of a book, I'm writing my own acknowledgments section for this project, more than six years in the making, which has been, in every way, a labor of love – not just for me, but for all of the people who loved me and supported me along the way. Because the acknowledgements section tends to be my favorite part of other people's books, I have been keeping a list along the way (although no list is complete and perfect, so apologies in advance to anyone unwittingly not named here), and am so honored to be able to offer others the excitement of seeing their names here, knowing that their contributions are immortalized in these pages.

First, thank you to my committee for their support – my dissertation chair, Susan Hyde, as well as Ron Hassner, Michaela Mattes, Meredith Loken, and Mel Chen. Susan never wavered in her support of my pursuit of this project, even when it moved further and further afield from what we both thought it was going to be when I started graduate school. She never told me not to pursue this question, and gave me free rein to allow the project to unfold in its own organic way. I am lucky to have had an advisor who understands the nagging question that tugs at you, demanding to be answered, and who allowed me to navigate the process of answering it. I came to Berkeley to work with Susan, and am so grateful to know that I made the right decision. Ron Hassner is the most cheerful and positive committee member anyone could ask for – his encouragement and belief in my ability to complete the project was invaluable in the moments when I wasn't sure what to do next. He is always encouraging me to reach for things I am not sure I am ready for, and I wish every grad student could have a Ron on their committee, cheering them on. I am so lucky to have had Michaela's eye for detail and consistency in support of this project. She pushed me to articulate the question, the puzzle, the theory better and better each time I gave her something to read. Writing to convince Michaela has made the whole project stronger, even (especially?) when I tried to hide the parts I hadn't fully developed in the footnotes and she would notice, and helped me address the most difficult parts of the project.

Meredith Loken joined my committee just two years ago, and I am grateful every day that she agreed to be a part of the project. She agreed to speak with me virtually via Zoom in early 2021, when I was floundering with where to begin, and when the theory was in its very earliest stages. Having admired Meredith's own work on gender and conflict, I have been amazed at her ability to get to the heart of the puzzle. Meredith has helped me mold all the bits and pieces into something resembling a coherent argument, and has been a safe space for all the moments when I thought all those bits and pieces would amount to nothing.

Thanks also to Mel Chen who stepped up as a pinch hitter and agreed to serve on the committee late in the game. I took the dissertation writing seminar with Mel in Berkeley's Gender and Women's Studies department, and was always grateful for their support, encouragement, validation, and kind words. I'm so grateful for Mel's flexibility and support in being on the committee as the representative of the Gender Studies department, where I am completing the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

This project has also benefitted tremendously from the mentorship and guidance from other faculty members in the Political Science department at UC Berkeley. One of the hallmarks of this department is how important graduate student mentorship is, and I am very thankful to other faculty members who supported this project. Martha Wilfahrt provided early guidance at the prospectus-writing stage; Leo Arriola provided suggestions for my first empirical chapter. Jennifer Bussell was an important resource as I muddled my way through learning all of the qualitative methods I used in this project. Scott Straus, who came to Berkeley just as I finished the second chapter of this project, read and provided substantial feedback on the theory. If this project properly walks the line between IR and CP, it will be because of Scott's guidance. Marika Landau-Wells and Helene Silverberg served on my prospectus committee and offered important feedback at the earliest stages – and during the earliest days of the covid-19 pandemic when we were all learning to navigate Zoom for the first time. Finally, although he is no longer with us, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the significant contributions that Bob Powell made to this project – the entire first mechanism I posit in the theory was developed in his advanced game theory class, and even though I never turned my theory into a game, Bob helped me hone my rationalist instincts to think about the strategic dynamics and incentive structures at play in any given phenomenon I study. His fingerprints are all over the project and I wish I could convey to him how grateful I am for him. The math was never intuitive for me, and yet his patience with me and desire to see the project blossom never wavered.

This project has been supported by many others at UC Berkeley as well – Erin Blanton, who has been a constant source of encouragement and support, and who has helped me navigate every challenge that Big Berkeley threw our way. I'm so sorry that we had to submit my committee sixteen million times before it finally got approved! Althea Grannum-Cummings in the Gender Studies department similarly helped me overcome the bureaucratic hurdles. Brenda Belcher helped me navigate the seemingly onerous process of procuring IRB approval for my human subjects research, again made more complicated by the fact that Berkeley wasn't allowing in-person research when I applied. I am also grateful to Claudia Gey and the whole IIS team, both for their financial support and for providing a team of fantastic undergraduate research assistants – Gamin Kim, Rana Nejad, Monzerrath Ortiz, Evie Portier, and Gurbir Singh. They were joined by Shantanu Kamat, whose excellent research assistance was very kindly funded by Susan Hyde. These research assistants threw themselves into the project and it is made better for the support they provided.

And where would I be without the support of my friends at Berkeley? I am sure every cohort thinks they are the best, but I got so incredibly lucky to be part of this community of supportive and caring cohortmates. I thank Tim Marple, the only other IR student in our

year – I got through comps because of you! Tim has provided wisdom, guidance, and support even after he graduated, and I am grateful to call him a friend. Black Bears, Brown Bears, affectionately known as Bx4 provided a safe space, and I could not have gotten through Berkeley without them, especially the support from Bhumi Purohit and Christian Hosam. I also thank our little JSTOR group – even though we never figured out what the S stood for. Jiali, Otto, and Rachel, thank you for allowing me to be an honorary CP member, and for being the best problem set group anyone could have asked for. Finally, Rachel Fisher has been an incredibly bright light in the darkest moments of the last six years. At every moment when I thought I couldn't do it, Rachel provided encouragement and answered all of my silly questions at all hours of the day and night. I have said this to her privately, but I want to say it publicly – I am thankful every single day that Rachel and I both chose Berkeley. Rachel, you are a lifelong friend, colleague, and coauthor, and I am genuinely not sure what this project would be or who I would be as a scholar without you.

I am also grateful for the scholars not at Berkeley who took time to meet with me – almost all of them virtually when they had their own lives to attend to. Dara Kay Cohen, who met with me at APSA and afterwards – you are cited all over this dissertation. Thank you for the work that you have done and for opening the door for young scholars who want to study gender and conflict seriously. Sarah Parkinson spent hours talking through the ethical implications of doing this kind of research with patience and without judgment. Sabrina Karim's comments are the reason that mechanism three exists! Jill Hazelton helped me figure out how to frame the project so it would make sense in the international security literature. Graeme Blair actually took the time to read a very long draft of the chapter on Nigeria and offered his expert feedback. Thanks also to Lauren Young, Rebecca Wolfe, Chelsea Estancona, Summer Lindsey, Marie Berry, Erica Chenoweth, Paul Staniland, Ore Koren, Akali Omeni, and Daniel Agbiboa who also took the time to meet with me and offer their comments.

I am also grateful to the faculty members from very early on in my career who believed in me and who endowed me with the critical thinking skills I needed in order to complete the arduous process that is graduate school. As an undergraduate at the University of Chicago, Patchen Markell, Charles Lipson, and Sankar Muthu invested much of their time in me. The faculty at Yale's Jackson Institute for Global Affairs (now the Jackson School!) helped me figure out that this was a project waiting to be done and I'm so grateful for the foundation my Jackson education provided.

Doing a dissertation during a pandemic is... something. I am not sure I have words for the anxiety and loneliness I felt in 2020. I defended my prospectus in May 2020 and somehow zombie-walked through the insanity of the rest of 2020 and into a very difficult early 2021. And then something magical happened. I stumbled into a community of other graduate students, some of whom have now become dear friends. Sara Plana and Julie George gave me community when I was withering away in isolation, and their friendship was a lifeline in a very tough moment in the last several years. Sara has offered the next right next step in every moment that I have needed it and is one of the wisest people I know, and Julie's constant belief in my abilities buoyed my motivation to keep writing, even through

the toughest times. Jemima Ackah-Arthur and I became friends during our virtual IQMR, and she has been the best co-writing companion ever – I only finished that last chapter because we were Zoom writing buddies. Nakissa Jahanbani and I met at SWAMOS and she has been an invaluable source of advice and mentorship since then. Blair Welsh has been a friend and a cheerleader during the hardest moments of this program, and I have been so grateful for his support.

I was lucky enough to receive support – some financial, some not – from many institutions – some formal, some not. Berkeley's Global, International, and Area Studies program offered a grant at a moment when I thought no one believed in the project enough to fund it. Similarly, the U.S. Institute of Peace's Peace Scholar Program was an incredible source of support – thank you to Jeremy Moore and Jordon Mpingo for all the work they do to make the program possible. I was lucky enough to participate in IQMR in 2021. Even though it was virtual, IQMR helped me make sense of my methods and put words to the instincts that I had for the kind of research I wanted to do. Bridging the Gap's New Era Workshop also gave me a sense of community when I felt like I was alone in the research process. I'm so grateful to Angie Torres-Beltran and Lizzie Brannon for starting the Gender and Political Participation workshop. GPP also gave me a sense of belonging in the broader research community and I was lucky enough to present my own work and to learn about the work other early career scholars are doing on gender around the world. Thanks to Thomas Worth, for his discussant comments on an early draft of the Nigeria case study.

In addition, the library staff – especially Sarah Haldeman and Malisa Culpepper – at the George W. Bush Presidential Library have been phenomenal. Their excitement about this project made what could have been a tedious week at the Library so much fun. I know that this is the start of a long and fruitful research relationship, but I also want to thank them, especially Sarah, for making so much time to answer my questions, explaining the archival system, and just generally approaching the whole process with so much patience and care.

I also want to thank (anonymously) all of my interview subjects – all of my interviews had to be conducted virtually and many of my interviewees made time during an extremely hectic, busy, and uncertain time to chat with me about their experiences dealing with the groups I study here. Many of them also went out of their way to introduce me to a number of other potential interview subjects, and I am extremely grateful for their help, and hope they know how much their time and effort meant to a grad student struggling to continue making research progress in the middle of a global pandemic.

Finally, there is an entire community of people who have kept me going every day for the last six years while I have been a graduate student. I don't even know where to start with this group. Heather Lind provided so much nourishment and support – I could not physically have gotten through this without her. Jeff Chen similarly helped undo much of the stress I foisted onto my body during the drafting of this project. Mama Snow has always taken care of me, and in the year that we were in Florida, she fed me and made me laugh and reminded me that family comes in so many forms. I have also been blessed with some wonderful friends and family – Eugene Larson-Hallock, who was on the same PhD timeline as me – that project at Jackson is the reason I did a PhD, and there was no one else to

better commiserate with the past several years. Thank you also to the friends who supported me through the ups and downs (even though I'm sure they thought I was crazy for doing a PhD after already having a Master's degree and a career) – Allie Cordell, Marilee Goad, Anzer Habibulla, Míriam Juan-Torres, Jay Khambhati, Stephanie Leutert, Rebecca Maurer, Sean Mirski, Monika Rathod (whose help literally got this project to the finish line), Eric Robinson, Reece Trevor, Laura Vella, and Liz Verardo, among others.

I am also grateful to my in-laws, Rick Herbert and Miriam Hayward – telling them that we were coming to Berkeley, where they live, from DC was one of the best parts of making a decision about where to attend graduate school. And the mile-long walk from their driveway to school and back every day weirdly became my favorite parts of the day. I thank them for all the big and little ways in which they have supported our lives here in the Bay Area.

Thank you also to my college roommates – I will not immortalize our apartment name in these pages forever – but Harini, Divya, and Nalika, you helped raise me into the person I am today. The older I get, the more grateful I am for these strong, smart, and powerful women in my life. They have never not believed for one second that I could get through this program, even when I had my doubts. Their presence in my life is an incredible gift. Sherina Persaud is my literal soul sister. Having a best friend who has known you from the time you were three years old is the most special and rare thing, and I treasure her more than she could ever know.

There's one other special person who deserves acknowledgement – David Rothkopf took a chance on me and hired me in my first full-time job when I was a bright-eyed 23-year-old, and I am so thankful he did. David is my absolute favorite writer; I hope I can one day come close to the standard he sets. More importantly, he is an incredible mentor. He has supported me in every career decision I have made and has always been there to answer my questions and help set me up for success in the next phase, whatever that looks like. PhD programs are almost designed to make one question oneself, and David never wavered, not for one second, in his belief that this project was worthwhile and that I could do it. I hope I can turn it into something more that will make him proud.

Last but not least, my family has been a huge source of support during this time, and there is no way I would have gotten through this without them. When I told my brother, Neal, that I wanted to do a PhD, his exact words were, "I can literally not imagine anything worse than that." Well, Neal, it wasn't quite that bad, but I did it, and am grateful always for your humor and the perspective that you bring to my life, even when I do all the worst things you could imagine. Hope you're proud that one of us finally got a degree from Berkeley. My father, Atesh Chandra, encouraged me from birth to reach for bigger and bigger things, and I would not be here without his voice in my head telling me that there isn't anything I can't do if I put my mind to it.

There are three people who deserve the final words of these lengthy acknowledgements. My mother, Sujata Uppal is the most incredible human. I don't know how I got lucky enough to be her daughter, but everything I am is because of her, and I hope I can live up to even a fraction of the example she has set for me of living a life of integrity and value. The second person – yes, Joe, dogs ARE people! – is no longer with us; we lost him in early 2021. Our

family dog, Spunky, was the brightest little light of my life. I am grateful for every moment I got with him. Little noodle, your snuggles are the best thing ever, and even though you didn't know it, you gave me the love I needed to keep going, and I miss you every day. Finally, there are no words to describe the gratitude I feel for my husband and partner, Joe Herbert. I really am so incredibly lucky to have him in my life. He has been there for every moment of doubt, every anxiety, every meltdown, an absolute pillar of belief in me through the best and the very worst moments. He is the best cheerleader, proofreader, dissertation title-giver and life partner that I could ever have wished for. Joe, I genuinely could not have made it through without your support, love, and care.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivating Puzzles

In November 2002, an eighteen-year-old girl named "Lidia" was walking with some other girls in Medellín when she was stopped by six men who identified themselves as AUC rebels (AUC stands for Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – a rebel group in conflict with the much better-known FARC rebels) (Amnesty International 2004).[1] Lidia was abducted by these men and driven away. When they arrived at the unknown location, the men questioned her intensely, trying to get her to admit to fighting for another rebel group in Colombia, even though Lidia was a civilian who was not working for or supporting either side of the conflict. During her imprisonment by these AUC rebels, Lidia was raped multiple times, had her body mutilated with sharp objects, and had "AUC" carved into her arm (ibid). Lidia survived this horrific incident, and was eventually interviewed by Amnesty International.

Lidia's story – and other forms of violence perpetrated against women in times of conflict – are generally not difficult to find when studying cases of conflict. Consider a case in August 2016, when Mayi-Mayi rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo conducted a raid in which three people were killed, several abducted, and four of the abducted women raped (ACLED Violence Against Women dataset). Or think of the case of Evelyn Amony – now the chair of a nonprofit organization called the Women's Advocacy Network, which champions rights for women affected by conflict-related violence (UN Women). Interviewed by UN Women, Evelyn told her story of being abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda at the age of twelve, and forced to become one of Joseph Kony's "27 wives." During her eleven years in captivity, she gave birth to three children (ibid).

These stories are just one of a number of similar accounts that organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, UN Women, and other organizations and scholars have identified. And this kind of violence begs the question: why did rebels from a group like AUC invest in this kind of violence against women like Lidia? We might initially

[1] "Lidia" is a psedonym given by Amnesty International to protect the identity of the survivor in this case.

be inclined to answer that it has something to do with the ideology of the group – after all, AUC is a far right paramilitary group, and, one might think, this makes them more likely to engage in this type of violence. The theory might be something like this: rebel groups with a leftist ideology fundamentally believe in the equality of all people, are more gender inclusive, and are therefore less likely to select targets of their violence to be women. However, consider then the case of the civil war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s, in which all the combatants across the ideological spectrum used systematic rape as part of their conflict operations. Or what about the case of the Kangleipak Communist Party, a leftist rebel group in India that rapes women as it moves through towns conducting attacks (Das 2008)? Over the course of the rest of this project, I show definitively that ideology is not by itself a predictor of whether a group will commit violence against women or not.

Instead, this project uncovers another set of incentives that can lead to increased violence against women and provides two innovations that should be considered by conflict scholars and policymakers alike: First, I explain variation within the same conflict. Existing scholarship generally considers violence against women as binary – it either occurred during a conflict or it did not. By deeply researching the moment-by-moment decisions – including through collecting novel interview data – that actors involved in the conflict made and how they reacted, I identify how incentives to allocate resources to particular types of violence can change over the course of the same conflict, with the same combatants. This approach allows me to explain the moments where a change in behavior by insurgents occurred, rather than consider the entire conflict as a binary (violence against women occurred or violence against women did not occur). Understanding why insurgents change tactics in the middle of a conflict should be of significant interest to policymakers who are responsible for creating plans for dealing with insurgents around the world. The policies and approaches that are most commonly used worldwide by government forces do not evolve or consider conflicts to be dynamic. In this project, I show that the dynamic between the insurgent and counterinsurgent and the robustness with which the counterinsurgent pursues its operational and tactical decisions can change the incentives on the ground for insurgents to perpetrate even more violent and abhorrent behavior.

Second, conflict scholars tend to consider rebel groups' decision to perpetrate certain types of violence in a vacuum. By carefully studying the counterinsurgent perspective as well as the insurgent perspective, I show that decisions made by rebel groups in a conflict are often reactions to the policies that counterinsurgents pursue. This project uncovers the ways in which counterinsurgents' behavior can inadvertently increase incentives for insurgents to change their behavior toward women – an important lesson in the age of very general counterinsurgency policy and theory that was developed in the West and tends to be applied to conflicts all over the world. This project also considers another important source of variation that has generally not been the focus of the burgeoning literature on violence against women in conflict – the type of violence that groups perpetrate. "Violence against women" has almost become synonymous with "sexual violence," but this leaves out other important cases of gendered violence, such as some paramilitary groups in Colombia that primarily attack women by mutilating their bodies, cutting off their sexual organs, or carving words or letters

into their skin (Amnesty International 2004). Indeed, some of the most misogynistic groups fall into this category – like the Taliban, which in its earliest instantiations refrained from perpetrating attacks that took the form of sexual violence.[2] On the other hand, throwing acid on young girls or stoning them to death was common practice.

Then there are groups that abduct women – some of the most infamous of which I examine in this project. But take as an example a massive abduction in Burkina Faso in January 2023, in which militants linked to either al-Qaeda or the Islamic State (the security situation does not allow for clarity on exactly who conducted the attack) abducted 50 women who were searching for food (New York Times 2023). Why would a group go through the effort to physically move these women? Why did they target these women and not their husbands? What is the strategic difference, for the group, between targeting women and targeting men?

These examples motivate the puzzles that this book attempts to answer. First, why do some groups allocate their limited resources to targeting women? And furthermore, what do we learn about insurgents' decisions to perpetrate violence against women when we consider forms of violence other than sexual violence? I introduce a novel explanation for the variation in sex-selective targeting both between and within cases. I argue that violence specifically targeting women can be quite costly for insurgent groups, which makes it puzzling why they would invest in sex-selective targeting instead of or along with broader civilian targeting. Of course, if insurgents – who are rational actors – are engaging in costly behavior, they must also have incentives to do so.[3] My theory suggests that insurgent behavior cannot be considered in a vacuum, and that the tactics that insurgents choose to use must be considered in the context of a broader conflict between the insurgent group and the counterinsurgent. Specifically, I argue that the presence of a robust counterinsurgency can, under certain conditions, increase incentives for insurgents to target women. Furthermore, by broadening the definition of violence against women, I include cases – such as Nigeria – that might not otherwise be considered in this literature, but which shed important light on the ways that insurgents make decisions during times of conflict.

My theory can therefore be divided into two parts. Because I argue that the perspective of the counterinsurgent as a cause of changing conflict dynamics and incentives has been understudied, the first part of my theory focuses on counterinsurgent type. I identify and study cases of three different types of counterinsurgents: (1) domestic counterinsurgents – that is, a state's own military fighting a rebel group within its own borders; (2) regional international organizations – these are coalitions of counterinsurgents comprised of fighters from countries that neighbor the one in which the rebel group being targeted is predominant; and (3) foreign counterinsurgents – a good example of this kind of counterinsurgent would be

[2]At the time this project is being drafted (2023), there are reports that the Taliban in Afghanistan does now perpetrate attacks taking the form of sexual violence; however, this is a relatively new phenomenon – the Taliban as it existed in the early 2000s was not a group known for using sexual violence against women and girls.

[3]The assumption that violent actors are rational is a common one in rationalist literature on conflict. For example, see Kydd and Walter 2006.

the U.S. in Afghanistan, where the counterinsurgent is completely removed from the social and political context where the rebel group is operating.

I find that domestic counterinsurgents are, in particular, highly susceptible to being undermined by the insurgent through the targeting of women, and that applying typical Western (e.g. Petraeus doctrine) counterinsurgency policies broadly without considering how they change incentives for insurgent behavior can actually increase insurgent motivation to target women. On the other hand, I find that for foreign counterinsurgents, violence perpetrated by the insurgent group against local women in the country where the counterinsurgency is being waged is less likely to constitute an existential threat, and that insurgents are therefore less likely to undertake the costly action of targeting women.

The second part of my theory focuses on the specific pathways through which targeting women can, in certain types of cases, undermine the counterinsurgent. I argue that if sex-selective targeting is going to be a salient means of extracting concessions from the counterinsurgent (whether material concessions, as in the case I study in this book – Nigeria – or concessions on the battlefield), it will operate through three mechanisms. These mechanisms elucidate the ways in which women both exert agency and become important symbols in broader conflict dynamics between insurgent and counterinsurgent, and therefore, there is variation in which of them are operant in different types of counterinsurgencies. However, I argue that for insurgents to be successful in severely hampering the counterinsurgent's mission, all three mechanisms must operate, as I show in the case of Nigeria (Chapter Three).

The first mechanism – which I find operates in every case – is what I call the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism. This is the idea that women have important information and that insurgents have an incentive to try to stop information sharing between civilians and the counterinsurgent. The second mechanism is called the Emasculation mechanism, which is the idea that insurgents use sex-selective violence to emasculate their male counterparts. Finally, the third mechanism is the Bargaining Leverage mechanism, which suggests that insurgents can use sex-selective violence to extract concessions from the counterinsurgent. These mechanisms are explored in detail in the next chapter.

1.2 Operationalizing Key Concepts

For the most part, this project uses terminology that is generally accepted in the broader political science literature, with one caveat – the concept of sex-selective targeting. Although there has been tremendous innovation in the literature in terms of considering gender in conflict, most of the research that focuses on violence against women in civil conflict limits the definition of violence to sexual violence. This work has been foundational for my own project, and I build upon this foundation by expanding the definition of violence against women beyond sexual violence to include a number of other tactics that disproportionately affect women, or which affect women in profoundly different ways than they do men.

In this project, I identify three forms of **targeting of women** by insurgent groups: (1) sexual violence, (2) non-sexual physical violence, and (3) abduction (without ransom). Below, I describe each of these forms of targeting in greater detail.

1. **Sexual Violence** – in most cases, sexual violence in conflict refers to rape, but I also consider sexual harassment, any form of sexual molestation, or genital mutilation to constitute sexual violence.

2. **Non-Sexual Physical Violence** - this can mean any form of physical harassment of women, to include any form of beating, stoning, or targeted killing of women specifically.

3. **Abduction** - this behavior is distinguished from kidnapping only in that there is no demand for ransom. For the purposes of this project, I consider abduction as the act of forcibly removing a woman from her community.

Evidence of any of these tactics that specifically target women are considered sex-selective violence for the purpose of this project. Although this book does not theorize why particular groups select into using specific forms of violence over others, it does lay the foundation for that question to be answered in a future project.

Other key concepts that I use consistently throughout the book are (1) insurgent (also used interchangeably with "rebel group" and (2) counterinsurgent. These are generally not contested terms in the literature; nonetheless, I include here the definitions as I operationalize them in this project.

Insurgent – I define an insurgent group as any armed group that violently opposes the state, in pursuit of either separatist or center-seeking objectives.

Counterinsurgent – I define counterinsurgents broadly, as a military organization whose purpose is to destroy the insurgent group, and which formally represents either an institution or a national government. In this project, I consider different counterinsurgent actors from domestic (forces operating within their own borders) to international (forces operating in a foreign country), and also include those forces contributed by foreign countries but operating under the authorization of an international regional organization (in this case, the African Union).

1.3 Methods

In order to test my theory, I rely primarily on three methods. First, to show that counterinsurgent type matters for the variation in incentives for insurgents to target women, I use comparative case analysis. I provide hard cases for my theory, and keep key factors consistent across cases by studying only Sunni Islamist groups. Going further, I study only groups

that were either a branch of al-Qaeda or were affiliated with al-Qaeda at the time that I focus on: (1) Boko Haram in Nigeria, (2) al-Shabaab in Somalia, and (3) al-Qaeda in Iraq. Because these groups all share the same ideology, any differences between them in terms of allocating resources toward tactics that target women cannot be attributed to ideology. In addition, these are hard cases for my theory, because these are all groups that hold a very misogynistic and patriarchal view of women from the outset, and may therefore have an increased propensity to use tactics that target women specifically. As I show, however, there is substantial variation in both form and intensity of sex-selective violence across my cases.

The second method I use to help uncover variation within cases over time is process tracing. In the next chapter, which explores my proposed theory in detail, I articulate the observable implications that I, as a researcher, can look for, and which suggest that the mechanisms I propose operated as posited. Process tracing is a method that allows researchers to use any observable remaining traces of a mechanism that cannot be directly observed within a case study. In each empirical (case study) chapter, I use process tracing to evaluate the evidence for each mechanism and assess whether or not it operated in that particular case.

Finally, I conduct interviews with counterinsurgents. Despite the limitations of conducting all of the research for this book during the Covid-19 pandemic when in-person fieldwork was not allowed, I manage to conduct at least one interview with a counterinsurgent or field expert for each case. For Nigeria, I conducted interviews with one former member of the U.S. armed forces who deployed there in support of the Nigerian military after the 2014 abduction of nearly 300 schoolgirls (this event is examined in depth in Chapter Two). In addition, I managed to reach two NGO workers who work for organizations in the region affected by Boko Haram. For the Iraq chapter, I conducted interviews with soldiers who served in Iraq in various capacities, from infantry to intelligence. For the Somalia chapter, I interviewed both a U.S. servicemember who served in an advising capacity on behalf of the U.S. military, as well as a field expert who has conducted research in Somalia as a contractor for the U.S. Department of Defense. These interviews provide a great deal of original data for each of the respective empirical chapters in which I process trace the mechanisms I propose.

There is one other method I engaged in during the course of this research, but because it has not yet yielded substantial data, I do not discuss it in detail – this method is archival research. In March 2023, I spent a week at the George W. Bush Library in Dallas, TX conducting archival research on the Iraq War. While there were some interesting documents that I was able to look at, the trip was fruitful primarily in that it laid the groundwork for requesting declassification of specific documents that will, in time, be very useful for this type of research.[4]

[4]While virtually every government document can be requested under the Freedom of Information Act, these requests can take years, and the U.S. government retains the right to withhold documents under the Presidential Records Act for reasons ranging from protecting personal information to national security-related information. Upon reviewing the reasons provided for withholding any given document, a researcher can request that they be submitted for declassification review. This puts the documents into a queue to be further evaluated by the National Declassification Center, which can then decide to declassify parts or all

1.4 Structure of the Project

The structure of the book is as follows. Chapter Two introduces my theory in detail and explains how the research design was constructed to evaluate the theory. The following three chapters each focus on one particular case. Chapter Three examines the conflict in Nigeria between Boko Haram and the Nigerian military. Chapter Four covers the rise of al-Shabaab in the wake of the Somali Civil War and the African Union Mission for Somalia's (AMISOM) counterinsurgency operations in Somalia. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the empirical analysis by tracing the early and middle years of the Iraq War (pre-Islamic State) in which the United States combatted al-Qaeda in Iraq. The last chapter wraps up the book, offering both avenues for future research opened up by this project, and policy implications of this research. Understanding why and when violence targeting women is more likely to occur has many real-world implications and this research can be useful to those who seek to mitigate the many ways that women suffer during times of conflict.

of a document. This process can further take anywhere from many months to several years, which is why my particular trip to the archives did not yield substantial documents to look at. Unsurprisingly, almost everything related to decisions made by the U.S. government around the Iraq War is still classified. However, I was able to submit several hundred requests for declassification, and it is my hope that sometime in the next year or two, I (and other researchers) will begin to have access to these documents.

Chapter 2

Theory and Methods

2.1 Introduction

Why do rebel groups choose tactics that selectively and disproportionately perpetrate violence against women? Even more puzzling, what would cause insurgents that previously were not targeting women during their operations to suddenly change tactics to selective ones that target women? Insurgents, like any other armed actor, have to make many decisions about how to allocate limited resources as part of their operations. Because insurgents already operate outside the laws of armed conflict and often target civilians, they must decide which forms of targeting are most likely to achieve their aims. Insurgents could use a wider range of tactics and target civilians indiscriminately – meaning that they do not take into account the sex of the target. In certain cases, however, insurgents choose to change their tactics to target selectively, using tactics that target women specifically.

A cursory search of the news on a daily basis might lead to an assumption that gender-based violence is common in every conflict. However, as I elaborate below, tactics targeting women are certainly not consistent in degree or in kind between conflicts, and are actually inconsistent even within the same conflict over time. Understanding why and when insurgents choose to shift resource allocation to tactics that target women is the core puzzle that this project explores. In addition, this project builds on a burgeoning literature on violence against women in armed conflict by expanding the definition of targeting beyond sexual violence. There are many ways that women suffer in conflict, and studying these gives us deeper understanding of the strategic calculations that rebel groups make during civil conflicts.

Given the prominence of groups that target women, a prominent explanation for this phenomenon is that the ideology of the group determines its behavior towards women (e.g. Revkin and Wood 2021). However, as I show in the pages that follow, the ideology of the group is not sufficient to explain variation in violence against women either within conflicts, or between conflicts in which the rebel groups all adhere to the same ideology. Given global events in the past two decades, including the rise of the Islamic State, ideology might at first appear to be an important causal factor, particularly Islamist jihadist ideology, and

that insurgents attack women because their ideology dictates that they do so. In order to assess the effect of ideology on the decision-making of rebel groups, this project examines only Islamist groups – and more specifically, only Islamist rebel groups that were either a branch of al-Qaeda or were affiliated with al-Qaeda during the period I consider – (1) Boko Haram (Nigeria), (2) al-Shabaab (Somalia), and (3) al-Qaeda in Iraq (Iraq).

If ideology were a dominant causal factor, we should expect to see two things in these cases. First, we would expect that, as soon as a group gains any ability to perpetrate attacks, it should be attacking women. And second, we should expect that groups of the same ideology, coached by the same leaders of global insurgency campaigns, should perpetrate the same kind of violence against women no matter where in the world they are fighting. However, as I show in each of the case-specific chapters that follows, we see immense variation in both form and intensity of violence against women within conflicts, even when the ideology and the leadership remains consistent throughout. Furthermore, we see that even groups that were incredibly closely linked to al-Qaeda, such as al-Shabaab, whose leadership traveled to Afghanistan to train with al-Qaeda and the Taliban in the early days of the Afghanistan War, perpetrate different forms of violence from each other.

This should not be taken as a claim that ideology does not matter at all; rather, for the purposes of this project, I consider ideology to be a consistent background feature of these conflicts and the groups that wage them. Furthermore, the impulse to over-index on ideology as the key explanatory factor is emblematic of the kind of binary approach most scholars tend to take when assessing conflicts where violence was perpetrated against women. Consider as an example the case of the Islamic State. This is a group that is infamous across the world for violence against women. Yet even this group displays variation in its use of sexual violence over time – the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) dataset suggests that there was some variation in the Islamic State's use of sexual violence between 2011 and 2020, and that this violence was more intense in some years than in other years (Cohen and Nordås 2014, see also Mapping Militants Project). In other words, a group that, world over is explicitly known for perpetrating significant sexual violence, torture, and sexual slavery against women and girls is not entirely consistent in its allocation of resources towards those tactics. It is this type of variation – both between and within conflicts – that motivates this study.

Because this project's goal is to explore and understand between and within-case variation in violence against women, I focus on explaining moments in long conflicts where there was a change in insurgent behavior. Given the unfortunately large list of insurgents operating all over the world, explaining every insurgent group's decision to perpetrate violence against women is outside the scope of this project. However, because one innovation that this project adds to the literature on sex-selective violence is to consider the ways that the presence and behavior of the counterinsurgent changes the conflict dynamics on the ground, and therefore also changes the incentives for insurgent behavior, the cases I study in this project all feature both a counterinsurgent and an insurgent, and center on the time period just before and just after a major change in counterinsurgency policy. This allows me to capture the changes to insurgent behavior that result from robust counterinsurgency operations and the ways in

which they change the conflict dynamics.

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, I propose a two-part theory. Because much of the literature on gender-based violence has focused on the group and its needs (e.g. Cohen 2016, Hoover Green 2018) as though it operates without a dynamic and often powerful challenger, bringing back into focus the broader conflict dynamic between the insurgent and counterinsurgent is a major focus of this project. By considering these broader conflict dynamics, I find that insurgent behavior toward women can be a means of trying to regain leverage in a conflict against a much stronger military force.

One important feature of counterinsurgency is that it relies heavily on civilians for success. Counterinsurgents must convince civilians to cooperate by identifying insurgents hiding within the community and providing information about their plans and whereabouts. This makes civilians legitimate targets in the broader conflict dynamic, and can incentivize insurgent targeting of civilians – and specifically, women civilians. One issue I examine closely in this project is how the presence of a counterinsurgent alone makes civilians more insecure, especially since using them as a source of information (which is something the counterinsurgents absolutely must do if their mission is to be successful) makes them a pawn in the broader conflict dynamic. This is not a causal part of the overall theory, but is nonetheless important to understand as a background feature of the insurgent-counterinsurgent conflict dynamic. Because the safety and security of the civilian population is often used as a justification for counterinsurgency missions, it is important to understand the tradeoffs of these kinds of military operations in terms of actual risk and benefit to civilians. As I show in each of the subsequent chapters, the insecurity caused by the counterinsurgent opens up rifts that, unfortunately, make civilians much less safe and secure.

The first part of my theory thus proposes that gender becomes most salient as a means the insurgent can successfully use to undermine the counterinsurgent if the protection of women becomes a core metric of success for the counterinsurgent. I find that the type of counterinsurgent for which civilian protection (and particularly protection of women) is most likely to become extremely important is a domestic actor. Because the audience to which a domestic counterinsurgent must answer is the same population where the insurgency is being waged, civilians in the conflict zone and outside of it are likely to hold the government responsible both for eliminating the insurgent group and for keeping civilians safe. On the other hand, when the counterinsurgent is a foreign actor – as the United States was in both Afghanistan and Iraq – their domestic audience is in a different country, and they are likely to be less invested in local civilian safety and more invested in troop safety. This incentivizes insurgents to innovate or allocate additional resources not to sex-selective targeting, but instead to measures that better target counterinsurgent forces. In addition, as I explain in Chapter Five (the case study on Iraq), because of its many assumptions about local gender norms, U.S. forces in Iraq did not catch on to the abnormality of much of the violence against women that took place there, which illustrates how difficult it is for outsiders to understand the population and wage successful counterinsurgency.

The second part of my theory focuses on three pathways through which the salience of sex-selective violence as a means of undermining the counterinsurgent operates. I call

these (1) the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism, whereby the insurgent must prevent the transmission of critical local information from the civilian population to the counterinsurgent; (2) the Emasculation mechanism, which is the idea that targeting women shames male counterinsurgents for being unable to protect the "most vulnerable" members of the population; and (3) the Bargaining Leverage mechanism, through which insurgents can extract material or battlefield concessions from the counterinsurgent by threatening the success of the counterinsurgency mission through sex-selective targeting. The theory underpinning each of these mechanisms is described later in this chapter.

Before discussing the ways that these mechanisms fit together, I want to provide a clear overview of the theory I am proposing, and how the two parts fit together. This project focuses on the presence of counterinsurgents because robust counterinsurgency tactics that change the situation on the ground can, I argue, incentivize insurgents to take on the costly action of targeting women as a means of undermining the counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgents who are most likely to be undermined by sex-selective targeting are those for whom the audience they respond to are most likely to hold them accountable for failing to protect women in conflict zones – specifically, domestic counterinsurgents. I propose that this happens through three mechanisms that work in concert (Information Transmission Suppression, Emasculation, Bargaining Leverage). In plain language (although each of these is described in more theoretical detail below), these mechanisms get at a few different ideas: that women are important sources of information during times of conflict, that targeting women may make civilians overall more hesitant to cooperate with the counterinsurgent, that civilian support is a critical pillar of counterinsurgency mission success, and that in certain cases sex-selective violence can become so abhorrent to audiences watching the conflict unfold that the government will make major concessions to stop it. I argue that if a conflict features a domestic counterinsurgent whose home audience connects protection of women to mission success and if an insurgent believes it can successfully undermines the counterinsurgent forces through the pathways I describe below, the incentives for sex-selective targeting in that type of conflict will be higher than in other types of conflicts that feature different counterinsurgent actors whose home audiences do not judge mission success on protection of local women.

The mechanisms I elucidate must operate in concert for the government's counterinsurgency mission to be successfully undermined. However, this is not to say that the mechanisms are all or nothing. I find in every case that I study – representing important and wide-ranging cases of counterinsurgency – that the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism is operating. In other words, in every single conflict, no matter how oppressive the insurgent, women have important information to share with counterinsurgents. This points consistently to a knowledge network fostered by women, even in the midst of conflict. However, attempts by the insurgent to suppress information sharing do not, in my findings, rise to the level of infamy and are not widespread enough to significantly undermine the counterinsurgent.

I find that the second mechanism, Emasculation, only operates systematically in cases where the counterinsurgent is, at the very least, held to some sort of reasonable expectation of civilian protection by the government or institution that is running the counterinsurgency.

While individual soldiers may report feeling shame for being unable to protect women, if the counterinsurgency mission does not consider it a failure if women specifically are targeted, and if local civilians do not similarly deny support to counterinsurgents if they fail to protect women, this mechanism cannot operate. As with the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism, this mechanism by itself cannot justify substantial re-allocation of resources by insurgents. However, I do not find in any case that this mechanism operates alone.

The final mechanism – the Bargaining Leverage mechanism – is what I would consider the linchpin of whether insurgents will be able to use sex-selective targeting to successfully undermine the counterinsurgent. The Bargaining Leverage mechanism operates when the home audience of the counterinsurgent considers protection of women to be a core metric of counterinsurgency success and when they begin to lose faith in the government's ability to protect women in conflict zones. While the other mechanisms describe insurgent motivation to target women, this mechanism explains why governments succumb to tactics that target women; if this mechanism operates and insurgents believe that the government is susceptible to offering concessions if the sex-selective targeting is painful enough, then they will take on the costs of perpetrating that type of violence, likely with great intensity. Because I argue that the type of counterinsurgent actor is important for whether the strategic dynamic will incentivize insurgents to shift tactics to those targeting women in the presence of a robust counterinsurgency, I study three types of counterinsurgents. First, I examine a domestic counterinsurgent, looking at the case of the Nigerian military against Boko Haram.

Next, I consider a case where the counterinsurgent is a local coalition, as in the case of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In this conflict, the threat emanating from the insurgent group poses an existential threat to its neighbors. In cases like these, the counterinsurgent may not be overly focused on protection of women as a metric of success, but as I show in this chapter, insurgent targeting patterns nonetheless change in response to a robust counterinsurgency effort. Finally, I examine a case – the United States in Iraq – where the counterinsurgent is completely foreign, and in which protection of civilians was not a core metric of success for the U.S. domestic audience.

The theory I propose can therefore be thought of as operating on a continuum – with the key variation being the actor who is undertaking the counterinsurgency. In cases of domestic counterinsurgents (as I will show in the next chapter, which examines Nigeria), all the mechanisms hold, because the key audience to which the counterinsurgent must answer is strongly invested in the protection of women, and will not accept "success" in counterinsurgency without it. On the other hand, in cases where the counterinsurgent's home audience does not consider protection of women as a key metric for the mission's success (as in Chapter Five, which covers Iraq), the insurgent may find it less and less useful to take on the cost of targeting women selectively if it is not a key means of undermining the counterinsurgent. As Figure 2.1 shows, incentives to target women increase as counterinsurgents move along the continuum from a completely foreign counterinsurgent to a domestic counterinsurgent. The overall theory and the individual mechanisms I propose are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

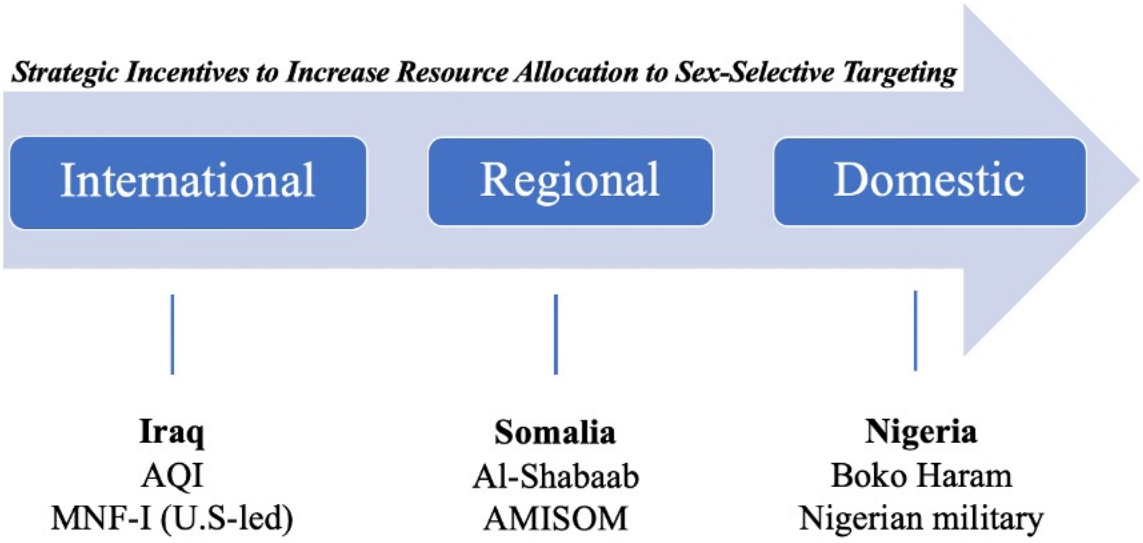

Figure 2.1: Overall Proposed Theory

2.2 Research Context and Puzzle: Targeting Women is Rising in Frequency and is Costly

Rebel groups are violent organizations who are either seeking to overthrow the government, or are separatist groups demanding autonomy of a particular region.[1] Violence against women by these kinds of armed actors has become so commonplace in the news and public discourse that we may think that gender-based violence is a "normal" byproduct of this type of conflict. However, descriptive data that captures violence targeting women shows significant variation in where violence against women is prominent and what forms it takes. In addition, I argue that the decision to target women is puzzling because it is costly to the group in a number of ways, and that groups are therefore only likely to utilize these tactics in certain conditions, which I elaborate in later sections of this chapter.

Variation in Targeting Data

First, I look at what descriptive data tell us about places where violence against women is particularly prominent, the forms that that violence takes, and how that might challenge our intuitive explanations. In 2019, ACLED released a report that introduced their new

[1] I use "insurgent" and "rebel group" interchangeably in this project; both terms refer to this definition of being a violent actor that is either center-seeking or autonomy-seeking.

dataset, which collected information specifically on violence targeting women (Kishi et al 2019). ACLED's data, while still susceptible to severe underreporting, is nevertheless useful in uncovering bigger cross-national patterns, and elaborating why the decision by rebel groups to target women is actually quite puzzling.

In addition, expanding the definition of sex-selective targeting beyond sexual violence is important in order to explain the variation that we actually observe in the world, as shown in Figure 2.2.[2] Figure 2.2 makes clear there is not a one-to-one overlap in terms of countries experiencing high levels of violence targeting women and countries experiencing high levels of political violence more generally.[3] In other words, it is not the case that just because there is a lot of violence happening in a particular country, that that violence is predominantly affecting women. And conversely, places with high levels of violence targeting women are not necessarily the most violent places in the world. This is why my project specifically focuses on understanding the motivations and strategic conditions that lead rebel groups to target women selectively, because, as existing research shows, violence against women in war is not "inevitable" (see for example Wood 2012, Hoover Green 2018). Thinking about the decision to target women as strategic, rather than as a natural byproduct of conflict helps us understand the conditions that give rise to insurgent tactics that seek to harm women.

In addition, when looking at ACLED's descriptive data, it turns out that much of our intuition about the forms that sex-selective targeting takes might not reflect the realities we observe in the real world. While the overwhelming literature on gender and conflict has focused on sexual violence, Figure 2.3 demonstrates why scoping our entire focus to sexual violence means that we are missing both a great deal of real-world events of violence targeting women and might be excluding important cases where violence against women was occurring, but which might be siphoned out if we cast a net with too specific a definition of sex-selective violence.[4] ACLED's collection of data on tactics other than sexual violence is an important contribution; however, the theoretical explanations for other types of violence are scarce in the literature. This project focuses specifically on the variation in targeting tactics within and between cases, and includes cases that exemplify forms of violence other than just sexual violence (as demonstrated by the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria).

This project provides a novel theory to explain what ACLED observes around the world by considering additional forms of targeting. While the scope of this project is limited to a number of cases and therefore a number of targeting behaviors, Figure 2.3 makes it clear that there is significant variation in the type of suffering women in different parts of the world must endure and that abduction and non-sexual physical violence, which are prominent in

[2]This image was taken from the following report: Kishi, Roudabeh, Pavlik, Melissa, and Matfess, Hilary (May 2019). "Terribly and Terrifyingly Normal: Political Violence Targeting Women." ©2019 ACLED All rights reserved. Used with permission from ACLED.

[3]ACLED divides its event types into the following categories: abduction/forced disappearance, attack, explosions/remote violence, sexual violence, and mob violence

[4]This image was taken from the following report: Kishi, Roudabeh, Pavlik, Melissa, and Matfess, Hilary (May 2019). "Terribly and Terrifyingly Normal: Political Violence Targeting Women." ©2019 ACLED All rights reserved. Used with permission from ACLED.

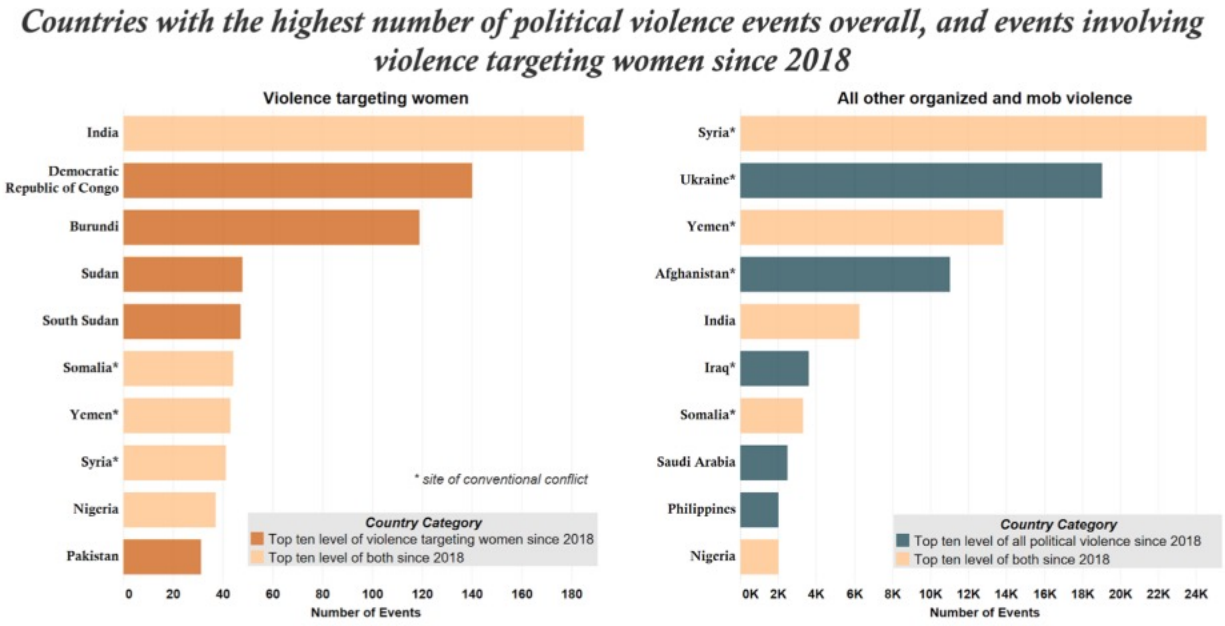

Figure 2.2: Political Violence Trends vs. Violence Targeting Women, Source: ACLED 2019

the cases I study, are, in other parts of the world, also quite prevalent.

The fact that women can be targeted in many ways and by many types of tactics is the reason that I expand my own definition of "targeting" beyond sexual violence. As a reminder, I identify three forms of targeting of women by insurgent groups: (1) sexual violence, (2) non-sexual physical violence, and (3) abduction (without ransom). These terms were defined in the previous chapter.

Costliness

The previous section showed that variation in sex-selective targeting is indeed puzzling because of the global variation in intensity and form. In this section, I argue that targeting of women by rebel groups is additionally puzzling because it is quite costly to the group in several ways. I identify at least three ways in which targeting women is costly to the group: (1) it is materially costly, (2) it increases the risk that the group will lose, and (3) it is reputationally costly. I explain each of these dimensions below.

First, allocating resources to tactics that selectively target women is materially costly in several ways. A group that engages in selective violence (i.e. targeting particular groups of civilians) rather than indiscriminate violence (i.e. targeting civilians generally, and, in its purest form, randomly) has to be much more careful in its operations, must have more disciplined combatants, and by definition cannot use any tactic which might result indis-

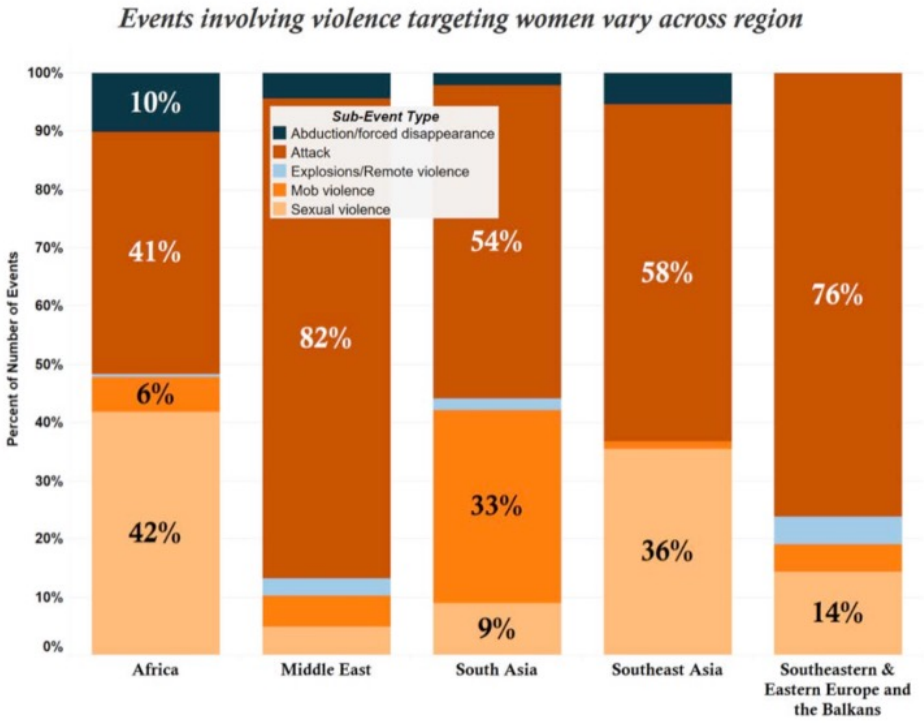

Figure 2.3: Variaton in Forms of Gender-Based Violence, Source: ACLED 2019

criminate deaths. A group that commits selective violence in a community – for example, a group that chooses to abduct all the women and kill all the men – has to plan its operations carefully, such that they are able to kill selectively but ensure that the female targets of the operation are alive. This takes much more coordination and training than indiscriminate violence. In addition, a group that chooses abduction of women as a strategy has further coordination and logistical challenges – they have to feed, clothe, and house the women they have abducted, ensure they do not escape, and ensure that security forces – like the military, police, or other counterinsurgent – do not execute a rescue operation that would likely result in insurgent deaths.

Second, targeting women is costly to the group's chances at winning or survival. It is not that targeting women will with certainty cost the group on the battlefield – there are, as I explain in this chapter, incentives that groups have to target women – but leaning too hard into coercive violence can be extremely costly. A number of other scholars have pointed out the role that violence against civilians plays during operations by both the state and rebel groups, and have argued that some degree of violence can have coercive power against the civilian population (see for example Kalyvas 2006, Staniland 2014, Metelits 2010, Weinstein 2007). While violence can be a tool that rebels use to coerce the population into compliance, it is also unsurprising that civilians do not take kindly to being targeted by rebel groups, and

may actually become willing to cooperate with the state in order to avoid excessive violence by the rebel group. I discuss an example of this information problem in the Iraq chapter, where an overly strong emphasis on sex-selective violence contributed heavily to the decision of previously loyal civilians to band together with the U.S. military to oust al-Qaeda in Iraq.

In addition, groups that operate in remote areas of a country, especially in places where the state cannot project its authority to all of its territory (following the logic of Fearon and Laitin 2003), might initially be granted temporary autonomy by the state. For example, in the decades-long insurgency-counterinsurgency between the Indian government and the Naxalites (a Maoist insurgency based in West Bengal), the government – both the federal and state governments – and especially given West Bengal's status as semi-autonomous, initially allowed the group to flourish (Lalwani 2011). However, it is unclear to the group which attack specifically will be the tipping point that causes the government to act swiftly and with more strength against the group, which can even result in its elimination. In this way, violence against women, which might be tolerated for some amount of time before it garners enough attention to elicit demands that the government respond, is a high-risk/high-reward strategy for insurgent groups, who do not know exactly which straw will break the camel's back and cause the state or counterinsurgent to suddenly decide that the group is an immense threat and invest significant resources into ousting them.

Finally, targeting women is reputationally costly for rebel groups. Although some groups might initially believe that targeting women will gain them attention on the national or international stage in a way that helps them recruit fighters (as may have been the case with ISIS – also a demonstration of a high-risk/high-reward strategy where the tipping point was crossed, resulting in the group's decimation), ideas and norms around the innocence, untouchability, and protection of women during conflict are so pervasive that these tactics do not make groups more appealing to a broader audience. The notion that a civilian audience is more willing to punish a group that targets women is reinforced by a set of experiments conducted by García-Ponce, Young, and Zeitzoff (2022), in which the researchers found that civilians supported punishment for criminal gangs that targeted victims perceived as innocents (like abducted schoolgirls) even if that punishment were lethal and extrajudicial.

The finding that civilians abhor targeting of women travels across actors – Loken et al (2018) find that perpetration of sexual violence by state security forces in Sri Lanka was so rapidly diminishing support for the government during the civil war that the government began prosecuting high-visibility cases in which members of the Sri Lankan military had participated in wartime rape. The main takeaway for my project is Loken et al's finding that tactics targeting women were so unpopular that governments could shore up support for counterinsurgency operations by prosecuting cases of sexual violence perpetrated by the government's own soldiers. Extrapolating from this, I argue that groups must carefully balance the level of violence they perpetrate. As previous research has shown, violence can be used coercively in ways that benefit the rebel group, but particular forms of targeting may be so unpalatable that the coercive effect is nullified, and in fact causes civilians to begin supporting the counterinsurgent. In addition, a lack of reputational popularity, even among locals who are willing to become fighters, could hamper recruitment or, in the event that

there are multiple local insurgent groups competing for the same pool of fighters, encourage potential recruits to join other, more popular groups.

Indeed, targeting women is a high-risk/high-reward strategy for groups to employ, as targeting can also help signal resolve and commitment to fighting, as well as serving to subdue an uncooperative population. This is why groups may engage in targeting, but they also face a challenging information imbalance – they do not know what the tipping point of violence will be, after which the population will actively begin to support the government, or violence will be so pervasive and abhorrent that the government will be forced to ramp up its operations against the rebel group, or local fighters will decline to join. In this way, once groups pass the unbeknownst-to-them tipping point, these tactics can quickly become extremely costly and could even result in the group's elimination entirely.

When rebel groups behave in ways that seem costly, or which undermine our existing intuitions and explanations for their behavior, it is important for scholars to more closely investigate those behaviors, so that we might better understand their strategic incentives, and help inform better and more effective counterinsurgency and counterterrorism policy that addresses those specific incentives. This project aims to uncover previously under-examined dimensions of conflict dynamics that lead to variation in rebel targeting of women within and between conflicts.

2.3 Existing Literature

This project exists at the intersection of the literature on civilian targeting and the gender-based violence in conflict literature. The civilian targeting literature, generally speaking, tries to explain why some groups demonstrate restraint towards civilians and others target them, while the gender-based violence literature, broadly, attempts to understand the causes of sexual violence during conflicts. My project pulls from and builds on both of these literatures. I specifically build on the civilian targeting literature by asking not only why groups would target civilians, but why rebel groups would target civilians selectively based on sex as opposed to or along with indiscriminate targeting tactics. I also extend the gender and conflict literature by expanding my definition of targeting beyond sexual violence and attempting to understand variation in targeting both within conflicts and between conflicts.

Civilian Targeting

These two existing fields of research provide an extremely important foundation for my project. The first area of study I mention – civilian targeting – is an enormous literature. Here, I outline a few explanations provided by these scholars, and how I build on their research. First are scholars who argue that coercive violence arises because of an information problem. Kalyvas (2006), in particular, argues that violence against civilians is due to an identification problem that arises during territorial disputes; when the insurgents know which swaths of the civilian population support the state, they can selectively target those

communities. On the other hand, when insurgents do not know who amongst the civilian population supports the state versus the insurgent group, they are more likely to target indiscriminately (Kalyvas 2006). This research is important for my theory, which argues that one cause of gender-based targeting might be because women have important information about the community, and targeting women prevents them from sharing that information with the counterinsurgent.

Another set of scholars argues that the goals of the insurgent group is the most important explanatory factor in whether a group will use violence against civilians. Stewart (2018) and Jo (2015) find that rebels are often seeking legitimacy, and that this explains their interactions with civilians. Stewart examines when insurgents partake in service provision to the communities in which they operate, and finds that autonomy-seeking groups are more likely to provide goods and services to civilians living in the territory they control, as they are attempting to prove that they are capable of governing an autonomous region legitimately (Stewart 2018). On the other hand, center-seeking groups are seeking to overtake the existing social and political institutions, so they do not need to engage in service-provision and will therefore not invest in this behavior (Stewart 2018). Similarly, Jo asks why some insurgent groups abide by international laws of armed conflict, while others openly flout these laws and norms, and finds that insurgents will demonstrate restraint in their interactions with civilians when they are seeking legitimacy from a particular domestic or international audience (Jo 2015).

The last two sets of explanations for civilian targeting – presence of natural resources and outbidding – are discussed more in the alternative explanations section of this chapter. In short, one explanation for civilian targeting is that when groups have external support or can extract material resources from natural wealth, they are more indiscriminate in their targeting (Weinstein 2007). Another explanation is that the presence of rival groups creates an outbidding dynamic in which multiple groups, all trying to signal their resolve and commitment to the conflict, will increase civilian targeting. Both of these explanations are alternatives to the theories I provide, and are therefore discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

Finally, as a brief note, there is a substantial literature on civil war and counterinsurgency as it relates to the civilian population (for a very small subset, see Lyall and Wilson 2009; Blair et. al 2014; Shaver and Shapiro 2021; Hazelton 2017). Though this literature does not focus on gender at all, it is important for understanding the dynamics I am studying. Scholars have devoted substantial time to understanding how counterinsurgents can most successfully interact with the population, and under what conditions civilians will support the state over the rebel group. As my theory focuses on the interaction between the rebel group and the counterinsurgent, the findings about in-group and out-group support (Lyall et al 2013) dynamics, as well as wartime informing (Shaver and Shapiro 2021) are foundational for my project as well. My research extends these existing studies to understand how counterinsurgent presence contributes to the strategic incentives for rebels to target women, which will help us broaden our understanding of the causes and consequences of civil conflict.

Gender and Conflict

The gender and conflict space, in particular, has grown significantly over the past few years. Painting this literature with the broadest brush, it is clear that there is, in general, a significant focus on why sexual violence occurs in some civil wars and not others. In particular, Elisabeth Wood and Dara Kay Cohen's work demonstrates that sexual violence in civil conflict is not "inevitable," and that there are strategic considerations that can make the systematic perpetration of sexual violence more likely during conflict (Wood 2009, Wood 2012, Cohen 2016).[5]

Within this literature, there are two dominant families of explanations for variation in sexual violence. First is the notion that the perpetration of sexual violence is in some way about the group perpetrating the violence (Hoover Green 2018, Nagel 2021). Most prominent among this set of explanations is Dara Kay Cohen's (2016) argument that the perpetration of rape – specifically gang rape – creates cohesion within the group. She argues that when members of groups engage in risky behavior, it bonds the group together in a way that benefits the group, especially for members of the group who were forcibly recruited and who did not join voluntarily. Cohen's work is critical for understanding my puzzle. At the outset of this chapter, I argued that targeting women is costly to rebel groups, and Cohen's explanation of the health risks to groups that use gang rape is certainly a significant potential cost that groups must consider.

Another family of explanations relies on a feminist logic (e.g. MacKinnon 2007, Bardall et al. 2020) that underscores the symbolic role that women play in society. Best exemplified by Sjoberg and Peet (2011), this family of explanations focuses on the argument that wartime rape is an attack on the property and pride of male/masculine enemies, and that victimized women in conflict constitute a form of "territory" being fought over. MacKinnon (2007), in particular, focuses on the rape of women as a way of targeting men, and also as a way of tearing the strong fabric of a community in order for the rebel group to take control of the community more easily. As I explain below, this set of explanations helps provide support for the Emasculation mechanism, which suggests that insurgents target women as a means of emasculating male counterinsurgents.

This project also joins this feminist theoretical perspective with a strong tradition of rationalism in the civil war literature (e.g. Fearon 2004; Berman, Shapiro, and Felter 2011). My theory posits both that there are strategic reasons to target women during civil conflict, but also that these efforts are strategic precisely because women are symbolic of the "vulnerable" civilian population.

[5]I do not engage deeply with Cohen's argument, largely because the cases I examine here do not feature widespread and concerted perpetration of gang rapes, which is the specific type of sexual violence Cohen's argument explains.

2.4 Research Methods

In this section, I discuss the methods I used. In particular, understanding the theory of process tracing is important so that the observable implications I articulate in the following sections make sense in the context of the methods I used. Because this project examines both within-case and between-case variation, I use a variety of methods that are outlined briefly here and discussed in detail below. To build and test my theory about when groups make the decision to begin or increase targeting of women, I employ a multi-method qualitative design. To assess within-case variation, I use process tracing, relying on a combination of interview data that I have collected, as well as other primary and secondary sources. I conducted approximately twenty-five in-depth, semi-structured elite interviews (a few of which are follow-up interviews) with policymakers and experts in counterinsurgency. Almost all the interviewees have personally served in Iraq; two others are Nigerians working for NGOs in northeastern Nigeria to counter Boko Haram. The rest of the interviewees include Americans who have worked in/served in Somalia and Nigeria. Because the contingents of U.S. forces deployed to Nigeria and Somalia were so small, the interview population is extremely small; yet these interviewees' perspectives are invaluable.

To examine between-case variation, I employ a comparative case method. I use a comparative case method to assess if there are specific contextual factors not previously studied that may lead to more or less intense targeting, and different forms of targeting over the course of a given conflict. Comparing cases where the insurgents all had very similar ideology allows me to understand other factors that influence decisions about resource allocation for targeting and to decipher the strategic conditions that most strongly inform a group's decision to begin targeting women or change the tactics they had previously been using.

Since my theory proposes counterinsurgency as the key independent variable, I examine cases with variation in the independent variable by choosing cases with different counterinsurgents – domestic, foreign, and international organization. To study the domestic counterinsurgent, I chose Boko Haram, in northeastern Nigeria as my case study. For the years I focus on in this project, Boko Haram was clearly and definitively aligned with al-Qaeda. For a case study with an international organization as the primary counterinsurgent, I study al-Shabaab, in Somalia, where the African Union mission (AMISOM) provided the core counterinsurgency forces for many years, and during which time al-Shabaab too was affiliated with al-Qaeda. Specifically, my study focuses on the years 2012 (when al-Shabaab officially declared an alliance with al-Qaeda) to approximately 2018. Finally, for a case with a foreign counterinsurgent, I study al-Qaeda in Iraq, particularly Baghdad and Anbar Province between 2004 and 2010, before the advent of ISIS and where the primary counterinsurgent was the U.S. military, rather than other coalition forces.

As explained previously, the dependent variable I investigate is the targeting of women, and this project considers multiple forms of targeting (sexual violence, non-sexual physical violence, and abduction). By expanding the definition of violence against women, I am able to include a broader swath of cases in this project, and the variation in targeting between and within cases is the outcome that my project aims to explain. Moving beyond a limited

study on sexual violence as the only phenomenon of interest also allows me to understand the many ways that women suffer during times of conflict.

Within-Case Variation

To understand within-case variation (e.g changes in targeting behavior by insurgents over the course of the same conflict), I use process tracing, a commonly used qualitative method that allows researchers to use existing sources to explain social and political processes that cannot be directly observed (such as why insurgents make the tactical decisions that they do). There are a number of sources that I rely on to conduct this process tracing. I use process tracing (as described by Bennett and Checkel 2015 and Gerring 2007 but most closely following the method suggested by Beach and Pedersen 2019) to test the theoretical relationship I propose between counterinsurgent type and targeting of women. I use both primary and secondary evidence to evaluate the observable implications. Primary source evidence was generated, as explained in the subsequent section, by one-on-one semi-structured interviews that I conducted.

Given that this entire project was conducted during the covid-19 pandemic and was therefore virtual in nature (and following Beach and Pedersen 2019), I rely on many other sources of differing provenances to provide evidence – particularly interviews that others (scholars, activists, and human rights organizations) conducted with individuals affected by the conflicts I study. I also use news reports, other scholarly work, human rights documents, and government and international organization reporting as secondary evidence in my process tracing. This comports with generally accepted practices of process tracing, as process tracing explicitly allows researchers to draw on a number of sources (best described in Waldner 2012) to make inferences about a given social-political process.

Between-Case Variation

In the previous section, I explained how I use process tracing to assess how and why rebels invest in technologies of coercion that target women inconsistently over the course of a given conflict. In this section, I explain how I use comparative case analysis to understand important differences between conflicts. Specifically, comparative case analysis allows me to gain leverage on the part of my theory that posits that counterinsurgent actor type is a significant contributor to the variation in levels of targeting between different conflicts that we observe.

The case selection method I use is what Gerring and Seawright call the "diverse case" method – which "has as its primary objective the achievement of maximum variance along relevant dimensions" (Gerring and Seawright 2008). Since my theory proposes the presence of counterinsurgents as a key dimension, I examine cases with variation in the independent variable by choosing cases with different actors who conduct counterinsurgency. In addition, I focus my study on cases where the dependent variable is present (that is, there is some targeting of women), but in which there is some variation in its intensity. Following George

and Bennett (2005), who concisely summarize Collier and Mahoney, I narrow my main case studies to those in which the dependent variable is present, in order to "capture heterogenous causal relations" that can only be assessed when the dependent variable exists.

As George and Bennett emphasize, part of the reason for engaging in comparative case analysis is to understand the multiple causal paths that may lead to the same outcome, and more importantly, to understand how they may differ across cases. I use a comparative case method to understand if there are specific contextual factors not previously studied that may lead to more or less intense targeting, and different forms of targeting over the course of a given conflict. As I stated previously, I find that, consistent with the theory, there are differing levels of incentives for insurgents to target women based on what type of actor is conducting the counterinsurgency operations.

An important criterion that must be acknowledged was to choose cases that are prominent enough to have generated sufficient data for process tracing, and gained enough attention that policymakers in the United States and abroad can speak to the conflict dynamics and provide evidence for my theory testing. There are many, many insurgent groups that operate all over the world, including those that are Islamist groups. However, many of these groups are quite small and therefore would be difficult to study in-depth, especially given the remote nature of the fieldwork that I conducted for this project. I therefore choose groups that are large, well-known, and which represent a significant enough security risk to the populations from which they operate that they warrant the type of counterinsurgent action that I argue is key to changing conflict dynamics and therefore incentive structures for insurgents.[6]

A Note on Covid-19

As I note elsewhere in this project, all my research was conducted virtually, as in-person research was not allowed by the University of California, Berkeley during the data collection phase of this project due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, I was lucky enough to be able to reach counterinsurgents and experts for each case study virtually. However, it should be noted that snowball sampling based on who would be available for interviews via Zoom was not, of course, the ideal data collection plan. I do not believe that conducting interviews virtually led to significant bias in the sample of interviews I conducted; however, I had initially planned to conduct interviews with many different groups, and due to difficulties accessing specific populations, this was not possible. I have, however, accounted for this perspective using interview data from interviews conducted by other researchers. In a future, more expanded version of this project, I hope to expand on the interview data to include a bigger and more diverse sample.

[6]There is, even within these three cases, substantial variation in available data and sources for assessing the theory. For Iraq, for example, there has been so much written and so many who have served there that it has filled an almost uncountable number of books and articles. For Somalia, on the other hand, the security situation and lack of U.S. Embassy presence there made it difficult to gather as much data as for other chapters; I discuss this in greater detail in each of the individual case chapters.

At the same time, conducting virtual research also gave me an advantage in that I was not limited to a specific base or location and was able to collect a much more diverse range of perspectives. As mentioned previously, especially for the Iraq case, which has a huge number of potential interview subjects, I wanted to be sure to conduct interviews with soldiers who had served in the places where the primary conflict was between the U.S. military and al-Qaeda in Iraq. Being able to interview subjects located in both London and Washington, D.C. in the same day or week due to all interviews being virtual was also helpful because it allowed me to ensure I was getting perspectives from soldiers who did serve in the areas of Iraq I study in this project.

2.5 Variation in Counterinsurgent: Why Counterinsurgent Actor Type Matters

A key source of variation in my case studies is what type of actor is conducting the counterinsurgency. As mentioned above, part one of the theoretical framework I propose is variation in counterinsurgent. I find that the type of actor conducting the counterinsurgency matters quite significantly, because these actors have varying incentives to respond to insurgent behavior. This in turn changes the insurgents' incentives with regard to targeting. For example, in the case of a domestic actor, the citizenry who determine the fate of the leadership have a vested interest in the success of the mission, and will punish or reward their leaders accordingly. A good example of the high standards that audiences and electorates have for their governments waging counterinsurgencies on their own soil is India, which has been plagued by the Naxalites (the Maoist group operating in West Bengal). Scholars of this conflict have noted that the optics and pervasive narratives of Indian soldiers behaving oppressively and coercively towards Indian citizens in pursuit of eliminating the Naxalites have actually increased support for the insurgent group relative to support for the Indian government's counterinsurgency efforts, despite the continued violence perpetrated against civilians by the Naxalites (Lalwani 2011, Ganguly 2021; for an explanation of how this phenomenon occurs in other contexts, see Lyall et al. 2013).

On the other hand, when the counterinsurgent is a different government, or is an international organization, the counterinsurgent's metrics of success are different than for a domestic counterinsurgent. In Afghanistan, for example, the leadership in the United States at the time – President George W. Bush – knew that he was being judged on the quickness of the mission's execution and keeping American casualties low. That meant conducting counterinsurgency in a way that increased potential risk to civilians – for example, many unarmed civilians were killed at checkpoints by anxious soldiers because they did not understand the instructions to slow down or, in some cases, that there was a checkpoint there at all (Bonds 2019) – and decreasing risk to servicemembers.

In addition, a foreign counterinsurgent operates in a much more challenging information environment. They do not understand local norms, customs, or social structures and hier-

archies, which in turn means that they do not know what is normal and abnormal either. Therefore, they are less likely to be responsive to changes in society caused by insurgent behavior. This is especially true in places with a Western counterinsurgent and a society they are already likely to cast as being "traditional" or "patriarchal."

This lack of understanding of local culture and norms has significant impacts on both the counterinsurgency and the civilian population. Of course, for civilians, one of the consequences is that targeting and harassment by insurgents may become more commonplace, but that reporting it to the counterinsurgents does not work. As my interviews with counterinsurgents who served in Iraq revealed, soldiers who knew nothing about local issues did not want to risk being used as a wedge in a dispute between families or communities and were often unable to distinguish whether the violence being reported was part of a broader insurgency movement as the victims claimed, or whether it was part of a local dispute.

The lack of cultural knowledge also affects the counterinsurgents because, based on assumptions about women's roles in society, they may fail to realize that women are a key source of information. As discussed in the Iraq chapter, some enterprising intelligence officers realized this individually and began to use female soldiers on their teams to gain information from local Iraqi women – and of course, in Afghanistan the U.S. military eventually innovated the Female Engagement Teams – but it was not until much later in the war, after the military had revised its training to reflect a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Iraqi gender relations that it became part of the mission.

In order to cover the spectrum of possible counterinsurgent actors, I also consider the case of Somalia, where there was a foreign counterinsurgent, but acting under the banner of an international organization, and comprised of neighboring countries that could understand, to at least some degree, Somali customs and culture. I posit that a neighboring country serving as counterinsurgents has a stronger imperative to protect civilians, since the risk of spillover violence affecting their own citizens is quite high. At the same time, protection of women in a neighboring state with security problems is less likely to be the linchpin of counterinsurgency success. This means that international regional coalitions like AMISOM can be undermined to some degree by gender-based violence conducted by the insurgent, but it is unlikely that the insurgent will be able to extract substantial concessions from the counterinsurgent as a result of that violence.

I discuss these cases in greater detail in the respective case study chapters, but the core takeaway for my theory is that when the counterinsurgent is a domestic actor, the incentives to target civilians are quite high, and the mechanisms I propose – Information Transmission Suppression, Emasculation, and Bargaining Leverage – are likely to operate. On the other hand, foreign counterinsurgents may not respond as decisively to sex-selective targeting because protecting civilians is not the primary metric on which the audience to which they answer will be judging success. This is why, in Iraq (Chapter Five), it is clear that al-Qaeda invested greater time and resources in innovating improvised explosive devices to target U.S. soldiers rather than investing in targeting women, as Boko Haram decided to do. Finally, in Somalia, which falls somewhere in the middle on a continuum between domestic counterinsurgent (as in Nigeria) and completely foreign counterinsurgent (as in

Iraq), I show that the counterinsurgency mission was to some degree affected by the changes in sex-selective targeting that occurred following robust counterinsurgency operations, but insurgents were not fully able to leverage this to gain the upper hand in bargaining with the counterinsurgent, or to force the counterinsurgent to the bargaining table to extract concessions.

2.6 Proposed Theoretical Mechanisms

In the previous section, I explained the basis for the first part of my theory, which contends that counterinsurgent actor type plays a role in determining the extent to which sex-selective targeting will challenge the success of the counterinsurgency. I argued that domestic counterinsurgents are more likely to be undermined by insurgents using sex-selective tactics than other types of counterinsurgent actors, such as regional or foreign counterinsurgents. In this section, I introduce in detail the second part of my theory, which explains the pathways through which insurgents can benefit from sex-selective targeting and demonstrates why they might be willing to bear the costs of changing to tactics targeting women when a robust counterinsurgency operation is underway.

I introduced these three mechanisms briefly in the previous chapter and named them (1) Information Transmission Suppression, (2) Emasculation, and (3) Bargaining Leverage. In this section, I explain the theoretical underpinnings of each mechanism and also articulate the observable implications for each mechanism. The observable implications are part of the process tracing method I employ to test my theory in each case. These are the observable traces of a process that I was not able to observe; finding evidence for the observable implications suggests that the mechanism operated in that case.

Mechanism 1: Information Transmission Suppression

The first mechanism I propose focuses on the critical transfer of information between the civilian population and the counterinsurgent. This mechanism posits that insurgents target women to prevent this information sharing which, if done correctly, can significantly benefit the counterinsurgent. The existing dominant theory of counterinsurgency – the idea that counterinsurgents must "win hearts and minds" – is important because by definition and by its nature, insurgency means that the rebels are hiding among the population, and are difficult for counterinsurgents to identify and target (Lyall and Wilson 2009; Sewall et al. 2007). Therefore, the theory goes, counterinsurgents must win over the population in order to entice them to inform on the insurgents. By the same token, the insurgent group wants to compel the civilians not to inform on them to the counterinsurgent. It is also well-documented that women establish networks, both formal and informal, that spread information among members of the community (e.g. Parkinson 2013).

Therefore, this mechanism works in two ways. First, intensifying tactics that target women selectively makes it unsafe for women to share the different types of information

that they have access to. In all the cases I study, interviews (either conducted by me or other researchers who shared their interview findings) confirmed that women do indeed have access to different types of information. One interview subject I spoke with explained that because women have to navigate the world with high levels of situational awareness for their own safety, they pick up on things that men do not (interview with author, February 24, 2022). This information, which could be something as seemingly simple as, "there are always two guys with guns on that street corner near the checkpoint," is extremely detailed and useful to counterinsurgents who are almost always unfamiliar with the territory in which they are operating. It is also the type of information that a man who feels more secure walking around his community, and who might perhaps himself be armed, may not necessarily notice or remember. Therefore, this mechanism posits that targeting women, and thereby making them feel insecure, unsafe, and unwilling to engage in public life or fearful to provide information to the counterinsurgent, is a strategic move by the insurgent group that prevents the transmission of information from the civilian population to the counterinsurgent.

New research is beginning to connect the importance of local civilian knowledge networks to broader counterinsurgency approaches. For example, Janssens (2021) examines the Guatemalan Civil War, and finds that information in the form of denunciations was vital to the counterinsurgency mission executed by the Guatemalan government, and that because informing was so easily permissible, it enabled the Guatemalan "state security forces to convey an impression of 'omnipotence' and 'omnipresence' that far exceeded their actual strength." (Janssens 2021: 116) In addition, in the Guatemalan case, the police and state security forces conscientiously created a counterinsurgency plan that relied on information provided to them by civilians (Janssens 2021). The local knowledge that the military and police institutions gleaned from civilians played a significant role in their ability to control social, political, and economic life in Guatemala during the civil war. It is this exact type of information-sharing which, I argue, insurgents have a strong incentive to prevent. Therefore, in places where women are providing information or are thought to be at risk of providing information, insurgents invest in targeting women to prevent this sort of information sharing.

Other scholars have also begun to focus on the importance of information networks among civilians before, during, and after civil conflict. For example, Larson and Lewis (2018) find that civilian networks are crucial to rebel group formation. Specifically, they argue that, "[b]ecause nascent rebel groups are typically small and vulnerable, [. . .] rebels need local civilians to keep quiet about their existence and location if they hope to become viable; information leaks to the government about incipient rebels' identity and whereabouts can be devastating" (Larson and Lewis: 872). Although the authors rightly point out that rebel groups are most susceptible to being eliminated by the government at their inception, their broader observation that rebel groups must remain relatively concealed from the government is always true; the rebels' major advantage, as other scholars have pointed out (e.g. Lyall and Wilson 2009) is that the government often does not know who they are. Larson and Lewis further argue that in order to develop "expectations about the nascent rebels' future

capabilities relative to the government," civilians rely on "rumors that reach them through their established networks of trusted communication" (Larson and Lewis: 872-873). These networks exist predominantly in rural areas in weak states, in which a majority of insurgencies also occur.

My argument builds upon these findings; I suggest that civilian information networks do more than merely protect the rebel group in its nascency; they can also protect the rebel group during active counterinsurgent operations undertaken by the government – or they can betray the rebel group by informing counterinsurgent operatives and police where the rebels are operating from. I suggest that in communities like the ones that Larson and Lewis focus on, strong social connections are nurtured by women, and that women therefore are likely to have valuable information about the goings-on of the community, as well as information about local grudges, dynamics, and norms that would help counterinsurgents both target rebels as well as exploit local cleavages. I find this to be true in each case, no matter how repressive the insurgent group or the social context. Sharing or withholding information is also a way in which women exert agency in conflict situations that rob them of many other freedoms.

Very little previous research has examined the specific role that women play in gaining access to and then relaying information to the government during a civil conflict. One important study, however, conducted in Lebanon by Parkinson (2013) finds that women's formal and informal networks were critical to militant resilience in Lebanon in the 1980s. Admittedly, Parkinson focuses her research on women in militant organizations; however, her findings are applicable to my project nonetheless. Parkinson's novel emphasis on quotidian relationships buttresses the notion that everyday interactions, particularly between women, are critical for creating and sustaining networks – whether they be militant supply networks as in her research, or information networks as in mine. Parkinson finds that women's networks allowed some semblance of militant groups' organizational structure to survive even "after formal chains of command were severed" (Parkinson 2013: 419).

Women have important information, and they can and do share it with counterinsurgents. Of course, the reverse is also true – women had information and chose to conceal that information from counterinsurgents. This is the ultimate battle between counterinsurgent and insurgent. The insurgent knows that civilians are able to provide information about them to the counterinsurgent, who is equally trying to entice (either cooperatively or coercively) the civilian to rat on the insurgent. This project demonstrates that it is not just men who participate in this process, but that women too, have important roles to play in the sharing or concealment of information.

The second part of the information transmission suppression hypothesis is that targeting women is a way to make communities in general more insecure and therefore less willing to cooperate with the counterinsurgent. Because women are seen as particularly vulnerable and because violence against them is seen as particularly atrocious, targeting them selectively is likely to have a stronger coercive effect on an entire community that is by and large cooperating with the counterinsurgent than simply targeting known informants. In many places, an attack on the women is an attack on the entire community. A good exemplification

of this is a quote from a New York Times article that described the war crimes in Darfur, Sudan that took place in 2003 and 2004: "'In this society, if you rape one woman, you have raped the entire tribe'" (New York Times 2008). Many communities have this belief as well, and the fear that women and girls within the community will be attacked is a strong coercive tactic to prevent cooperation between the population and the counterinsurgent.

As mentioned previously, I use a process tracing approach in three cases to test my hypotheses. Process tracing requires researchers to outline the mechanisms that they hypothesize, and then enumerate the observable implications of those mechanisms. In other words, if the mechanisms worked as posited, what would be the observable traces of those mechanisms that a researcher could look for? In this section, I outline the observable implications for each of my proposed mechanisms. It is worth noting that these are extremely high-level and generalized, because they are applied to three different cases, and therefore cannot be specific to any one location's norms, history, or conflict. It is also important to note that not all observable implications have to be found in a given case for the mechanism to have operated. The observable implications listed here are analogous to a sort of pre-analysis plan, in which I outline the evidence that, in advance of conducting the study, if found, will allow me to say that the mechanism operated in that particular case (see for example Beach 2016). Because process tracing is a qualitative method, the logic underpinning the method differs slightly from quantitative methods. In this method, researchers do not focus on the number of observable implications that were found as the core evidence for arguing that the mechanism operated as posited. Rather, process tracing requires researchers to think about the quality of the evidence that was found and assess whether that evidence would exist if the mechanism did not operate as posited (ibid). Because I use the same list of observable implications across cases, I make this assessment in each of the case study chapters, rather than in this chapter. In the subsequent chapters, I assess each mechanism and the evidence that exists (or does not exist) for each of my cases and use that (following Beach 2016 and Beach and Pedersen 2019) to support the claims I make about whether the mechanism operated or did not.

Below, I list the observable implications for the first mechanism, the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism.

	Observable Implications for Information Transmission Suppression
OI 1	Targeting by insurgents increases when civilian information sharing increases
OI 2	Clear evidence of a knowledge network fostered by women
OI 3	Evidence suggests that targeting is designed to coerce civilians into silence
O1 4	Men who have or are perceived to have better information are also targeted

Table 2.1: Observable Implications of Information Transmission Suppression Mechanism

Emasculation Mechanism

My second mechanism is rooted more firmly in a feminist IR tradition. I argue that targeting women in the presence of the counterinsurgent emasculates the counterinsurgents, shaming and humiliating them for being unable to protect the most "innocent" or "vulnerable" members of the community. This mechanism rests on a long tradition of feminist scholarship, which has demonstrated the gendered nature of the notion of civilian protection and civilian victimization (Sjoberg and Peet 2011, MacKinnon 2007, Bardall et al. 2020, Khalili 2011, Enloe 1990).

Like the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism, the Emasculation mechanism too is underpinned by two theoretical ideas. First is the long-held feminist notion that targeting women is a means of undermining the masculinity of the male forces designated to protect them. Second is the reality that civilians do exert agency in times of conflict even if they are being targeted by one or more sides. The combatant that the civilian population chooses to support – whether tacitly, by refusing to cooperate with one side or another, or overtly, by actively providing information or other forms of support – will enjoy significant benefits on the battlefield. Targeting women is a means of convincing the population that the counterinsurgent is incapable of protecting them and that civilians might be better served by throwing their weight behind the insurgent instead. As with mechanism one, the observable implications articulated at the end of this section capture both these themes.

In order to understand the pathway through which insurgents might be emasculated for failing to protect women, it is first important to examine the ways in which counterinsurgents themselves gender women. By constructing important narratives around gender, femininity, and innocence, counterinsurgents endow women with a particular vulnerability, which counterinsurgents often use to justify their own military projects, and which insurgents can capitalize on to undermine counterinsurgency operations. One of the common justifications for investing in a robust counterinsurgency, particularly against jihadi groups, is the need to protect women and girls from being targeted by insurgents (Sjoberg and Peet 2011). In this project, I do not aim to make claims about or assessments of the success of these counterinsurgency operations. Rather, I seek to understand how the presence of counterinsurgents and counterinsurgent behavior contributes to changes in the strategic dynamics for insurgents, and how the construction of gender by both insurgent and counterinsurgent can create incentives for insurgents to begin targeting women or ramp up operations that selectively target women in the face of a robust counterinsurgency effort.

A key part of this mechanism is that counterinsurgency is an extremely intimate and intrusive activity, requiring entrance into everyday civilians' lives, homes, and social networks. Doing counterinsurgency successfully requires counterinsurgent forces – who are almost always male and almost always from outside the community – to become present within these communities. This presence takes many forms, from setting up checkpoints where civilians are searched while walking through their own community, conducting raids and searches in civilians' homes – without warning and often in the middle of the night, and interrogating locals on the activities of others in their community – asking them to share information on

people with whom they might have strong relationships. Because civilian cooperation is such an important requirement for counterinsurgent success, it is virtually impossible to conduct a large-scale and successful contemporary counterinsurgency without involving the civilian population. In each of the case study chapters of this book, I show how the activities of counterinsurgents doing normal everyday counterinsurgency increased the civilian insecurity and made them "legitimate" targets for violence by insurgents. The extent to which counterinsurgents feel the lack of civilian support as a result of these activities helps determine whether this mechanism will operate or not; and as the first part of my theory postulates, this may vary by counterinsurgent actor type.

Because counterinsurgency is often predicated on the notion of "protecting vulnerable civilians" or "freeing women," this way of gendering civilians creates a special class of civilians whose protection can (depending on the extent to which the counterinsurgent's home audience demands their protection) become tied to the success of the counterinsurgency mission. For example, the War in Afghanistan, where counterinsurgency against the Taliban was conducted primarily by U.S. forces, provides a good example of a counterinsurgent's construction of gender narratives. Hirschkind and Mahmood, who study the framing of the situation in Afghanistan in the years just prior to and just after the 2001 invasion, argue that the ways in which Western feminist organizations and Western governments framed gender, Islam, and fundamentalism, created a discourse designed to help justify expansive military operations and denial of aid that actually worsened living conditions for women and children (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002). In fact, much of the public affairs campaign waged in the West to garner support for Operation Enduring Freedom (the name of the military operation in Afghanistan) focused on "liberating" women and girls from an oppressive and fundamentalist regime. This narrative has continued throughout the duration of the War in Afghanistan, which ended on August 31, 2021, almost 20 years after it began on October 7, 2001. A significant and oft-repeated criticism of the Biden Administration's decision to remove U.S. troops from Afghanistan was that the U.S. was abandoning women and girls whose fate would be once again left in the hands of the Taliban.[7]

Another key example of this is the Islamic State (IS). Beginning in 2014 with their surprising capture of Mosul in the power vacuum left in Iraq in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal of forces, the Islamic State's violent behavior against women captured public attention internationally, especially with their use of sexual slavery against Yazidi girls (Revkin and Wood 2021). U.S. President Obama, who had campaigned in 2008 on withdrawing troops from Iraq, which he characterized as the "war of choice" (contrasted with Afghanistan, which he framed as the "war of necessity"), and who had just a couple of years prior managed to successfully withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq, was then forced to orchestrate a counterterrorism campaign to eliminate the Islamic State, due largely to the international outrage at the group's extremely violent and abhorrent behavior towards women. Framing the need to

[7]Although the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have become lumped together over the course of the past two decades, a closer analysis reveals that the use of gender concerns to justify the war in Afghanistan was much stronger than in Iraq, as I show in the final case study chapter of this project.

eliminate bad actors as a means by which governments can protect women and girls contributes to a gendering of civilians during conflict that in turn can increase incentives for insurgents to target them.

There is a burgeoning tradition of feminist scholarship that examines the ways in which counterinsurgents construct gender (e.g. Khalili 2011, Kinsella 2019). These authors find that in the United States in particular, there is a "mutually constitutive relationship" between gender and counterinsurgency (Kinsella 2019:2). Kinsella goes so far as to argue that U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, articulated in the 2006 Counterinsurgency Field Manual, "actively shape[s] and form[s]" constructions and narratives of gender (ibid). Therefore, there is an active process of construction, negotiation, and re-negotiation of gender that takes place as part of the development and implementation of counterinsurgency doctrine and practice. This is important because it signals to insurgents that gender is an important and salient dimension of civilian identity for counterinsurgents. More specifically, for the cases I study, this is what occurred in Nigeria, where the abduction of schoolgirls was too horrific for the Nigerian public to bear. On the other hand, in Iraq, the gendering process hampered the U.S. government's ability to understand what was actually going on – because they had pre-determined that Iraqi cultural values cast women into the role of "other," not to be talked to or touched, they unintentionally erased important gender differences that would have helped counterinsurgents connect better with the civilian population.

Sjoberg and Peet (2011) explore why the construction of gender by combatants during conflict actually leads to greater gender-based targeting.[8] Specifically, they find that "civilian victimization is a logical extension of wars justified by protecting women and children, and that 'civilian' is a fundamentally gendered idea" (Sjoberg and Peet 2011: 164). They point to a lack of gender analysis in the civilian victimization literature (as does my own project) and examine the ways in which the construction of gender during conflict leads more directly to targeting women. Their explanation rests wholly in the feminist tradition, and my hypothesis about emasculation of counterinsurgents is derived from their work, which argues "that victimized women are the territory being fought over, and wartime rape is an attack on the property/pride of male/masculine enemies. 'Civilian victimization' is the assertion of one belligerent's (masculine) virility and dominance and the revealing of another's (feminized) inadequacy, often inscribed on women's bodies" (Sjoberg and Peet 2011, 166).

In this project, I extend the definition of civilian targeting beyond Sjoberg and Peet's study of wartime rape, but nonetheless rely on their argument that targeting women is a means by which insurgents can emasculate and undermine counterinsurgent forces. Specifically, I argue that other forms of targeting can also construct and reify gender in ways that have strategic and material consequences for the conflict. By targeting those that the counterinsurgent has made clear are a "protected" and "special" class of civilian, the insurgent can undermine the efficacy and morale of the entire mission by emasculating soldiers who cannot protect women within their area of responsibility.

One final and very important contribution to this explanation is provided by Aisha Ah-

[8]See also MacKinnon 2007 for a similar argument

mad, who studies several of the cases that I examine in my project. Ahmad argues that jihadi groups in particular may begin to engage in gendered violence after they experience violence against "their girls" perpetrated by the state (Ahmad 2019). Her work provides important evidence that rebel groups, too, often consider women to be a "special" class of civilian, and that they purposefully enact gender-based violence as a form of retribution against counterinsurgent forces, knowing it will instigate a sense of horror and helplessness in the counterinsurgent. In addition, Robert Nagel (2019) finds conflicts in which rebels perpetrate gender-based violence (he focuses on sexual violence, as with almost all literature on this subject) are more likely to be mitigated by the state, because sexual violence against these "vulnerable" people is thought to emasculate the state.

I argue that while there are benefits to creating a narrative of emasculation, this behavior can also have tactical and operational benefits for insurgents, as counterinsurgent combatants who feel defeated emotionally or who feel demoralized about their chance of victory against the rebel group may lose interest in waging a robust counterinsurgency.

Additionally, government forces who cannot protect the "innocent" against attack from rebel forces may also lose public support for the operations, which are costly to states, both in terms of material and human resources, and which, as I demonstrated above, are often justified on the basis of protection of women and children. This is the second part of the mechanism – that governments that fail to protect women from insurgent attacks may lose the support of both local civilians, which will have battlefield consequences, and/or their home audience, which will have consequences for the mandate of the entire counterinsurgency mission.

As with the first mechanism, where I elaborated the observable implications that follow from the proposed mechanism, I enumerate the observable implications of this emasculation mechanism as well. As before, it should be noted that these are somewhat generalized so that the same framework can be used to evaluate multiple cases.

	Observable Implications of Emasculation Mechanism
OI 1	Evidence that counterinsurgents feel shame for inability to protect women
OI 2	Decreased civilian confidence in counterinsurgency if women are specifically targeted by insurgents
OI 3	Insurgent propaganda attacking masculinity of counterinsurgent
OI 4	Insurgents attacking areas specifically under the purview of the counterinsurgent along with or instead of softer or "easier" targets

Table 2.2: Observable Implications of Emasculation Mechanism

Bargaining Leverage Mechanism

Finally, my third mechanism posits that insurgent groups may use violence against women as a costly signal and in order to extract concessions from the counterinsurgent. It is well-established that costly signaling is an important means of communicating commitment and resolve in international politics (e.g. Fearon 1997). Costly signaling is important in civil conflict because it allows insurgents to communicate that they are committed to waging the conflict, sticking it through until the end, and perpetrating violence until they wear down the counterinsurgent forces. And as I have already established, targeting women is costly to the group in many different ways. Therefore, I argue that groups target women in order to signal their commitment to the cause, and to gain enough leverage over the population to be able to either extract concessions directly from the counterinsurgent or force them to the bargaining table.

As I establish previously, there is an extensive literature on civilian targeting that focuses on indiscriminate civilian targeting, but fairly limited research on selective targeting of women and girls in forms other than sexual violence; the theoretical mechanism I propose here builds upon the existing work in the civilian targeting literature. However, within the literature on the effectiveness and goals of civilian targeting, there is not a broad consensus. In fact, some scholars argue that the goals of civilian targeting are not necessarily limited to extracting concessions from the government or securing a place at the bargaining table; for example, Polo and Gleditsch (2016) argue that rebel groups use terrorist tactics during civil war in order to communicate their resolve, and that we are most likely to observe civilian targeting when groups are weak and there is uncertainty about the group's strength or resolve. Alternatively, Polo and González (2020) argue that civilian targeting by rebel groups is a means of rallying support for the group by provoking government forces into acting repressively and therefore convincing civilians to support the rebels instead of the government.

Among scholars who examine the effectiveness of using terrorist tactics (another way of saying civilian targeting) during civil war, there is some disagreement about whether civilian targeting is in fact an effectual means of being invited to the bargaining table and securing a favorable outcome. Thomas (2014) examines African civil conflicts and finds that groups that use terrorist tactics are much more likely both to be invited to participate in end-of-conflict negotiations and to extract concessions from the government. Wood and Kathman's (2014) earlier work supports this finding but they posit a curvilinear relationship between civilian targeting and bargaining outcomes, arguing that insurgents need to perpetrate enough violence to bring the government to the bargaining table, but that too much violence will actually diminish the concessions that rebels can extract. Similarly, Stanton (2013) finds that rebels fighting against democratic governments are most likely to reap concessions by using civilian targeting, as democratic governments are more sensitive to civilian violence.

On the other hand, Fortna (2015) argues the opposite – she concedes that democratic governments against which rebels employ terrorism may be more sensitive to it, but still finds that non-terrorist rebels achieve both more favorable concessions from governments

and military victory, and that "terrorists undermine rather than enhance their military effectiveness by attacking civilians indiscriminately" (519). These mixed findings suggest that the effectiveness of civilian targeting as a means of forcing the government to the negotiating table and securing outcomes that favor the rebel group may be context-specific. In addition, it is clear that civilian targeting, after a certain point, has diminishing returns or even a negative effect for the insurgent group's support and effectiveness.

This third mechanism builds on this work in the context of the cases that I examine in this project. I hypothesize that targeting women in particular is disliked by governments and civilians alike, and that there is near universal sensitivity to the ways in which the rebel groups I study target women. By showing that they are willing to bear the costs of this type of targeting, I argue that groups are engaging in costly signaling. In addition, by undertaking targeting against groups that are almost universally viewed as "vulnerable," or "innocent," with a high need to be "protected" or "saved," they are signaling to the government or counterinsurgent forces their resolve and commitment to their goals and willingness to fight. Because women are generally constructed – both by insurgent and counterinsurgent, as I discussed previously – to be a special class of civilian most in need protection, I posit that targeting women is an especially effective means of communicating resolve encouraging the government to concede – perhaps even more so than the indiscriminate targeting that the scholars I cite above focus on. In addition, as I show in Chapter Three, certain tactics can provide leverage that materially benefits the group in clear and distinct ways.

Once again, I outline the observable implications that follow from the mechanism as I have posited; again, these are at a more general level so that they can be applied to multiple cases.

	Observable Implications of Bargaining Leverage Mechanism
OI 1	Counterinsurgents speak to being willing to negotiate because of sex-selective targeting
OI 2	Evidence that insurgent is targeting women to create a war of attrition that will lead to better outcomes
OI 3	Interviewees speaking to changed messages and/or resolve of insurgents and counterinsurgents when targeting of women is high

Table 2.3: Observable Implications of Bargaining Leverage Mechanism

2.7 Alternative Explanations

Existing literature provides a number of generalized alternative explanations for the phenomenon I study. There are three primary alternative explanations I identify. These are (1) ideology, (2) outbidding, and (3) presence of natural resources, I discuss each of these

explanations and their relevance to my project in more detail below. In the next chapter, which examines the conflict in Nigeria, I address some counterarguments specific to that conflict.

Ideology

The first, and perhaps most intuitive alternative explanation for why insurgents would target women and girls as part of their insurgency operations is their ideology. This explanation would suggest that the ideology of the insurgent group determines the behavior of the group towards women and girls. To be sure, the groups operating in the conflicts I study in this project would under no circumstances be considered feminist, or even gender-equal. Many of them take very harsh patriarchal views of the role of women in public and private society; all of the groups I study in this project are associated with some sort of Sunni fundamentalism and are either a branch of al-Qaeda or at one time were affiliated with al-Qaeda. Ideology as an alternative explanation suggests that groups that feature these types of beliefs about women target women and girls in order to coerce them into performing the roles that the group believes they should play in society.

In terms of my puzzle, for the ideology explanation to be the main explanatory factor should (empirically) mean that all groups that hold roughly similar beliefs about the role of women should use coercive methods against women and girls in order to subdue them into those roles. In fact, this is not what we see bear out in the world. To be sure, it is very difficult to disentangle ideology from group behavior in that it is impossible to understand every motivation that an actor (or group of actors) has for perpetrating a specific behavior in the world. But as I show in the chapters that follow, ideology alone is an insufficient explanation for the phenomenon I examine in this project.

Interestingly, there is not a large-scale literature that takes the perspective that ideology can be all-determinative; as Sanín and Wood note, ideology has been notably absent from the literature for the past twenty years (Sanín and Wood 2014). One notable exception is Juergensmeyer (2003), who argues that religion, interacting with political, economic, and social circumstances, can be mobilized toward violence. However, even this is a slight overstatement of the simplicity of Juergensmeyer's point, as even he concedes that religion has to be coopted in order to become the kind of ideological explanation that we might immediately reach for in answering the question of why insurgents target women. There have been enormous strides made in the ideology literature over the past ten years or so. Scholars have begun to think about the ways in which ideology matters in insurgency and terrorism (Sanín and Wood 2014, Sanchez-Cuenca and de la Calle 2009, Postel 2013). In particular, Sanín and Wood advocate for incorporation of considerations of ideology into the scholarship on conflict. They argue that ideology can be read in two ways: first, as an instrumental tool that provides a map for the strategies and goals that an insurgent group should pursue; and second, as a normative tool that will resonate in ways that will mobilize fighters to support the group (Sanín and Wood 2014). They further argue that this latter reading has more explanatory power for the importance of ideology, thus acknowledging that ideology

is consciously shaped by leaders of an insurgent group, and therefore coopted in ways that convinces civilians and potential fighters to support the group. Other scholars (for example Leader Maynard 2019, Schubiger and Zelina 2017) also consider ideology to be a tool that can be shaped by the insurgent group to benefit them most. This dovetails nicely with Nielsen (2020), who finds that even the most anti-feminist organizations sometimes make space for female preachers when it benefits them strategically.

However, the most important contribution for my own study is Ahmad's (2019) examination of norm change toward women in Islamist organizations. Ahmad considers the Pakistani Taliban, Boko Haram, and al-Shabaab's approaches to female civilians over time, asking why some organizations are constrained by religious doctrine and norms while others are able to bend them to their advantage. Although Ahmad's study focuses just on Islamist organizations, her findings on the cooptation of ideology and religious doctrine at key moments are critical for my own work. Ahmad examines cases in which the state "perpetrates an egregious act that shocks the local population. These trigger events create openings for jihadist entrepreneurs to take advantage of the scandal, while deflecting attention away from their mutating violence [. . . .] The result is the rapid erosion of former taboos, the adoption of previously proscribed behaviors, and the emergence of radical new norms" (Ahmad 2019, 84-85). Ahmad's findings suggest that even the most egregious violators of women's rights and autonomy are strategic actors and further, that the most successful of them are able to manipulate the conditions on the ground to benefit them strategically, coopting their ideology to allow them to behave more violently toward women, even if this was previously doctrinally prohibited.

My project does not engage deeply with the individual ideology of the groups. This is partly because the ideology of the groups I study has remained relatively consistent over time, and because the groups I study have relatively similar ideologies, but very different behaviors. I do not disagree that ideology is an important factor in understanding group motivation and even behavior; however, in my project, I consider ideology to be a background factor that remains constant, and I argue that other strategic conditions (such as the presence, absence, and behavior of the counterinsurgent) create greater incentives for changes in insurgent tactics than does ideology. It is possible for violence against women perpetrated by an insurgent group to be both ideologically based and strategic in nature; by brushing away variation over time and space and attributing all violence against women to ideology, we lose much detail and understanding of the actual conflict dynamics that influence groups to change their tactics and strategy.

Resources

Another alternative explanation, adapted from the civilian targeting literature, is that the resources of the place where the conflict occurring can create incentives for insurgents to target civilians during conflict. Weinstein's (2007) work best exemplifies how this explanation might be adapted to account for gender-selective targeting. Weinstein proposes that groups operating in areas with a wealth of natural resources, or which have the support of an

outside sponsor are more likely to perpetrate indiscriminate violence against civilians. This is because groups who are supported either by natural resource wealth or by an outside actor "are populated by opportunists, lack mechanisms for disciplining behavior, and tend to commit widespread abuses against civilians" (Weinstein 2007: 14). On the other hand, he argues, resource constrained rebels have to rely more on building social capital and goodwill with civilians, and are therefore more restrained in their targeting and more selective in their use of violence against civilians. Weinstein's approach is innovative because he differentiates different types of capital that rebel groups might need and instrumentalize in different ways.

The way that this alternative explanation might manifest in my project is if women are, in their own way, a particular type of resource capital that groups rely on in order to achieve particular goals. To some extent, using women as resources is a relatively common tactic across all groups – for example, even the groups I study in this project force abducted women and girls to serve as suicide bombers, or as cooks and cleaners, and, in some cases, force them into marriage to their fighters. However, I find no evidence that this is the main motivation for targeting women; if this were a true utility of the group, then we should expect to see this behavior consistently across time for the duration of the conflict.

Outbidding

A third alternative explanation for my puzzle is outbidding (in the way that Kydd and Walter 2006 articulate). Rivalry of competing groups, or groups outbidding each other is a popular explanation for insurgent targeting of civilians (see, for example, Wood and Kathman 2015, Metelits 2010, Toft 2007, Bloom 2004). This explanation rests on the notion that insurgent groups will become more violent when they face competition from other rebel groups or from the state (Metelits 2010). Because insurgent groups are fighting for survival, they must extract resources from the communities in which they operate. If they are unchallenged in this, they remain relatively innocuous in their interactions with civilians. On the other hand, if it becomes clear that another group or the state presents a threat to the group's survival, they will become more repressive in order to preserve the social and economic order they have created (Metelits 2010). This strand of explanations, too, relies on the notion that resources are important for insurgents, but focuses more on whether the leaders of the insurgent organizations can manage the strategic conditions, rather than assuming that "insurgents will inevitably become violent predators" (Metelits 2010, 230).

This rivalry explanation is more flexible in that it accounts for change in the strategic conditions that the insurgent faces, as the presence of rival groups or the state may vary over time. Of course, the presence and behavior of counterinsurgent forces is critical to my theory, so it is possible that my theory might actually dovetail with the outbidding explanation – especially when the actor that the rebels are trying to rival is the state. However, the outbidding explanation usually refers to the presence of other rebel groups, in which there is quite a lot of variation in my cases. At the time I focus on each of the cases, they are the dominant insurgent group that is active in that conflict; this should help eliminate the outbidding explanation as an alternative.

2.8 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has provided a summary of the overall theory that I propose. I argue first that targeting women is costly for insurgent groups, and that they therefore use sex-selective targeting as a means by which to undermine the counterinsurgent when faced with a robust counterinsurgency operation. I further argued that the attempt to undermine the counterinsurgent through the use of tactics that target women is mostly likely to be successful for a domestic counterinsurgent. In the next chapter, which focuses on the case study of Nigeria, I show why the Nigerian government, as a domestic actor, was particularly susceptible to being undermined by Boko Haram, who ramped up their violence against women in response to a strong counterinsurgency.

I further argued that if gender becomes salient as a means of undermining the counterinsurgent, it will operate through three mechanisms: (1) the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism, (2) the Emasculation mechanism, and (3) the Bargaining Leverage mechanism. In the next chapter, I show how Boko Haram's use of tactics targeting women was a strategic response to the Nigerian military's biggest and most successful counterinsurgency operations, and that they successfully used sex-selective violence to undermine the Nigerian government and extract substantial concessions from them.

Chapter 3

Nigeria

3.1 Introduction

This project examines the puzzling inconsistency in rebel-group targeting of women during insurgency operations, seeking to understand why, at certain points in a conflict, rebel groups allocate more of their resources to sex-selective targeting as opposed to indiscriminate targeting. This chapter leverages within-case variation in the conflict between the Nigerian government and the insurgent group Boko Haram. I show that Boko Haram's use of tactics targeting women was not consistent over the course of the years this chapter focuses on (roughly 2012-2015). This chapter explains the change in behavior that we observe over those years.

In the previous chapter, in which I introduced the novel theory that I propose and test in this project, I suggested that it is costly to insurgents to target women – it limits the tactics they can use, makes them extremely unpopular, and, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, in the case of abduction, requires them to feed, clothe, and house the abductees. This chapter will demonstrate why and under what conditions insurgents would be willing to bear those costs.

My theory contends that insurgents may be willing to take on the cost and risk of gender-based targeting when they are faced with changing conflict dynamics. I argue that the fluctuation in form and intensity of gender-based targeting can be explained by the presence and behavior of the counterinsurgent, and that the ways in which counterinsurgents both interact with and gender the civilian population can change the conflict dynamics for insurgents and create incentives for targeting women. This theory has two parts – first, that counterinsurgents whose home audiences demand protection of women by government troops are more likely to be domestic counterinsurgents, and second that if protection of women becomes tied to the success of the counterinsurgency mission, then sex-selective targeting may be a salient means through which the insurgent can undermine the counterinsurgent.

If protection of women becomes a core metric of success for the counterinsurgent, I argue that it happens through three mechanisms: (1) preventing the transmission of information

from the population to the counterinsurgent; (2) emasculating the counterinsurgent for failing to protect the "most vulnerable" members of the population; and (3) creating bargaining leverage to extract concessions from the counterinsurgent.

In this chapter, I show how the Nigerian government – a domestic counterinsurgent actor – was successfully hampered by Boko Haram's use of sex-selective targeting, and demonstrate how each of the three mechanisms operated in this case. Because the Nigerian government was operating, in this case, within its own borders, the home audience it was responding to (Nigerian citizens) had high expectations for their government's ability to protect its own civilians and would not accept the government's failure to protect fellow Nigerian citizens.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Boko Haram and the conflict in Nigeria. I then move to evaluating evidence for each of the proposed mechanisms before turning to some common counterarguments. I wrap up the chapter with some conclusions about how this case fits into the overall theory I propose.

3.2 Overview of the Conflict in Northeastern Nigeria

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad – known worldwide as Boko Haram (also how I refer to the group in this project) – has become infamous for its abduction of schoolgirls, rising to global prominence after the April 2014 abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, Nigeria. However, when tracing the group's history, strategic communications, and tactics, it is clear that the focus on gender-based targeting was not a clear, present, through-line from the group's inception. As part of the project's overall goal to understand why insurgents target women, this chapter uses process tracing to test the mechanisms laid out in the previous section as they manifested in the Nigeria case. I find that, at various points of the conflict, all three mechanisms can be supported by the actions taken, statements made, and reactions of all parties in the conflict.

In addition, I narrow the scope of this chapter to the years 2012-2015. I do this for several reasons. First, and most importantly, this project aims to understand change in strategic and tactical behavior by insurgent groups, and the years 2012-2015 represent a significant shift in Boko Haram's behavior. As I elaborate below, the group did not start out committing violence against women. Rather, most of its early activities (even once it gained quite a lot of targeting capacity) focused on attacking the state, which scholars would consider "normal behavior" for a center-seeking group like Boko Haram.

Second, beginning in 2015, there are indications that the group began to morph into a branch of the Islamic State, known as Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). One methodological objective of this project is to examine groups of relatively consistent ideology, which is why all the case studies focus on groups that were themselves or were at one point affiliated with al-Qaeda. Although experts on Nigeria debate the extent to which the switch from allegiance to al-Qaeda to allegiance to the Islamic State matters, I scope down to 2012-2015 to avoid muddying the waters on the question of which ideology the group espoused.

Finally, I limit the scope to these years in order to conduct a thorough and rigorous process tracing approach to the puzzle. Limiting the study to a four-year time span allows me to deeply engage with the many dimensions of conflict – both tactical and strategic – that all the actors in the war (civilians, counterinsurgents, and insurgents) faced. When appropriate, I reference activities and events that occur before and after this time horizon, but for the purposes of this chapter, the bulk of the analysis is focused on the war between Boko Haram and the Nigerian state between 2012 and 2015.

3.3 Boko Haram – A Brief History (2009-2016)

There are only a few rigorous and detailed accounts of Boko Haram from its inception, but most agree that the group rose to prominence in northeastern Nigeria – specifically in Borno state, in the Lake Chad Basin, on the border with both Chad and Cameroon (see map below). In general, the city of Maiduguri, where Boko Haram emerged from the preaching of its first leader, Mohammad Yusuf, is thought to be the epicenter of the group's activities for many years (Thurston 2018).

Figure 3.1: Map of Nigeria, Source: Agbiboa 2021

Boko Haram began, as do many rebel organizations, with a group of hardliners, who at least initially, worked with the local political community to advocate for their policy

preferences, including implementation of sharia (Islamic law) and less funding and emphasis on Western-style schools (Thurston 2018). Under Yusuf's leadership, the group preached some violent rhetoric and did engage in some relatively infrequent political violence, but as stated above, this was mostly directed against the state, rather than civilians (Omeni 2018, Thurston 2018).

2009 was a pivotal year for the group, however, and most scholars of Boko Haram point to 2009 as the year when the group became the modern threat that the Nigerian state has been dealing with. After it became clear that the group was not diminishing in stature, and indeed, as Thurston (2018: 132-133) notes, that "Boko Haram members were leaving Maiduguri for paramilitary training," the governor of Borno state created Operation Flush, purportedly to deal with "banditry" in Borno, but which was likely targeted toward Boko Haram. Most canonical accounts suggest that tensions between Boko Haram and the state came to a head in June 2009 when state security forces operating under the purview of Operation Flush "detained and then opened fire at Boko Haram members en route to a funeral procession" (ibid). The violent uprising (sometimes also referred to as a riot, e.g. Matfess 2017) and the subsequent violent response by the state resulted in the extrajudicial death of Mohommad Yusuf, who was replaced by the now infamous Abubakar Shekau (Thurston 2018, Omeni 2018, Matfess 2017). Both Thurston and Omeni take pains to specify that while Shekau's tactics were more violent and aggressive than Yusuf's had been (although it is unknown what Yusuf's response to violence by the state would have been, had he survived), they shared the same ideology, which ensured that there has been relative continuity in Boko Haram's ideology since its inception.

For several years after Yusuf's death, the state was relatively absent from the picture; most assume that state security officials (both in Borno province and in Abuja) believed the threat to be largely eliminated. This allowed Boko Haram to regroup, during which time there was some "harassment of the population" but characterized largely by "war avoidance" (Omeni 2018: 91), meaning a desire to avoid direct military confrontation with the Nigerian military. Following this, Boko Haram began attacking the state again in earnest in 2011-2012. During this time, the state had formed an operation to counter instability in northeastern Nigeria led by a Joint Task Force of police and military, called Operation Restore Order (JTF ORO).

Some scholars might call JTF ORO a counterinsurgent force, but by Western (particularly American) standards, the task force would better be described as waging counterterrorism – as Omeni (2018) details, the initial response was to try to curb violence by increasing patrols and checkpoints, with very little engagement of "hearts and minds" or with the population more generally. This, combined with a heavy dose of what Lyall and Wilson (2009) call the "identification problem," or the counterinsurgent's inability to differentiate insurgents from members of the civilian population, is what allowed Boko Haram to conduct so many attacks in 2012 (see Figure 2 below for exact numbers of attacks).

Given Boko Haram's rise in attacks, and its success in both recruiting and smuggling arms into northeast Nigeria, JTF ORO was dissolved in 2013 in favor of a much more robust counterinsurgency approach. The Nigerian government launched a much bigger, and

more coordinated counterinsurgency response (one that we could reasonably call a counterinsurgency). This new phase of operations launched by the Nigerian military changed the strategic dynamics for Boko Haram – instead of struggling with intelligence operations, the Nigerian military had now placed thousands more soldiers and operatives in Borno who could engage in a more disciplined and consistent counterinsurgency.

The years 2013 and 2014 saw escalation in conflict on both sides, with the Nigerian Army forces engaging in strong, punitive, and often indiscriminate action against Boko Haram, and by several accounts (e.g. Human Rights Watch 2014) communities of civilians not clearly affiliated with Boko Haram. Around this time, by most accounts, Boko Haram was changing its tactics; kidnapping and abductions became a much more prominent tactic, with the most infamous case being the Chibok schoolgirls, who were abducted in April 2014 (e.g. Zenn and Pearson 2014). Although some scholars of Boko Haram (e.g. Matfess 2017) suggest that Boko Haram had been engaging in infrequent kidnappings before this, most scholars (including Matfess 2017, but also Zenn and Pearson 2014, and Oriola 2017) point to a shift that occurred in 2014, whereby abduction became a much more commonly employed tactic. Around this time, Boko Haram had gained significant strength and had even pushed the Nigerian government out of particular areas, signifying that the counterinsurgency operation was struggling (Omeni 2018).

By the end of 2014, leading into 2015, things began to shift for the Nigerian Army (ibid). The international outrage that followed the Chibok kidnapping reignited the Nigerian military's purposefulness in squashing the insurgency, allowed it to make some quick innovations (usually a very difficult endeavor for military organizations weighed down by military training and organization that does not allow for quick doctrinal and tactical changes), and gave the Nigerian government the leverage it needed to form a multinational coalition with Chad, Niger, and Cameroon (called the Multinational Joint Task Force, or MNJTF), which also helped target Boko Haram's operations.

These gains were hard fought – in early 2015, Boko Haram staged a violent offensive on the town of Baga that the Nigerian Army could not repel; and "the Nigerian Army contingent of [. . .] (MNJTF) at Baga, north-eastern Borno State, staged a tactical withdrawal" (Omeni 2018: 234). However, beginning in February 2015, coordinated action by Nigeria in close cooperation with other members of MNJTF to retake territory claimed by Boko Haram began to succeed, and built on that momentum, resulting in far less violence by Boko Haram in 2015 than in the previous years (see Figure 3.2 below). Although still a serious threat, Boko Haram's ability to take and hold territory, as well as to conduct effective and efficient engagements against the Nigerian military and units from MNJTF was degraded significantly by 2016 (Omeni 2018). These gains notwithstanding, Boko Haram was, and continues to be a significant threat to the stability of northeastern Nigeria; however, as the developments since the 2015-2016 period do not feature significantly in the argument I make in this chapter, I do not recount them here.

Boko Haram's Changing Tactics Against Women and Girls

Boko Haram has become very well known as a group that abducts women and girls; intuitively, we might assume that Boko Haram began targeting women and girls in this way as soon as it was able. Yet when we examine data on attack type and attack frequency, we can see that there is quite a lot of variation in both attack type and attack frequency. Attack frequency (the overall number of attacks of any type that a group commits in a given year) varies quite significantly in accordance with the group's scope and size.

The most interesting variation, however, arises when we look at attack type by year compared to overall attacks. There are some years (notably 2012) in which Boko Haram was able to commit a large number of attacks, and yet the proportion of those attacks that were specifically abduction (the Global Terrorism Dataset, or GTD, calls this kidnapping) is quite low – about half a percent. Then there are years (notably 2014, which is when the Chibok schoolgirls were abducted) in which attacks are high, but the proportion of attacks taking the form of abduction has skyrocketed to about 12%. This is illustrated in Figure 3.2.

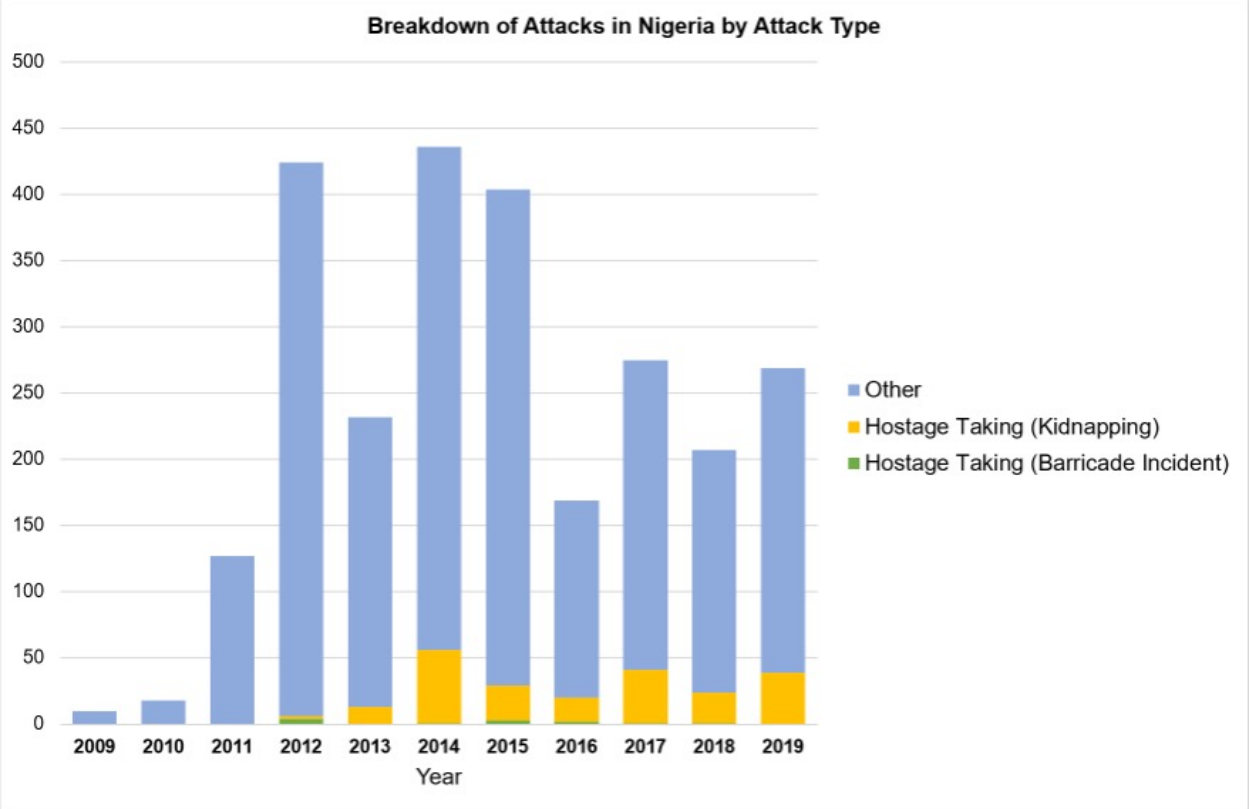

Figure 3.2: Kidnappings by Boko Haram by Year, Source: Global Terrorism Data

Looking at Figure 3.2, it is clear that even as Boko Haram became more active and violent in the years after its somewhat formalized inception in 2009, kidnapping was initially a relatively underutilized form of targeting.[1] In 2012, for example, while the group clearly did not invest heavily in kidnapping, they managed to perpetrate other substantial attacks, including bombing a United Nations building and successfully infiltrating other hard security targets. By 2014, however, the group's resource allocation decisions had changed significantly. As I have laid out while recounting Boko Haram's history, some scholars are puzzled by this shift in targeting tactics. In general, the literature on the group's emphasis on gender-based targeting in the form of abduction has coalesced around one explanation for this shift: that the group was seeking revenge. Most of these arguments are built on a statement by Shekau (the group's leader) in 2012, in response to the Nigerian government's detainment of some of the wives of known Boko Haram commanders, in which he claimed, "Since it is our women you are now holding captive, then you should await what happens to your women according to Shariah" (quoted in Ahmad 2019). Ahmad notes that Boko Haram did in fact target the wives of Nigerian officials just a few months later, and attempted to ransom them or exchanged them for the wives of the Nigerian officials (ibid). There seems to be some confusion about whether the Nigerian government did in fact release the wives of the Boko Haram fighters or not – Ahmad suggests that "the Nigerian government refused to exchange the hostages for the wives," while Matfess (2017) states that "in May 2013, 23 women, some identified as wives of high-ranking Boko Haram fighters, were released" (Matfess 2017: 82). These disagreements notwithstanding, what I call the "revenge" story is the canonical explanation from multiple scholars of Boko Haram (Ahmad 2019, Matfess 2017, Maiangwa and Agbiboa 2014).

In the sections that follow, I argue that, when examining the available evidence and the sequence of events carefully, the revenge story does not wholly explain the group's behavior, and find support for each of the three mechanisms that I posit in this project, all operating between the years 2013 and 2015. I first argue that the Nigerian government's securitization of the civilian population by its use of an attrition-based counterinsurgency strategy helped make gender a salient dimension of civilian identity. I then show that the Nigerian government's formation of and cooperation with the Civilian Joint Task Force helped ameliorate the identification problem, and created the incentive for Boko Haram to take more coercive measures to prevent the Nigerian government from easily identifying its members. Next, I turn to the details of the Chibok schoolgirls abduction, examining evidence that contradicts the revenge story as the sole explanation for a shift to targeting schoolgirls, and focusing specifically on how the abduction elevated the Chibok girls specifically, and girls and women more generally, to a status that became symbolic of the Nigerian military's success or failure in its mission. I then demonstrate how, based on the newly symbolic nature of the Chibok girls as an international phenomenon, Boko Haram leveraged their value to the Nigerian

[1] In my analysis, I separate kidnapping (for ransom) from abduction; the GTD does not make this distinction. Therefore, in this section, I use kidnapping and abduction interchangeably, especially in reference to Figure 3.2.

government to extract concessions from the state, and ultimately, successfully undermined the Nigerian government. Finally, I conclude by engaging briefly with some alternative explanations.

3.4 Securitization of Civilians and Militarization of Communities

One contribution of this research is the consideration of insurgent behavior as a response to counterinsurgency and civilian behavior and dynamics. As mentioned in the previous section, some scholars have pointed to specific actions as being the impetus for a response from Boko Haram, but most analyses of Boko Haram's gender-based targeting ignores the broader culture of securitization and militarization that makes civilian identity salient and frames civilian bodies as sites of violence by the counterinsurgent.[2] The instrumentalization of civilians as sources of information during counterinsurgency operations makes them "fair game" for insurgent operations as well – and leads to a downward spiral, where coercion of civilians becomes an important factor in what both sides view as success. In the previous chapter, I introduced the importance of understanding the ways that risk for civilians is elevated by the very presence of counterinsurgent troops and noted that even though this is not a part of the causal argument, it is nonetheless a very important contextual factor that contributes to the operation of these mechanisms. Following Beach and Pedersen (2019), it is important in a process tracing approach to have a full understanding of the context within which the posited mechanisms operate.

In addition, much of the literature that attempts to understand civilian targeting focuses solely on the strategic level. This project focuses on highlighting the changes in incentives for insurgents when faced with a strong counterinsurgency operation, and it is not possible to grasp the intensity of those changes without understanding the experiences of conflict and the insecurities it creates for civilians and insurgents alike. Therefore, this section is key to a deeper understanding of the strategic dynamics underpinning both insurgent and counterinsurgent behavior. In the case of Boko Haram, the Nigerian government's initial approach to counterinsurgency meant that essentially, anyone who inhabited the regions where Boko Haram was prominent could be considered by the state security forces to be working with Boko Haram, whether this was true or not.

Boko Haram created a great deal of insecurity for the communities from which it operated, especially since much of the violence in the early years of its existence was in the form of banditry or riots. But the hugely repressive approach taken by the Nigerian military in the wake of the 2009 uprising, and later, JTF ORO, created deep insecurities for civilians

[2]One exception is Aisha Ahmad (2019) who points to counterinsurgent "provocation" as a pretext for Boko Haram's gender-based targeting; this is in the context of her overall argument that rebel groups use government/counterinsurgent actions for what she calls "norm entrepreneurship," which entails insurgent groups using government abuses as justification to begin using tactics that were previously explicitly prohibited by their ideology.

who inhabited the area. Counterinsurgency, many have noted, is difficult to do well, as counterinsurgents are consistently at a disadvantage. Not only do they not know the area, the community norms, and social structures, they are combating an essentially faceless enemy while they themselves are sitting ducks, easily identified by insurgents to be attacked.

In addition, the bar for success is much higher for counterinsurgents than for insurgents. The U.S. Counterinsurgency Field Manual perhaps puts it best: "Insurgents succeed by sowing chaos and disorder anywhere; the government fails unless it maintains a degree of order everywhere" (Sewall et al. 2007). In other words, both the starting conditions and the measures of success favor the insurgent group, which has the advantage of being able to adapt its tactics and even its strategy in order to plague the civilian population and the counterinsurgent, and only has to perpetrate a small number of attacks consistently to be considered successful. The counterinsurgent, on the other hand, must manage a much larger organization, coordinated through a bureaucracy, to wage counterinsurgency operations that should be (but are not always) compliant with the Laws of Armed Conflict, and it will only be considered successful if it can fully deny the insurgent's ability to perpetrate consistent attacks. Even though the Nigerian military operation, by many accounts, did not adhere to the Laws of Armed Conflict, it nevertheless encountered many of these problems. As Omeni (2018) notes, Boko Haram had the advantage of being able to adapt its tactics in response to Nigerian military doctrine, whereas doctrinal and even tactical shifts by large military bureaucracies are extremely difficult to implement.

Faced with these constraints, the Nigerian military, at least in its initial operations, took an extremely coercive and punitive approach against communities it perceived to be supporting Boko Haram. One very notable example was the operation against Baga in 2013, where, following a Boko Haram attack on a military outpost that resulted in the death of one soldier, the Nigerian military ransacked the city, setting 2,000 homes on fire and killing more than 180 people (Human Rights Watch 2013). Human Rights Watch subsequently released a report on this incident, based on interviews with residents of Baga and satellite imagery, which showed "2,275 destroyed buildings, the vast majority likely residences, with another 125 severely damaged" (ibid). [3]

Interviews with eyewitnesses to the operation (though it is unclear whether this was a planned operation and if so, if it was executed as planned) pointed to its gendered nature, noting that soldiers went from house to house demanding to speak with any man who was present, and accusing men they did find of conspiring with Boko Haram. One harrowing eyewitness account highlighted the extraordinary insecurity and fear caused by the military's operations:

> I was in my house at night, after prayers, when we heard gunshots. Everybody

[3]The Nigerian military opposed this assessment of the damage and deaths caused by the raid on Baga, claiming that 30 people had died. However, I have chosen to go with Human Rights Watch's version of events, both because of the satellite intelligence, the on-the-ground eyewitness accounts they provide, and the fact that they note other sources of intelligence that counted more than 180 freshly dug graves after the fact.

> was in a panic and people were running. My husband wasn't home, so I was very disturbed. I asked my neighbors what am I going to do because my husband isn't around? My neighbors ran, but I couldn't carry my two children, so I stayed inside the house. I saw soldiers come into the community. They came in military vehicles. The soldiers were shouting "Come out! Come out!" They asked me if there were any men in the house. I said there were none. One of the soldiers came inside and searched the house. He then told us to go outside. When we were outside I saw the soldiers drag a man out of another house. They started beating him with their guns. They were beating him severely and he was crying. The man then ran, and I saw the soldiers shoot him. I heard the gunshots and saw him fall. On the other side of the road the soldiers were beating other people (Human Rights Watch 2013).

Human Rights Watch also spoke with another civilian, a "42-year old fisherman," who provided this shocking account of what happened on the night of April 16, 2013:

> It was on Tuesday, around 7 p.m. we heard gunshots and all of us ran into the house. I live in Kalumbu Quarters. It is in the middle of the town. The gunshots were getting too much and were getting closer to our quarters. We came out and ran helter-skelter everywhere. I was with my family – my wife and two children – and some neighbors. We heard gunshots everywhere. We also heard a lot of explosions. Two of my friends I work with were shot. We were running together with them. They were behind us and we saw them fall. We couldn't do anything about it. We just ran to escape the bullets (Human Rights Watch 2013).

Finally, Human Rights Watch also collected evidence that the indiscriminate nature of the attack was intentional rather than accidental, and that the attacks continued into the next day. A farmer who lived in Baga told Human Rights Watch: "I saw about six military vehicles and groups of soldiers in Kampala Ward. The soldiers were putting fire on the houses. It was about 9:30 a.m. I saw a group of soldiers throw explosive devices into houses. It was a military device which as a layman I would not know. They would throw it and then fire would come out of it. I saw them do this to about 10 houses. I was about 100 meters away. I snuck out of the place and ran back to the bush" (ibid).

I share these accounts to show that the civilians who live in this area became caught up in the Nigerian military's overreactions to their frustrations about the lack of information. From these accounts, one can see that, frustrated by their inability to distinguish Boko Haram from ordinary civilians, the Nigerian government resorted to extremely coercive and punitive measures against civilians, hoping, no doubt, that the civilians would, as a result, inform on Boko Haram. The military's indiscriminate targeting of these communities militarized civilians, and legitimated civilian bodies as sites of violence between Boko Haram and the Nigerian military. It is in the middle of this environment that civilians had to decide between supporting Boko Haram or supporting the Nigerian military. These details show

how harrowing that decision is for civilians caught in the middle of a conflict and that even if government forces are the "good guys" fighting the "bad guys," – the insurgents – the decision of which party to support is not so simple for civilians on the ground in the middle of the conflict. Yet without support from the civilian population, neither insurgent nor counterinsurgent can win on the battlefield.

The Intimacy and Invasiveness of the Counterinsurgency Project

Another experience that is often brushed away by the international security literature is how violating counterinsurgency operations can be. Waging urban counterinsurgency requires entering people's homes, searching their possessions, surveilling them, talking to community members about their activities, and getting involved in local disputes that might otherwise be resolved by entities that understand local norms and cultures. By militarizing civilian communities in this way, counterinsurgents make civilians a legitimate target for insurgents. The very definition of counterinsurgency, however, requires these kinds of invasive and close encounters with the population – because that it is a fundamental part of doing counterinsurgency operations. The project of counterinsurgency is fundamentally disruptive to the social order, as the community support on which counterinsurgents thrive requires locals to essentially surveil their communities and then report any suspicious behavior to the counterinsurgents, who may then arrest, interrogate, or otherwise search those people. The constant presence of these kinds of external actors, who are themselves armed and threatening to members of the community, is extremely disruptive to the social order and social cohesion in general.

As described in the accounts above, the Nigerian military leaned heavily into the coercive elements of counterinsurgency, but also was clearly seeking information, as they were constantly yelling at civilians to declare who Boko Haram members were, and assuming that every military-age male was somehow associated with the insurgent group (Human Rights Watch 2013). Faced with a lack of information about the insurgent's operations, the Nigerian soldiers moved from cajoling citizens (this is theoretically what the hearts-and-minds, or population-centric counterinsurgency would demand, though it is unclear whether JTF ORO ever subscribed to a fully population-centric view of counterinsurgency) to coercing them.

Now that I have provided some of the details of the day-to-day experiences of civilians, and explained the ways in which civilian communities, civilian property, and civilian bodies are securitized and militarized by the process of doing counterinsurgency, I move in the next section to evaluating the evidence for the theoretical mechanisms I propose. The aftermath of the Baga operation, during which the Nigerian military made clear their investment in a particular counterinsurgency strategy, signaled a turning point of the conflict, after which local communities, the Nigerian military, and Boko Haram had to contend with a new and more militarized strategic dynamic.

3.5 Mechanism 1: Information Transmission Suppression

The previous section made it clear that the project of counterinsurgency – no matter the approach – inherently militarizes and securitizes civilians as part of broader conflict dynamics, because information from civilians is the engine of counterinsurgency. Without information provided by the population, counterinsurgents are operating completely in the dark, without being able to identify their enemy. In Nigeria, the part of the story that I examine closely in this project as a means of testing the hypotheses I propose begins after the Baga operation in 2013.

Before I begin evaluating exactly what happened in Nigeria, I first review the observable implications I listed in the previous chapter. These observable implications are, I suggested, empirical fingerprints left behind in the world by the mechanisms I propose. The first mechanism I articulated is what I called the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism, and in its general form, suggests that insurgents target women to prevent the transmission of key information from the civilian population to the counterinsurgents. There are two parts to this mechanism. First, that women have different information (in this project, I try to stay away from assessments of what constitutes "better" information) that is extremely useful for counterinsurgents. In the cases I study in this project, women not only had key information, but they also shared with counterinsurgents. Second, if a community is perceived as cooperating with the counterinsurgent, even if only men are visibly helping the counterinsurgency, targeting women is still a very effective way of punishing communities and coercing them to stop information sharing that makes counterinsurgency activities more successful.

	Observable Implications for Information Transmission Suppression
OI 1	Targeting by insurgents increases when civilian information sharing increases
OI 2	Clear evidence of a knowledge network fostered by women
OI 3	Evidence suggests that targeting is designed to coerce civilians into silence
OI 4	Men who have or are perceived to have better information are also targeted

Table 3.1: Observable Implications of Mechanism One in Nigeria

In the section that follows, I walk through the evidence for several of these observable implications in the case of Nigeria. As illustrated by the highlighted boxes in Table 3.1, where highlighting means that strong evidence was found for that observable implication in this case, I find that for the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism, OI 1, OI 2, and OI 3 are clearly present in the Nigeria case. Because I discuss these observable implications chronologically in the Nigeria case, they will be discussed in the following order: OI 2, OI 1, OI 3. In addition, before I delve into examining evidence for these observable

implications, I discuss some important background information about the formation of the Civilian Joint Task Force, which provides essential context.

Creation of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)

Before I focus on specific observable implications, I first discuss the creation of the Civilian Joint Task Force, which is critical to my evaluation of the evidence for this proposed mechanism. It is clear from the Nigerian military's actions that by 2013, they were extremely frustrated by the lack of information, and that they had resorted to attempting to coerce the civilian population to aid them against Boko Haram. The civilian communities in Borno state, either in response to the Baga operation or in response to increased attempts by Boko Haram to engage the Nigerian military in the streets (or perhaps both), decided to actively support the counterinsurgency mission by forming what came to be known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).

There are several accounts of the exact nature of CJTF, and scholars debate whether the group arose with the intention of working together with the counterinsurgents or if the close connection between CJTF and the Nigerian Army (which between 2013 and 2014 would disband JTF ORO – Joint Task Force for Operation Restore Order and transition to a much bigger operation) developed organically. The way that the CJTF is described in accounts of the conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government varies – some seem to think of it as an extension of the Army (e.g. Omeni 2018), many others refer to CJTF as a vigilante group (e.g. Matfess 2017), and others occasionally refer to it as a pro-government militia. The exact definition aside, most accounts agree that CJTF was formed in mid-2013, and that it was comprised largely of young locals from Borno state who actively worked in close coordination with the Nigerian military to mitigate the threat from Boko Haram. Akali Omeni, for example, suggests that the group was created by or with supervision/approval of the Nigerian Army, with the idea of integrating civilians "into the Army's operations and augment[ing] its traditional advantages of fire and maneouverability," (sic) with the specific purpose of increasing the information flow from civilians to the counterinsurgency (Omeni 2018: 213).

On the other hand, Daniel Agbiboa, who spoke to many CJTF members in northeastern Nigeria, writes that CJTF emerged in "June 2013, [when] a group of young men from Maiduguri mobilized themselves into a vigilante group known as [...] CJTF or *kato da gora* ['youth with sticks'], with the aim of flushing out Boko Haram insurgents hiding in their dangerous neighborhoods ['wards']" (Agbiboa 2020). Agbiboa also suggests that he spoke to the founder of the CJTF, a man named Jafar. Jafar, the story goes, chased down an armed member of Boko Haram with a stick, arrested him, and turned him over to the authorities (Agbiboa 2020). Thus, the CJTF, known colloquially as "youth with sticks" was born, and would achieve an almost mythical status, with some locals believing that members of the CJTF were blessed and were therefore invincible and could not be killed by Boko Haram (ibid).

Agbiboa's interviews with members of CJTF (on which I rely heavily to test the theoretical framework I am proposing) provide a clear understanding of why CJTF was such a powerful tool on the side of the counterinsurgency and, as I will show, why Boko Haram had to respond to its information operations. Agbiboa quotes a CJTF member who told him:

> 'You know we are indigenes and like most people living in this area, we suffer. We have been oppressed by Boko Haram with nowhere to go. People either have our phone numbers or that of our relations and they can always reach out to report anything unusual around them. The moment they notice any suspicious movement of car or motorcycle [achaba] they call one of our members on the phone or if there is no network they can use even [a] bicycle to connect with us to give information to be acted on.' (Agbiboa 2020).

Field research by Agbiboa and others highlights the extent to which CJTF operations weighed in the favor of the Nigerian government. The information CJTF provided was a counterinsurgent's dream. As young folks who moved around the city, they were easily able to identify members of Boko Haram, and because they were not dressed in Army uniforms, they did not invite criticism or retribution by community members who were angry about the Nigerian Army's punitive operations against civilian communities.

For at least a year and a half – from their inception in 2013 through 2014 – by most accounts, there was a great deal of support from local communities for CJTF, to such an extent that the Army began working closely with CJTF members, and helped set up CJTF operations across northeastern Nigeria. Members of CJTF were initially viewed very positively by the communities, who saw them as "local boys" who were fighting to save their community from the scourge of Boko Haram (Agbiboa 2020, Agbiboa 2021). This meant that individuals who observed unusual activity in their community would be both motivated and willing to share that information with CJTF, which would then either try to arrest the suspect(s) in question, or provide the details to the Nigerian Army to do so.

This coordination also had the added benefit of allowing the Nigerian Army to shift from an attrition-based counterinsurgency strategy to a more population-centric one, and Agbiboa credits CJTF's cooperation with the Nigerian Army with "significantly reduc[ing] state violence against locals" (Agbiboa 2020). Knowing who the enemy was allowed the army to go after insurgents in a targeted and more precise manner, as opposed to the punitive actions they had taken at Baga, or the general "shoot first, ask questions later" approach that characterized much of the pre-2014 period.

Members of CJTF also made for sympathetic figures, as many of them had personally experienced losses at the hands of Boko Haram. Some of those that joined had been professionals who gave up their careers in order to join CJTF and defend their community from the violence inflicted by Boko Haram and the state's response. Agbiboa (2020) gives the example of Ganiyu, who was a party secretary for the People's Democratic Party, but who left his job as a party secretary to join CJTF. For Ganiyu, working for CJTF was honorable. Agbiboa quotes Ganiyu: "'Many of us just sacrificed ourselves to defend our communities

and our people. Just the respect we get from our communities is okay for us'" (Agbiboa 2020). Others who joined were motivated by extremely traumatic losses. Agbiboa quotes Shehu Abdul Gani, who said, "'We would see [Boko Haram] carrying guns. They would come out and kill our brothers and sisters any time. My brother was killed. They came into our house and shot him in the evening time. I was sitting right next to him'" (ibid).

The personal connection that many CJTF members had to fighting Boko Haram, along with their willingness to stand up and defend their communities, endeared them to the communities in which they operated. Because they were locals, they were seen as more trustworthy, and were therefore able to collect highly accurate, reliable information that they or the Nigerian army could act on. Eventually, however, they too would come to be accused – as were the other actors in this space (the Nigerian military, Boko Haram) – of being overly abusive, and carrying out extrajudicial punishments. Nevertheless, it is clear that their incorporation into the counterinsurgency mission – from creating checkpoints to passing on tips to the military – made the counterinsurgency much more effective than it had ever been before.

CJTF's Incorporation of Women and its Success Against Boko Haram

Now that I have explained the context and conditions under which CJTF arose, I turn to evaluating evidence for the observable implications I outlined in the previous chapter, of which CJTF will be an important part. The first observable implication for which I find clear support is OI 2: a knowledge network fostered by women. As a reminder, in process tracing, the quality of the found evidence matters more than the quantity. The evidence I share below provides strong support for the claim that OI 2 operated in this case.

To understand the evidence for OI 2 in this specific context, I advance two specific arguments relating to developments in Nigeria during this time. First, I argue that the incorporation of women by the CJTF gave them access to information that they would not have had if they had only allowed male members. In other words, I suggest that women have different, if not better, information than men, and are therefore very useful as informants for counterinsurgency operations; I show evidence for this below. Second, I argue that the effectiveness of the CJTF in identifying Boko Haram members and therefore enabling their arrest (although in some cases they were killed rather than captured), required Boko Haram to shift tactics toward a much more coercive approach against local civilian communities. In much the same way that, frustrated by the lack of information, the Nigerian military had previously relied on a coercive strategy against civilians, when the tide turned against Boko Haram and scores of civilians began fighting for their communities by providing information to the counterinsurgent, Boko Haram began targeting women as a means of terrorizing the communities in which it operated and coercing them to stay silent. This shows the importance of the decision by civilians to cast their support behind one combatant or the other.

The first piece of evidence that would support these claims would be to show that women actually were incorporated into the CJTF in a meaningful way. Again, Agbiboa's thorough field research, during which he interviewed many members of the CJTF, is extremely helpful here. Agbiboa notes that, "[w]omen play a central if largely unacknowledged role" in CJTF (Agbiboa 2020):

> Some of the women vigilantes that I observed in the Wulari area and the crowded Monday Market in Maiduguri, the site of multiple suicide bombings, identified themselves as wives of the CJTF men. Their surveillance work, along with those of other female volunteers, has led to the arrests of hundreds of (female) suicide bombers, many of whom hide improvised explosive devices under their veils. 'Women are very important to our operations in the state,' says Abdul, a leader of the CJTF in Maiduguri. 'They are mostly used for intelligence gathering. They give information which we report to security agencies and this has been useful in arresting many of the insurgents.' Another CJTF man from Abadam explains: 'You know there is something that women can see just standing that we men cannot see even if we climb a tree.' (ibid)

As this quote shows, women are often able to pick up on dynamics and information that men may not be able to see easily. As one interview subject told me about his time working with female informants during U.S. counterinsurgency operations in Iraq, because women are so used to managing their own safety, they are able to provide much better detail on the goings-on in their neighborhoods, and have a much more sensitive radar for things that might be considered dangerous or threatening than men do. This supports my claim that women, at least in the case of Nigeria, are able to gather different information than men are, and that they are, therefore, a particularly useful and important source of information for counterinsurgents.

In addition, female members of CJTF are used not just for surveillance operations in public places, such as markets, but also for managing other aspects of counterinsurgency operations. For example, women are used for house-to-house searches (Agbiboa 2021). Agbiboa quotes a "CJTF sector commander from Yola North in Adamawa [who] noted, 'Women play an invaluable role in our vigilante work, because Islamic religion doesn't allow men to enter houses, and we make use of the women to go into these houses for either surveillance or arrests'" (ibid).

Another element of the counterinsurgency project with which women in the CJTF provide critical support is frisking and searching women "at homes, market spaces, mosques and churches, and commercial transit stations" (ibid). This means that they are visibly working in support of the counterinsurgency, even if only a few scholars discuss the importance of their contributions. These observations provide clear empirical evidence for the claim that there was a knowledge network in Nigeria operating against Boko Haram that capitalized on women's roles in the community and the information those roles allowed them to gather.

Changing Allegiances, Changing Tactics

The second observable implication for which I find support in the Nigerian case is OI 1: that targeting patterns change when civilian tip sharing increases. I discuss this evidence below. Pretty much every scholar who has written about the CJTF agrees on their effectiveness vis-à-vis the larger conflict between Boko Haram and the Nigerian military. Between 2013 and 2014, it was clear that the CJTF's work had reduced Boko Haram's advantages significantly. Thurston (2018) notes that "By July 2013, the security forces and the CJTF had largely expelled Boko Haram from Maiduguri" and that their immense local knowledge had eroded Boko Haram's ability to operate covertly in the city (Thurston 2018: 209). Omeni, too, credits CJTF with providing a huge advantage to the Nigerian Army, which previously, had had conventional superiority but was frustrated by lack of local knowledge. By bridging the security forces' knowledge gap, combined with the Army's reorganization between late 2013 and early 2014 from JTF ORO to a new division called 7 Div, CJTF allowed the Nigerian security forces to make inroads against Boko Haram (Omeni 2018).

However, insurgent groups are nothing if not nimble. While they had been previously able to operate from urban areas, Boko Haram now had to move into more rural areas, changing both its strategy and its tactics – urban warfare is very different than fighting in less dense areas, requiring adaptation to big open spaces and dense forest (Omeni 2019). In addition, the CJTF had brought in civilians as part of the counterinsurgency fight, making them "legitimate" targets in the eyes of the insurgents. It is around this time that Boko Haram began a coercive campaign against civilians, and more explicitly began targeting women. Just as the Nigerian Army had previously seen anyone who lived in a community from which Boko Haram operated as potentially aiding the insurgents, so did the creation and effectiveness of the CJTF lead to Boko Haram treating civilian communities as traitors for helping the security forces. Several scholars point to a rise in Boko Haram violence against civilians around this time. Omeni (2018) suggests that CJTF's presence invited direct attacks on civilians, while Thurston (2018) suggests that Boko Haram sought to punish individuals it suspected had informed on them, and sadly notes that, "[s]ome civilians found themselves facing the wrath of all sides" (Thurston 2018: 209).

Agbiboa, citing Strochlic 2014, quotes a captured Boko Haram commander, who said, "'Our original target was security operatives and politicians. But since the formation of the CJTF, who now reveal our identities and even arrest us, we decided to kill anyone that is from Maiduguri because we believe every person there and some other towns of Borno state are members of the CJTF'" (Agbiboa 2018). In general, because insurgent groups know that their internal and external messaging will be read by wide audiences (including the governments they're trying to overthrow), and because this gives them a strong incentive to misrepresent their true capabilities or intentions, I do not put huge stock in public declarations that insurgents make in order to justify their behavior. However, in this case, I suggest that this quote is credible, both because the commander was captured (rather than giving a public speech) and because it was backed up by the costly action that Boko Haram did indeed take of targeting civilians.

In 2014, having been largely driven into the Sambisa Forest and the rural areas of northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram began to change its tactics, stepping up attacks on civilians generally, and women specifically. As Zenn and Pearson (2014) note, "[k]idnapping is a recent development for the group" – they seek in their article to understand why the tactics might be changing and to explain that this particular type of gender-based targeting was new in 2013 and 2014.[4] This behavior is consistent with what we would expect to have seen if Boko Haram were indeed trying to be more coercive and raise the costs for civilians of cooperating with the counterinsurgent. I argue further that targeting women – which is seen almost universally as abhorrent (e.g. Loken et al 2018, MacKinnon 2007) and which raises significant concerns about security for the "most vulnerable" people in the community – is a low-tech means of coercing a community. Many feminist scholars have written about the ways in which women become symbols of the community's future (e.g. MacKinnon 2007) – I engage more deeply with this perspective in the next section – but the important thing to note for the argument I make in this section is that targeting women selectively is likely to make civilians feel more insecure than targeting civilians indiscriminately, and may thereby decrease their comfort with sharing information with the counterinsurgent.

Although the biggest and most infamous event of gender-based targeting that Boko Haram conducted in 2014 was the Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping, which I address in the next section, it was around this time (2013-2014 – after the formation of CJTF) that they began conducting abductions. Although Boko Haram had been conducting kidnappings (e.g. abduction with a demand for ransom) beginning in 2013, Omeni suggests that these were nothing more than "cash grabs" (Omeni 2019). I distinguish these from the mass abductions that would come to characterize the post-2013 period, where girls in particular were taken without necessarily a plan to ransom them. This is supported by the fact that, before 2014, the kidnappings that Boko Haram conducted were generally of people of perceived higher status, for whom they could reasonably expect to get a good bargain in exchange. For example, in 2013, Boko Haram kidnapped a French family in Cameroon (Zenn and Pearson 2014) – although they were released, it is unclear whether Boko Haram received a ransom; similarly, they kidnapped wives of high-level officials in northeastern Nigeria in order to bargain for an exchange with their own wives who had been detained by the security forces. But beginning in 2014, abductions of women and girls became more common, although the best information we have suggests that the April 2014 abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls was the most significant operation of its nature up until that point. The changing tactics in response to CJTF's success in identifying the insurgents provides empirical evidence for the presence of OI 1.

[4]It is also important to note that Zenn and Pearson published this article in February 2014, before the infamous Chibok schoolgirls kidnapping, which is why it does not account for the kinds of mass abductions we would later see.

Violence Designed to Coerce

Finally, I also find evidence that supports OI 3, which suggested that targeting becomes coercive in order to force civilians into silence. I discuss this evidence below.

As I have discussed, the CJTF was extremely effective in aiding the Nigerian military forces in identifying members of Boko Haram, to such a degree that it significantly hampered Boko Haram's operations in Maiduguri and the surrounding areas. Yet this success came with costs as well – a number of scholars and human rights organizations who study or witnessed this change expressed concerns that the efficacy of CJTF's cooperation with the Nigerian military forces resulted in a significant shift in targeting patterns.

Akali Omeni cites the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), which issued a report stating that:

> Members of civilian vigilante groups known as the 'civilian joint task force' (CJTF) are taking an increasingly active role in the government's fight against Boko Haram (BH). But while some residents call them heroes, others fear they are inciting Boko Haram to more directly target civilians, that they are committing abuses themselves and that they are eroding the already strained rule of law in Nigeria's northeast (Omeni 2018: 213).

IRIN, cited by Omeni, was not the only group that observed the connection between Boko Haram's increased civilian targeting and CJTF's increased information sharing. Human Rights Watch, which chronicled Boko Haram's behavior towards civilians during this period and up through the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls, noted that:

> The pace and intensity of Boko Haram's attacks, especially against civilian targets, dramatically increased after the federal government imposed a state of emergency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states in mid-2013. Since then, and even more intensely since January 2014, the group has perpetrated almost-daily attacks on villages and towns, and laid siege to highways. In the attacks, Boko Haram has killed civilians, pillaged property, and destroyed schools, homes, and businesses, which were often razed to the ground. The creation in Maiduguri, around July 2013, of a civilian vigilante group known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF), or Yan Gora, also appeared to contribute to the increase in attacks against civilians, mainly for their perceived support of the vigilante group (Human Rights Watch 2014).

These findings align with the argument I put forth – that faced with intensified and more successful identification and targeting by the Nigerian forces, aided by the CJTF, Boko Haram became even more punitive towards civilians populations in an attempt to coerce them to stop cooperating with the Nigerian security forces.

Agbiboa (2020) noticed the same trend, that as CJTF made inroads with both the local population and against Boko Haram, civilian targeting increased. He writes, "[B]y weakening local support for Boko Haram's 'holy war,' the CJTF inadvertently increased the violent

targeting of civilians by vengeful insurgents." As I argued previously, in the counterinsurgency project, the local population becomes an unwitting pawn, with both counterinsurgent and insurgent vying for their support, although of course "vying" can in many cases (including in Nigeria) take the form of violent coercive tactics. With the formation of the CJTF, the perception of local support (and likely actual support, although this is difficult to measure), switched. Previously, the Nigerian army, during the JTF ORO phase of its operations, perceived the civilian population to be more supportive of Boko Haram than of the army, which, as previously discussed, led to extrajudicial violence against civilians, who were all perceived as supporting Boko Haram. However, with the advent and success of the CJTF, the dynamic switched – it was now Boko Haram who was wrongfooted and perceived the civilian population to be more supportive of the army than of the insurgents. The flip in this perception, bolstered by the success of the Nigerian military in its cooperation with CJTF, led Boko Haram to adopt more coercive tactics that directly targeted civilians, rather than harassing the state apparatus as they had previously been doing with greater regularity and focus.

3.6 Mechanism 2: Emasculation

Despite the fact that Boko Haram, loosely translated, means "Western education is forbidden," Boko Haram did not, as I showed previously, initially abduct schoolgirls. Although schools had been sites of violence prior to the April 2014 Chibok incident, the Chibok incident was one of the first instances of abduction at a massive scale. Much of the violence previously had been targeted at university students with varying outcomes – some students reported that they had been segregated by both gender and religion and discriminate violence enacted on specific groups, while others experienced either gender-based violence or religiously-discriminatory violence (e.g. all Muslims were let go, while Christians were killed) (Zenn and Pearson 2014, Oriola 2017). Others reported that Christian students had been killed or raped while Muslim students were let go entirely (ibid). In other words, there were inklings of a discriminatory tactical approach, but it was by all accounts and appearances not an organizational-level tactical decision, but rather, individual commanders making on-the-spot decisions (for a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see Wood 2018).

Most cases I examine in this project are not characterized by one event that came to be a defining moment in the conflict in the way in which the Chibok schoolgirls' abduction did. Much ink has been spilled trying to explain why and how the Chibok abduction came to take place, and given the shockwaves it generated throughout the world, I spend this section of the chapter discussing in detail the Chibok abduction – what took place, why existing explanations are insufficient, and evaluating evidence for the observable implications for which I find support in the second proposed mechanism.

As a reminder, the observable implications for the second mechanism that I articulated in the previous chapter are listed in the table below (highlighted boxes indicate observable implications for which I find strong evidence):

	Observable Implications of Emasculation Mechanism
OI 1	Evidence that counterinsurgents feel shame for inability to protect women
OI 2	Decreased civilian confidence in counterinsurgency if women are specifically targeted by insurgents
OI 3	Insurgent propaganda attacking masculinity of counterinsurgent
OI 4	Insurgents attacking areas specifically under the purview of the counterinsurgent along with or instead of softer or "easier" targets

Table 3.2: Observable Implications of Mechanism Two in Nigeria

In this section, I evaluate evidence for this set of observable implications, and find support in the empirical record for OI 2 and OI 4, highlighted in the table above. As with the previous mechanism, these are discussed in detail below. I first discuss OI 2, examining how counterinsurgency success became tied to the protection of women in northeast Nigeria, and specifically to the return of the abducted Chibok schoolgirls. I then turn to evaluating the evidence for OI 4.

The Events of the Chibok Abduction

Before I turn to a deeper analysis of the Chibok abduction, I first lay out the sequence of events that took place on the night that the girls were taken. Some of these are largely agreed upon by area experts, while others provide contested timelines – I indicate below where there is largely agreement and where there is some disagreement amongst scholars.

The kidnapping took place on the night of April 14, 2014, in the town of Chibok, which was supposed to be under the purview of the Nigerian Army's newly formed 7 Div (Omeni 2018). There is some debate about whether the Nigerian Army knew in advance that the town of Chibok would be targeted by Boko Haram; some scholars have suggested this, but it is (perhaps unsurprisingly) contested by the Nigerian Army (Omeni 2018). Regardless, the Army protection over the town was insufficient on the night of April 14, and Boko Haram gained access to the town (Zenn 2018).

A point of debate that is yet unresolved in the literature is whether Boko Haram intended to abduct the girls or not (this is central to my argument and is discussed in greater detail below, but here I give a cursory overview for the sake of providing a timeline). The girls who escaped during the raid were since interviewed by Human Rights Watch. All of them report that Boko Haram arrived on motorcycles and in trucks, and upon encountering the girls, told them that they were members of the Nigerian security forces and had come to protect them from Boko Haram. One victim told Human Rights Watch researchers her account of that evening:

> Two men told us we should not worry, we should not run. They said they had

> come to save us from what is happening inside the town, that they are policemen. We did not know that they were from Boko Haram. The rest of the men came and started shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and at that moment we realized, they were Boko Haram. We were told to be quiet. One of them told us that the horrible things we heard happening elsewhere, like burning houses, killing people, killing students, kidnapping people, would happen to us now. We all started crying and he told us to shut up (Human Rights Watch 2014).

The result of the raid on the school was that 276 girls were taken from the grounds of the school. Fifty-seven of them, including the one who provided this account to Human Rights Watch, escaped on the night of April 14th itself, and were therefore able to give a reliable account of what had taken place.

Some of the girls who escaped told Human Rights Watch that they suspected that, as the men arrived on motorcycles and with only a few trucks, they were intending to loot the school, looking specifically for a "brick-making machine as well as food and other supplies" and that the insurgents made an on-the-spot decision to abduct the girls, once they realized that they were unguarded and that they would be able to escape the town with the girls in tow (ibid). After the girls who could fit into the truck that had been brought for the purposes of carting the brick-making machine and assorted other supplies had been forced into the truck, the rest of the girls were forcibly marched toward Boko Haram's headquarters in the Sambisa Forest, until further transport could be arranged to take them away (ibid).

Although these are the accounts given by the eyewitnesses who lived through the raid, some scholars have suggested that because Boko Haram had arrived with trucks, they may have been anticipating abducting the girls (Zenn 2018). And as I discuss later in this section, many scholars suggest that the abduction was retribution for the government's detention of the wives and children of Boko Haram commanders several years prior.

It was only a few weeks after the abduction – and the government's subsequent inability to retrieve the girls – became public that the abduction made national and then international news. What began as protests in Nigeria, demanding that the government locate the girls (igniting the popular hashtag #BringBackOurGirls), soon erupted into an international obsession with the abducted girls, with then-First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama and girls-education activist and Nobel Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, among others, posting the hashtag (Matfess 2017).

On May 4, 2014, realizing that Boko Haram was now receiving international attention as a result of the abduction, Shekau (the leader of Boko Haram) posted a video discussing the abduction and claiming "he would 'sell' the girls 'as slaves in the market'" (Zenn 2018). The girls were not released or found, and there was little movement in this direction until October 13, 2016, "when Boko Haram exchanged 21 of the Chibok girls, and on May 7, 2017, when Boko Haram again exchanged 82 of the girls" (ibid). I discuss these exchanges in greater detail in the next section. Zenn suggests that the fifty-seven girls who escaped on the night of April 14, 2014, along with these girls who were exchanged, are the only Chibok

girls who have been freed by the group and that the remainder of the group are still detained by Boko Haram (ibid).

Existing Explanation for the Chibok Incident

As I have suggested elsewhere in this chapter, the most common explanation for why Boko Haram abducted the schoolgirls relies on a message from Shekau in 2012 after the detention of the wives of several Boko Haram commanders, including his own, in which he claimed that security forces should "await what happens to your women"" (Ahmad 2019). The argument, made by multiple scholars (e.g. Matfess 2017, Ahmad 2019, Zenn and Pearson 2014, Maiangwa and Agbiboa 2014), is that the Chibok abduction was the retribution that Shekau promised two years prior.

However, as I will argue in this section, I do not agree with what I call the "revenge" narrative. I suggest that if the revenge narrative were true, there are three pieces of incongruous evidence: (1) timing, (2) status of abductees, and (3) preparedness for abduction.

First, the Chibok abduction took place almost two years after Shekau made his comments about the Boko Haram wives. I am not questioning the fact that he was upset by the detention of women and children associated with Boko Haram; he made that clear in his 2012 comments. This makes sense, as the women were detained in early 2012 (Ahmad 2019). However, in the intervening time between the detention of the wives and the Chibok abduction, the group was not specifically focused on abducting women and girls on the massive scale that we saw during the Chibok incident. As I explained previously, the group was perpetrating more indiscriminate violence and engaging in kidnapping for ransom, but despite the fact that they clearly had the resources to target schools and perpetrate more selective gender-based targeting, they did not make this a main goal. If the revenge narrative were true, we should not observe a more than two-year gap between the time that the wives were taken and the Chibok abduction; if the group were so motivated by the detention of their own wives, they should have been attempting schoolgirls' abductions as soon as they were able, rather than focusing on other types of attacks. Two years is a long time to wait for the kind of retribution that Shekau promised.

The second reason I do not find the revenge narrative convincing is the choice of victim. If we look carefully at what Shekau promised in the revenge speech (for lack of better phrasing), he specifically calls out "your women" – in other words, the wives of the security forces and politicians of the state who he views as responsible for the ignominy of having his wives detained by the state. There is no plausible reason that "your women" would translate to a group of schoolgirls, especially given that there seems to be no connection between these particular girls and the state (e.g. none of them were children of politicians, as far as we know).

If Shekau's words can be taken as credible (as most scholars who support the revenge narrative seem to believe), we should see Boko Haram attempt to kidnap the wives of members of the security forces or state politicians. And in fact, that is exactly what did happen. Although not internationally publicized, in early 2013, there was a spate of kidnappings

directed at the wives of local government officials (Ahmad 2019). According to Ahmad's account, Shekau attempted to use the kidnapped wives of local officials to bargain for the release of the Boko Haram wives (ibid). By most accounts, the bargain worked and the wives were released (Zenn and Pearson 2014, Matfess 2017), although Ahmad disputes this fact (Ahmad 2019).

Zenn and Pearson provide another account of a kidnapping in 2013 that aligns more closely with the empirical expectations we would have of the revenge story. They give an example of women who were kidnapped while visiting their relatives who worked as police officers in a local police station (Zenn and Pearson 2014). Zenn and Pearson note that these women were in fact released in exchange for the Boko Haram wives, and that they were told by their captors that "their abduction was a response to the government's detention of their wives and children" (ibid). In these cases, given that the women who were abducted were clearly affiliated with the state in some way, it is reasonable to make a causal claim that their kidnappings were in response to the government's own instrumentalization of women associated with Boko Haram. But given that the kidnappings that Shekau promised had already taken place by the time of the Chibok abduction, and that he had already bargained for the release of the Boko Haram wives (i.e. he had already achieved his objective vis-à-vis the Boko Haram women), applying the revenge story to the Chibok abduction does not make sense. If Shekau had believed there would be continued value in kidnapping specific women in order to punish the politicians who had detained the Boko Haram wives, we should have seen more emphasis placed on kidnapping women perceived to be of high status. Although the schoolgirls would become symbolic in their own way, as I discuss below, they were not of particularly high status to local politicians and state security forces, who only made a half-hearted attempt to retrieve the girls before their abduction became a major international news incident.

The third reason I refute the revenge story is one I alluded to above, and that is the dispute about the group's preparation to abduct the girls on the night of April 14, 2014. As many of the girls told Human Rights Watch, the group seemed surprised to find so many girls at the school unguarded (Human Rights Watch 2014). In addition, the girls reported that the insurgents came predominantly on motorcycles, with just a few trucks. Motorcycles – the predominant mode of transport for many members of Boko Haram, which some say started essentially as a motorcycle gang (Matfess 2017, Thurston 2018) – are not the most efficient way to cart away nearly 300 schoolgirls.

In addition, the fact that the group had to call for additional support in the form of larger trucks would be unusual if the revenge story were true. If in fact the Chibok abduction took place in retribution for the detention of the Boko Haram wives (the other issues I have pointed out notwithstanding), we should have observed a well-planned operation, which would entail the group knowing the girls were there and executing a well-orchestrated operation to abduct them. Instead, the operation, as best as we can tell, seemed focused on raiding the school of supplies, which is likely why most of the members of the group who participated arrived on motorcycles with only a few trucks that would carry the brick-making machine and any other supplies they might be able to steal from the school.

Chibok Girls as a Symbol of Government Ineptitude

Now that I have explained why I do not believe the major existing explanation for the schoolgirls' abduction is wholly accurate, I evaluate my second proposed mechanism – that despite the fact that the Chibok abduction seems to have been a spur-of-the-moment decision, the decision to attack the school was symbolic, and the group would quickly instrumentalize international attention on the girls into a symbolic campaign to emasculate the Nigerian military. This relates to the argument I propose in my theory, which is that groups target women in order to emasculate the counterinsurgent, capitalizing on the symbolism of girls and women as "vulnerable" and their need to be "protected" during conflict, and furthermore, lessening civilian confidence in the counterinsurgent's ability.

The events that took place in the aftermath of the Chibok abduction provide empirical support for the second observable implication I articulated: that civilians report having less confidence in the counterinsurgent forces when there are high levels of gender-based targeting taking place. Therefore, I begin by examining the ways in which civilian confidence in the counterinsurgent came to be tied to the return of the Chibok schoolgirls and the ways in which the Chibok schoolgirls came to symbolize the success or failure of the government forces against Boko Haram.

More likely than not, anyone who lived through the aftermath of the Chibok abduction remembers the media firestorm that surrounded the abducted girls. Although it seems clear that the abduction of the Chibok girls may not have been intentional, Boko Haram was nonetheless able to capitalize on the attention that the abduction garnered, and the criticism it generated for the Nigerian government, which, I argue, is one of the reasons that abductions increased so much after the Chibok incident.

Regardless of the fact that the girls were not the main target of the abduction, the attack on the school was itself symbolic and was part of a recent spate of attacks at schools and universities. This is likely not just because of the group's opposition to Western education but also because school-age children had joined the CJTF and because schools had been sites from which some CJTF members had operated, which legitimated them as sites of violence for Boko Haram.

But girls themselves carry lots of symbolism in society – almost universally. As Thurston writes, the "kidnapping had strong symbolic resonance, which Shekau exploited. For both jihadists and Western governments, young women – their schooling and their bodies – symbolize visions of moral order" (Thurston 2018: 221).

Moreover, these specific girls came to be seen as the symbol of counterinsurgent success or failure. The huge protests that erupted in the weeks following their abduction, coupled with the international scrutiny on the Nigerian government's attempts to retrieve the girls, put huge pressure on the Nigerian government, and raised the costs of failing to contain Boko Haram. Suddenly, what had previously been a government-managed operation in a relatively small corner of the country was now the topic of discussion in the highest circles of policy in the West. Now, the Nigerian government's inability to get the girls back meant not only that they were emasculated in front of their own domestic audience, but also internationally.

There is ample evidence that the girls came to be seen as symbolic of the Nigerian government's progress against Boko Haram, though there is some debate as to when exactly Boko Haram cottoned on to their enormous value. Many who study the Chibok incident point to the video Shekau released on May 5, 2014 – exactly three weeks after the abduction – in which Shekau mentioned his intention to "sell the girls" as evidence of his instrumentalization of the girls (e.g. Matfess 2017). Other scholars point to the rambling nature of the video, which covered many topics, as evidence that he did not initially understand the symbolic value of the girls (e.g. Zenn 2018). Regardless, one week later, by May 12, 2014, when he showed a video with the girls as a proof-of-life, it was clear that he had a better understanding of the value of the girls.

The continued inability of the government to find and rescue the girls was a source of shame and emasculation for the counterinsurgent, especially when others on the international stage began to question the competence of Goodluck Jonathan's (then-President of Nigeria) regime. Matfess (2017) cites former U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell as saying publicly that Boko Haram's abilities "'[appear] to be increasing. The government's ability to provide security to its citizens appears to be decreasing.'" Many of those interviewed by Human Rights Watch, which included some survivors of Boko Haram's violence, as well as their family members and other community members, spoke to their frustration at the security forces' inability – and in some cases, unwillingness – to protect the communities they were assigned to.

In addition, the abduction of the girls contributed to a general view of the government's ineptitude in protecting its citizens from the violence wrought by Boko Haram, and factored heavily in the 2015 elections, which President Jonathan delayed. Jonathan cited security issues in the northeast as the primary reason for the delay, arguing that he did not believe citizens could vote safely (Blanchard 2015). The Jonathan administration had a particularly fraught relationship with the families of the Chibok girls, who publicly protested, and demanded the government do more to find their daughters. Jonathan's wife, Patience Jonathan, by some accounts, demanded the arrest of one of the protesting parents who she felt made her husband's administration look bad (Matfess 2017). By the time Jonathan realized the effect that the continued absence of the girls had on his administration it was too late. Even with the delayed elections, Jonathan was ousted and his competing candidate, Muhammadu Buhari was declared the winner, making Jonathan the first incumbent in Nigeria's history to lose an election.

Buhari clearly took the message seriously, realizing that his constituents' – and indeed, the world's – view of him would be shaped by his ability to retrieve the girls. Matfess (2017) cites his inaugural address, in which he declared that his "'government will do all it can to rescue [the Chibok girls] alive' and stated that he could not declare that he had 'defeated Boko Haram without rescuing the Chibok girls and all other innocent persons held hostage by insurgents.'" The fact that a year after the abduction, despite aid being sent by the U.S. and other Western governments, the girls had still not been returned, was clearly a source of shame for the counterinsurgents. In the next section, in which I evaluate the third mechanism I propose, I discuss in more detail the lengths to which the Nigerian government

would go to retrieve the Chibok girls.

Boko Haram's Attempts to Exploit Security Weaknesses

Another piece of evidence that supports the second proposed mechanism, that the insurgents target women as a means of emasculating or shaming counterinsurgents, is that the attack took place specifically within the military's Area of Responsibility (AoR). This is OI 4, listed in Table 3.2, which states that insurgents will purposely plan attacks in geographic locations that are under the protection of the military, in order to highlight the military's weakness, and undermine the confidence that soldiers have in the mission and that civilians have in the military overall.

Chibok in particular was under the purview of the newly-formed 7 Div, the Army division that replaced JTF ORO. This may also be a form of costly signaling, as targeting civilians in areas where insurgents may run into security forces raises the risks of doing operations in those areas. But it may also be high-reward for the insurgents, as their ability to exploit weaknesses in security may enhance the group's reputation for being terrifying to civilians.

In the case of Boko Haram, survivors of several attacks that took place between late 2013 and early 2014, when Boko Haram began to act more coercively against civilians, told Human Rights Watch that the group was able to escape detection by security forces, and that in some cases, outposts that were supposed to be manned by security forces were abandoned entirely, while in other cases, survivors witnessed security forces fleeing the scene upon hearing that Boko Haram insurgents were in the area (Human Rights Watch 2014).

Boko Haram clearly capitalized on the reputation they had built to flagrantly exploit weaknesses in the security environment. Not only was the Chibok abduction an overt attack in a region that was within the AoR of 7 Div, the attacks that took place thereafter followed a similar pattern. Omeni (2018) notes that another abduction that took place in June 2014, which resulted in 31 boys/men and 60 girls/women being taken was conducted "within the AoR of 7 Div; within a 60-mile radius from HQ, 7 Div, Maiduguri" (Omeni 2018: 226). This was high risk because the government was on especially high alert after the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls only two months prior. Yet their ability to continually evade government forces raised questions about the government's ability to manage the security situation, lowered morale among soldiers, and raised the profile of the group both domestically and internationally, which may have justified the risks of flagrantly conducting operations in areas where government troops could have been present. Once they learned that abductions of symbolic targets – such as schoolgirls – would result in immense national and international attention, and that they could hold the abducted girls over the government's head, abduction attempts increased.

3.7 Mechanism 3: Bargaining Leverage

In the previous chapter, the third mechanism I proposed to explain insurgent targeting of women was that targeting women provides bargaining leverage or a means of extracting concessions from the counterinsurgent. In Nigeria, as has been shown, the predominant form of targeting I analyze is abduction, in which case the insurgents maintain physical control over those civilians who are targeted. The observable implication that most clearly bears out in the real world case of Nigeria is OI 1, which states that gender-based targeting provided some form of leverage that changed the government's willingness to negotiate with the insurgents. I detail this below.

	Observable Implications of Bargaining Leverage Mechanism
OI 1	Counterinsurgents speak to being willing to negotiate because of sex-selective targeting
OI 2	Evidence that insurgent is targeting women to create a war of attrition that will lead to better outcomes
OI 3	Interviewees speaking to changed messages and/or resolve of insurgents and counterinsurgents when targeting of women is high

Table 3.3: Observable Implications of Mechanism Three in Nigeria

As explained above, targeting women can be translated to bargaining leverage by insurgents in two ways. First, targeting women is almost universally disliked by civilians and state governments and being able to stop the perpetration of an unpopular behavior is a significant bargaining chip for insurgent groups. Second, insurgents can literally use women as leverage against the government. This is what occurred in Nigeria. Upon realizing the immense value of abducted girls, but in particular, the Chibok girls, Boko Haram insurgents capitalized on this to open negotiations with the Nigerian government. Below, I walk through the sequence of events after the Chibok abduction, and argue that they provide clear evidence that targeting women and girls yielded bargaining leverage for the insurgent group.

There are three ways that Boko Haram instrumentalized the girls, and I walk through each of these in more detail below: (1) making deals with the government to exchange abducted girls for Boko Haram commanders imprisoned by the Nigerian government or for money; (2) using the girls as a shield to dissuade counterinsurgency operations from targeting Boko Haram strongholds; and (3) as a means of attracting alliances and sponsorships from external actors or other (in this case, jihadist) groups.

First and most obviously, Boko Haram used the Chibok girls as the basis for a prisoner exchange. There is some debate about exactly when Boko Haram shifted from using the abducted girls as a means of humiliating the Nigerian government to seeking to use them as leverage, especially because the Nigerian government has been open about some of the

exchanges with Boko Haram, but reticent to admit to or discuss others. For example, Matfess (2017) argues that by the time he released the May 12, 2014 video, Shekau was already aware of the girls' value in a potential negotiation with the Nigerian government, which is why he said in the video, of the girls: "We will not release them while you detain our brothers." She cites a former Boko Haram commander in a follow-up article who states that the idea to negotiate with the Nigerian government came to the group when Michelle Obama held up the #BringBackOurGirls sign (Matfess 2017, Daily Beast). Zenn, on the other hand, suggests that the May 12 video was more an attention-getting display that fed Shekau's "megalomania" rather than the opening salvo in a negotiation attempt (Zenn 2018).

Either way, it was not until two years after the kidnapping – and the transfer of power from Jonathan's administration to the Buhari administration – on April 14, 2016, that Boko Haram released another proof-of-life video confirming that the remaining girls (not including the fifty-seven who escaped during the night of the raid or the days immediately following), were alive and living in the Boko Haram camp, now operating largely from the Sambisa Forest, where Boko Haram had had to relocate its operations once the CJTF effectively ran the group out of the urban areas in the northeast. According to Jacob Zenn's account, this is when the Nigerian government signaled its willingness to negotiate for the release of the remaining girls. Zenn suggests that Buhari went so far as to offer a ransom in exchange for talks to create a "comprehensive peace agreement" between the Nigerian state and Boko Haram (ibid).

Whatever negotiations took place between Boko Haram and the Nigerian state are not public – so it is not known what exactly each side offered and demanded. Zenn reports that both parties reached a deal in October 2016, about two-and-a-half years after the girls had been abducted (Zenn 2018). The deal led to the release of twenty-one girls in exchange for one million euros paid to Boko Haram (ibid). Once Boko Haram realized the government would be willing to negotiate for the release of the girls, discussions continued even after the release of the first group of girls. In May 2017, a second group of girls – this time eighty-two of them – were released following negotiations between Boko Haram and the state. In exchange, Boko Haram reportedly received two million euros and the release of five Boko Haram commanders from prison, where they had been detained by the Nigerian security forces (ibid).

In this way, it is clear that Boko Haram used the abducted girls as a means of leveraging significant assets from the Nigerian government. Another notable and telling fact is that the government was only willing to negotiate with Boko Haram to get the Chibok girls back (Matfess 2017). In this way, the leverage the girls created quite literally was the only means that Boko Haram had to force the Nigerian government to the bargaining table. The negotiations for the girls caused consternation on both sides – within Boko Haram, hardliners disliked the idea of lending the government they were fighting credence during negotiations; within the Nigerian government, there are always risks of negotiating with illegitimate and violent actors for fear of encouraging such behavior in the future. Indeed, the Chibok incident was only the first of many abductions; Human Rights Watch reported (Human Rights Watch 2014) that there were many subsequent abductions, albeit on a smaller scale. This behavior

continues, and in the intervening period there has been another Chibok-style event in a town called Dapchi, where in 2018, more than 100 schoolgirls were taken. Although this did not come to dominate the news headlines in the same way, this group of girls, known in Nigeria as the "Dapchi girls," was likely abducted in an attempt to extract concessions from the Nigerian government in much the same way as they did with the Chibok girls (Omeni 2019).

The second way in which Boko Haram managed to use the girls as leverage was in the nitty-gritty of insurgent-counterinsurgent violence. Once Boko Haram retreated into the Sambisa Forest, it was clear from both human intelligence and suspected satellite intelligence that the Chibok girls were being kept there. The terrain of the Sambisa Forest is challenging for counterinsurgents in general, who tend to be less nimble than insurgents, who can hide within forests. Counterinsurgents who have to operate heavy machinery, such as tanks or armored personnel carriers, struggle more in forest terrain (Omeni 2019). Akali Omeni, in his book on the insurgency operations conducted by Boko Haram, explains why the forest terrain is so difficult for counterinsurgents to navigate:

> . . . operations to recapture Sambisa must be infantry centric and, beyond that, must limit or may entirely preclude the use of airpower, motorized infantry or heavy armour within the engagement. [. . .] Under these conditions and due to Boko Haram's terrain familiarity, its tactical advantage is force-multiplied by choice of battleground. The Nigerian Army and especially the combat arm of the Infantry, therefore, must take the time to adapt specifically to jungle warfare or press head into the forest and encounter heavy losses (many of which are unlikely to be documented for the public) (Omeni 2019: 81).

Not only is the terrain naturally difficult for the counterinsurgents to navigate, they also cannot use indiscriminate means of targeting insurgent strongholds in terrain like this, because they would be likely to injure or kill the abducted girls. In fact, by some accounts, the Nigerian military openly admits that one reason it was ineffective in rescuing the Chibok girls was because they had to "exercise restraint" during operations conducted in or near the Sambisa Forest in order to ensure that they did not accidentally kill the girls (Oriola 2017).

This is a clear form of leverage that the insurgents exercise over the counterinsurgents while they have possession of the abducted girls – they are forcing the counterinsurgent to quite literally limit its operations by integrating the girls into the camps from which Boko Haram operates. By definition, this means that counterinsurgents are not as effective as they might be otherwise, if they were operating without consideration for the civilian shields that Boko Haram created. Although using civilians as shields is not unusual – this chapter was written during the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in Spring 2022, where this kind of civilian targeting is rampant in that situation as well – I argue that in Boko Haram's case, the fact that the Chibok girls in particular became so symbolic and valuable meant that the government would pay an extremely high cost if it eventually came out that they had accidentally killed one or more of the girls while attempting to rescue them. This is how the second and third mechanisms – Emasculation and Bargaining Leverage – I propose go

hand-in-hand: if sex-selective targeting becomes symbolic of government success or failure, and violence against women and girls in particular becomes symbolic of counterinsurgent failure, insurgents are more likely to be able to use that leverage to extract concessions from the counterinsurgent.

The third way in which Boko Haram may have capitalized on the abduction of the Chibok girls was to use the notoriety they gained to create alliances with other jihadist groups and solicit sponsorships for their activities. In particular, in 2015, about a year after the abduction of the Chibok girls, Shekau pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS). It is not entirely clear the extent to which this allegiance actually changed anything materially, or to what extent it was driven by the Chibok abduction, but it may have been a relevant factor. Hilary Matfess, writing for The Daily Beast on the three-year anniversary of the Chibok abductions, noted that from the group's perspective, the notoriety they gained from the abductions was invaluable (Matfess 2017). In fact, Matfess suggests, the group worked hard to fan the flames of international obsession with the Chibok girls; she argues that this is the reason for the release of the 2015 video that would ultimately end with the release of the first group of twenty-one schoolgirls.

It is important to note that the infamy associated with these kinds of attacks is a double-edged sword for insurgent groups, which is likely why we do not see them happen in every conflict, or even consistently used by Boko Haram. On the one hand, insurgent groups are able to capitalize on their moment in the sun to attract fighters, capital, and external support. On the other hand, they become a target of single-minded focus from the perspective of the counterinsurgent, which knows that its success or failure is being judged on preventing such abhorrent violence, or in the case of the Chibok girls, rectifying violence that already occurred by retrieving the girls. In the case of Boko Haram, this resulted in a severe diminishment of the group for almost a year – it was not until mid-2015 that the group was able to reemerge after the intense and focused military innovations of the Nigerian Army (along with what would come to be called the Multinational Joint Task Force, which also included Chadian, Cameroonian, and Nigerien forces) to erode any gains the group had made.

In addition, there are the logistical and material challenges to the group of having to hold such a large group of girls, who needed to be housed, clothed, fed, etc., and who could not be nimbly and easily relocated. Zenn provides evidence that, by 2016, there were grumblings within the group about continuing to keep the remaining girls – this may have even contributed to the group's willingness to exchange the girls for money and Boko Haram fighters. Zenn writes that a subset of Boko Haram fighters "were increasingly concerned that the girls (and their infants) were a drain on the group because they required food, lodging, medical treatment, and transport during periods of military pressure, especially those who did not convert to Islam and take husbands" (Zenn 2018, citing Parkinson and Hinshaw 2017). Especially given that there is substantial evidence that Boko Haram did not intend to abduct the girls, and certainly that they did not expect to be able to ransom them, it is reasonable to conclude that they were unprepared for the logistical challenges of managing such a large group of girls who did not contribute to the fighting force.

The costliness to the government of being unable to retrieve the girls was also a double-

edged sword. On the one hand, as I have stated, the abduction raised the stakes for government success significantly, and in fact seems to have contributed to Jonathan's ouster. On the other hand, the Nigerian government has leveraged the Chibok abductions into a means of acquiring significant security assistance from the West. The U.S. government, one American interview subject who worked in Nigeria told me, was only interested in sending boots on the ground to assist with the search for the girls, but beyond this, was willing to provide war materiel to the Nigerian government in order to support the broader counterinsurgency mission. The Nigerian government, this interview subject reported, indisputably capitalized on the fact that the abduction had captured the attention of the West to extract security assistance from countries whose own constituencies were demanding that the West intervene in support of the mission to find the girls. This support in turn can help the government be more effective at eliminating the group, which is why the group must be wary of the costs of targeting girls and women brazenly and in ways that make them a clear target for state and international security forces.

The fact that Boko Haram's chosen form of gender-based targeting is abduction meant that they retained literal control over the women they targeted. This provided the group a very real bargaining chip that they clearly used to extract significant concessions from the government, which was one of the observable implications I searched for. Although not all groups have control over women in a manner that allows for physical exchange, it is clear that in the case of Nigeria, the international attention that followed the Chibok girls created an opportunity for Boko Haram to bargain for their own fighters and for material resources. Because the Nigerian government could not claim success against Boko Haram without retrieving the girls, the safe return of the Chibok girls was the only issue that forced the government to the negotiating table. This provides support for my argument that gender-based targeting is a unique means of creating bargaining leverage for insurgent groups.

This chapter has demonstrated how domestic counterinsurgents are particularly susceptible to the consequences of sex-selective targeting perpetrated by insurgent groups. In Nigeria, I found strong evidence for each of the three mechanisms I proposed – Information Transmission Suppression, Emasculation, and Bargaining Leverage – as means for the insurgents to use sex-selective targeting to punish civilians for sharing information with the counterinsurgents, diminish confidence in the Nigerian military, and eventually, force the government to the negotiating table where they were able to extract substantial material concessions.

3.8 Alternative Explanations

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to discuss why the evidence that we see in the Nigeria case contradicts certain existing or alternative explanations. However, in this section, I provide a more thorough set of alternative explanations for the gender-based targeting we observed in Nigeria, and evaluate if there is any evidence that might support these alternative

explanations.

The group's ideology is the reason why they abducted girls and women

I have taken pains to show that, while Boko Haram's ideology is not particularly friendly to women (although Hilary Matfess provides an account of ways in which the group actually helps local women), their ideology is not the sole explanation for the kind of gender-based targeting that became more commonplace beginning in 2014. If it were the case that the ideology were the primary explanation, then we should have expected to see gender-based targeting from the group's inception. But as I show through the process tracing method I employ here, as well as with the GTD data in the Figure 3.2, there is a significant change in targeting around 2014.

It is also not the case that the group's ideology changed. One of the reasons I scope to the years 2013-2015 is that this is the period where, despite declarations of allegiance to various groups, there is no clear merging with any other group the way there would be beginning in 2015 when the group morphed into the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). In addition, scholars who have documented the whole history of the group note that their ideology remains consistent from their inception to present-day (Thurston 2018, Omeni 2018). Therefore, while their ideology may have contributed to gender-based targeting being viewed as an acceptable practice, it is not sufficient as an explanation by itself.

The group's goal is to rape girls and it does so by abducting them

While there is certainly evidence of rape, sexual abuse, and forced marriage being perpetrated by Boko Haram, rape does not appear to be the main tactic they intend to use. A number of survivors of various types of Boko Haram violence have spoken to inconsistency in outcome (Human Rights Watch 2014). Some women who were initially abducted but who told their captors that they were married were released; others were made to cook or clean for the group but were later released without facing sexual abuse of any kind (Human Rights Watch 2014, Oriola 2017). Unlike other insurgencies, it does not appear that the group's purpose in abducting girls and women is as part of a broader campaign to perpetrate sexual violence. These observations notwithstanding, I do not want to minimize the fact that a significant number of women have experienced sexual violence at the hands of Boko Haram, but I do not find evidence that this would be consistent with Wood's definition of rape as a practice (Wood 2018).

The abductions are about access to women

This too is an explanation for which evidence in the world is varied. There are numerous reports that abductees are forcibly married, or that they are made to support the group's activities in other ways – cooking, cleaning, etc. However, if this were always true, we should

have seen abductions en masse much earlier than we did. The group was flourishing in 2012, but did not perpetrate abductions of girls and women in the same organized fashion as they did beginning in 2014. Again, this is not to say that it did not happen – it certainly did, and there are reports of abductions beginning as early as 2009, but these are not as commonplace as the abductions that took place in 2014, suggesting that they were perpetrated by individuals acting outside the scope of their orders, rather than following a coherent strategy.

The abductions are a means of demanding a ransom

Although Boko Haram did end up receiving what could essentially be called a ransom for the Chibok girls, it should be clear from the sequence of events that I described above that this was not their original intent, and that these abductions differed from kidnappings that the group had conducted prior to 2014. Those kidnappings – notably the kidnappings of the foreigners in 2013 and the kidnapping of local officials' wives, also in 2013 – were clearly designed to extort the state. The ransoms were demanded immediately, and Boko Haram was specific in its justification for having taken the kidnapped people. In the case of the Chibok girls, and subsequent abductions, the group did not begin negotiations with the Nigerian government until more than two years after the abduction took place; this timing is inconsistent with a story that the group was after a ransom payment. As I described above, the longer the group kept the girls, the greater a cost they had to pay to keep them clothed/housed/etc., and they also had to worry about the girls being killed in a raid, which would lower the ransom that they could demand.

Boko Haram always wanted to perpetrate abductions but could not because they did not have the resources until 2014

This explanation might provide a reasonable alternative to the theory I propose, except that in 2012, Boko Haram was able to conduct the same number of attacks as in 2014 (again, see Figure 3.2). If a group is able to attack police stations and the United Nations, and free imprisoned group members, as they did in 2012 and 2013, it is a reasonable assumption that they would also be able to attack schools. After all, schools are likely to be less closely guarded, and most of the people inside the school untrained in fighting methods to fend off any attack. A police station, on the other hand, is likely to have a large contingent of guards, and even if it does not, it is by definition filled with people who know how to fight, and are likely armed. It is clear that there was a tactical shift that took place in 2014 – this has been reported by other experts who study Boko Haram (e.g. Zenn and Pearson 2014, Matfess 2017).

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have assessed the evidence present for the hypotheses I presented in the previous chapter. I find strong evidence that all three mechanisms – Information Transmission Suppression, Emasculation, and Bargaining Leverage – operated in the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria. Boko Haram began targeting women and girls following the integration of women into the civilian arm of the counterinsurgency, CJTF. Once the abducted girls – particularly the Chibok girls – became notorious and came to symbolize government success against Boko Haram, the group accelerated their targeting of girls and women, specifically taunting the government with their inability to rescue the abducted girls. Finally, after realizing the material value of the girls to the government, they used them as bargaining chips to extract concessions from the government. In addition, the fact that Boko Haram faced a domestic counterinsurgent whose home audience would accept nothing less than complete success in protecting women from Boko Haram's violence, incentivized the group to invest heavily in tactics that targeted women selectively. In the next chapter, I examine the case of Somalia, where a regional international organization conducted the counterinsurgency against the al-Qaeda-affiliated group al-Shabaab, and show how the differences in the extent to which the counterinsurgent's domestic audiences responded to violence created different incentives for al-Shabaab to invest in violence targeting women.

Chapter 4

Somalia

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed that because the government could not claim success against Boko Haram without being able to demonstrate that they could protect the most "innocent" and "vulnerable" civilians from being attacked, the protection of women became a core metric by which counterinsurgent success was measured – both by the government and by Nigerian citizens. And because Nigerian citizens were judging the government on its ability to protect women from Boko Haram's violence, Boko Haram was able to successfully undermine the government through its use of violence against women. In the next chapter, which focuses on the War in Iraq, I will show that because the protection of women was not viewed by the U.S. domestic audience as mission-critical, the level of abuse that women faced generally did not change in response to stronger or more robust efforts by counterinsurgents, including in response to efforts by counterinsurgents to enlist civilians into intelligence gathering efforts that would clearly endanger or undermine the insurgency.

Somalia, therefore, represents an interesting case in the sense that technically, the counterinsurgent is foreign. Or rather, the counterinsurgent is many foreign soldiers serving under the African Union banner. This might suggest that they would be subject to the same forces as played out in Iraq, where the core mission goal is protection of troops primarily, and protection of civilians secondarily. On the other hand, many of these troops were from places that border Somalia, such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, which means that they have a strongly vested interest in eliminating the security risks emanating from Somalia, perhaps moreso than countries who do not share a border, and for whom risks of spillover violence are lower. Indeed, Kenya has already been facing the brunt of this type of spillover violence; when al-Shabaab cannot be contained within Somalia, they have managed to conduct numerous attacks in neighboring Kenya.

This chapter examines the ways in which protection of women becomes critical for foreign troops operating not that far from home, and the incentives that arise (and do not arise) for insurgents to target women as a means of undermining the counterinsurgent, as Boko

Haram did in Nigeria. I find that, unlike in Iraq, women were in fact instrumentalized by the insurgent group as a means of undermining the counterinsurgent group, and that despite the repressive nature of al-Shabaab's behavior towards women, there was a shift in targeting tactics once the counterinsurgency operations became more robust. At the same time, AMISOM did not face the same imperative to protect all civilians as the Nigerian government did when countering Boko Haram. In this case, I find substantial support for the first two mechanisms I propose – Information Transmission Suppression and Emasculation – but not for the third mechanism – Bargaining Leverage. In other words, it is clear that al-Shabaab invested in different forms of targeting when facing a strong counterinsurgent, but because the home audience to which the counterinsurgent forces responded did not consider protection of Somali women to be critical to mission success (but instead worried more about containing and preventing spillover violence from Somalia within their own borders), al-Shabaab was not able to extort AMISOM forces by targeting women as Boko Haram did in Nigeria.

One important point to note about studying Somalia is that almost no non-military organization – including the U.S. government – has operated safely in Somalia for most of the period that is covered in this chapter. The U.S. government only just recently (in 2019) reopened its embassy in Mogadishu, but since 1991, the U.S. had had no embassy presence in Somalia, and did not during the period covered in this chapter. It is almost impossible to overstate the extent to which Somalia is an extremely dangerous place, with very little service provision outside the capital. Even organizations that are normally experienced at conducting research on the ground in war zones, such as Human Rights Watch, have had to adapt their research methods and plans in order to keep their research staff safe. In 2021, Freedom House gave Somalia just 7 out 100 points, easily qualifying it as "not free," and it is so dysfunctional that it does not even make the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report, which tracks the "education, economic empowerment, health, and political empowerment of women" in over 130 countries (Freedom House 2021, Rothkopf 2014).

Nevertheless, this is an important case, and despite the state's dysfunction, al-Shabaab is a dangerous and capable insurgent group that has conducted hundreds of attacks, resulting in thousands of deaths (ACLED). Despite the relative dearth of information about what is happening on the ground in Somalia (especially compared to the wealth of information about other cases in this project, such as Iraq), I have collected some primary data, as well as secondary information from other researchers and entities that have been able to conduct research with Somalis, even if interviews and surveys took place in refugee camps in neighboring Kenya. I was also lucky to conduct interviews with two Americans who have worked in Somalia – one as a consultant for the U.S. government and the other, a U.S. Marine who served in Somalia to help assist with training AMISOM troops. The number of American troops that have been sent to Somalia is extremely small, meaning the interview population is also very small, so I was very lucky to be able to interview this Marine.

This chapter proceeds in a similar fashion to the previous one. I begin by providing some background on the insurgent group and its origins, as well as discussing the group's treatment of women before the counterinsurgent made significant inroads in challenging the

group. I then discuss the counterinsurgent's approach to the conflict, and then turn to a description of the ways that the group's targeting of women changed when the counterinsurgency presence increased. Next, as with the other chapters, I evaluate the evidence for each of the mechanisms I posit in my theoretical framework, and find that there is evidence for mechanism one (Information Transmission Suppression) and mechanism two (Emasculation). I find no evidence that AMISOM either negotiated with or paid off al-Shabaab, and therefore conclude that mechanism three (Bargaining Leverage) did not operate in this case. I wrap up with suggestions for areas for future research in this specific case; hopefully as embassies reopen and human rights organizations are able to access civilian populations with greater ease, more analysis can be done.

4.2 Background on the Conflict in Somalia

The history of the conflict in Somalia is extremely complex, with many different phases and different actors. Therefore, in this section, I aim to cover just those events that provide important background and context for the period of time on which this chapter is most intensely focused, which is the period between roughly 2010-2015. Rather than focusing on the history of the conflict, I focus instead on the brief history of al-Shabaab, the genesis of AMISOM, and the al-Shabaab's relationship with al-Qaeda (since all the cases I examine at some point are allied with or allegiant to al-Qaeda).

The organizations that preceded al-Shabaab have been around for several decades, and formed as a violent response to Siad Barre's administration, as a center-seeking group whose goal was to overthrow the Barre regime, who had been the President of Somalia since taking power in a coup in 1969. Though Barre's regime was not, by most accounts, fully democratic, it was nevertheless not a theocracy. Al-Shabaab's predecessors were founded with the goal of overthrowing Barre and implementing a fully Islamic state (Gartenstein Ross 2009). Their resolve was strengthened by Barre's harsh approach to the multiple Islamic movements that flourished during his regime (ibid). Due to general instability (not created just by these Islamist groups) and in the face of coordination by multiple anti-Barre factions, Barre was forced to flee Somalia in 1991 and lived the rest of his life in Nigeria (Williams 2018). Barre's exit opened up a huge power vacuum, which resulted in the Somali Civil War, with multiple factions (including those that had previously cooperated to overthrow him) vying for control of the central government, or whatever was left of it (ibid).

One of these factions was the Islamic Union, which had designs not only to put in place an Islamic state, but also to absorb many of Somalia's neighbors, including Kenya, Djibouti, and even parts of Ethiopia (ibid). Multiple sources (including, as cited by Gartenstein Ross, West Point's Combating Terrorism Center) suggest that there was a close association between the Islamic Union and al-Qaeda as far back as the 1980s and early 1990s. As part of the Somali Civil War, the Islamic Union was defeated, and its members scattered to re-form into other groups.

In the wake of the Somali Civil War, the country essentially dissolved into individual

clans. As a result of the collapse of any meaningful federal government, the 1990s and early 2000s saw some regions – notably Somaliland and Puntland – secede from Somalia entirely (Jones et al. 2016). In this period of significant fragmentation, several clans and court systems eventually banded together to create the Islamic Courts Union, which shared the common interest of making Somalia an Islamic state. The group seized control of Mogadishu and began implementing – sometimes violently – its goals. Many of the members of the Islamic Courts Union would eventually become key players in al-Shabaab, who got significant battle experience fighting alongside the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan following September 11 and the subsequent October 7, 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

In the mid 2000s, these individuals, inspired by what they had witnessed in Afghanistan, returned to Somalia to form an organization that would take up the mantle of global jihad in east Africa, beginning in Somalia. By 2006, when the Islamic Courts Union officially took power in Somalia, al-Shabaab (many of whose members had trained with al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and therefore wanted a more active campaign for global jihad) formed as a splinter group and formally separated from the Islamic Courts Union, although their fighters, numbering in the hundreds by that time, worked alongside Islamic Courts Union fighters to gain control of strategically important places in Somalia, such as Mogadishu and Kismayo, a port city (Jones et al 2016).

In 2006, fed up with the Islamic Courts Union's obvious intention to eventually try to absorb part of Ethiopian territory, Ethiopian troops invaded Somalia and seized Mogadishu. This paved the way for the Transitional Federal Government (founded in exile) to return to Somalia and regain control. However, it quickly became obvious that the TFG forces would not be able to hold the gains that the Ethiopians had made. By this time – when the United States was about to authorize a surge of forces to Iraq to deal with al-Qaeda there, and the alliance between al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab caused significant anxiety for the West, still reeling after 9/11 and follow-on attack attempts, such as the shoe bomber – it was clear that the TFG had to be supported somehow, or risk Somalia falling freely into the hands of Islamic jihadists.[1] But the West, embroiled in Iraq and to a lesser degree, Afghanistan, could not possibly support military intervention on another war front. In response to this, the idea of an international regional coalition being authorized to address instability in Somalia and support the TFG began to gain traction – and soon after, AMISOM, the African Union Mission for Somalia – was born (Williams 2018).

Uganda was the first country to commit to AMISOM and provided the first troops under the AMISOM banner, which arrived in early 2007. The early days of AMISOM were frankly, extremely messy, with countries promising, and then rescinding, their offers to send troops (ibid). The mission had been authorized by the UN Security Council, so at one point,

[1]The "shoe bomber" was a UK-born man who trained with jihadists in Afghanistan and Pakistan and tried to smuggle explosives onto a flight in his shoes in the months following the al-Qaeda-perpetrated attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. At the time, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was newly created and did not require passengers to remove their shoes during security screening; this was changed after the attempted shoe bombing (the plot of which was, thankfully, foiled before it could be successfully conducted).

AMISOM leaders turned to the UN to ask for assistance. As Williams notes, however, this assistance would never come: "Debate about a potential transition to a UN peacekeeping operation was ended, at least temporarily, in November 2007 when UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon concluded that deploying UN peacekeepers to Somalia was 'neither realistic nor viable' – the security situation was so bad that it was not even possible to send a UN technical assessment team" (ibid). As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, the security situation in Somalia is probably one – if not the – most dire on earth; even the United States was not able to securely have an embassy presence following the fall of the Barre government in 1991 and a failed intervention resulting in the downing of two U.S. military helicopters and the deaths of 18 U.S. servicemembers (U.S. Department of State). It was therefore clear that the African Union would have to figure out how to scale up AMISOM and lead it successfully without assistance from the West or the United Nations. As this reality became clear and the security threat to Somalia's neighbors started to become evident, additional countries began to join under the AMISOM banner over the following years, including Burundi.

However, any optimism about AMISOM's future was short-lived when Ethiopia announced that it would be withdrawing its troops entirely; as they withdrew from areas they had held after their invasion, al-Shabaab easily took over these areas without having to exert substantial effort (ibid). This left about 3500 AMISOM forces to secure the entire country, although they mostly concentrated in Mogadishu (ibid). Unsurprisingly, they were quickly targeted by al-Shabaab, and entered a long and protracted conflict that would be costly to human lives and capital and increase the insecurity of the entire country. The result, however, was that prior to the period I analyze in this chapter, huge swaths of the country, including important parts of Mogadishu, like Bakara Market, were held by al-Shabaab.

In the following sections, I detail what life looked like for Somali citizens under al-Shabaab's control, and how al-Shabaab's behavior changed when AMISOM eventually took seriously the secutity challenge and mounted a robust counterinsurgency in response to al-Shabaab's control. However, there are two final important things to note up front. First is that initially, AMISOM was not authorized to conduct peace enforcement operations, only peacekeeping operations.[2] This naturally limited its ability to proactively go after al-Shabaab and resulted in significant overcompensation and overreaction to attacks that al-Shabaab perpetrated against AMISOM forces.

Second, al-Shabaab is a group that has, essentially since its inception and in its various iterations, been aligned with al-Qaeda. Ahmed Abdi Godane, al-Shabaab's leader, first publicly pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2010, and would officially declare a merger with al-Qaeda in 2012, but the affiliation of al-Shabaab to al-Qaeda long preceded either of these formal announcements (Jones et al 2016). This is a group that sent fighters to Afghanistan to learn from and train with members of al-Qaeda, so it easily fits the broader category of al-Qaeda-affiliated groups I focus on in this project.

[2]Peacekeeping operations are distinct from peace enforcement operations. The former is generally carried out by forces that are not heavily armed. The latter requires the use of force to prevent combatants from continuing conflict and therefore requires forces to be more heavily armed and more closely resembles a military operation.

4.3 Al-Shabaab's Treatment of Women – Background

Al-Shabaab represents an interesting case of gender-based violence. The other two groups examined in this book did not systematically police women's presence in the public sphere even in areas where they controlled territory. Rather, there seemed to be sporadic attempts at various points and by specific commanders to enact a particular vision of the group's ideology. Al-Shabaab on the other hand, was systematic in its oppression of women when the group came to power. Adhering quite literally to a very strict interpretation of Islamic law (an interpretation that, it should be noted, was not shared by the general civilian population, as it was anathema to their social, cultural, and religious traditions that were specific to Somali society), al-Shabaab was extremely repressive toward women, especially when it came to women's behavior or presence in the public sphere (International Crisis Group 2019). However, even though they were clearly using force to enact a deeply patriarchal ideology, there are nuances that must be considered. As with most ideological precepts, their attitude towards women was not black-or-white, and the group actually did provide some services and rights for women that the Somali state could not provide or protect. In addition, and importantly – as I discuss in the next section of this chapter – all evidence suggests that, despite being extremely oppressive toward women in terms of their appearance and behavior in public, the group at this time (pre-robust counterinsurgency), did not use sexual violence against women, as this was prohibited by Islamic law and, apparently, by the commanders of al-Shabaab. As I show in the next section of this chapter, this would change when AMISOM launched a robust counterinsurgency against the group in 2011. In this way, al-Shabaab as a case demonstrates why, although ideology matters, it remains a background factor in this project – the form of targeting of women clearly changed along with the conflict dynamics when the counterinsurgent began responding robustly to their attacks. In addition, this case underscores the importance of considering the moment-to-moment tactical changes that insurgents make; as I show in the following pages, even a group that already starts out being extremely patriarchal and repressive towards women can change its tactics in response to changing conflict dynamics on the ground. Without delving deeply into the variation in the conflict over time, these important nuances would likely be missed.

Life Under Al-Shabaab Pre-Counterinsurgency

As with Boko Haram, al-Shabaab's behavior toward women is not cut and dry. As I detail in this section, they were extremely repressive towards women, but they also provided some measures of rights and security to women who lived in areas they governed. For example, a 2019 International Crisis Group report noted that despite its repressiveness, "[Al-Shabaab] can provide some security and its courts often uphold Islamic family law to [women's] benefit" (International Crisis Group 2019). The authors of the report go on to note that:

> Where it controls territory [Al-Shabaab] can [...] offer women and girls a degree of physical safety – hardly complete, but still appreciable – in a country where

> they are otherwise exposed to violence. Through its courts, Al-Shabaab upholds tenets of Islamic family law, that, to some degree, protect women's rights in matters such as divorce and inheritance in a manner the official justice system does not" (ibid).

One point that came up repeatedly was al-Shabaab's support of women wanting to divorce their husbands – even if they were al-Shabaab fighters – if they were shown to be insufficient providers for their wives and children (Khadija and Harley 2018).

In addition, the group did not treat all women equally repressively. Although the group did enforce strict ideological norms upon women within its areas of control, they did allow some freedoms for women; mostly for those who were associated with the group, but on occasion, other women who were operating under its purview: "[i]n principle, Al-Shabaab [...] preaches against women leaving the house without a mahram, or male relative, and bans interaction between men and women who are not close family. But despite its official stances, the movement displays some pragmatism in recognizing that women are often now primary breadwinners. [...] It tolerates suuqley, or market women, who sell their wares to both men and women" (ibid). As I show below, the group's acceptance of women's participation in the market was inconsistent, and women's participation in public and economic life tended to be tolerated better if they were associated with the group; this is perhaps a reason that some women were willing to marry into the group, as it provided both economic and physical security.

These points are not to suggest that the group is inherently benevolent towards women or that women did not suffer immensely under the group's control, but rather, to demonstrate the ways in which insurgent group behavior – especially for those groups that have strong ideological beliefs about women's roles in public and economic life – is more complicated and complex than simply saying that a particular group "hated" women. As I have suggested, this group in particular, did impede women from fully participating in social life, and punished them for violations of the rules that the group was trying to impose on civilians.

Some of the best reporting on the conditions women faced in Somalia under al-Shabaab's control comes from a 2010 Human Rights Watch report. Even though researchers were unable to travel to Mogadishu due to significant security concerns, Human Rights researchers "carried out dozens of interviews in the Dadaab refugee camps and in Nairobi's Eastleigh neighborhood" (Human Rights Watch 2010: 6). These refugees then, freed from the oppressive control of al-Shabaab, were able to give honest descriptions of life under al-Shabaab. Much of the information these interviewees shared describes what happened after significant gains by al-Shabaab against the Somali government and the meager AMISOM forces that were present in 2009.

Upon consolidating its control, al-Shabaab enacted and enforced strict rules for women's behavior and appearance. The Human Rights Watch report details fairly draconian requirements, beginning with measures that required women to wear a veil in public (Human Rights Watch 2010). These soon became even more demanding, as the group added "the additional stipulation that women wear an abaya made of particularly thick cloth and that touches the

ground and hides all physical contours" (ibid). This abaya requirement was a significant shift for Somali women, "who traditionally cover their heads and bodies, but often with lightweight, colorful fabrics that they wrap around themselves loosely" (ibid). One of the main challenges of the new abaya regulations that al-Shabaab implemented was the cost of the fabric – the thick, heavy cloth that the group required the abayas to be made of is extremely expensive. As a result, many women had to resort to sharing one abaya between themselves and other family members or neighbors. Because only one woman could be wearing the abaya out at a time, this severely restricted the women's movement (Human Rights Watch 2010: 28-29)

By many accounts, the group was extremely inflexible about the abaya requirement, and punishments for flouting the dress restrictions could be severe. Human Rights Watch interviewed a former fighter, who described the group's manner of dealing with women who appeared to be in violation of the dress codes that the group had implemented: "First, he said, they would slash the woman's clothes with a knife or scissors. Afterwards, he continued, 'We would whip her for a while to feel the pain and then take her to the nearest emir [local al-Shabaab commander] to decide punishment.'" (ibid). The group was indiscriminate in its application of this punishment, and did not take into account specific circumstances under which the violation occurred. For example, one woman described having been punished – by being "publicly whipped and then locked in a shipping container" – for the crime of "racing out of her home without her abaya in pursuit of a toddler who had wandered into the street" (Human Rights Watch 2010: 3). Al-Shabaab, by these strict and oppressive edicts, was clearly enacting a particular ideological vision for women's appearance in public spaces.

It was not just women's physical appearances that the group tried to regulate by the threat (and actual use) of punishment; the group's demands extended to women's behavior as well. Al-Shabaab was adamant that women maintain appearances of propriety and therefore not be seen in close proximity with any men to whom they were not closely related. Human Rights Watch describes how intensely the group policed women's segregation from men. According to interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch researchers, men and women could not be seen in public together. In theory this was supposed to be a rule applied to men to whom women were not closely related, but Human Rights Watch quoted one man as saying, "'You cannot even go to the market with a woman, even if she is your sister'" and describing the fears women and girls have about going out to places like the market or school (Human Rights Watch 2010: 32).

Another woman recalled being threatened by al-Shabaab for speaking with her male neighbor outside her own home, while simultaneously punishing other women for being without a male escort (ibid). Several female interviewees noted the importance of being with a male chaperone when appearing in public, but of course, they would have to be able to prove that the male escort was a close family member and that there was no inappropriate relationship between them. Human Rights Watch researchers explained how complicated and specific these rules were: "[m]ale escorts must sit in a different seat if the woman is traveling in a vehicle [. . .] as al-Shabaab bars men and women from sitting together. Several women told [Human Rights Watch] they were warned by bus drivers that they would be flogged

if they were caught sitting beside a man" (Human Rights 2010: 31). Of course, most of these regulations, especially in combination with the abaya requirements, made it very difficult for women to leave their homes. Some women, however, did not have a choice but to leave their homes, and these women were constantly at risk of attack by al-Shabaab. These are women who had no choice but to work in order to support themselves and their families. Oftentimes, these were women who had lost their husband or other male family members who could support them, and therefore had to resort to participation in some sort of commercial enterprise in order to make ends meet. Al-Shabaab banned women from participating in any sort of commercial activity when they came into power. However, this was quite contradictory to the norms of Somali society, where "women have traditionally engaged in a wide array of small-scale businesses," mostly consisting of selling tea or food or trinkets – something that was corroborated by the interview I was able to conduct with a member of the U.S. military who served in Somalia (Human Rights Watch 2010: 30). These practices existed by necessity. Somalia, which had been plagued by war for decades, had lost many citizens to the various wars that had been waged within its borders, which meant that there were many widows whose husbands had died at some point during the decades-long conflict. Left alone to run the household and care for their children, they earned necessary income by selling fruit or tea or other things in the market. When al-Shabaab came into power, these women had to decide between being able to earn a living to care for themselves and their families and risking the ire of the insurgents.

Again in these cases, al-Shabaab was indiscriminate in its application and enforcement of its edicts, and did not take individual circumstances into account. One woman told Human Rights Watch that "she was in her third term of pregnancy when al-Shabaab members whipped her in August 2009 for selling tea. They did not appear to care that al-Shabaab had previously abducted her husband and two brothers," and that when she informed them of this, they did not refrain from beating her (Human Rights Watch 2010: 31). Without going into too much disturbing detail here, it was clear that the group enforced its beliefs extremely intensely and oppressively on women it believed had violated its rules. The punishments took a range of forms from jailing women, beating them until they were unconscious, whipping them, breaking their bones, and other forms of physical punishment. However, it should be noted that I came across no evidence that the punishments took the form of sexual violence – this was something that al-Shabaab clearly took care to avoid during the period in which it was enacting its will upon women living under its purview.

4.4 AMISOM as a Counterinsurgent

While al-Shabaab was creating an extremely repressive environment for Somali women, the group also continued its mission to take over the entire Somali state. This involved attacking the Transitional Federation Government (TFG) of Somalia, put in place after the Somali Civil War and generally trying to destabilize the Somali state, or whatever of a Somali state existed in the early 2010s. At this time, as I explained in the background to this conflict,

AMISOM was mostly trying to support the TFG and was only authorized by the African Union and United Nations to conduct peacekeeping operations in Somalia. Nevertheless, the group considered itself at war with any nation who was supporting the fragile Somali government.

As we saw in the Nigerian case, there was a brief period in which the counterinsurgents allowed the group to co-exist with the Somali state. However, in 2010, after it had won some important military victories and consolidated many of those gains into a governance structure that threatened to rival the Somali state, the group became a much bigger security risk. By most accounts, the tipping point was an attack conducted by al-Shabaab suicide bombers at a cafe in Kampala, Uganda, where 76 civilians watching the World Cup were killed (Jones et al 2016). Because South Africa was the host of the World Cup in 2010 – the first time an African nation had hosted the World Cup – and the attention of the entire international community was focused on the African continent, this attack was particularly egregious and provocative. The attack followed an open call that al-Shabaab issued, demanding that foreign jihadists "attack Ugandan and Burundian embassies worldwide in retaliation for their participation in AMISOM" (Jones et al 2016). In the Somalia case, this, combined with the actual perpetration of a major attack against civilians in Uganda, was the tipping point, after which the insurgent group could no longer be ignored. In Nigeria, the tipping point was reached after Boko Haram, allowed to run mostly unobstructed in Borno State in northeastern Nigeria, got bold and perpetrated multiple large attacks against the United Nations and security institutions of the Nigerian state. In the same way, this was the moment at which the African Union realized that al-Shabaab could not be allowed to continue to flourish.

Indeed, less than two weeks later, the African Union "agreed to expand AMISOM's mandate [. . .] from a peacekeeping to a peace enforcement mission, allowing units to engage al-Shabaab directly" (Jones et al 2016). As with Boko Haram in Nigeria, the decision by the counterinsurgent to engage in large-scale, robust counterinsurgency would eventually lead to some erosion of the group. The urgency with which AMISOM had to act was underscored by my own interview research, where an interviewee told me: "For AMISOM, it was very much an existential threat. I mean, there were bombings in Nairobi when we were in Somalia, and al-Shabaab was definitely expanding across East Africa, so in that sense, you know, that's an existential threat to other governments. [. . .] It was very much like, 'keep al-Shabaab in Somalia'" (interview with author January 18, 2022). A Joint Special Operations University review of counterinsurgency against al-Shabaab corroborates this perspective, noting that the attack "was clearly aimed at local residents of Kampala, and was apparently intended to undermine the Ugandan public's support for AMISOM" (Bruton and Williams 2014: 31). However it actually had the opposite effect – for the first time, Uganda was willing to support a surge of AMISOM troops and a shift to a legitimate counterinsurgency mission.

After some internal debate – and frankly, struggle, for the African Union in terms of figuring out how to fund a surge without immense material support from the West – the African Union, supported by the United Nations, enlarged the size of AMISOM's force to 12,000 in December 2010 (Bruton and Williams 2014). While this was short of the 20,000

that the African Union had approved in its July 2010 summit, it nonetheless represented a significant push by the AU to address the significant security threat posed by al-Shabaab. In addition, the renewed AMISOM forces also received some important material support from the United States, which ensured that the strategic approach AMISOM used took the form of true counterinsurgency (rather than what the U.S. foreign policy apparatus would call counterterrorism-plus):

> The U.S. State Department's Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program delivered a refined pre-deployment training package as an addition to the increase in AMISOM troop strength. This new package included more robust and better combat equipment and focused on counterinsurgency tactics – including how to fight through buildings to tackle al-Shabaab sniper teams – and better task force organization (i.e. combat teams with armor and special forces). AMISOM forces also received more timely intelligence from their partners and developed a better close combat supply arrangement (Bruton and Williams 2014: 57)

All of this training and assistance would enable AMISOM to reenter the fight against al-Shabaab with the strategy, tactics, and equipment that would best set it up for counterinsurgency success.

Armed with these new tools, AMISOM launched a counteroffensive against al-Shabaab, mostly concentrated first in Mogadishu, beginning in early 2011 (Jones et al 2016: 21, Bruton and Williams 2014: 59). This mission, which they called Operation Panua-Eneo – meaning "expand space" in Swahili – was devised with the goal of regaining control of Mogadishu (Bruton and Williams 2014: 59). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the additional training and forces allowed AMISOM to start making significant gains against al-Shabaab. Beginning with Mogadishu, AMISOM regained control of much of the territory it had previously lost – and actually controlled 13 out of 16 districts in Mogadishu, including the main marketplace by early 2011 (Jones et al 2016: 21). The operation continued to gain momentum and experienced further success throughout 2011. In May, AMISOM regained control over a number of important landmarks in the capital city, "including the symbolic Red Mosque, the former military camp, [...] the former Italian Embassy, the former Interior Ministry building, and Alimo Hotel" (Bruton and Williams 2014: 60). And by August, AMISOM had forced al-Shabaab out of central Mogadishu entirely, although this did not mean AMISOM could rest on its laurels – as Bruton and Williams note, this brought additional challenges, because al-Shabaab "retreated only as far as settlements just outside the city [...] from where they continued to launch various guerilla-style attacks and assassinations as well as suicide bombings against targets in the city center" (Bruton and Williams 2014: 61). These challenges notwithstanding, AMISOM continued to hold the gains that it had made over the course of the year.

At the end of 2011 and into 2012, two events occurred that gave AMISOM an additional advantage in its counterinsurgency against al-Shabaab. First, was Kenya's decision to join

the counterinsurgency operations. Kenya was not originally part of AMISOM, and actually launched their first major counterinsurgency operation (called Operation Linda Nchi, meaning "Protect the Nation" in Swahili), without being officially part of AMISOM (Mwangi 2016). Due to the refugee crisis along the Somalia-Kenya border, as well as al-Shabaab attacks that were ramping up within Kenya's borders, Kenya too decided that it needed to take bold military action to prevent Somalia's security risks from continuing to spill into Kenyan territory. This initial incursion, although not officially part of AMISOM, did experience some success (as well as setbacks, when Kenyan troops were unable to advance in the muddy conditions of the rainy season) (Bruton and Williams 2014: 61). Nevertheless, their additional troops, in combination with the Transitional Federation Government forces did erode some of al-Shabaab's territorial control. And just a few months after Kenya launched its own counterinsurgency mission, it officially accepted AMISOM's invitation to join the coalition's forces in the counterinsurgency against al-Shabaab (ibid). Thereafter, the Kenyan troops – with their advanced capabilities, including air support, operated in concert with AMISOM, increasing AMISOM's material, technical, and political capabilities substantially.

The second major event that tilted the fight significantly in AMISOM's favor was the authorization for them to expand the fight beyond Mogadishu and the expansion of AMISOM contributors to include Djibouti and Sierra Leone in early 2012. Between fall 2011 and early spring 2012, there was a clear acknowledgement on the part of the African Union and neighboring countries in and around the horn of Africa that the situation with al-Shabaab had gotten out of hand and was threatening the sovereignty and security of several of Somalia's neighbors, and that the group must be destroyed once and for all. This agreement between many of the nations that had been contributing troops to AMISOM (and even those that had not) enabled the coordination of forces, training, and operations in a way that allowed AMISOM to begin to fight a very robust counterinsurgency to erode al-Shabaab's territorial control. Jones et al note that the inclusion of the Djiboutian and Sierra Leonan troops brought AMISOM troop numbers up to about 17,000; these were in addition to the fighters provided by the TFG (Jones et al 2016: 23).

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, this period (especially by late 2012) saw many successes on AMISOM's part. Jones et al detail some of these important victories at this time: "AMISOM and TFG forces won important territorial victories throughout south and central Somalia, including recapturing the port town of Merka in Shabeelaha Hoose and the towns of Miido, El-Maan, and Sooyac in Jubada Hoose. On September 28, coalition troops advanced toward Kismayo, sweeping in and easily ousting al-Shabaab from its last urban stronghold" (ibid). This operation (nicknamed Operation Sledge Hammer) signaled that AMISOM was able to achieve two important phases of modern counterinsurgency: clear and hold. Unlike previous missions in which al-Shabaab had been temporarily ousted from various towns and cities, this time, AMISOM had the firepower to prevent the group from re-entrenching itself within important population centers: "As in several previous AMISOM operations, al-Shabaab fighters were reticent to engage in conventional battles with AMISOM forces and instead withdrew their forces, probably assuming they would be able to return once AMISOM forces withdrew from the city. But AMISOM countries did not withdraw" (Jones et al 2016: 43).

For the first time since AMISOM came into existence, al-Shabaab was facing a legitimate counterinsurgent force.

Public Opinion

AMISOM gains posed another problem for al-Shabaab – belief in and support of AMISOM rose sharply in 2012 as the counterinsurgency mission began to yield successes. Like virtually every counterinsurgent force in history, AMISOM troops had originally arrived in Mogadishu and faced what Lyall and Wilson (2009) call the identification problem. That is, they knew that al-Shabaab was operating from within the population centers, but they could not easily identify the fighters as opposed to unarmed civilians, since they could not be easily distinguished from each other visually. In addition, AMISOM had another constraint, which is that it was not originally authorized to conduct peace enforcement missions, only peacekeeping missions. This hampered AMISOM's ability to proactively attack known al-Shabaab strongholds; instead, they could only respond when an al-Shabaab attack took place. Of course, being a wily and flexible insurgent group (certainly more flexible than AMISOM, which was constrained by international law and its own mandate), al-Shabaab took advantage of this to wage attacks against AMISOM in a way that would also ensure AMISOM's reputation among civilians – who, as in every insurgency, have to decide the extent to which they will support the government or the insurgents – would suffer tremendously.

From a tactical standpoint, al-Shabaab achieved this by "deliberately engag[ing] in tactics designed to provoke AMISOM into causing civilian casualties" (Bruton and Williams 2014: 53). More specifically, al-Shabaab would fire mortar rounds against AMISOM troops, oftentimes from within a market filled with civilians. In retaliation, and determined to find the source of the mortar fire – especially if the attack had caused casualties to AMISOM forces – AMISOM troops would indiscriminately return fire. One report claimed that the Transition Federation Government's defense minister reported watching "AMISOM forces fire 60 artillery shells, missiles, and mortars into Bakara Market in response to three mortars fired by al-Shabaab" (ibid). AMISOM later tried to amend its image by creating policies against these types of attacks, but the seed of uncertainty was already planted in the minds of local civilians – al-Shabaab would emphasize the civilian casualties caused by AMISOM operations, while AMISOM tried to argue that al-Shabaab would purposely fill the market with civilians who were not allowed to leave, fire the mortars knowing that AMISOM would return fire, and then use civilian casualties caused by AMISOM as fodder for recruitment or, at the very least, encouraging civilians not to support AMISOM and TFG forces (ibid).

The souring of public opinion on AMISOM was not just a local phenomenon. A scathing 2010 Human Rights Watch report detailed the devastating consequences of AMISOM's indiscriminate use of mortar attacks, noting that in fact the mortar attacks could be more discriminating in terms of their targets but that AMISOM did not invest in this technology:

> While mortars can be highly accurate weapons if guided to their targets by spotters or guidance systems, none of the warring parties in Mogadishu have

> employed such methods. Opposition armed groups have indiscriminately fired mortar rounds in the general direction of TFG or AMISOM installations in southern Mogadishu. TFG and AMISOM forces sometimes respond in kind, directing mortar rounds towards the general area they take fire from or simply bombarding areas such as Bakara Market that are opposition strongholds. Such attacks, while of limited military value, cause considerable loss of civilian life and property damage—and have done so for the past three years. (Human Rights Watch 2010: 37)

The report went on to describe one particular period in 2010 during which "a Médecins Sans Frontières-supported [known as Doctors Without Borders in English-speaking countries] hospital in Mogadishu's opposition-controlled Daynile neighborhood treated 89 people for blast injures from indiscriminate shelling in just five days – including 52 women and children" (ibid).

Existing research emphasizes (e.g Lyall et al 2013) the extent to which casualties caused by the counterinsurgent forces are punished more severely by the civilian population as compared with injuries or deaths caused by the insurgent, who civilians perceive as the in-group, even if they are causing them harm. Somalia was no exception – the level of population support for AMISOM in 2010 and 2011 (right before and right at the beginning of the robust counterinsurgency, respectively) was much lower than AMISOM would have wanted. In 2010, 61 percent of respondents agreed that AMISOM and the TFG forces were "'very effective' in stabilizing the country and encouraging reconciliation" (Jones et al 2016: 24). By 2011 – after the Kampala bombings during the World Cup but before AMISOM had made substantial inroads against al-Shabaab – this number rose only marginally, to 65 percent (ibid).

However, by 2012, once AMISOM began conducting more traditional counterinsurgency operations, that number had risen to 77 percent. The actual level of support among civilians, especially those living in Mogadishu, may have been significantly higher – a 2012 survey of residents of Mogadishu "found that an overwhelming 93 percent of respondents reported an improvement in the security situation in the past 12 months, with 4.5 percent saying it had remained the same, and only 1 percent reporting a deterioration in security" (ibid). This rapid turnaround in civilian support – similar to what occurred in Nigeria with the formation of the Civilian Joint Task Force – spelled trouble for al-Shabaab, which would now need to adapt to the new conditions it faced in its conflict with AMISOM, including diminished civilian support.

As I show in the next section, al-Shabaab reacted in a similar manner as Boko Haram did in the same circumstances. The group, which had for the most part, up until it was meaningfully challenged by a robust counterinsurgency, only targeted women specifically and systematically in order to enforce its repressive edicts about women's behavior and appearance in the public sphere, would now change its resource allocation and engage in new tactics to target women – specifically sexual violence, which by all accounts, it had not

used systematically before. The next section describes the changes in al-Shabaab's targeting tactics following the gains made by AMISOM and TFG forces in 2011 and 2012.

4.5 Al-Shabaab's Tactical Changes

As with any insurgent group facing a strong and determined counterinsurgent, al-Shabaab had to rely on the advantages afforded it by its position as the weaker force in the conflict with AMISOM. As I have mentioned previously, the main advantage that insurgents have over counterinsurgents is that they are flexible; they can change targeting patterns, try new things, and see what measures give them the best chance at success against the counterinsurgent, who will be hampered by the military bureaucracy and the laws of armed conflict. In order to survive and to undermine the counterinsurgent in whatever ways it could, al-Shabaab, as I show in this section, changed its targeting tactics, expanding the use of violence against women – particularly sexual violence – in order to frighten civilians out of cooperating with the counterinsurgent and to test the counterinsurgent's resolve.

In earlier sections of this chapter, I demonstrated that while al-Shabaab was extremely repressive towards women, it did not use sexual violence against them, not even when it needed to coerce local women into cooperating with its edicts. Once the group was challenged by a robust and organized counterinsurgent, the tactics the group was willing to use changed dramatically. While human rights watch organizations' reports, U.S. government accounts, and other sources documented the extremely oppressive approach that al-Shabaab had taken to women prior to 2012, none described systematic use of sexual violence as a tactic.

Beginning in 2012, and aligning with AMISOM gains, however, the group began to use both increased sexual violence and increased non-sexual physical violence against women. Hilary Matfess, who helped collect ACLED's Violence Targeting Women data, noted the shift in targeting patterns that occurred around this time: "Between 2011 and 2012, the number of events in which al Shabaab targeted civilians rose from fewer than 50 to nearly 140 events; in 2014, there were more than 200 events in which the rebels targeted civilians" (Matfess 2020: 8). ACLED's Violence Targeting Women data also captured an increase in violence against women specifically during this period; ACLED suggests an increase from four to 12 events of violence targeting women at this time (ibid). However, it is likely that these numbers are severely underreported, both because violence against women is almost always underreported, especially in Somalia, where rape survivors are highly stigmatized by their families and the rest of Somali society, and because many of the external sources that datasets such as ACLED use to collect data on attack patterns simply cannot operate given the significant security risks of the conflict in Somalia. Therefore, I treat these numbers as initial evidence for the shift that I am describing, and which I supplement below with qualitative accounts as well, but I am skeptical that they represent anything close to the real number of events of violence targeting women during this time.

One thing that should be made clear is that, just as with Boko Haram in Nigeria, al-Shabaab's ousting from major population centers or areas of strategic importance (such as

the port at Kismayo) did not mean that the group completely vanished. As evidenced by the ACLED data (and supported by START's Global Terrorism Data (GTD)), the group actually increased its attacks after being ousted from Mogadishu and other cities in south and central Somalia during the AMISOM/TFG operations of 2011 and 2012. Therefore, they retained significant tactical and operational capacity even despite the erosion of territorial control.

Especially given the fact that AMISOM enjoyed substantial population support beginning in mid-2012, al-Shabaab's expansion of its tactics targeting women was, as I show in subsequent sections, a means of undermining the popular counterinsurgent. Rape became much more prevalent beginning in 2012. In an earlier section of this chapter, I cited a 2010 Human Rights Watch report that detailed the many ways that al-Shabaab perpetrated violence against women – including policing their behavior, mandating that they be chaperoned in public (but only by a close male relative), insisting that they wear a heavy abaya anytime they left their homes, prohibiting them from engaging in commercial activity, and forcibly segregating them from men in the public sphere – and that they enforced violations (real or perceived) of these rules most severely. However, the same report did not describe systematic sexual violence perpetrated by the group. Just a few years later, however, Human Rights Watch reports issued in 2012 and 2014 would begin describing the substantial risks of sexual violence women experienced in this period of the conflict – admittedly, much of this risk to women occurred in refugee camps, which were full at this time, and which almost always pose significant physical security risks to women – but both reports also detail significant increases in actual perpetration of sexual violence, forced marriage, and abduction by al-Shabaab fighters.

In researching for its 2012 report, which focused on risks to children (and included young women), Human Rights Watch interviewed several Somalis who described experiencing or witnessing sexual violence perpetrated by al-Shabaab, and also offer a clue as to why switching to this previously taboo form of targeting might have yielded strategic benefits for al-Shabaab, despite the costs to the group in terms of potentially affecting the health of their fighters and almost certain erosion of whatever population support they might have previously enjoyed:

> Al-Shabaab members have assaulted girls and young women in schools, public spaces, and their homes. Because perpetrators of rape and other violence in Somalia enjoy almost total impunity, the victims and their families often have very little power to resist, and those who do face great risks. Victims of rape and their families rarely have anywhere to turn to for support and are at times stigmatized and ostracized within their own communities. [...] Rape by al-Shabaab occurs both within the context of [...] forced marriages and outside (Human Rights Watch 2012: 53).

Unlike in Nigeria, where, by several accounts (including an original interview I conducted with an NGO worker in northeastern Nigeria, which is Boko Haram's stronghold), girls

and young women who are assaulted by Boko Haram fighters are not stigmatized socially and are actually offered quite significant social support, rape in Somalia is highly taboo and stigmatized and rape survivors are generally not welcomed back into society with any support. Even if their families are willing to accept them after they have been raped, the family members generally have no means of getting justice for girls and women who have been raped, and the family may themselves be ostracized socially if it becomes public information that a member of the family was raped. Therefore, threatening to rape female family members or actually following through with such threats is likely a way that al-Shabaab coerced civilians into tacitly or overtly cooperating with them instead of with AMISOM.

The Human Rights Watch researchers emphasized how immensely rape is shamed in Somali society, and how it separates survivors from their social supports and therefore creates rifts in society:

> The issue of rape in Somalia is taboo. There is profound stigma associated with sexual violence and, therefore, victims and their families rarely speak out. Human Rights Watch interviewed one girl and one young woman in the course of this research who described their rape by al-Shabaab members, the former the victim of a gang rape, the latter in the context of a planned forced marriage. A handful of Somali refugees also spoke to us about other incidents of rape perpetuated by al-Shabaab forces [...] Victims of rape and, at times, their families may also face severe stigma and repercussions in their communities (Human Rights Watch 2012: 59-60).

As I discuss in subsequent sections of this chapter, perpetrating sexual violence against women and girls, knowing the social effects it would have, provides evidence of al-Shabaab's intention to terrorize women and girls, and their families, into silence and tacit or overt cooperation with the group instead of with AMISOM. The perpetration of this violence also underscored AMISOM's inability to protect women and girls from suffering in this way.

The threats of sexual violence towards women did not abate during the period following AMISOM's battlefield successes. In a 2014 report, entitled "Here, Rape is Normal," Human Rights Watch detailed the daily risks of sexual violence faced by women both within and outside of areas of TFG/AMISOM control. Given the scope of this project, I focus here on sexual violence perpetrated by al-Shabaab and how this type of violence represents a major departure from the group's earlier tactics, but there is a substantial and ever-growing literature that attempts to explain variation in sexual abuse by peacekeeping troops that readers interested in understanding sexual violence perpetrated by AMISOM troops or in internally-displaced persons (IDP) camps should consult (e.g. Westendorf 2020). By 2014, Human Rights Watch was documenting systematic and wide-ranging forms of violence against women. In areas where it could enforce its previous edicts preventing women from leaving their homes unchaperoned or without their abaya and prohibiting women from participating in market activity, they continued to inflict violence in order to do so. But

just as the 2012 report began to illustrate, the violence against women in the wake of the counterinsurgency successes began to shift in both degree and kind:

> Outside of areas under the control of the Federal Government of Somalia, Somali women and girls face threats of sexual and gender-based violence from al-Shabaab. In al-Shabaab-controlled areas, militants have been responsible for numerous acts of violence against girls and women, including rape, forced marriage, corporal punishment, and killing. [...] The UN special rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, said that Somali women and girl refugees and IDPs reported several cases of female refugees and IDPs, ages 11 to 80, being kidnapped, raped, or forced into marriage by al-Shabaab militias. The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa also reported that girls as young as 12 were being forced into marriage with al-Shabaab fighters, while also being subjected to rape and sexual abuse (Human Rights Watch 2014).

These accounts are particularly enlightening because, unlike Boko Haram's targeting of women, which tends to focus on young, unmarried women, al-Shabaab does not seem to discriminate in terms of the types of women it chooses to target. This evidence thus eliminates alternative explanations that are sometimes posited for targeting women and girls for forced marriage, such as the theory that insurgent groups target women in order to provide fighters with access to women's bodies for both domestic and sexual labor. Rather, the indiscriminate nature of these types of attacks – on women ages 11 to 80 – suggests that the group's use of sexual violence is strategic in another way: it is designed to created rifts in Somali society, attack the masculinity of the counterinsurgents or those they perceive as supporting AMISOM, and terrorize women into being too afraid to cooperate with AMISOM for fear of this sort of violence as a consequence; I will demonstrate this more systematically in the sections of this chapter that address each of my proposed mechanisms.

It is not just Human Rights Watch that documented the differences in al-Shabaab's targeting pre- and post-counterinsurgency and what effects these new tactics might be having. De Brouwer et al – experts in international law – point to the strategic gains that are possible from this behavior: "Al-Shabaab is responsible for a wide range of violence against girls and women, including abduction, sexual abuse, rape, gang rape, exploitation, forced marriage, corporal punishment and killing" (de Brouwer et al 2020: 510). But, the experts note, this violence is strategically beneficial to the group: "Al-Shabaab uses THB [Trafficking in Human Beings] and CRSV [Conflict Related Sexual Violence] as a tactic to terrorize both civilians and the state, not only in Somalia but also in neighboring countries. The sexual terrorism forces those affected into compliance, displaces them from or into strategic areas, enforces cohesion among fighters and even generates revenue through trafficking. (de Brouwer et al 2020: 510-511)"

These accounts demonstrate that, in the face of a strong and robust counterinsurgency conducted by AMISOM, al-Shabaab shifted the tactics that it used against women from a punitive enforcement approach to a much more proactive and indiscriminate (while still

selectively targeting women) approach. In the following sections, I build upon the evidence I have presented here to test the mechanisms I proposed in the theory chapter of this book.

4.6 Mechanism 1: Information Transmission Suppression

To provide a quick recapitulation of the theory proposed and tested in this project – I argue that the type of actor conducting the counterinsurgency matters a great deal for the extent to which they can be undermined by insurgents' targeting of women. Domestic counterinsurgents, who have to be very responsive to the citizens of the locations in which they are conducting counterinsurgency – their own citizens – are most susceptible to being undermined when insurgents target women, because the costs to domestic counterinsurgents are highest for being unable to protect their own civilians. As I showed in the previous chapter, where I examined the case of Nigeria, the Nigerian government paid significant political, monetary, and reputational costs for being unable to prevent Boko Haram's attacks against women. Foreign counterinsurgents from a completely different region of the world, on the other hand, are rarely punished by their own citizens for being unable to protect the women of some country halfway around the world; in the next chapter, I use the case of Iraq to demonstrate this. In this chapter, I am considering a regional counterinsurgent whose mission is supported by a regional international organization.

My theory further posits that if incentives exist for insurgents to try to undermine the counterinsurgents through ramping up violence against women, it is likely to operate through three mechanisms: (1) Information Transmission Suppression – that is, targeting women to prevent civilians from sharing critical information with the counterinsurgent; (2) Emasculation – that is, targeting women in order to emasculate the (usually) largely male counterinsurgents; and (3) Bargaining Leverage – that is, targeting women in order to extract concessions from the counterinsurgent. I argue that in cases where the counterinsurgent is highly susceptible to facing costs from insurgent targeting, we should see evidence that all of these mechanisms operated in the conflict; this is what I demonstrated in the previous chapter. However, as we move on the continuum of counterinsurgent actor away from domestic and toward foreign counterinsurgent, fewer of these mechanisms will bite, because the costs to counterinsurgents from sex-selective violence perpetrated by the insurgent are diminished, and it will therefore be more strategic for the insurgent to invest in different tactics.

In this section, I walk through the evidence for the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism as it exists in the case of Somalia. Recall that this mechanism proposes that women are a very important source of information and that insurgents target women in response to robust counterinsurgency operations for two reasons (1) to prevent women from sharing information with counterinsurgents, and (2) to terrorize civilians in general as a means of punishing or discouraging cooperation with counterinsurgents. Somalia presents a very interesting study of this mechanism, because until now, I have largely characterized al-

Shabaab as being a group that severely constrains women's participation in public space, so the idea that they would participate in any sort of military capacity seems absurd. However, as I demonstrate below, al-Shabaab is very aware of the strategic benefits of using women to gather information, as evidenced by their own systematic use of women as intelligence agents. It is therefore sensible to think that, faced with an increase of counterinsurgents on the ground who would need access to legitimate and high-quality information, they would want to prevent tip sharing between civilians and AMISOM forces.

In order to test the operation of the Information Transmission Suppression hypothesis, I proposed several observable implications:

	Observable Implications for Information Transmission Suppression
OI 1	Targeting by insurgents increases when civilian information sharing increases
OI 2	Clear evidence of a knowledge network fostered by women
OI 3	Evidence suggests that targeting is designed to coerce civilians into silence
OI 4	Men who have or are perceived to have better information are also targeted

Table 4.1: Observable Implications of Mechanism One in Somalia

As in the previous chapter, I have highlighted the observable implications for which there is evidence in the case of Somalia. However, as I have mentioned previously, it is extremely difficult to get a wealth of reliable information about the conflict dynamics to such an as extent as was possible in the previous chapter where I examined Boko Haram, due to both the extreme security risk to researchers and NGO workers who usually are able to provide this information and the general disinterest internationally in al-Shabaab relative to Boko Haram. While much ink has been spilled explaining the violence that reverberated around the world in Nigeria, there has been a much less substantial focus on the violence occurring in Somalia, which has naturally limited the sources available for researchers like myself.

Nonetheless, one of the things that has been made very clear, even from the relatively limited studies that have been conducted on al-Shabaab is that the group is capable of conducting extremely sophisticated intelligence operations. Al-Shabaab has its own intelligence wing, called Amniyat, which brings in information from a wide range of sources and using many complex and sophisticated methods (International Crisis Group 2019). In addition, there is ample evidence that Amniyat uses women as intelligence operatives, despite its otherwise very strict and repressive approaches to women (ibid). This provides support for OI 2, which suggests that the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism is operating in this case.

This observable implication – labeled OI 2 and highlighted in Table 1, suggests that one way to tell whether the mechanism might be operating is to look for evidence of a knowledge network that it is specific to or fostered by women. Indeed, interestingly, in this case, it is clear that the knowledge network is most obviously robust in support of the insurgent

group (although this is not to say that the counterinsurgents may not also be benefiting from information women provide).

Several sources (e.g. Jones et al 2016, Bruton and Williams 2014, Williams 2018) underscore the extent to which Amniyat is a sophisticated and legitimate organization that actually, as one expert put it, is a substantial contributor to the resilience of al-Shabaab in the face of multiple threats from AMISOM to the Islamic State (although I do not examine the relationship between al-Shabaab and the Islamic State) (Anzalone 2016). However (and unsurprisingly, given that a gender lens is not often applied to these groups), there is less of an emphasis on the gendered aspects of al-Shabaab's intelligence collection methods. Nonetheless, there are some important sources that explain the role that women play.

For example, a 2019 International Crisis Group report highlighted the importance of women to intelligence collection for Amniyat, and therefore al-Shabaab at large:

> Al-Shabaab has long relied on its intelligence agency, Amniyat, to monitor threats and carry out attacks. Women have gathered information for the Amniyat since the movement's inception [. . .] One of women's functions is to garner intelligence on government facilities and Somali and foreign troops' bases. Some do business with government and African Union soldiers, selling milk, tea, vegetables and fruit, and gleaning from them information on their military capabilities and other matters. Those troops often supply villages with water and medical services as part of counter-insurgency campaigns, which also brings them into contact with women working undercover for Al-Shabaab. Women tend to have greater access to government-held areas than male counterparts because such trading activities give them natural cover. Women also spy on individuals of interest for the Amniyat. Women traders appear to obtain intelligence on businesspeople's commerce, thus helping Al-Shabaab identify targets for extortion in areas outside its direct control. Women sometimes help facilitate Al-Shabaab assassinations; they give male operatives cover and provide critical information, such as the target's daily routines. According to one former wife of an Al-Shabaab fighter: "They identify locations and guide perpetrators to those locations." Government and foreign troops are increasingly aware of such activity, and have adjusted their security procedures, attempting to deploy more female security personnel at checkpoints. Six women are reportedly serving jail terms after being convicted for offering operational support to Al-Shabaab assassination squads and attackers. (International Crisis Group 2019: 12)

International Crisis Group based these claims on interviews conducted with former wives of al-Shabaab fighters who were intimately aware of the group's tactics and operations; some of whom had actually worked for the group in this capacity. The phenomenon of women carrying out intelligence operations for al-Shabaab was also observed by others who have studied the group, including other authors who interviewed former wives of al-Shabaab, including some who were still sympathetic to the group. These studies also underscored

the ways that women used the "lax security" of AMISOM to gain access to spaces that men would have been unable to access and providing information to al-Shabaab afterwards (Khadija and Harley 2018).

This evidence supports the observable implication that women have a specific knowledge network that is fostered by women. Although it is hard to find documentation about the way that AMISOM collects intelligence, the fact that al-Shabaab relies on women as intelligence agents suggests that they likely have the expectation that AMISOM would do the same – that counterinsurgents who come to provide medical supplies and water to civilian populations are hoping to gain access to information about al-Shabaab during these operations. Because AMISOM was trained by western governments in counterinsurgency procedure, it is likely that they are using the same "hearts and minds" approach used by the west, which relies heavily on service provision as a means of garnering both information and support from civilians.

The second observable implication in this mechanism for which I found evidence is OI 3, which is the idea that targeting is designed to be coercive against the civilian population to demonstrate to them the significant risks they will take if they cooperate with the counterinsurgent, and instead coerce them into silence. The strongest evidence for this observable implication is perhaps the fact that targeting patterns changed dramatically after the counterinsurgents decided to wage a robust counterinsurgency. It is not the case that al-Shabaab would not have been capable of substantial and devastating sexual violence and forced marriage prior to AMISOM's counterinsurgency, but as I showed previously, they did not use this type of violence systematically. Indeed, even perceived cooperation with TFG or AMISOM forces prior to 2011 was largely punished using non-sexual physical violence. This is because individual cooperation here and there with a force that was largely not present and was not able to conduct operations that threatened al-Shabaab's ability to operate was not terribly problematic for al-Shabaab. However, once AMISOM began conducting a robust counterinsurgency, the risks to al-Shabaab of civilian cooperation with the counterinsurgent became much higher, because now AMISOM was both authorized and equipped to act on the information that civilians could provide. The importance of women to Somali society was underscored by an interview that I conducted, in which the interviewee suggested that women were "running the place," especially in areas where they were allowed to work in the market (interview with author, (January 22, 2022)). These women would have their thumb on the pulse of the community; with an increased presence of AMISOM that would benefit greatly from the information these women could provide, al-Shabaab had an increased incentive to silence them, which is what we observe that they do.

However, additional support for OI 2 – the idea that targeting is meant to be coercive – comes from another study that relied on interviews with civilians who had lived in Somalia during the conflict between AMISOM and al-Shabaab. One interview conducted by Ibrahim Bangura essentially confirmed that al-Shabaab had a vested interest in conveying to civilians how serious they were about coercing them into cooperation. Bangura quotes a soldier in the Somali Army, who said:

> "What al-Shabaab has succeeded in doing over the years is to create fear in the minds of Somalis. They have presented themselves as very violent young men who can destroy the women of clans if they are not supported by the clans. They rape and kill women and usually keep them in the groups as slaves of theirs. [...] I saw how horrified the people were and came to understand how the fear tactics that the group uses would make communities support them to avoid carnage" (Bangura 2021: 91-92).

The group's use of violence against women to subdue civilians more generally supports the second part of this proposed mechanism – that targeting women is a particularly effective way to make civilians too terrified to cooperate with counterinsurgents. Therefore, al-Shabaab's shift to a much more indiscriminate and systematic use of violence – especially sexual violence – against women in the wake of the 2011-2012 military operations by AMISOM, as well as their overt threats to communities to prevent civilians from cooperating with AMISOM supports the fact that the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism operated in Somalia.

4.7 Mechanism 2: Emasculation

This mechanism posits that insurgents target women in order to shame or emasculate male counterinsurgents, highlighting their inability to protect the most vulnerable civilians, and conducting attacks that are designed to provoke the counterinsurgent into a sense of despair that they will ever be able to defeat the insurgent. As with the previous section, I look for observable implications, which suggest that the mechanism operated in this case. Once again, I have highlighted in yellow the observable implications for which I find evidence in this case.

	Observable Implications of Emasculation Mechanism
OI 1	Evidence that counterinsurgents feel shame for inability to protect women
OI 2	Decreased civilian confidence in counterinsurgency if women are specifically targeted by insurgents
OI 3	Insurgent propaganda attacking masculinity of counterinsurgent
OI 4	Insurgents attacking areas specifically under the purview of the counterinsurgent along with or instead of softer or "easier" targets

Table 4.2: Observable Implications of Mechanism Two in Somalia

As suggested by Table 4.2, I find evidence for OI 2 and OI 4. I begin with OI 2, which suggests that targeting women leads to a decrease in civilian confidence in the counterinsurgent, which therefore likely also leads to diminished cooperation with the counterinsurgent,

and perhaps even civilian loyalties switching to the insurgent. Although there is limited evidence on civilian attitudes in Somalia, I was able to gather several pieces of evidence that support the presence of this observable implication, and therefore the operation of this mechanism in Somalia.

First, I was lucky to be able to interview someone who served in Somalia as part of a team that advised AMISOM on counterinsurgency techniques and was therefore able to see the challenges of waging counterinsurgency against al-Shabaab on the ground, particularly after it had ramped up attacks against women in response to AMISOM's military offensives. They were able to observe the costs to counterinsurgents of civilian suffering caused by insurgents, especially once the counterinsurgent force was present. The insurgent being able to conduct attacks with impunity in the presence of the counterinsurgent is a clear demonstration to the civilian population that the counterinsurgent is ineffective. Of course, in reality, it is not quite this simple, but the insurgent's ability to undermine the counterinsurgent in the eyes of the civilian population by ramping up attacks once the counterinsurgent is present is one of the major advantages the insurgent has – they can act swiftly, change tactics quickly, and melt back into the population once the attack is conducted. The counterinsurgent on the other hand, is encumbered by heavy armor, often has to operate in larger and very easily distinguishable formations, and of course, is meant to adhere to the laws of armed conflict and other international norms and agreements on the conduct of war.

My interview subject explained this phenomenon in greater detail, but perhaps put it most bluntly when they said, "If you want to prove that your governance model works, people have to trust you, and if you can't protect them in their own homes, then you're not going to have that trust" (interview with author, (January 22, 2022)). In other words, insurgents continuing to attack civilians even once the counterinsurgency has increased in pace and intensity has significant costs for counterinsurgents who continually rely on civilians to provide information. But sex-selective targeting can actually amplify the message that counterinsurgents are ineffective and may cause even more distrust in the ability of counterinsurgents to protect civilians. This interview subject went on to say:

> It plays to your advantage if you're an insurgent if you're attacking people's homes and [. . .] like if someone's going after my wife that's going to rile you up a hell of a lot more than if you're being attacked yourself. Because it's like that's your family, that's your future, like your wife and kids. [. . .] So you're going to get a lot more of a reaction, so yeah, maybe [. . .] targeting women in that respect makes sense (ibid).

This quote echoes others that I heard from interviews conducted for other cases, as well as having a basis in a long history of feminist theory, that targeting women is tantamount to attacking the community overall, which is likely to have a big effect on the extent to which the community is willing to support the counterinsurgent.

The next piece of evidence that these increased attacks were designed to undermine the counterinsurgent by targeting the community's support for and willingness to engage with

counterinsurgent forces comes from Jones et al's report that examines counterinsurgency against al-Shabaab. Although Jones et al do not consider gender at all (as with most studies of counterinsurgency and international security), their explanations for why attacks against civilians (which as I have shown, also targeted women with much more intensity than before AMISOM launched its counterinsurgency) also support my argument that these attacks serve the purpose of diminishing community support for the counterinsurgents and their mission. Jones et al suggest that there are a few reasons for why al-Shabaab altered their targeting behavior:

> The high number of attacks may have been caused by several factors. First, al-Shabaab leaders were likely trying to coerce the withdrawal of foreign forces, particularly AMISOM forces, by punishing their civilians. Second, al-Shabaab may have increased terrorist attacks in order to bait governments such as Somalia and Kenya into overreacting. In past insurgencies, the goal of a baiting strategy is that governments and their security forces are so appalled at the killing of civilians that their military response is excessive (Jones et al 2016: 30).

Some of the specific incidents that Jones et al are likely referencing here are big and notable attacks that took place outside of Somalia, such as the 2013 bombing of the Westgate mall in Nairobi, Kenya. However, the vast majority of increased attacks took place within Somalia's borders, and their description of the ways in which civilian attacks can specifically undermine the counterinsurgent are nonetheless important, and it is even more important to take their analysis one step further. What happens when governments and security forces overreact to attacks conducted by insurgents? As was the case with AMISOM prior to the 2011 shift towards counterinsurgency, their overreaction, which cost substantial civilian lives, also cost them in the court of public opinion. And what is the message that insurgents are fundamentally sending when they target civilians as a means of testing the resolve of the counterinsurgents? That the government and its security forces are incapable of protecting civilians; therefore, it may be safer and better judgment for civilian communities to stick with the insurgents rather than assuming that supporting counterinsurgents will keep them safer in the long run.

Finally, Paul Williams, an expert in counterinsurgency, specifically in Somalia, points out the importance of the relationship between the civilians and counterinsurgents. In a 2016 report he coauthored for the International Peace Institute outlining the continued challenges to AMISOM's mission success, Williams specifically calls out the importance of community support for the counterinsurgent, and suggests that continued civilian insecurity (as with every study I could find that assessed AMISOM's counterinsurgency, he does not distinguish between attacks on women and attacks on men) created by al-Shabaab was a significant hurdle to long-term counterinsurgency success, and that if AMISOM could not keep civilians safe, they would not be able to glean important information from them or enjoy their overall support. Lotze and Williams write: "Effective stabilization requires positive relationships between the peacekeepers and the local population [. . .] Locals are best placed

to identify insurgents and inform a peace operation of militants' movements and routines. Peacekeepers who do not develop positive relationships with local populations risk, at best, operating without optimal information and, at worst, driving locals to collaborate with the insurgents" (Lotze and Williams 2016). This quotation underpins their overall observation that successful military operations against al-Shabaab did not increase security for civilians permanently, nor did they inure civilian populations to the types of attacks the group began to undertake in response to large and important military successes.

The evidence I have provided here demonstrates two things: first, that ousting insurgents from their former strongholds is not sufficient if the counterinsurgent cannot prevent them from shifting to tactics that are designed to expose the insufficiency of the counterinsurgent's ability to protect civilians. Second, that al-Shabaab's shift in the wake of counterinsurgency success by AMISOM was strategic and effective in diminishing civilian support for AMISOM, which in turn makes clear that this mechanism did operate in the case of Somalia.

Before shifting to evaluate whether the third mechanism (Bargaining Leverage) operated in Somalia, I want to briefly provide evidence for OI 4 in this (Emasculation) mechanism. OI 4 is the idea that insurgents would specifically attack in places with high security force presence in order to emasculate the male counterinsurgents and provoke both counterinsurgents and civilians into thinking that they cannot win against the insurgent group, which can shift and contort itself as needed depending on the conflict dynamics it is facing. Once again, I cite my own interview research conducted with a member of the U.S. Armed Forces who served in Somalia. When I asked about the strategic nature of the attacks that al-Shabaab conducted, my interviewee responded: "[it] had a pretty effective strategy, I think, of showing that they had the military superiority to take on Somali bases. [. . .] Their method of [. . .] proving that the government was ineffective in areas of control was with terrorist attacks, but then also providing [an] alternative, and like, filling a power vacuum [. . .] you know, that's pretty effective" (Interview with author, January 22, 2022). This insight, gleaned from being on the ground and observing both AMISOM and al-Shabaab, makes clear that al-Shabaab was willing to attack well-guarded areas where they risked their fighter being killed or captured.

This is particularly strong evidence that this mechanism operated in Somalia, because one might thing that the most rational way for insurgents to respond to military defeat is to use their limited resources to perpetrate attacks in areas in which there is not a significant presence of military forces, so that they can be more likely to be successful. However, this would not have the significant payoff of being able to show civilians that the counterinsurgent is ineffective. On the other hand, attacking under the nose of the counterinsurgent, even if it means that the group will at some point likely pay some significant costs in terms of fighters being killed or captured, sends a clear message to both the civilians and the counterinsurgent that no security force is effective at protecting civilians from targeting by the insurgent group. As Williams and others suggest, this can have the effect of driving civilians to support the insurgent group, as they may perceive that they are better off supporting the group that seems "stronger" in the overall conflict.

4.8 Mechanism 3: Bargaining Leverage

As I suggested in the theory chapter of this project, this mechanism is the linchpin in terms of whether insurgents can fully succeed in undermining counterinsurgents by targeting women. Insurgents will often try to undermine counterinsurgent forces by changing targeting strategies in the face of robust counterinsurgency operations, but whether the attempt is successful depends to a large degree on the extent to which the counterinsurgent's metrics of success depend on protecting women from being attacked by the insurgent.

I also suggested that mechanism 3 (Bargaining Leverage) cannot operate alone, but that it operates in concert with mechanism 2 (Emasculation). That is, once counterinsurgents are duly shamed for being unable to protect women from being targeting by insurgents, they are susceptible to insurgents being able to extract concessions from them. However, mechanism 2 by itself is not sufficient to explain when insurgent targeting of women will actually pose an existential threat to the counterinsurgency mission. In the previous chapter, which examined Nigeria, I showed that, because the citizens of Nigeria were unwilling to support a government whose security forces could not protect women from being attacked by Boko Haram, the original government that had ordered the counterinsurgency mission was eventually voted out, and the subsequent leadership, understanding that there could not be counterinsurgent success without protecting women, eventually capitulated to the insurgents and was eventually forced to the bargaining table, where Boko Haram was able to extract substantial concessions from the government.

In this chapter, I have shown that mechanisms one and two (Information Transmission Suppression and Emasculation) both operated. However, there is no evidence that targeting women allowed al-Shabaab to extract any concessions from AMISOM. This finding therefore supports the overall theory that domestic counterinsurgents are particularly susceptible to this kind of undermining attempt by the insurgent. It is nonetheless important that mechanisms one and two operated in this case, because the change in targeting behavior that we observed in this case once a more robust counterinsurgency was occurring demonstrates that insurgents can and do respond to changing conditions on the ground, and that they may undertake costly action in order to coerce civilians into silence and attempt (even if unsuccessfully) to extract concessions from the counterinsurgent. Perhaps because of their physical proximity, as well as a shared regional identity, AMISOM was more vulnerable to this type of undermining than was, for example, the U.S. in Iraq, as I show in the next chapter. Another important factor in AMISOM's susceptibility to some undermining (but not to such a degree that they had to concede to the insurgent) is that its operation was conducted under the banner of the African Union and supported by the United Nations, which may have added some pressure to the mission when they were unable to protect women within their purview. This is another way that the actor conducting the counterinsurgency matters, in accordance with the theory I propose. As an actor in the middle of the continuum between a domestic counterinsurgent and a completely foreign counterinsurgent, AMISOM was subject to some of the incentives that exist for insurgents to target women, but not so much so that al-Shabaab was able to extract major concessions or battlefield advantages

from doing so.

As a reminder of the observable implications for mechanism three, I include below the table of observable implications that I outlined in the theory chapter of this book. However, as stated above (and as expected based on the theory I suggest), there is no evidence for any of these observable implications in Somalia, which suggests the mechanism did not operate in this case:

	Observable Implications of Bargaining Leverage Mechanism
OI 1	Counterinsurgents speak to being willing to negotiate because of sex-selective targeting
OI 2	Evidence that insurgent is targeting women to create a war of attrition that will lead to better outcomes
OI 3	Interviewees speaking to changed messages and/or resolve of insurgents and counterinsurgents when targeting of women is high

Table 4.3: Observable Implications of Mechanism Three in Somalia

In the previous chapter, which examined Nigeria, I showed how the abduction of girls, beginning in 2014 with the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls set off an existential threat to the counterinsurgents. In Somalia too, al-Shabaab began increasing its use of abduction of girls from schools and homes around the time it shifted its targeting patterns; however, what is very different in this case is that this behavior did not result in any substantial increase in domestic or international pressure for AMISOM to protect women, largely because neither AMISOM nor the home populations that supplied AMISOM troops felt that the AMISOM mission could not be successful without protecting Somali women and girls. As I show in the next chapter, this was even less of an emphasis in the Iraq War.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has covered the gendered aspects of the conflict in Somalia between al-Shabaab and AMISOM from roughly 2010 to 2015, and includes the shift from peacekeeping operations to peace enforcement operations by AMISOM. The evidence showed that al-Shabaab did change the ways they targeted women in response to this more robust counterinsurgency approach, and that they did make investment in sex-selective targeting in order to try to undermine AMISOM, most directly by coercing civilians not to work with AMISOM and diminishing civilian support for AMISOM through sex-selective targeting. These attempts operated through mechanisms one (Information Transmission Suppression) and two (Emasculaton), suggesting that regional and/or regional international organization counterinsurgents are slightly more vulnerable to being undermined by insurgents targeting women. However, because they do not face the existential and immense pressures that domestic counterinsur-

gents face when their own citizens are being targeted, they are less likely to be completely manipulated into having to concede to the insurgent than a domestic counterinsurgent.

As I show in the next chapter, which examines the war in Iraq, focusing on the regions where the U.S. Armed Forces were conducting counterinsurgency, a completely foreign counterinsurgent is even more inured to being undermined by insurgents through the targeting of women. This contrasts with what we saw in Nigeria, in the previous chapter, where the audience to whom the counterinsurgent – the Nigerian government – was responsive (the Nigerian people) would not tolerate continued violence against Nigerian citizens, and therefore the government was forced to concede that the counterinsurgency could not be called successful unless attacks against women could be prevented, and had to actually pay Boko Haram to release girls it had already captured in order to maintain a semblance of legitimacy as a counterinsurgent.

Somalia represents an interesting case that operates in the middle of the continuum between Nigeria, with a domestic counterinsurgent, and Iraq, with a completely foreign counterinsurgent. Having neighbors provide troops for conducting counterinsurgency, especially when the insurgency threatens the sovereignty and safety of the citizens of the troop-contributing countries creates some additional pressure points around gender that can be exploited by insurgents, but clearly not to the extent that we saw in Nigeria. AMISOM is perhaps a somewhat unique case in that regard, but it is important to understand how pressure from counterinsurgents like AMISOM changes incentive structures for insurgents on the ground, since regional international coalitions conducting counterinsurgency may become more the norm as the West, and particularly the United States, begins to withdraw large counterinsurgent troop contingents from their posts around the world.

Chapter 5

Iraq

5.1 Introduction

In 2003, the U.S. invaded Iraq with the intention of toppling Saddam Hussein's regime, and then moving quickly to conduct regime change throughout the so-called "Axis of Evil" that President George W. Bush had introduced in his 2002 State of the Union address (Woodward 2004). Instead, what developed was a complex insurgency that eventually devolved into something resembling a civil war and would lead to devastating instability in Iraq for years to come. This chapter examines the conflict between the United States, a completely foreign counterinsurgent, and its main insurgent target – al-Qaeda in Iraq.

In Chapter Three, I showed that Boko Haram successfully extracted numerous concessions from the Nigerian government and decreased civilian support in both the Nigerian government and the Nigerian military through their use of sex-selective targeting. In the previous chapter, I found that AMISOM in Somalia did face changes to targeting tactics by al-Shabaab in the wake of a strong counterinsurgency, and although al-Shabaab was able to diminish civilian support somewhat for AMISOM, they were not able to fully undermine AMISOM's credibility as a counterinsurgent, nor were they able to extract material concessions from them.

In Iraq the main counterinsurgent was a completely foreign military from a completely different region. Although the George W. Bush administration referred to the forces in Iraq as the "coalition of the willing," and indeed, there were non-Iraqi forces that were also not American forces, the composition of troops was overwhelmingly American (Gollob and O'Hanlon 2020).[1] In this chapter, I examine the U.S. counterinsurgency against al-Qaeda in Iraq, and the incentives that existed or did not exist for al-Qaeda's response to this counterinsurgency.

[1]Gollob and O'Hanlon (2020) break down boots on the ground in Iraq by year. In 2003, U.S. troops made up 141,800 of the total 164,500. In 2004, U.S. troops comprised 130,600 of 155,300, and in 2005, there were 143,800 out of a total of 165,800. This number would only grow over time as other countries (including the UK, which contributed the second-highest number of troops) removed their troops from Iraq.

The theory I have articulated suggests that undermining the counterinsurgent via sex-selective targeting happens through three mechanisms. I find that all three mechanisms operated in Nigeria. This is consistent with my argument that domestic counterinsurgents are most likely to be affected by the insurgent's use of sex-selective targeting. As that chapter demonstrated, the use of violence against women as a costly signaling mechanism is most persuasive against a domestic counterinsurgent who answers to a domestic audience. In Nigeria, one NGO worker who works closely with the government's counterinsurgency effort told me, "of course, it is seen as the government's responsibility to bring back the [Chibok] girls," and that it was the government's failure that the girls had been abducted in the first place (interview with author (May 7, 2022)). Because the Nigerian government was acting within its own borders, the sense of responsibility for squashing the insurgency – and the consequences of failing to do so – were assigned by Nigerian civilians, politicians, and frankly, even the international community, to the Nigerian government.

This contrasts with what happened in Iraq. As this chapter will show, the situation there was a bit more complicated, because the domestic audience to which the counterinsurgent answered was not Iraqi. In order to keep morale at home – and subsequently, support for the war – high, U.S. military commanders had to prioritize protecting American lives, rather than keeping Iraqi civilians, and specifically Iraqi women, safe. This prioritization manifested in the tactics and strategy that the military used in Iraq, which exacerbated security risks for Iraqi civilians. Because the weak spot of the American audience was servicemember deaths, al-Qaeda did not invest heavily in selectively targeting women, and chose instead to invest in improvements to IED technology, which became dramatically more deadly over the course of the conflict (Weisberger 2015). In assessing evidence for the mechanisms I propose in this project, I find evidence that mechanism one – Information Transmission Suppression – did operate. The U.S. military is especially experienced and professional in its ability to protect its sources, however, so in this case the counterinsurgent did a better job obscuring the exact civilians who were cooperating with them. In addition, because targeting women is costly (as I show in the mini-case study of Anbar Province later in this chapter), and because it was not the core means by which the counterinsurgent would measure its own success, the incentives for al-Qaeda to invest heavily in those tactics were diminished.

Nonetheless, the fact that the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism travels across cases is an important finding that underscores women's agency; even in the midst of intense conflict, and even in places where, culturally, women may not have as much freedom in the public or private sphere, they are still important sources of information that can alter the local conflict environment. And, on the whole, they always have agency in choosing to share or withhold the information that they carry. Therefore, it would be remiss of both policymakers and scholars to assume that because they operate within a particularly patriarchal or restrictive social-cultural context, they are merely pawns in a larger game, without any control over their lives or the ways they participate – in favor of either insurgent or counterinsurgent – when placed in the middle of a conflict.

This chapter also illuminates the significant ways that counterinsurgency – despite being framed as a "necessary" war to keep civilians safe or to improve their lives – actually

increases the risks they face. As in Nigeria, but to a far greater extent, the U.S. military presence in Iraq created fractures in Iraqi society that insurgents were able to exploit to their own advantages, and increased opportunities for individual insurgents to attack women. Unlike Nigeria, however, the U.S. military had less incentive to be responsive to any selective violence that took place – and, as I will show, it was not responsive to violence against women that did increase, as a result of the instability created by the invasion, almost from the beginning in March 2003.[2] As I suggested in the theory chapter of this project, engaging in selective targeting is costly to insurgent groups; if it does not undermine the counterinsurgent substantially, it is likely not worth engaging in, which is why there was not substantial variation over the course of the conflict in violence against women, but rather that it stayed at a relatively consistent level.

This chapter proceeds similarly to the previous chapters; however as I have already stated, only mechanism one was present in this case. I begin with an overview of the conflict before explaining why the United States' role as a foreign counterinsurgent incentivized increased investment in technology targeting U.S. servicemembers rather than investing in the costly action of targeting women selectively. I then move to examining the evidence for mechanism one before discussing why mechanisms two and three are not present. Finally, this chapter illustrates why a deep contextual understanding of gender norms is critically important for any counterinsurgent, but particularly a foreign counterinsurgent, and that getting this wrong can have dire consequences for both counterinsurgency efficacy and civilian safety. Because it is important to understand the ways in which counterinsurgency itself can increase instability faced by civilians that insurgents can nonetheless take advantage of, I conclude with an examination of how counterinsurgent presence – and the day-to-day practice of counterinsurgency itself – creates significant insecurity for civilians and legitimates them as targets of violence.

5.2 Scope Conditions and Overview of the Conflict

It almost goes without saying that the Iraq War is an important and substantial conflict in the study of counterinsurgency, spanning more than ten years, three U.S. presidential terms, and involving so many different combatants that it can be difficult to disentangle all of them. Studying this one war could be an entire book project itself, and reading everything that has been written about this conflict would be nearly impossible. Therefore, since it is just

[2]The "fog of war" was very real for the early days of the Iraq War and it is not clear even more than twenty years later when the violence that was occurring that was perpetrated largely by what the Bush Administration called "former regime elements," (i.e. those that had been empowered by Saddam Hussein's regime and were significantly disempowered in the wake of the U.S. invasion) turned into a cohesive and organized insurgency operation. Therefore, I discuss the forms of violence that were taking place for two reasons: (1) to show that when counterinsurgents arrive, insurgents may try different types of tactics as they learn quickly what best undermines the counterinsurgent, and (2) to show that, due to their own preexisting stereotypes, the U.S. military did not take seriously the gender-based violence that did occur in the wake of the invasion.

one chapter in this project, I significantly limit the scope of the conflict. First, I focus only on U.S. troop presence and behavior. Although many countries did provide troops to the "coalition of the willing," as President Bush called it, the United States was the leader in terms of determining military doctrine and strategy, and was overwhelmingly the largest contributor of both material resources and soldiers.

Second, in order to provide consistency between the different groups I study in this project, I focus only on al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) – as I discussed in the case selection section of the theory chapter, all of my cases are focused on groups that share the same ideology. As a result, I also limit the scope of the study to the earlier years of the insurgency/counterinsurgency, before the formation of what would come to be known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), roughly the period from 2003-2008. I also focus only on the areas where there was predominantly U.S. troop presence – Baghdad and Anbar Province – as opposed to other coalition forces. These were also the areas with heaviest fighting, as well as meeting my main scope condition of the predominant belligerents being the U.S. and al-Qaeda in Iraq.

Context

There are many different insurgent groups that operated during the Iraq War. The U.S. counterinsurgency primarily targeted the Sunni insurgency that became known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the predecessor of the Islamic State. AQI, by most accounts, was made up of former Saddam Hussein regime elements who had been fired by the Coalition Provisional Authority headed by Jerry Bremer, some initial foreign fighters looking to take advantage of Iraq's insecurity, and, by late 2003/early 2004, local homegrown Iraqi insurgents looking to take on the U.S. military (Rothkopf 2014). For the most part, AQI's mission was to target and undermine the U.S. mission in Iraq, while the U.S. was equally focused on eliminating AQI (McChrystal 2013).

Although I focus almost exclusively on the Sunni insurgency in this chapter, I would be remiss to ignore the multiple factions of Shia militia groups that targeted innocent Sunni civilians in retaliation for the group's elevation during Saddam Hussein's regime. The soldiers I interviewed who have fought in Iraq described the overwhelming and indiscriminate violence perpetrated by Shia militias. One soldier reported that every morning in 2006, his team would wake up to find multiple hundreds of dead bodies in the streets, the waterways, or in private homes, calling it a "grim thing [...] to count how many people showed up in the morning [at the morgue] that day" (interview with author (February 12, 2022)). Others reported similar experiences – seeing men, women, children's bodies "blasted apart" or killed in other gruesome ways.

A major factor that enabled Shia groups like Jaish al-Mahdi (colloquially known as JAM) or Muqtada al-Sadr's army (known colloquially by U.S. forces as "the Sadrists") to commit this level of violence was both tacit and overt support by the United States. Because the dominant and most threatening enemy for both U.S. forces and the broader U.S. mission in Iraq was AQI and its affiliated groups, U.S. troops initially considered the Shia militia to

be a potential ally in identifying and eliminating al-Qaeda. As matter of policy, the U.S. therefore provided material support and ignored the rising levels of violence. This is not to say that soldiers on the ground were unaware of growing violence, but as one of them told me in an interview, in the very beginning, "we weren't allowed [to call what we were doing] a counterinsurgency" (interview with author (December 28, 2021)). In addition, it is pretty clear that while the Bush Administration hesitated to call the growing violence being observed in Iraq an "insurgency," there were nonetheless indications to the contrary. Initially, it appears that the administration's preferred explanation for continued violence in Iraq despite promises of a quick and easy victory was that there were violent remnants of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath party and the Iraqi Army, both of which had been disbanded very early on by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) headed by Jerry Bremer.

For example, Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, who wrote a book that examines, in-depth, both the situation on the ground in Iraq and the policy decisions in the Bush years of the Iraq War, pointed to a "Red Cell" team that General Casey and Ambassador John Negroponte formed in 2004 to understand why the U.S. military was still facing violence in Iraq. Gordon and Trainor write that the 'Red Cell' was supposed to provide a broader strategic picture of the future of U.S. operations in Iraq and that it was composed of "embassy officials, military officers, and intelligence experts, as well as a few British officers and diplomats" (Gordon and Trainor 2012: 95).

The "Red Cell" reported back that "The United States [...] had not come to terms with the character of the conflict or the lack of coordination of its response," and that "the principal danger [...] came from the Sunni tribes, who needed to be lured into the political system before they fully bonded with the insurgents" (Gordon and Trainor 2012: 96). And the insurgency was no small band of fighters – the Red Cell estimated that there "were eight thousand to twelve thousand Sunni insurgents" who "were seeking to restore their place in Iraqi politics and society" (ibid). Though they did not use that language, the Red Cell was essentially pointing to the perennial problem of counterinsurgency; namely, that civilians who are fence-sitters, choosing between throwing their support behind the insurgents or the counterinsurgents, will be the deciding factor in which party wins. Because of the conception of all Sunnis (the minority in Iraq, who had been empowered by Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party) as being inherently aligned with former regime elements, the Bush administration decided not to engage cooperatively with Sunni civilians, and therefore adopted a much more coercive approach.

5.3 Why Incentives Differ for Foreign Counterinsurgents

One of the important ways that foreign counterinsurgents differ from domestic counterinsurgents is that the audience to which they must respond is not the civilian population with which they are engaging to conduct their counterinsurgency mission. In Chapter Three, I

demonstrated how the success of the counterinsurgency mission in Nigeria came to rest on the return of the Chibok schoolgirls, and how the effectiveness of the counterinsurgency mission was determined by soldiers' ability to protect "innocent" civilians from Boko Haram. Nigerians were protesting in the street over the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls, Goodluck Jonathan lost his presidency in part over his actual and perceived inability to eliminate Boko Haram, and his successor, President Buhari, had to negotiate secretly for several years to return only some of the girls.

On the other hand, in Iraq, the domestic audience to which the counterinsurgent (the United States) was most responsive was not the Iraqi people, but rather, the American people. This meant that minimizing costs to U.S. servicemembers had to be the absolute first priority of the Bush administration – whatever else they might publicly claim about civilian protection – because, while American citizens might tolerate a few thousand or a few hundred thousand Iraqi deaths, they would not continue to support politically any administration that endangered the hundreds of thousands of troops that eventually served in Iraq.

Indeed, polling from this period of the war shows that these concerns of the administration were not exaggerated – one poll conducted in 2007 demonstrated that the average American had a very good sense of how many Americans had died in the war, and could give a fairly accurate estimate (Associated Press 2007). On the other hand, the average American vastly underestimated how many Iraqi civilians had died (ibid). Additional polling showed that Americans never fully came to grasp the cost of the war as it related to the consequences for Iraqis – Gallup's historical trends in polling show that while opinions on the war held by average Americans changed up and down, the trend was that the majority of respondents agreed that Iraq was somewhat or much better off after the invasion than before (Gallup). This also suggests that the main concern that average Americans at home had was about the material cost to the United States, and that their opinion on the war was more likely to fluctuate based on how many soldiers were being injured or killed rather than how many Iraqis were being injured or killed.

Martin Shaw calls this phenomenon the "Western Way of War," and argues that policymakers during times of war have to operate in a risk economy. He suggests that "... risk in war is more than the currency of the abstract risks to groups that are traded in the imagined economies of political debate. It comprises the concrete risks – risks to life, limb, health, social life and well-being – to which real people are exposed. However, what is crucial for the risk economy is not individual experiences of risk as such, but how these experiences are represented and fed back into the understanding of risk in the minds of policy-makers and electorates" (Shaw 2005: 106-107). The biggest risk factor for the two leaders who had most championed the Iraq War – George W. Bush and Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was the immediate danger faced by their soldiers on the ground.

As a result, the war was waged with a primary goal of protecting coalition forces above all else, even if that created the significant insecurities, instabilities, and risks of death to Iraqi civilians that I have outlined in this section. Shaw confirms this, arguing that, even though the United States and the United Kingdom made "both general commitments and

specific preparations to reduce the likelihood of civilian casualties," both countries' military operations "used methods that would lead directly to them" (Shaw 2005: 110). For example: "Few doubted that bombing was very precise by historical standards, but the huge quantities of explosives inevitably caused many civilian deaths" (ibid).

The insurgent is always observing the behavior of the counterinsurgent – and attempting to uncover the counterinsurgent's weaknesses. When the counterinsurgent themselves wages war in way that endangers civilian life, and tolerates high levels of civilian death perpetrated by other insurgents, it is clear to the insurgent that investing in additional means of targeting civilians – and undertaking the costly action of targeting women in particular – is not worthwhile beyond the baseline violence they were already perpetrating. While individual soldiers I interviewed reported being upset by the death they witnessed, and while the U.S. foreign policy apparatus would have certainly wanted to minimize targeting of civilians, it is clear that the institutional forces deciding the strategy in Iraq did not want to make any changes that would protect civilian life at the potential cost of servicemember safety. AQI's observation of these decisions showed them that the weakness of the U.S. military was not, as was the case in Nigeria, if women were targeted, but rather, if U.S. servicemembers were increasingly put at risk.

In addition, a cursory glance at the media coverage surrounding the Iraq War confirms that the Bush administration (and the Blair administration, though I do not examine Blair's actions specifically as I focus on the United States as the predominant counterinsurgent) did everything it could to minimize information about civilian casualties, ensuring, in effect, that it would never become part of the narrative about the Iraq War that was developing at home in the United States. For example, a Reuters article that came out in the wake of a 2010 leak of classified documents addressed concerns that the U.S. government purposely underreported civilian deaths, quoting General Casey, who had been the commander of CENTCOM in 2003 as saying, "'I don't recall downplaying civilian casualties,'" despite documents being leaked that showed undercounting of civilian deaths by at least 15,000 (Stewart and Shalal-Esa 2010).

When the American public began to question the efficacy of the military operations being conducted in Iraq – not because there was a general concern about the social, political, and emotional well-being of Iraq and its citizens, but because the American public had been promised a quick and easy victory and the troops still had yet to return home – the Bush administration began to more closely evaluate the way the mission was being fought.[3] This became especially important as the 2004 presidential elections approached, during which time Bush knew he would be judged by the American public on the U.S. performance in Iraq.

Shaw suggests that one year after Saddam Hussein had been overthrown, the American public – having been promised a quick victory – started to sour on the war, and public

[3]There was, of course, substantial concern about the conduct of the Iraq War in pockets of the United States. However, by and large this did not translate into the national consciousness and was not a core metric of success on which the Bush administration was judged, especially in the 2004 presidential elections.

opinion began to drop. This created significant political danger for the Bush administration, which was up for reelection in November 2004, just a few short months away. It was the concerns about reelection, Shaw argues, and not concern for the high numbers of dead Iraqis, that led to a renewed emphasis on civilian protection in Iraq:

> [The emphasis on civilian life that began in earnest in 2004] had relatively little to do with quantifying the life-risks to which Iraqi civilians had been exposed. It had everything to do, instead, with the risks to which the USA had exposed its own and other international troops in Iraq; the exposure of the thin ideological rationale of 'weapons of mass destruction'; and the counterproductive effects for the risks of terrorism that had framed the war. Only when all three factors had already done huge damage to the credibility of the war and the occupation did violence against Iraqi civilians become – over a year after the war – a serious media-political issue in the USA and UK. Even then the cumulative death toll was much less important than major specific incidents of harm: first the US assault on Fallujah in April 2004 caused widespread alarm, and then in May 2004 the exposure through photographs of abuse committed by US soldiers against Iraqi prisoners was the defining moment at which harm to Iraqis finally became a real issue. It was no accident that these questions became serious after the month in which more US soldiers had been killed than in any previous. Issues concerning Iraqi civilians acquired saliency because the occupation as a whole had gone critical (Shaw 2005: 123-124).

In short, the United States, as the leader of the coalition forces, had started by waging war in a manner that prioritized the safety of coalition force servicemembers above all else because the domestic audience to which they were responsible was more attuned to risks to its soldiers than to everyday Iraqis. As a result, U.S. military planners implemented tactics such as checkpoints, home raids, cordon-and-search protocols, etc., that led to greater insecurity for Iraqi civilians and opened them up to threats from all sides – insurgents and coalition forces alike. When the stability – such as it was – that the Iraqi state had provided before the U.S. invasion fell away with the immediate dissolution of not only all of the Iraqi government but also much of Iraqi civil society, it provided new opportunities for insurgent groups to perpetrate violence against women. Yet we do not observe substantial variation in violence against women over the course of the conflict because it was clear that the violence that began occurring immediately was not concerning enough to the counterinsurgent to warrant a change in strategy. In fact, it was not until insurgents began very effectively targeting U.S. servicemembers that broader concerns about coalition force behavior – including the horrific abuses that took place at Abu Ghraib – were taken into account more seriously.

Bob Woodward, who has written multiple in-depth accounts of the Bush administration's policies in Iraq, explains how quickly the conflict devolved into an insurgency, and how hesitant the Bush administration was to publicly acknowledge it. "From June to August 2003," he reports, "there had been a change in the nature of violent incidents in Iraq. In

June an average of 35 to 38 violent incidents occurred each day, and the U.S. forces would have initiated half of them. In contrast, on one day in August, insurgents initiated 28 out of 33 violent incidents" (Woodward 2006: 244). Data from the organization Iraq Body Count corroborates this. In the latter half of 2003, somewhere between 500 and 1000 Iraqi civilians died from violence each month. In 2004, this number crept closer to 1000 deaths per month and several times even reached more than 1500 per month (iraqbodycount.org). Of course, this would become even worse in the years to come, but it is clear that while the United States was touting "Mission Accomplished," the reality of the mission was very much not-yet-accomplished.

At the same time, Woodward reports, the people who were supposed to be running the transition to an independent, democratic Iraq, were open about their distaste for the Iraqi people. This is a good example of why violence against women perpetrated by insurgents lands differently for foreign counterinsurgents – they do not understand the underlying norms and capacity of the society in which they are conducting counterinsurgency. Woodward recounts one conversation between Jerry Bremer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and Paul Wolfowitz, then the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy (USD-P), often considered the number three position at the U.S. Department of Defense: "Bremer was telling the Iraqis in no uncertain terms that the coalition held sovereignty over Iraq for now. He reports in his book that he told a group of new Iraqi ministers on September 16, 'Like it or not – and it's not pleasant being occupied, or being the occupier, I might add – the Coalition is still the sovereign power here.' He did not try to hide his disdain for the Iraqis. 'Those people couldn't organize a parade, let alone run the country,' he told Wolfowitz" (Woodward 2006: 249).

All of this provides evidence that, despite public proclamations that the war was going well, that the troops would be coming home soon, and that the Iraqis were excited about the democratizing mission the U.S. had deployed, there was, behind the scenes, very little concern at the policy level for the ways that Iraqi life had been severely disrupted by the war. This is not to say that every soldier who fought in the war felt this way. I personally interviewed a number of current and former members of the military who were very interested in what they could do to limit the effects of the war on the communities in which they were patrolling, but a number of them reiterated that they were not allowed to call the violence that they were seeing in these communities "insurgencies."

Woodward corroborates my observation from interviews that, at the policy level, there was a hesitance to acknowledge the escalating levels of violence against Iraqi civilians. He reports on a meeting of the National Security Council[4] in late 2003 where a CIA briefer said, "'according to DOD's own publications there are three characteristics of an insurgency.'" The three characteristics the briefer identified were "popular support, sustained armed attacks or sabotage, and the ability to act at will and move independently. [. . .] [I]n [the CIA briefer's]

[4]The National Security Council refers to the statutory body of Cabinet members and the President and National Security Adviser, as laid out in the National Security Act of 1947. The National Security Council should not be confused with the National Security Staff, sometimes colloquially referred to as the National Security Council, that operates within the White House to advise the President on issues of national security.

view that was the reality, and it needed to be faced. 'I need some more data, Bush said. 'I don't want to read in the New York Times that we are facing an insurgency. I don't want anyone in the cabinet to say it is an insurgency. I don't think we are there yet'" (Woodward 2006: 266).

Bush's own memoir also points to an emphasis on considerations of American life for at least the first three years of the war. He writes that, "[t]he toll mounted over time. America lost 52 troops in Iraq in March 2004. We lost 135 in April, 80 in May, 42 in June, 54 in July, 66 in August, 80 in September, 64 in October, and 137 in November, when our troops launched a major assault on insurgents in Fallujah" (Bush 2010: 357). But it is not until the narrative of the war reaches 2006 in his memoir that he begins to express concern for the civilians dying in Iraq. He writes: "The summer of 2006 was the worse period of my presidency. I thought about the war constantly. [...] I was deeply concerned that the violence was overtaking all else. An average of 120 Iraqis a day were dying. The war had stretched to more than three years and we had lost more than 2,500 Americans. By a margin of almost two to one, Americans said they disapproved of the way I was handling Iraq. For the first time, I worried we might not succeed" (Bush 2010: 367). The violence in 2006 had finally reached a crescendo that could not be ignored, and would eventually precipitate the surge – a dramatic influx of U.S. soldiers into Iraq beginning in January 2007.

There is so much that has been written about the Iraq War that what I have elaborated here represents only a very small sliver of the memoirs, documents, media coverage, and scholarly studies of the war. The main point, however, is that because of the way the United States chose to conduct the war – prioritizing safety for its own forces over safety for Iraqi civilians – it quickly became clear to al-Qaeda what those priorities were. As I have stated elsewhere, insurgents learn quickly, and are able to adapt their tactics. The fact that the U.S. ignored the general violence being perpetrated on Iraqi civilians had a major consequence: by dismissing violence as potentially "normal" in that culture, they were missing important causes of deep insecurity that they as the counterinsurgents were responsible for preventing, making the overall mission to "win hearts and minds" inadvertently much more difficult for themselves. Because, as a counterinsurgent force, the U.S. military operating in Iraq was beholden more to the American public than to the Iraqi public, military operations would open up rifts that, as I show in the next section, insurgents exploited immediately. Although this case specifically examines the United States as counterinsurgent in Iraq, I expect this dynamic – where the counterinsurgent's first priority is to protect its own soldiers rather than the citizens of a foreign country – to play out when the counterinsurgent is a completely foreign government.

5.4 Gender-Based Violence in Iraq

One of the most interesting things about studying gender-based violence during the Iraq War is how difficult it is to dig up stories of gender-based violence that occurred in Iraq. From the U.S. perspective, there was no substantial gender-based violence. Other than being cursorily

mentioned, there are no deep discussions about the gender dimensions of the Iraq War in the memoirs written by key members of the Bush administration, including Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, National Security Adviser and later Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, CPA head Jerry Bremer, and even Bush himself.

In addition, it is clear from existing and available documents that protection of women – and even protection of civilians more generally – was not a core metric of success for the Bush Administration. While conducting archival research at the George W. Bush Presidential Library in Dallas, Texas, I came across an unclassified summary of a November 2005 report written by the National Security Council entitled "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq." The Bush administration actually outlined the specific metrics that would allow the government to know whether strategic progress was being made in Iraq. As stated in the report, they were:

> "Political: The political benchmarks set forth in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1546 and the Transitional Administrative Law; the number of Iraqis from all areas willing to participate in the political process as evidenced by voter registration and turnout.
>
> Security: The quantity and quality of Iraqi units; the number of actionable intelligence tips received from Iraqis; the percentage of operations conducted by Iraqis alone or with minor Coalition assistance; the number of car bombs intercepted and diffused; offensive operations conducted by Iraqi and Coalition forces; and the number of contacts initiated by Coalition forces, as opposed to the enemy.
>
> Economic: GDP; per capita GDP; inflation; electricity generated and delivered; barrels of oil produced and exported and numbers of businesses opened." (National Security Council 2005: 13)[5]

In fact, I looked at as many original documents as I could find, as well as primary accounts from those who were decisionmakers at this time, and the only references to concerns about gender tended to be either around not interacting with women on the ground out of the misconceived notion that gender norms in Iraq were exactly like those in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, or about ensuring that women had the right to vote and participate in government; this was something that the Bush administration considered an important goal, but which also relied on a notion of Iraqi women of having been without any freedom or agency prior to the U.S. invasion. There is virtually no official document or account (that I could find) that outlined any perpetration of gender-based violence, systematic or otherwise.

Yet there is definitive evidence, provided from first-hand accounting and subsequent research, that gender-based violence was occurring in Iraq, and that it began with the U.S.

[5]This document is not available online; I viewed it in person at the George W. Bush Presidential Library

invasion. This may have been an initial attempt by insurgents to try to use sex-selective violence to undermine U.S. forces; however, because insurgents learn quickly and have the strategic benefit of being able to change their tactical and operational strategies, they quickly realized that sex-selective tactics were not helping them make substantial operational gains. This is why we do not observe the drastic changes in form and intensity of targeting that we observe in the other cases I study. Nonetheless, this section demonstrates that there was widespread ignorance of the consistent levels of gender-based violence that was occurring and that the assumption that reports of sex-selective violence that did come into the consciousness of the U.S. military were "normal" in a patriarchal Iraqi culture was deeply problematic for the overall goals of the mission to "win hearts and minds."

In this section, I discuss first, the different forms of gender-based violence perpetrated by insurgents that ramped up when the United States invaded in March 2003. Then, I examine how the presence of counterinsurgent troops and the way that coalition forces conducted counterinsurgency actually increased certain forms of gender-based violence in Iraq, and argue that the United States' approach to gender in counterinsurgency was essentially gender erasure. Finally, I examine the use of forcible marriage by al-Qaeda insurgents in Anbar province, and show why gender-based violence contributed to the Anbar Awakening, in which Sunni Iraqi civilians shifted support from al-Qaeda to counterinsurgent forces, underscoring the ways that gender-based violence can be extremely costly for insurgent groups.

Gender-Based Violence Occurring During the Iraq War

There are two primary reasons why gender-based violence did not garner much attention in Iraq. First, as the war devolved from what was supposed to be a relatively orderly and quick leadership decapitation and transition to democracy into all-out sectarian violence perpetrated by multiple armed actors and counterinsurgency by U.S. and coalition forces, NGOs that normally are able to operate on the ground had to cease their operations. It takes quite a bit for the security situation to fully derail organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, but many human rights-focused NGOs were not able to safely assess the situation and conduct research to the extent that they would have liked from 2004 through the end of the surge.

The second reason, which I will discuss in greater detail later in this section, is that the United States had basically no focus on gender, even as it moved from an enemy-centric to a population-centric counterinsurgency approach with the surge (Kilcullen 2009). Some officials acknowledged that gender-based violence was occurring, but again, these acknowledgments were cursory, tinged with a sense of inevitability, rather than the sense that top U.S. officials could actually do something to mitigate the violence that was erupting all over the country. When it became clear that certain rights were in terrible jeopardy, there was not a strong focus on their protection, nor an understanding of the myriad ways in which the war contributed to their breakdown. Of the invasion and immediate spread of violence following in its wake, Bush writes:

> "I was appalled to see looters carrying precious artifacts out of Iraq's national museum and to read reports of kidnapping, murder, and rape. Part of the explanation was that Saddam had released tens of thousands of criminals shortly before the war. But the problem was deeper than that. Saddam had warped the psychology or Iraqis in a way we didn't fully understand. The suspicion and fear that he had cultivated for decades were rising to the surface" (Bush 2010: 258).

Anyone who has worked on national security issues knows that where the attention of the president goes, there too will go the entire focus of the national security apparatus (Rothkopf 2014). It was clear that protecting women in Iraq was not a priority from the top. Indeed, every single soldier I interviewed corroborated that, doctrinally, there was little to no support for understanding gender relations in Iraq other than "do not talk to the women." I discuss this doctrine and its impacts later in this chapter.

Even though narratives of "liberation" had been used to justify the initial invasion and subsequent war, there did not seem to be a sense that protecting women was on the agenda at all, let alone a priority of any sort. For example, Bush writes in his memoir: "Many of those who demonstrated against military action in Iraq were devoted advocates of human rights. Yet they condemned me for using force to remove [Saddam Hussein]. [. . .] I understood why people might disagree on the threat that Saddam Hussein posed to the United States. But I didn't see how anyone could deny that liberating Iraq advanced the cause of human rights" (Bush 2010: 248). Despite the fact that "liberation" and "advancement of human rights" were given as core reasons for the war, I found little evidence that there was a focus on these ideas as part of the counterinsurgency effort. In fact, some interviewees essentially said that, given the security concerns, gender had to take a backseat, and that they did not really have time to worry about the effects of the war on Iraqi women (interview with author (December 28, 2021)).

Nevertheless, despite not being a core focus, if one looks hard enough, it is clear that gender-based violence was occurring from almost the moment that the counterinsurgency project opened up rifts that allowed insurgents to operate more freely. Despite the oppressive nature of being a dictatorship, Saddam Hussein's regime created a shell of stability that allowed Iraqi society to exist without substantial violence. When the U.S. invaded, the military and foreign policy decision-makers disbanded not only the Iraqi government, but also – due to the decision, ascribed by most accounts to the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority, Jerry Bremer, but ascribed by Bremer to then-undersecretary of defense for policy (USD-P) Douglas Feith – the entire Ba'ath Party, and with it, much of Iraqi civil society. This created substantial social and political rifts that were then exploited by insurgent groups who both wanted to use the invasion as an opportunity to renegotiate the power dynamics in Iraq, and to undermine the entire U.S. mission.

A very important point to understand as well is that, by most accounts, gender-based violence was not any more rampant in Iraq under Saddam Hussein than it is in any developed country today. That is, there does not seem to be strong evidence that women were not allowed to roam freely, to marry and divorce, to work, to seek higher education, to dress

as they pleased, and all of the other freedoms that we ascribe to contemporary Western democracies. Just as in the United States there might be very different norms for women's behavior between urban and rural areas, so too in Iraq there were differences between urban and rural women. But in Baghdad, one of the geographic regions I focus on in this chapter, life for women under the Saddam Hussein regime was not characterized by significant insecurity.

Despite the narrative propagated in the West that Iraq was culturally very patriarchal – and comparisons made to Afghanistan, where the Taliban had severely restricted women's access to and participation in the public sphere – numerous accounts corroborate the fact that women's rights in Iraq were actually quite advanced under Saddam Hussein, and that these rights had been codified in Iraqi law. For example, the women's rights organization MADRE wrote in a 2007 report that, "... characterizations of violence against Iraqi women as 'cultural' in nature de-emphasize the ways that such violence is used as means toward political ends and obscures the role of the United States in fomenting gender-based violence" (MADRE 2007). Human Rights Watch concurred, finding in interviews with Iraqis that, "[a]bduction of women and girls from the streets is a phenomenon Iraqis cite as new: 'This never happened before the war' was an oft-repeated refrain" (Human Rights Watch 2003). This evidence is important for two interrelated reasons – first, it was hard to come across, which means that it was not a core part of the narrative history of the U.S. invasion. But second, it also shows the extent to which, when faced with evidence that gender-based violence was occurring, the U.S. government ignored it, based on the assumption that this type of violence was normal in a "patriarchal" society, which the United States policymaking apparatus understood Iraq to be.

This is one of the main ways in which a foreign counterinsurgent differs from a domestic counterinsurgent; a domestic actor would have a better sense of what type of violence or behavior is normal or common in a given part of its own territory. Even a regional counterinsurgent, as in Somalia, has a better grasp on the norms of a neighboring country. A completely foreign counterinsurgent, on the other hand, does not have the local knowledge or deep understanding of the culture, values, and social mores of the society in which it is conducting counterinsurgency. Therefore, the U.S. government ignored violence that was very much out of character for Iraqi society, due in large part to its misconceptions about that character. This is important because if the counterinsurgent is deemed by the population to be at best unresponsive to the violence they are experiencing or at worst actively facilitating that violence, the counterinsurgent cannot successfully convince civilians at scale to cooperate with counterinsurgent troops. This in turn means that they are likely missing important information that could both more effectively stop insurgent violence as well as keep servicemembers safe.

These NGOs also documented in detail the type of violence that women in Iraq faced, especially in the immediate aftermath of the U.S. invasion. The most common forms of violence that women faced were abduction and rape. It is not always clear from early reports exactly who was perpetrating the violence, because the differences between Shia and Sunni militia groups had not yet become very clear, and some of these groups were referred

to by human rights organizations as more general "Islamist groups." In a July 2003 report, Human Rights Watch documented the way that fear of abduction and rape had permeated the city:

> Throughout the city, Iraqis talk of women and girls being seized from public locations, particularly while walking down the street, even in broad daylight. Out of the thirty or so women and girls Human Rights Watch interviewed in Baghdad, virtually every one cited fear of abduction and sexual violence as justification for not returning to or looking for work, holding children back from school, and in many cases, preventing young women and girls from leaving the house. In late May, women and girls were rarely seen outside in Baghdad, even during daylight hours when male shoppers and workers crowded the sidewalks and streets. Although by the end of June women formed more of a public presence, they continued to tell Human Rights Watch that they limited their movements and remained afraid. Because of the real or perceived prevalence of such attacks, women and girls clearly believe they are more vulnerable than they were before the war (Human Rights Watch 2003).

MADRE, the women's rights organization cited previously, went further, identifying a very broad repertoire of violence that women faced – "including public beatings, abductions, rapes, and assassinations" (MADRE 2007). They noted that the violence "occurred within the context of a rapid erosion of women's legal rights and political participation" (ibid).

Although the Bush administration, and even early on, these human rights organizations, attributed this violence to a more general lawlessness that had gripped the city since the invasion (and in Bush's case, as seen from his memoir as cited above, to the criminals that Saddam Hussein had released on the eve of the invasion), to those who were following closely, it became obvious that the continued violence was not just the kind of criminal activity that observers had previously assumed. Nadje Al-Ali writes that when the 2003 Human Rights Watch report (whose findings I describe below) came out, "most of the sexual violence experienced by women was carried out by criminal groups" but that this rapidly changed beginning in "late 2003," when "politically motivated groups, remnants of the past regime, and Islamist militia and terrorist groups [. . .] also contributed to the general climate of fear through kidnappings and bomb attacks targeting Iraqi civilians" (Al-Ali 2011).

As with most of the violence that took place during the Iraq War, it is not always possible to distinguish which group perpetrated which act of violence, especially because there is little evidence that the main actor capable of monitoring it best – the U.S. military – paid any attention to gender-based violence. However, some groups seem to be more closely associated with specific identifying markers of violence. For example, my interview subjects noted that Shia groups would use particular types of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and that they were more likely to kill civilians using guns, while Sunni/AQI-affiliated groups were more likely to use beheadings to kill civilians (interview with author (December 28, 2021)). In that same vein, from having closely analyzed the conflict and as much information about

the forms of violence that were used, it seems that while there were, of course, cases of gender-based violence perpetrated by Shia groups (Lee-Koo 2011 quotes the MADRE report that "Islamic groups taking revenge on each other by raping women"), in general, it seems that Shia groups were more likely to attack Sunni civilians indiscriminately using mass violence, while Sunni/AQI groups were more likely to target women specifically. Because the violence by Shia groups was tacitly tolerated by the U.S. government until 2006 (that is, while the violence was of course not condoned, there was not a clear plan to prevent its continuation, and the U.S. government continued to work with its perpetrators based on the belief that working with Shia groups would help the counterinsurgency mission), the early targeting of women by AQI may have been a means of testing the resolve of the U.S. government with respect to gender-based violence. Because the U.S. showed greater sensitivity to servicemember death than to violence against women, however, this is likely why we do not see substantial variation in levels of violence against women that co-vary with the intensity of the counterinsurgency mission in the same way as occurred in Nigeria, and to a lesser extent, Somalia.

The one exception to this seems to be that Shia groups were very concerned about sexual minorities and made a concerted effort to target anyone suspected of being part of the LGBTQ+ community. MADRE, the women's rights organization noted that the anxiety about homosexuality extended even to men. MADRE noted that:

> . . . in 2005, the Badr militia began a program of surveillance of unmarried men over the age of 30, threatening the men with violence if they did not get married. Furthermore, because entire communities are called to enforce the ethic of family honor, the framework provides a powerful means of social control over potential victims and perpetrators alike—in other words, over everyone. For example, the Badr militia has ordered male relatives of gay Iraqis to murder their gay family member in the name of honor—or face murder themselves (MADRE 2007).

It is clear that both Shia groups and Sunni groups espoused what the U.S. counterterrorism apparatus would call "Islamist" ideology – that is, a radical and violent interpretation of Islam, but their use of violence in trying to further these ideologies differs greatly. Although I focus this study to the behavior of Sunni groups in targeting women, further research may help elucidate important differences between different types of Islamist groups.

As the MADRE report makes clear, there was concerted and substantial violence against women on the ground in Iraq beginning in 2003. The 2003 Human Rights Watch report did note that some of the violence seemed to stem from criminal activity – such as the case of Muna (name changed by Human Rights Watch), a fifteen year-old girl who was abducted in Baghdad along with her sisters (aged eleven and sixteen), the older of whom was gang raped by the kidnappers, and then held in a house with a number of other young children: "three girls (one approximately age ten, and two approximately the same age as herself), and four boys (two were five or six years old and the other about eleven)." Muna recounted that: "[o]n several occasions, the [kidnappers] brought other people who looked the children over"

(Human Rights Watch 2003 (Climate of Fear)). Human Rights Watch notes that Muna "believed [these people] to be traffickers who were going to bid on the children" (ibid). Having been held at this house for a month already, Muna became convinced that "she and her sisters would be sold to these men," and as a result, "managed to escape when her captors left to get food for breakfast. She ran through fields [...] until she reached a road, then flagged down a car which took her to Baghdad, where she eventually made her way to U.S. soldiers who took her to a police station" (ibid). Human Rights Watch interviewed her just a few days after she had returned to Baghdad, but noted that "she had not seen her sisters since her escape in early June [2003] and feared that they were still in captivity or that they had been sold" (ibid).

Such horrifying stories as Muna's make clear that, in the immediate rupture of law and order created by the U.S. invasion, there were criminals who immediately took advantage of the chaos to pursue human trafficking. But this does not seem to be the full extent of the violence against women, even in the first year of the war, before the violence became more clearly political.

Human Rights Watch interviewed many people – both witnesses to and survivors of sexual violence – and found that many civilians believed there to be an increase in sexual violence after the invasion:

> Human Rights Watch obtained credible information on twenty-five cases of sexual violence and abduction and interviewed four victims of rape and abduction in Baghdad in the period between May 27, 2003 and June 20, 2003. Two of the cases involved girls under sixteen years of age. At one police station that Human Rights Watch visited, Iraqi police officers said that prior to the war they typically received one rape complaint every three months but had seen several cases in the few weeks it had been reopened since the war. Police investigators at the East Baghdad station stated categorically that the number of cases reported was substantially higher than before the war. "It is much worse," said one Iraqi police investigator who asked not to be identified (Human Rights Watch 2003).

The types of cases that they identified in the report were not all consistent with stories like Muna's, where there was clear criminal intent. A number of girls and young women were abducted from the street, raped or gang-raped and then released back onto the street. This had the chilling – and likely intended – effect of keeping women away from the public sphere.

I have provided as much detail as possible about gender-based violence that we know about perpetrated by insurgent groups. Between 2004 and 2006, the security situation in Iraq deteriorated immensely, and it was often difficult or impossible for human rights organizations to track everything that was happening on the ground. However, subsequent scholarship has established that, though it did not become a core part of the narrative of the war, especially the narrative that was propagated in the West, Sunni groups did use violence against women as part of a broader repertoire of violence against Iraqi civilians and coalition

military forces (Lee-Koo 2011). This violence is often difficult to discern against a broader backdrop of significant violence perpetrated by Shia militia groups, the Iraqi police, and Iraqi security forces, that raged until the United States decided to send additional troops in the surge in 2007. However, these AQI-affiliated Sunni groups are the forebears of what would become ISIS, and these are the inklings, in the early years of the Iraq War, of the immense capacity for violence that that group would perpetrate.

Again, because of the difficulty that reporting organizations had, it is difficult to know the exact extent of gender-based targeting. However, it appears that there was some variation in the employment of targeting tactics based on gender. As I have shown, the early years of the conflict featured a good deal of gender-based targeting. As the insurgency coalesced, and it became clear that the counterinsurgent would not be undermined by attacks on women and girls, the insurgents began instead developing tactics to target coalition forces, which led to significant innovations in IED technology (interview with author (November 22, 2021, December 20, 2021, and December 28, 2021)). Of course, groups do not perpetrate exactly the same number and types of attacks every year, but as the U.S. ramped up its counterinsurgency mission, there was not the kind of substantial increase or change in sex-selective targeting that occurred in the other cases in response to increased counterinsurgency efforts. This is consistent with my theory that foreign counterinsurgents are less responsive to being undermined through sex-selective targeting. However, as I will show later in this chapter, there is always a fine line that insurgents have to balance – conducting attacks against civilians can be effective in terms of coercing the civilian population not to support the counterinsurgents, but it can also be costly and in the case of Anbar province, the AQI pushed too hard and too far, resulting in reprisals against them led by the civilians who were no longer willing to be coerced into silence.

The Effect of COIN Presence on Violence Against Women

Although foreign counterinsurgents – exemplified by the U.S. in Iraq – do not tend to judge their own success as heavily on protection of women as domestic counterinsurgents do, their presence in a foreign nation can, in both direct and indirect ways, affect the levels of violence that women experience. As I have stated before, much of this violence was assumed to be a normal consequence of the state of Iraqi society, and therefore did not substantially influence the calculus of the counterinsurgency.

In the previous section, I showed that there was substantial violence against women, focusing on violence perpetrated by AQI. The space for AQI to commit violence against women with impunity was opened up because of the invasion of Iraq. However, there is another way that the project of counterinsurgency led to increases in gender-based violence. This occurred through the mass detention of women, leading to an increase in honor crimes against them. I discuss this in the interest of providing a full picture of the consequences of counterinsurgency, even one in which the counterinsurgent's priorities do not directly increase the incentives for insurgent groups to invest resources in tactics that target women. Again, because the U.S. foreign policy apparatus neither prioritized prevention of gender-based

violence nor considered the ways that its own practices of counterinsurgency were changing the security situation for women specifically, the project of counterinsurgency indirectly had substantial impacts for women. This is important because the ways in which violence against women was actively facilitated by counterinsurgent policy is part of the broader contextual backdrop against which civilians had to make decisions about which combatant to support.

The U.S. military in Iraq very quickly developed a carceral program for investigating those Iraqi civilians they suspected of being insurgents. As in Nigeria, the frustration of facing the identification problem was reflected in the approach to civilians. As in the case of Nigeria (and Somalia), the process of everyday counterinsurgency was invasive and intimate, and treated Iraqis with a high degree of suspicion, even if it meant endangering civilian life. As the insurgency grew in late 2003 and into 2004, and as it became more organized and capable of attacking both U.S. forces and Iraqi civilians, the U.S. military became even more desperate to extract information from the Iraqi civilians they had in custody. Antonius Robben quotes an Army intelligence message from August 2003, which stated, "The gloves are coming off regarding these detainees" (Ricks 2007 quoted in Robben 2010). Robben goes on to note that, "[a]s the armed resistance expanded and US troops were killed in rising numbers, all Iraqi adult males became suspect. They were sent by the tens of thousands to understaffed prisons such as Abu Ghraib" (ibid). But it was not just men who were held in these detention centers – "inmates included women from their teens to their seventies" and "around 60,000 people were held by US and Iraqi security forces without charge or trial" as of November 2007 (ibid). The approach was clear – hold civilians if there was any suspicion that they had in any way supported the insurgents – particularly the Sunni insurgents – even if that meant depriving them of the due process that the United States prioritizes so highly.

Many of these detainees were held for long periods of time, but even when they had been released, they were still not safe from being detained again. One interviewee told me that the innovation of keeping a clear database of civilians who had been detained and questioned took quite a while: "In Baghdad [. . .] I mean, literally learned to like, look through their wallets, pull their cell phones down and look at the numbers that were there. We didn't do any of that stuff, question them enough – how many ways, there are to spell Abu Muhammad? Like six hundred, so we can pick up the same dude ten times, enter his name ten different ways, and never knew we had the same guy" (interview with author (March 23, 2022)). All this shows that the United States, holding tens of thousands of people in detention, some without being charged with any crime, did not have a good process for managing these detention centers, and that they led to the harassment of thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians.

The detention centers were especially problematic for women, who – as the evidence around the abuses at Abu Ghraib demonstrated – often faced threats of or actually experienced sexual violence, torture, and humiliation at the hands of the detention center guards. Men in detention also often faced these abuses, but because of the perception in Iraqi society that a woman's honor had been violated by her being detained, the fact of her detention was significantly more threatening to her life than it was for male civilians.

While it may have always been the case that the stigma attached to rape was so high

in Iraqi society that women could have been killed for reporting a rape to a family who believed that her violation resulted in a stain on her honor to the extent that she needed to be killed, the reality of Iraq before the U.S. invasion was also that sexual violence was relatively uncommon – or at least, was not being perpetrated en masse against civilians on the streets. Once abduction and rape became more commonplace after the invasion in March 2003, honor killings also rose significantly. In the next section, I describe the consequences of U.S. counterinsurgency forces' erasure of gender, but the result was that they did not take action against insurgents perpetrating violence against women. At the same time, because of the widespread sexual abuse or threats of sexual abuse that women faced in detention, coalition forces who detained women for suspicion of being an insurgent or supporter of an insurgent were directly threatening her life. In fact, the perceived slight on the family's honor was so life-threatening to a woman who had been detained that she often had to choose between the risk of being killed by her family in an honor killing or continuing to risk sexual violence and other forms of abuse or torture at the hands of the prison guards running the detention centers (Al-Ali 2011).

Both of these dangers were very real. MADRE reported that "[i]n October 2004, Iraq's Ministry of Women's Affairs revealed that more than half of the 400 reported rapes since the US invasion resulted in the murder of rape survivors by their families" (MADRE 2007). MADRE also went on to explain that because of the "extensive documentation of the sexualized torture of detainees by US forces in Iraq," families believed (often with good reason) that a woman who had been held by U.S. forces had been raped, and that therefore she would have to be killed (ibid, Human Rights Watch 2011 report).

U.S. and coalition forces fed into this fear by intentionally detaining the wives of suspected insurgents in order to use them as bargaining chips (Al-Ali 2011). This is a similar counterinsurgency tactic as one the Nigerian government employed against Boko Haram. In Nigeria, it led to retaliation by Boko Haram. Similarly, in Iraq, there is no evidence that detaining family members of suspected insurgents yielded anything useful, but it certainly had the effect of making those women more insecure, and opening them up to the possibility of death by honor killing. This type of violence against women occurred largely because U.S. military planners and policy officials did not investigate carefully the cultural norms that they might be activating or exacerbating by enacting broad counterinsurgency policies. Some accounts suggest that the tradeoff of protecting U.S. troops at the cost of civilian security was known. Robben cites Shahid (2005): who quotes an Army captain who said, "'We're not going to risk the lives of one of our soldiers to be more culturally sensitive'" (Robben 2010). Because the ramifications of counterinsurgency policy would only become significant for the counterinsurgents if they put their own troops in danger, rather than the lives of the civilians, the need to make adjustments to their doctrine in order to prevent the increased gender-based violence that their presence and behavior was causing did not become clear. Although the honor killings were perpetrated by insurgents, and in some cases, Iraqi civilians, the cases of this particular type of violence nonetheless demonstrate the ways in which foreign counterinsurgents may have a higher tolerance for violence that results from their practices than do domestic counterinsurgents, who will be more easily punished by

the population for their failure to keep women secure and for being overly brutal in their counterinsurgency practices.

5.5 Gender Erasure in Iraq

My theory argues that against the backdrop of counterinsurgency, which itself creates a very insecure environment for civilians and legitimates them as targets for insurgents, insurgents can use gender-based targeting tactics in ways that undermine the efficacy of the counterinsurgency mission. Specifically, I posit three mechanisms, which I called (1) the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism, (2) the Emasculation mechanism, and (3) the Bargaining Leverage mechanism. In Chapter Three, which examined the case of Nigeria, I showed how all these mechanisms operated, and that as a result, Boko Haram was able to use sex-selective targeting to not only undermine the Nigerian government, but also extract substantial concessions from them. In the previous chapter, where I evaluated these mechanisms in Somalia, I found that two of the mechanisms operated, but not the third, resulting in changes to targeting behavior as a result of a strong counterinsurgency effort, but not full success in undermining the overall counterinsurgency project. In this chapter, I show that, due to the U.S. practices of counterinsurgency being developed to prioritize protection of coalition forces, it did not make sense for al-Qaeda to invest substantially in sex-selective targeting tactics in the face of a more robust counterinsurgency effort. Rather, as I demonstrated earlier, there was instead a more concerted effort to invest in development of technologies that threatened coalition soldiers, since prevention of servicemember deaths was one of the highest priorities for the U.S. foreign policy apparatus.

I conducted approximately fifteen in-depth interviews with soldiers who fought in Iraq. They inhabited different roles – from infantry to intelligence officers. There are some who have become academics, others who worked in policy after completing their tours in Iraq (and often, Afghanistan as well). Overwhelmingly, they told me that they were not really aware of much of the violence that I described in previous sections of this chapter. A couple of interviewees who have studied Iraq or who worked on counterterrorism policy when ISIS became the dominant insurgent force in Iraq were aware that AQI was using gender-based targeting over the course of the first several years of the war, but all of them told me in no uncertain terms that from their perspective, it was clear that, doctrinally, gender had no role to play in the counterinsurgency mission in Iraq.

Some of my interviewees, who served in Iraq after the decision to surge troops was made in 2006 and after surge troops began arriving in 2007 did describe some "cultural" trainings that included discussions of gender, but these trainings had a clear message: do not talk to Iraqi women, do not look at Iraqi women, they do not exist for you. As one interviewee described it:

> [...] My perspective is that first Iraqi deployment in 2009 – so by that time there was significant emphasis in training on what those cultural barriers were.

> And, for example, by 2009 we were training with and deploying with what I think the Marine corps was calling at the time Lionesses or Female Engagement Teams attached to a ground combat units or infantry units and a lot of the training involved integrating deeply so that if you were in a counterinsurgency environment where you had to, you know, can make sure that everybody was disarmed or not a threat or whatever the case is, you did not have US or coalition military males performing searches or segregation, you know segregating different groups of people across a compound or an area you didn't have males doing that, with in this case Iraqi females, because that was a cultural, you know that was verboten, That was a big, no, no, and so I think there was significant emphasis and sustained to and probably learned from a lot of hard lessons up until 2009 (interview with author (November 20, 2021)).

This particular soldier served in Iraq in 2009, by which point there was at least some training on how to interact with the population. Another interview subject, who served just after the invasion, corroborated this, saying that not only was there no training on how to interact with women, the general interactions with civilians, including men, were pretty fraught:

> So when we [. . .] invaded, none of the marines or soldiers that I observed, or that I went North with were prepared to deal with the Iraqi population. We had no interpreters to speak of – we had some free Iraqi force guys, some of them didn't speak any English. And that was it. So our interactions tended to be at gunpoint, I will – [. . .] there will be one or two people like me who could speak a decent amount of Arabic to get through. So even just having a language barrier was a serious problem, but there was no understanding across the entire force that we were there to fight a counterinsurgency operation (interview with author (January 20, 2022)).

Other interview subjects who served earlier, when asked about a focus on gender, responded that there had been essentially no meaningful discussions about gender. As one interview subject put it when asked about gender in the COIN doctrine:

> Okay, not, I mean, never – none that I can – let me see. I mean, there may have been a couple token members of the, you know district council, some provincial councils that were put on. But in the main, I mean the only experience we're having with women is like herding them out of the way when we're conducting raids at night, and you know there's obviously not a lot of nuanced conversation going on (interview with author (December 28, 2021)).

This sentiment, in general, was echoed by my interview subjects, even those who were very introspective about gender relations in Iraq. Some of them provided examples of ways that they had tried to be thoughtful about gender relations while serving, but the overwhelming

takeaway was that doctrinally, even after the surge doctrine, there was not a huge emphasis on understanding gender relations in Iraq.

Due largely to the U.S. experience in Afghanistan, combined with the lack of cultural training as detailed by my interview subjects, there was a general assumption that Iraq was a deeply patriarchal society, which, as I showed in the section above, then fed into the dangerous notion that the type of violence that women faced in Iraq, the challenges that – in particular, widows and families with young girls faced – were a normal part of life in Iraq. In that way, even though insurgents did not appear to overwhelmingly invest in using gender-based targeting as a significant tactic, the low-to-medium levels of violence that were likely occurring at some levels of constancy went unreported or significantly under reported, and no tactical or strategic changes were made by coalition forces to mitigate it.

Some interviewees were either aware or had themselves observed that Iraq, and Baghdad in particular, was not always as patriarchal as it became once the invasion began and insurgent forces began to unleash atrocities on the civilian population. One told me when asked about observations of gender in civilian life:

> I got the sense that you Iraqi women were still largely part of civil society, like there were schools for women, there is secondary and tertiary education, women there were winning on the neighborhood advisory council. Clearly, in a subordinate position to two men in any of those roles – there was clear gender segregation in all parts of life that, like that that was there, but women were out at shops, they were occasionally driving cars and it's like – it struck me that Iraqi women, at least in that part of Baghdad had degrees of independence that they enjoyed probably to a degree before the American invasion (interview with author (November 22, 2021 and December 20, 2021)).

This sentiment was echoed by those who served in Iraq – particularly in Baghdad – early in the war. One interviewee told me that, with the remnants of nightclubs and restaurants, Baghdad seemed like "somewhere I'd bring my wife" (interview with author (March 23, 2022)).

Even with these observations, it is almost inevitable that the "Iraq is patriarchal" view became dominant in my interviews. As several scholars of gender in Iraq have pointed out (Enloe 2010, Lee-Koo 2011), the nightclubs, salons, and other businesses run by women were unable to survive, in the long-run, the invasion and subsequent targeting by insurgent groups. In my interviews, even those who did not subscribe to the notion that Iraq had always been like this used the word "patriarchal" to describe gender relations. One interview subject (also quoted previously) said:

> I mean it was – it was obviously patriarchal, I mean I didn't fully understand it with the nuance I know now, but you know, in just the fact that we're not interacting with any of the women is a pretty obvious indicator of you know, the state of gender relations. And then that's pretty universally true I don't

> remember it being any different out in the country side, or you know out in rural Fallujah or rural Anbar than it was in Kadhimiya or Shu'ula. I would say that's a that's a fairly constant experience (interview with author (December 28, 2021)).

This particular interview subject did not attribute the patriarchy to norms inherent to Iraq, however. He suggested that insurgent violence and counterinsurgent presence did account for the lack of women:

> I mean [...] the use the threats and or use of sexual violence can always be extremely effective in targeting not only the women, but then indirectly the men. You know the, the honor culture and shame of having your women dishonored is historically extremely effective. [...] I think that's, that's the counter to the fact that we didn't see any women under 60 on the streets is they were kept home to protect them from this sexual violence. And therefore you only saw men and old women, maybe children, now that I recall, you would see children. But no, no, sexually mature women under you know sixty-ish would you see on the street (ibid).

Because the interview population I was able access myself – largely very highly-educated and those who served in multiple roles – was as a result of their education and experience able to be more critically thoughtful and introspective in their responses, they did not necessarily represent the mainstream understanding of gender in Iraq.

To get a better sense of advice that was being given to mainstream soldiers serving in Iraq, I read through dozens of issues of service organization magazines. In the September-October 2004 issue of Armor magazine, here is the advice that First Lieutenant David Tosh offered to fellow soldiers serving in Iraq:

> Another aspect to consider is how females are viewed in this society. Soldiers must understand the local customs concerning women. What we may consider as being polite or a gentleman, such as a wave or a smile, may have dire consequences for the woman, inflicted by her husband or father. In the United States, it is considered rude to whistle at a woman, but here, it is downright forbidden. Soldiers must remember to avoid unnecessary eye contact or unnecessary social contact with Muslim females. While a Muslim woman may smile or wave in return she will most likely be assaulted later for doing so (Armor 2004: 41).

This aligns with what other interview subjects told me was their approach to women in Iraq – essentially, pretend that they do not exist. One interviewee (quoted previously) who attended and later helped develop cultural sensitivity trainings, told me that the U.S. approach to gender in Iraq relied heavily on problematic "tropes" that furthered the notion that Iraq was a heavily patriarchal society:

> A lot of that also boiled down to kind of tropes where you know the training would focus on how to avoid women and not offend women, not offend men, you know, through their women. And, and they would be you know we would talk about and reinforce this idea that women belong to the men and not that you know not really understanding the women is independent people. Because that was that was what was available to us in the public domain, you know about Iraqi women is that they were always covered up you never talked to them you don't touch them you don't go near them you don't you know you don't have any interactions with them. And it took many years for us to evolve past the point of those kind of you know 'hey hands off' is the best approach to actually getting our women on our side involved through the female engagement teams and other activities to learn and engage with the women, you know as people you know and. And not treating them as objects and I don't mean mistreating them, just like not you know pretending that 50% of the population didn't exist (interview with author (January 20, 2022)).

These tropes were nearly universal in my interviews and in much of the literature about Iraq. Yet a deeper examination of Iraq before the U.S. invasion shows that women actually had many rights that eroded during and after the Iraq War (e.g. Lee-Koo 2011, MADRE 2007). U.S. doctrine, however, leaned into the tropes that my interviewee mentioned, and operated from the perspective that Iraq was, by nature, a "patriarchal" country.

There is likely a nearly un-ending stream of evidence that shows the extent that U.S. military doctrine went to in essentially erasing the experiences and perspectives of women in Iraq. This meant that, when gender-based targeting occurred, soldiers were not really aware of it, and were therefore unable to mitigate it, or to understand the motivations that underpinned it.

With this understanding that gender, despite whatever broad assertions high level officials, including President Bush, may have been making about women's rights or gender equality in Iraq, was not at all a significant consideration and that the most common advice to soldiers was to ignore the presence of women (except when they had to be searched for weapons or bombs), we can now begin to see why it was therefore not strategic behavior for al-Qaeda to invest substantially in targeting women selectively. In addition, this section has shown that the erasure of women's experiences by the counterinsurgent – more likely to occur when the counterinsurgent is completely foreign and does not possess deep knowledge of the target country's culture and norms – created insecurities for women that were not addressed by the United States. In the next section, I now turn to evaluating the mechanisms that operated and those that did not operate in the case of Iraq.

5.6 Mechanism 1: Information Transmission Suppression

As a reminder, the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism posits women have important information that is useful for counterinsurgents and that it is different from the information that men have to share. Insurgents may then target women in order to prevent information sharing by both women and men. In any counterinsurgency, but most especially in a case where the counterinsurgent is foreign, information about who the insurgents are, what they are planning, and from where they are operating, is critical to counterinsurgency success. Both insurgents and counterinsurgents need the support – be it overt or tacit – of the population, and insurgents and counterinsurgents can win population support by using both cooperative and coercive methods. In the pre-surge phase of the Iraq War, the U.S. military and coalition forces relied more heavily on coercive methods, including checkpoints, house raids, searches, mass detention of civilians, etc.

I find in every case – Nigeria, Somalia, and Iraq – that women have important information that is both useful to counterinsurgents and different from the type of information that male civilians usually share.

	Observable Implications for Information Transmission Suppression
OI 1	Targeting by insurgents increases when civilian information sharing increases
OI 2	Clear evidence of a knowledge network fostered by women
OI 3	Evidence suggests that targeting is designed to coerce civilians into silence
OI 4	Men who have or are perceived to have better information are also targeted

Table 5.1: Observable Implications of Mechanism One in Iraq

In this section, I show that, just as in Nigeria and Somalia, women in Iraq had useful information that was differently valuable from the information that men shared with coalition forces. The fact that this mechanism operates in every case is important because it shows the ways in which women can maintain agency in a conflict, no matter how oppressive the combatants are towards them, or how repressive and patriarchal the social norms within which they operate.

In Iraq, one advantage to the way that the U.S. military conducts operations is that sources are better protected than the women who, for example, served with the CJTF in Nigeria, which meant that it was more difficult for AQI insurgents to pin down exactly where information was coming from. Both secondary research and my own interviews also suggested that the U.S. military did not consider women to be critical sources of information. Even though individual commanders suggested that they did provide important information, the gender erasure performed by the military apparatus meant that, systemically, the counterinsurgent did not pursue information from women in the same systematic and rigorous way in which they pursued information from men. Therefore, the U.S. military did not, by

its information collection methods, encourage investment in technologies of coercion by AQI that specifically targeted women.

Because women were banned from frontline combat at the outset of the Global War on Terror (as declared by President Bush in the 2002 State of the Union address), the development of the practice of using women for counterinsurgency processes was a bit ad hoc. Some researchers suggest that what came to be called the Lioness program in Iraq came before the development of the Female Engagement Teams, which were first launched in Afghanistan (Beals 2010). However, the Lioness program was not an official Department of Defense-sanctioned program, whereas the Female Engagement Teams were trained by the U.S. Marine Corps and deployed alongside infantry units in Afghanistan. Regardless, the development – both officially and unofficially – of the practice of having female soldiers perform searches, as well as having them accompany male soldiers on missions to elicit the population to share information with coalition forces was an acknowledgement that women have important information to share, and that the counterinsurgency efforts would benefit from women's perspectives. However in Iraq, for the period of time I study in this chapter, the formalization of this acknowledgment came too late to be truly effective.

It is a bit unclear when exactly the need for what would become Female Engagement Teams was first discussed at the policy level, however. As early as 2004, general guidance (for example, in Armor magazine) was that "females must be searched!" but also that those searches needed to be conducted by female soldiers (Armor 2004: 38). This is not hugely revelatory – even in the United States, airport security is sex-segregated such that a female-identifying passenger will not be hand-searched or patted down by a male Transportation Security Administration officer. So it is clear that those norms and boundaries around physical contact were, for the most part, respected from almost the outset of the invasion. Eventually, however, it became clear that the process of procuring information from women could also only be handled by female counterinsurgents – women and their families were not comfortable with foreign men with guns and bulletproof vests talking to them.

The innovation of the Female Engagement Teams as official units came in Afghanistan first, but some of my interview subjects suggested that individual unit leaders figured out the need for sex-segregated intelligence reconnaissance by themselves in Iraq. One interview subject (previously quoted) who served as an intelligence officer in Iraq told me this story, which provides clear evidence for OI 2 from the Table 5.1:

> I had an early experience with that in 2004. I was working out of Ramadi, and I was [redacted for anonymity] but I was also doing a lot of engagements around Ramadi, and we would patrol out into the countryside and engage with some of the families right outside of our base, and I would go to this one guy's house and we would bring, you know, a squad of marines – of ten or twelve marines, and we would go out there, we would have a meal with him. We'd have tea and [. . .] the women would be in the back room away from us nowhere near us. They would just bring food out and then they would disappear, they would be covered, and so they were not entities to us. And it never – I'll criticize myself –

> it never occurred to me to try to take advantage of what they were experiencing and their knowledge. And a couple of female marines who had been aware of the fact that we were doing these patrols came up and said, "Hey Sir, you know, we would love to go out with you on one of these patrols." So this is early 2004 – this is well before we had the, I think before we had any female engagement teams. [. . .] These two female marines came out with us, and I said, "Okay." You know, I was an intelligence officer, and I said, "Why don't you just go in the back with the women and talk to them or just listen to them and see what they say?" And I didn't really ever get anything of use out of the guy except having a, you know, pleasant engagement with him, but when we came back from that meeting the two female marines had to be debriefed by one of our human intelligence people because they just got this deluge of information from the women who really had wanted to talk with them, and I think it was those early experiences that led us to kind of collectively slowly come to understand that the best approach was not to ignore or be afraid of engaging with them (interview with author (January 20, 2022)).

That women were able to provide actionable and important intelligence became clear, especially in interviews with and through reading materials written by those who had to work with the intelligence they got from civilians. When asked why the information that women provided was different, the same interview subject continued:

> . . . [Women] were pretty frank about who was supporting the insurgency and who wasn't they would tell us about mistakes that we were making that the Iraqi men would not tell us about. For various reasons, and so we were able to identify things that we didn't even know we were doing wrong [. . .] Iraqi women to a significant extent are isolated within their family group, and they have their mother and their sisters and they stay just, all of them will go to one house during the day and sit there and smoke cigarettes and cook and things like that, but they don't have opportunities to engage in with the broader community that often, and so this was a chance to speak to people as well, they just would open up (ibid).

Although it was not clear from my interviews that this description of Iraqi women's lives accurately captures the experiences of all Iraqi women, it is nonetheless the case that being at home with the entire family unit during most of the day would lead to a wealth of information being shared between women from different parts of the family. Being primarily based in the home (especially during the highest peaks of violence, when women would have been safer at home) meant that they were able to keep track of who was coming and going from their homes, what conversations the men were having, and what the observations were of other women who lived in different parts of the city.

Another interview subject who could not reveal the exact locations in which he had operated, since he served as a special operator who hunted down high value targets, also noted

that women had a different level of situational awareness when wandering their community, and were therefore able to pick up on details that men would not, but which would be extremely useful to counterinsurgents trying to map the neighborhood and identify locations where insurgents were hiding, or where they had stashed weapons caches that they would later use to attack coalition forces. His words also provide important support for OI 2, which was evidence of a knowledge network fostered by women:

> So, okay, so if ultimately you want good information, if the person, the informer is good, right? Like what? It – I would put it this way. [...] Ask a dude, "Hey David, like, What's the scoop?" He's going to give a particular viewpoint. But if you ask his sister, his sister might actually have a very different point of view and experience just because, you know, her experience, try it. It's very different. So in Iraq, given their position as well, I would say it's because lots of men take women for granted and assume that they are kind of passive or passive observers or whatever. I mean, I haven't. But the fact is and also it's an insecure environment, right? Unsafe. That puts a huge burden on you as a woman or as a young girl to learn, get, collect as much information as you can just to get from point A to point B? Yes. Same information and same information sources could be very valuable in understanding dynamics [...] They have to pay attention to safety issues. But also, I think in those environments, [they] have a heightened sense of awareness, situational awareness. You have to. That's how they navigate. (interview with author (February 24, 2022)).

This enhanced situational awareness provided important information for the counterinsurgency mission. But one interview subject pointed to another reason why it was so useful to talk to women – they did not have to manage the politics of the triangle between the civilians, the insurgents, and the counterinsurgents the way that their husbands did. Because both insurgent and counterinsurgent forces were trying to glean information from the population, both sides were watchful and wary of civilians, and were constantly trying to assess each household's loyalty. The task of carefully balancing both parties – appearing neutral to each, or providing just enough information to each so that both parties would leave members of the household alone – fell to the men, as the head of the household. Because women did not have to (and were not generally allowed to) play a public-facing role in terms of representing the family to coalition forces or to AQI, they were less constrained in sharing the information that they had, especially if they were supportive of the counterinsurgency.[6]

[6]Some may take this as evidence that Iraqi society was in fact quite patriarchal. However, it is likely not that different from any other society that is dealing with high levels of violence perpetrated by both insurgents and counterinsurgents. Even in a Western society, were such a thing to occur, it is not unimaginable that the main individuals who would be interfacing with violent extremists and foreign counterinsurgents who could only communicate through interpreters would be men. Some interviewees even expressed this sentiment with regard to their own families, noting that if foreign men were raiding their homes in the middle of the night or trying to get their wives alone to talk to them, they too would start to feel deeply insecure.

Of course, the reverse of this would also be true – since women did not have to appear to be neutral toward or openly supportive of the Americans and other coalition forces, they were also free to support AQI by providing incorrect information, shielding members of their community who were fighting on behalf of the insurgents, and even pushing their husbands and sons to join the insurgency, as one interview subject told me. In this way, they exercised quite a lot of agency, even if it did not manifest in the form that Western scholars, in particular, might think of it.

The idea of women as information gatherers is not new – especially in the context of Iraq. Some scholars explain that in Iraq, there actually is context for the expectation that women might have specific and valuable information about family and social life. In her book, Iraq in Wartime, which covers the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s, Dina Khoury notes that women played extremely important roles under the Ba'athist Regime – some women participated actively in defense and production of defense materiel, alongside men.[7] But only women were empowered as informants within communities. Khoury writes:

> The importance of women to the business of reporting and monitoring dissent was clearly articulated in 1981. At a Revolutionary Command Council Meeting in December focused on reorganizing the party's security services, the [General Federation of Iraqi Women] was called upon to visit the families in more "conservative" areas where male party cadres were not welcome. [. . .] Thus, as a matter of policy, the Federation was enlisted as an arm of the party and the state to penetrate the family domain. The mechanisms employed by the local branches of the Federation in addition to female party members included regular visits to families of soldiers, dissidents, deserters, and prisoners of war. [. . .] In addition, women visited families of martyrs and prisoners of war and reported any criticism of the regime or the war effort and any expressions of support for outlawed political parties (Khoury 2013, 80).

This complicates the idea that women in places that the West considers to be patriarchal or where women may predominantly exert influence inside, rather than outside the home (though again, this was not the case in all of Iraq) cannot still be conveyers of critical information. Women's roles as the carriers of important information about social ties, local politics, and familial relationships cannot be eliminated just because a society tends to be more repressive toward their actions in the public space; nor is it as simple as assuming a particular social context is patriarchal or not. The United States eventually learned this, and, through the Female Engagement Teams, did at least in Afghanistan attempt to engage with local women as part of a broader counterinsurgency effort; however in many places it was too little, too late.

It is pretty clear from the evidence I have provided here that the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism did operate in Iraq – women had important information and they

[7] See also Lisa Blaydes' research on Iraq

did share that information with the counterinsurgents, even if the counterinsurgents did not seek it in a systematic way. However, one of the reasons – and here the U.S. military must be given substantial credit for their operational planning and execution – why information sharing by women did not lead to substantial increases in sex-selective targeting is because of the extremely professionalized intelligence collection apparatus that the U.S. runs. Because the U.S. is able to protect its sources, it did not become common knowledge that women were in fact a source of information for coalition forces.

The United States military has a strict procedure for running sources and is very aware that intelligence sources are literally risking their lives, and that any misstep on the part of the intelligence officer could get someone killed. It is not surprising that the clearest examples of women providing actionable intelligence came from those who served in roles where they would have had regular access to intelligence and whose job it was to collect that intelligence. As another interview subject told me: "The Army rules are like, pretty strict about who can [...] try to run sources and who can't. And so informal discussions and conversations are fine. [...] But anything that really approaches running a source, or like asking somebody to meet [...] that was really frowned upon [...] for good reason" (interview with author (February 12, 2022)). In fact, in describing the process that intelligence operators have to go through to convince someone to serve as an official intelligence source made clear that the professionalism and bureaucracy of the U.S. armed forces likely meant that sources were able to remain safely anonymous. The Army "at least [tries] to train people to do it and like, certify you before you're supposed to [run sources] because you'll get the person killed [...] if they do it wrong" (ibid).

As described in the previous chapter, the civilians who were working with CJTF were much more easily identifiable and it is not clear that the Nigerian military would have had the capability – procedurally or technologically – to keep their sources safe. The ability of the U.S. to keep sources secret may be one reason why, despite the fact that there were some women who were clearly cooperating with coalition forces in Iraq, their cooperation did not result in significantly increased gender-based violence. In fact, as I have shown, many soldiers who served in Iraq were actually unaware of women having provided information, and were not involved in general with running sources, as that was managed by those who were trained to be experts in intelligence collection.

5.7 Mechanism 2: Emasculation

While it is clear that the first mechanism operated in Iraq, because of the priorities of the U.S. military, the decision-making apparatus was less sensitive to being undermined by targeting of women specifically. The second mechanism I propose posits that targeting women in the presence of the counterinsurgent emasculates them, shaming them for being unable to protect the most "vulnerable" members of the community. In Nigeria, where it became clear that protection of women was a core metric of success on which the population was judging the counterinsurgents, Boko Haram was able to successfully undermine civilian

confidence in the Nigerian military and extract concessions from the Nigerian government by targeting women. In Iraq, it became clear quite early on in the conflict that investing in technologies and tactics to target women selectively would not help al-Qaeda successfully undermine the counterinsurgent, because protecting women specifically never became a core metric of success, and as I have discussed previously, much of the violence that did occur against women was ignored by the decision-makers and military planners.

I include below a reminder of the observable implications for mechanism two, but do not find strong evidence for any of these observable implications.

	Observable Implications of Emasculation Mechanism
OI 1	Evidence that counterinsurgents feel shame for inability to protect women
OI 2	Decreased civilian confidence in counterinsurgency if women are specifically targeted by insurgents
OI 3	Insurgent propaganda attacking masculinity of counterinsurgent
OI 4	Insurgents attacking areas specifically under the purview of the counterinsurgent along with or instead of softer or "easier" targets

Table 5.2: Observable Implications of Mechanism Two in Iraq

I did ask each interviewee about what it means to witness violence and whether violence perpetrated against women lands differently. While none of them expressed feelings of shame or inadequacy themselves for being unable to prevent such violence, some of them did note that they understood the impacts of violence against women and children on their psyche through the lens of their roles as fathers and husbands. However, unlike in Nigeria, there was not a general sense that the mission was doomed to fail because of gender-based targeting. In Nigeria, protecting civilians from Boko Haram became the core mission after gender-based targeting, whereas in Iraq, the mission shift from rooting out insurgents to what came to be known as clear-hold-build under the Petraeus Doctrine occurred not because the mission was being undermined by gender-based targeting, but because not winning hearts and minds was leading to increased violence against and endangerment of U.S. troops on the ground.

I asked my interview subjects about the impacts of gendered violence on them and their units. Several of them invoked their roles as husbands or fathers in explaining how personal that violence could feel. One interview subject essentially said that, as a man, he "[couldn't] think of a greater personal affront than a threat against a wife or children" (interview with author (November 20, 2021)). The same interviewee said that, "of course," it lands differently when women and children are targeted by insurgent violence, but also pointed to the need to protect civilians generally in order for the mission to succeed. Another interview subject had a very vivid perspective on how his role as a father of a daughter affected his experience of the violence that he witnessed in Iraq:

> Interviewee: If you've seen a suicide bomber [. . .] it affects you in a particular way because, I mean, they're just civilians, right? [. . .] And also in Iraq, it also makes us feel very guilty because it's our responsibility. It's our, it's that – it's on us. We failed. So I don't know about everyone, but something we've talked about when we see civilian casualties, right? Like it doesn't have – it's not just like – kids, we have a particular reaction, right? Dead and injured kids, right? But it's not just because it's kids, it's because kids kind of personify the most powerless. And our reaction always [. . .] when this shit happens, like, it's just we get so angry, right?
>
> Author: But do you think that there is the difference between like women shopping in the market who were killed versus men shopping in the market, like in terms of how that lands?
>
> Interviewee: You know. So, I mean, a suicide bombing. You're just angry because they're just powerless and nothing like that scene, you know? Yeah. It's lots of dead bodies and dead people walking because they're going to die in a few seconds too. So, I mean, I'm a dad. So I think that changes how we view things too. [. . .] I have a daughter. [. . .] That's a particular, you know, like we don't think about it, but it's just because like, it shapes how we relate to things and people, right? [. . .] Really think, I mean, everyone should think that way, but I think we are kind of more attuned to seeing power relations in a way because we have daughters.
>
> Author: And do you think that's true just generally, like it was – like these were conversations that you're having with your Army buddies even around like gender violence in Iraq?
>
> Interviewee: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we're fuckin' dads, right?
>
> Author: A lot of my friends have kids, I can see that it changes your outlook.
>
> Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely, it fundamentally changes [you]. And I think having daughters, you know, I mean, not everybody [. . .] but. . . yeah. (Interview with author (February 24, 2022)).

Although the scope of this project focuses on violence against women, several interview subjects pointed to their role as fathers and violence against children as being the most

traumatizing, or in some cases, as the interviewee quoted above, they thought about gender-based targeting as fathers of daughters specifically. The effect of violence against children on counterinsurgent morale is an avenue for future research, but clearly seemed to have a strong effect. Another interview subject who served in Iraq told me:

> Look, I think – you know that there are a lot of Americans who did make terrible mistakes and did bad things in all [. . .] wars that we've participated in. But, for the most part, I saw – with some exceptions, I saw some pretty bad behavior – but people who care deeply about other people. You know, and a lot of time – it was mostly fathers who could relate to being a father, and especially if children were hurt or something like that – were protective of Iraqi families. [. . .] I think, you know, certainly, having children get hurt was traumatic for a lot of people, and that was going back to 2003. You know, seeing children killed. I know guys who have pretty severe PTSD because of, you know, seeing children's bodies blast apart and things like that are burned – whatever, I mean, I have some bad memories from that too. I mean, it's – it really bothers you to see that (interview with author (January 20, 2022)).

In general, my interviews elucidated immense respect for Iraqi civilians, and many of my interviewees had reflected deeply on their experiences, and were careful about overly generalizing their comments. These interviews made it clear that at the individual level, soldiers could be deeply affected by what they were seeing, and the sense of failure when they saw civilians – particularly women and children – targeted could be profound.

If my interviews demonstrated a great deal of a felt sense of protectiveness of "innocent" victims at the individual level, they also showed that civilian targeting did not register as hugely problematic at the policy level until 2006, when the sectarian violence that followed the bombing of the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, Iraq by AQI reached its peak. One interview subject recounted being part of a briefing for a senior U.S. military officer about the sectarian violence in Iraq, the senior official commented that, "This cannot stand, we've got to do something about this," to which the briefer had no choice but to respond, "Do something about it?! Fuck, sir – it's already done!" (interview with author (April 26, 2022)). In other words, by the time U.S. military officials began noticing and worrying about the excessive violence in Iraq, it was already too late to stop it, and tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of Iraqi civilians were already dead.

For the most part, the people I spoke with who had served in Iraq were responsible for executing the mission, not planning it. The fact that the people responsible for writing military doctrine and planning military operations considered gender-based targeting to be a normal part of Iraqi life meant that there was not a strong and significant emphasis on civilian protection until much, much later in the war (Lee-Koo 2011, Human Rights Watch 2003). In addition, the American public was (perhaps intentionally) not kept abreast of the effects of violence on civilian communities and women in particular. All this meant that, even though violence targeting women occurred at some consistent level (with spikes after

the invasion and then again before the Anbar Awakening that I discuss in the next section), it did not serve the insurgent as a means of undermining the counterinsurgent, and was therefore not worth the significant cost of allocating resources to tactics targeting women specifically.

5.8 Mechanism 3: Bargaining Leverage

In the third mechanism that I propose, I suggest that insurgents might target women as a form of costly signaling or as a means of extracting concessions from the government, as Boko Haram was able to successfully do in Nigeria. It is only once insurgents are able to leverage sex-selective targeting into actual concessions that they will have successfully used targeting of women to undermine the counterinsurgent. Only counterinsurgents for whom the protection of women has become strongly tied to mission success will be willing to offer material concessions to the insurgent group; as I have discussed at length in this project, the type of counterinsurgent for whom this is most likely to happen is a domestic counterinsurgent.

	Observable Implications of Bargaining Leverage Mechanism
OI 1	Counterinsurgents speak to being willing to negotiate because of sex-selective targeting
OI 2	Evidence that insurgent is targeting women to create a war of attrition that will lead to better outcomes
OI 3	Interviewees speaking to changed messages and/or resolve of insurgents and counterinsurgents when targeting of women is high

Table 5.3: Observable Implications of Mechanism Three in Iraq

I also proposed that mechanisms two and three go hand-in-hand. That is, unless women are narratively framed by either insurgent or counterinsurgent to be "innocent" and "vulnerable" and their targeting to be unacceptable, the third mechanism, which exploits the symbolic value that women have to the insurgent, is likely not to operate. This is exactly what I observe in Iraq. Because the U.S. military's approach to gender, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, was to ignore women, pretend they did not exist, and refuse to consider the complex gender dimensions of the conflict, gender-based targeting did not undermine the counterinsurgency, and therefore, there was no bargaining leverage to be gained by targeting women.

5.9 A Case Study in the Risks and Benefits for Sex-Selective Violence for Insurgents

In this chapter, I have demonstrated why the mechanisms I propose in explaining insurgent targeting of women are most likely to operate in cases where the counterinsurgency mission is carried out by domestic counterinsurgents, as I find that, in general, the U.S. orientation toward gender in Iraq dissuaded insurgents from using gender-based violence as a means of undermining the counterinsurgency. However, a core assumption in my theory, discussed in Chapter Two of this project, is that gender-based violence can be costly for insurgents, and insurgents face a problem of asymmetric information. Some amount of violence against civilians can be coercive, especially when insurgents cannot determine who is supportive and who is not (Kalyvas 2006). On the other hand, too much coercive violence can, as we saw in Nigeria, tip the scales to the other side and cause the population to band together with the counterinsurgents, even if they are seen as outsiders and are, in their own way, coercive. In the case of the Anbar Awakening in Al-Anbar in Iraq, this is exactly what happened.

Even though the mechanisms I propose do not operate in the same way in Iraq as in Nigeria, in that we do not observe substantial variation in violence targeting women, the example of what happened in Anbar highlights the reason that there is a big risk-benefit tradeoff for insurgents of targeting women. Al-Anbar, home to both Ramadi and Fallujah, two cities with high levels of AQI activity and the sites of several important battles during the Iraq War, is a Sunni-majority province in Iraq, and was therefore used by AQI as a home base for planning and executing military operations. This led to U.S. incursions into Anbar, which then further sustained AQI's mission to target the United States military. As a result, there were significant military operations in Anbar over the course of the Iraq War, resulting in what the Bush administration and the military called the Anbar Awakening, during which the local Sunni tribes banded together with American military forces to oust AQI from their province.

AQI initially thought that Al-Anbar would be a good safe haven for them because as sectarian violence raged against Sunni civilians and coalition forces tried to forcibly weed out insurgents, Sunni civilians would, AQI assumed, throw their support behind the insurgent group, since they at least shared a religious identity with them, even if they did not espouse the exact same ideology. To a certain extent, AQI was not wrong about this. The Bush administration's rigid approach to Iraq – holding that the Shia, who had been oppressed under Saddam Hussein were the "good guys" and needed to be empowered while the Sunni, who had been empowered by Hussein were the "bad guys" who needed to be hunted down – initially fed into the narrative that AQI tried to perpetuate. As a result, civilians in predominantly Sunni areas, which only grew more and more homogenous as Shia militias summarily executed Sunnis en masse, did, to varying degrees, support AQI. However, coalition forces made incursions into these areas, such as Al-Anbar province, and, as all counterinsurgents do, tried to – by coercion and cooperation – entice the civilian population into working with them. Fearing that they would lose their hold on the population's support, AQI became even

more coercive against the population, which eventually resulted in the population's support tipping the other way – toward the counterinsurgent.

Part of the theory I present is that targeting women is a high-risk/high-reward strategy for insurgents, and that while they can reap significant rewards from gender-based targeting, they face an information problem; namely, that they do not know the exact amount of coercive gender-based violence that the population will tolerate before they explicitly flip their loyalty to another actor. The case of the Anbar Awakening demonstrates this perfectly. Although not one hundred percent attributable to sex-selective targeting, AQI's behavior toward women was nonetheless a contributor in the population reaching the tipping point where they would no longer tacitly support the insurgent, even if they saw the insurgent as being part of their in-group (in the way that, for example Lyall et al 2013 describe). As AQI's anxieties about the loyalties of the local populace grew, they increased gender-based coercive tactics – in this case, forcible marriage into local Sunni families – as a means of coercing the population to continue supporting them. Both my own interviews and existing scholarship suggested that forcible marriages contributed heavily to the tipping of Sunni tribal loyalty from AQI to coalition forces. For example, one interviewee explained:

> ...what really defeated [...] and contributed significantly to the awakening movement was the abusive nature of Al Qaeda in Iraq behavior primarily between [...] mid-2005 and mid-2006 and they became increasingly – you know, they would steal from the population, they started controlling the black-market networks and taking money out of people's pockets forcibly marrying themselves to local women, rape, murder, a lot of murder, torture, killing children. Both indiscriminately and purposefully in order to make points to various people and eventually that led to a series of, kind of, growing awakenings [...] so they defeated themselves to a significant extent (interview with author (January 20, 2022))

This account is corroborated by Mattis (2009), in a book about the Anbar Awakening based on deep interviews with both Iraqis and Americans. Mattis quotes an American soldier who also explained that AQI overreached in terms of their coercion toward the population:

> ...the enemy, they were so stupid. They made mistake after mistake. [...] And as the enemy cuts of the heads of young boys, as they kill a sheikh and leave his body to sit out there in the August sun for four days, as they continue this sort of behavior, these forced marriages, what you and I would call rape, where they marry someone for three or four days, these are all telling...And so eventually these mistakes, and our forbearance, pay off, and in a very short period of time, all of a sudden the tribes realize whose side they're really on, and it all shifts (McWilliams and Wheeler 2009: 32-33)

These mistakes benefitted coalition forces, and showed the very real consequences for insurgents of overly coercing the population.

One could write – and many have – an entire book on the Anbar Awakening. Many small, additive factors contributed to the eventual result of the changing loyalties of the local Sunni tribes in Al-Anbar province; in this very small case study, I have shown just one of these many factors. More importantly, this case demonstrates that there is in fact, a tipping point of how much violence a population will tolerate, even when they perceive that the insurgent is part of the in-group (for an explanation of why in-group/out-group differences matter, see Lyall et al. 2013), and even when they believe that the insurgent is acting in defense of the civilian population. The insurgents, however, do not know at what point civilians will stop tolerating being targeted for violence by insurgents and begin supporting the counterinsurgent; the case of what happened in Anbar province is exactly why targeting civilians – and specifically women – is a high-risk/high-reward endeavor.

5.10 A Note for Policymakers on the Securitization of Civilians

Though the object of this chapter is to evaluate the extent to which insurgents invested in tactics perpetrating violence against women that occurred in Iraq, and the extent to which the counterinsurgency was responsive to that violence, my research in writing this chapter also uncovered many ways in which the presence of a counterinsurgency is deeply destabilizing for civilians. The takeaway from this chapter's finding that because the U.S. was more sensitive to servicemember death than violence against women, there was less investment in and variation of violence targeting women should not be that foreign counterinsurgencies are essentially harmless because they do not necessarily overtly invite violence against women as part of a mechanism to undermine the counterinsurgent. Earlier in this chapter I detailed the ways in which the behavior of the U.S. counterinsurgency affected women's safety and security; here I briefly detail how U.S. counterinsurgency practices made civilians more insecure overall. These are important tradeoffs to consider from a policy perspective, especially given that the justification for counterinsurgency incursions by foreign militaries often rests on notions of paternalism or protection of innocent, or liberation of oppressed peoples.

Civilian Deaths

If it seems obvious that the presence of counterinsurgent troops caused the securitization of civilian communities in northeastern Nigeria, this phenomenon manifests even more clearly in Iraq. In Nigeria, counterinsurgent troops responded to an existing and growing threat posed by Boko Haram. In the case of Iraq, coalition forces descended into a country where they did not speak the language, did not understand the culture or local norms, and where they undoubtedly opened up rifts that led to extreme levels of violence.

The first and most obvious way in which civilians' lives were made insecure by war was by being killed. Many systematic efforts have been undertaken to document the number of civilian deaths in Iraq. Getting an exact number is impossible, but Iraq Body Count

(iraqbodycount.org) is the most cited by scholars of the Iraq War. One scholar demonstrates the glaring disparities between different sources, noting that "[a]t least 40,000 civilians were killed between March 2003 and June 2006 according to Iraqi press reports, while a demographic survey [Iraq Body Count] estimated that around 600,000 civilians had died from the violence during this period" (Robben 2010). Of course, not all of these deaths were caused by counterinsurgent forces, but the Western narrative of the Iraq War tends to focus on troop numbers and servicemember deaths, rather than civilian deaths, and the cultural narratives of the Iraq War in the west therefore do not often grasp the extent of the suffering of Iraqi civilians. This claim is not speculative – for example, a 2007 Associated Press/Ipsos survey of American adults found that the average American vastly underestimated the number of Iraqi civilians that had died since the invasion in March 2003 (Tirman 2012). The true number by that point was, at the very least, close to or surpassing at least 100,000 – the median answer to the question of how many Iraqi civilians had died was 9,890 (ibid).

Eric Bonds, whose 2019 article examines compensation claims that Iraqi civilians filed with the U.S. military for family members who had been killed and property that had been destroyed by U.S. military operations, identifies four main ways that Iraqi civilians were killed directly by U.S. forces. The first was when Iraqi civilians would drive their cars too quickly or too close to a checkpoint. Bonds notes: "Soldiers would fire on vehicles in these situations because insurgents sometimes loaded cars and trucks with explosives. But Iraqi civilians, with no connection to the insurgency, were also sometimes fired on because they failed to understand U.S. soldiers' warnings or commands to stop or slow down due to language barriers and cultural differences" (Bonds 2019). The next most common way that Iraqis died was "by getting caught up in a firefight or simply being in the vicinity of an exploding weapon, that is, by becoming 'collateral damage'" (ibid).

Bonds also points to a lesser examined cause of death for Iraqi civilians – traffic accidents. He writes that while "crashes are an important cause of mortality in almost every society throughout the world," the types of "large, heavy, armored vehicles that U.S. forces operated in Iraq dramatically increased the risks for civilians driving there. In addition, the files indicated that U.S. forces often failed to obey traffic laws or widely shared norms when driving, resulting in crashes" (ibid).

Finally, mistaken identity was the fourth most common cause of death by U.S. forces who in the initial phase of the counterinsurgency operation, were largely using house-to-house searches and checkpoints to identify, locate, and arrest individuals suspected of being connected to the Sunni insurgency. During these intense, intimate, and invasive operations, soldiers would often assume that anyone acting in a way that they considered suspicious was an insurgent. Bonds provides an example from a compensation claim that this family later filed:

> The individuals mistaken for insurgents sometimes included children, as is exemplified in one file describing a 2005 raid of a home occupied by a woman, her daughter, and two sons. The eldest son was detained, and a bag was placed over his head, which was a typical practice U.S. forces used to disorient potential in-

> surgents that they captured before interrogation (see McCoy 2006). Seeing this, the youngest son tried to flee and was shot to death. U.S. solders also confiscated money and other property from the house, which they presumed to be connected to the insurgency (ibid).

This example is just one of many that Bonds discusses, and is just one of the 488 claims that he examined that were obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Another way that civilian life was severely affected was through military air and ground operations. The constant sound of bombs dropping creates many feelings of insecurity and trauma among the civilian population, and there is no evidence that I could find that this was considered by military planners. In addition, there are specific types of weapons which, when used, are more deadly. A 2003 Human Rights Watch report pointed to the "widespread use of cluster munitions" that "caused at least hundreds of civilian casualties." These types of weapons "[contain] dozens or hundreds of submunitions" and are particularly threatening to civilian life "because of their broad dispersal or 'footprint,' and the high number of submunitions that do not explode on impact" (Human Rights Watch 2003). The Human Rights Watch report cited Central Command's (CENTCOM) own report that it "used 10,782 cluster munitions, which could contain at least 1.8 million submunitions" (ibid). The report is also filled with stories of civilians whose family members were killed by bombs that were intended to target homes and safehouses of Saddam Hussein's regime, but which were, for whatever reason, mistargeted at civilian homes. A particularly devastating story is that of Dina Jabur, a then four-month-old baby whose home was hit by a bomb dropped by coalition forces. The seven other members of her family died in the explosion; she survived only because she was thrown from the wreckage of the house and found "in a neighbor's garden." (Human Rights Watch 2003).

To their credit, U.S. military officials did try to both limit civilian casualties as well as review actions that had unintentionally resulted in civilian deaths. In his memoir, General Stanley McChrystal, then the Vice Director for Operations on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and later, head of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), which killed AQI leader Zarqawi, writes:

> In planning every air strike, we performed painstaking analysis to estimate the risk of possible noncombatant injuries or deaths. Computer-based algorithms calculated estimates for potential unintended civilian casualties. To provide the most informed analysis of the risk, these took into account the sizes and blast ranges of the explosives, the probability of their accuracy, a count of the number of civilians likely to be there at that exact time of the day, the structure and strength of the building, and the shrapnel it might produce. What this scientific rigor underscored was a deeply human desire within my force to avoid hurting innocents (McChrystal 2013: 142).

Even Human Rights Watch agreed that the procedures seemed designed to protect civilian life, but also noted that these procedures failed frequently enough to result in hundreds of civilian casualties.

General McChrystal, in 2003, as Vice Director for Operations for the Joint Chief of Staff outlined the coalition forces' procedures for reviewing military actions that resulted in civilian targeting:

> [O]ne of the things I would highlight at the beginning, that we have proven already in this operation, as we said we would, every time we have a case where there is a real or even potential case of unintended civilian injury or death or collateral damage to structures, we've investigated it. And we go back and we look at the targeting; we account for every munition that, in fact, was suspended; we look for whether the aim points that we intended to hit were hit, to determine if, in fact, there was the result of our targeting unintended civilian damage—or casualties, or damage, and then we correct the errors as we go. (McChrystal, cited in Human Rights Watch 2003).

It does seem that there was a process for reviewing the operations, but one challenge that led to increased danger for civilians is the pace at which decisions need to be made during operational planning. Because foreign counterinsurgents are not intimately familiar with the culture, the landmarks, and the local norms of the places in which they are conducting counterinsurgency, they have to do the best they can to adapt to new information and tactical changes by insurgents as quickly as they can. McChrystal explained how this manifested in terms of operational decisions, and the effects it had on civilian communities:

> There tends to be a careful process where there is plenty of time to review [the targets]. . . . [T]hen we put together certain processes like time-sensitive targeting. And those are when you talk about the crush of an emerging target that might come up, that doesn't have time to go through a complicated vetting process. . . . [T]here still is a legal review, but it is all at a much accelerated process because there are some fleeting targets that require a very time-sensitive engagement, but they all fit into pre-thought out criteria (ibid).

All of this provides important context for a core part of my theory, which is that the mere presence of counterinsurgents greatly endangers civilian lives. In the early days of the Iraq War, before coalition forces had even gotten a handle on the different combatant forces on the ground, and just as insurgents were beginning to organize into a force that could attack the U.S. military, the airstrikes and ground operations that arrived suddenly and with tremendous speed and force created deep insecurity within these previously healthy and tight-knit communities that insurgents would very quickly begin to exploit.

Raids and Humiliation

In other parts of this project, I have outlined the ways in which the project of counterinsurgency is, by its very nature, extremely invasive in people's lives. To succeed in a counterinsurgency mission, a counterinsurgent force must extract information, cooperation, and even support from the civilian population. If this was true in northeastern Nigeria, where the Nigerian military, most of whom were from the southern part of the country, struggled to understand local norms, culture, and social hierarchy in their fight against Boko Haram, it was significantly more challenging in Iraq, where there was no question that the counterinsurgents were outsiders who did not understand the context in which they were operating.

The most intimate and invasive operations were house raids, which the U.S. conducted frequently, in order to identify and arrest those suspected of being insurgents. These raids would often occur at night, when counterinsurgent forces had the element of surprise on their side. Amnesty International interviewed Iraqi civilians about their experiences of these raids, and found that they were among the most feared types of operations:

> House raids frequently conducted by the US-led forces at night have been terrifying experiences for many Iraqis. There have been particular concerns that during such operations women were exposed to male soldiers when they were not properly dressed. A former woman detainee told Amnesty International that she was arrested in August 2003 at her home in Baghdad at about 2am by US soldiers and taken in her nightclothes to al-Karrade Security Center. She was released in the evening of the same day, at around 9pm, and had to walk back home still only in her nightwear (Amnesty International 2005).

These are the types of events that made civilians feel extremely insecure about the presence of U.S. troops and, in addition, were deeply humiliating for a once-stable and more gender-equal society.

Antonius Robben, who writes about the effect of military operations on civilian life in Iraq, cites Hedges and Al-Arian (2007: 14), who described how these raids unfolded:

> Upon entry, a flash bang might be thrown in whose deafening noise and blinding light stunned the unsuspecting inhabitants. Half a dozen heavily armed men would invade the home at night in search for hidden weapons, hidden loyalties and disguised insurgents. Sergeant John Bruhns of the 1st Armored Division, who participated in more than 1,000 raids in and around Baghdad, described what happened upon entry. 'You go up the stairs. You grab the man of the house. You rip him out of bed in front of his wife. You put him up against the wall . . . . And if you find something, then you'll detain him. If not, you'll say, "Sorry to disturb you. Have a nice evening." So you've just humiliated this man in front of his entire family and terrorized his entire family and you've destroyed

> his home. And then you go right next door and you do the same thing in a hundred homes' (Robben 2010).

Again, I cite these incidents because, as a community, security scholars in general do not engage with the ways that the presence of soldiers and the project of counterinsurgency disrupts and securitizes communities of civilians. It is true that, for the most part – the counterinsurgents in this case attempted to minimize civilian death.[8] And if we consider the number of deaths directly caused by just coalition forces, and not by Iraqi security forces who were trained, equipped, and supported by coalition forces, it is true that the number is relatively much smaller than deaths caused by Iraqi security and insurgents. But the fact of the invasion, while purporting to create liberation, actually created deep instability and rifts in the social fabric that had not existed there before.

Checkpoints

Another way that counterinsurgency presence created significant insecurity in Iraq was through the creation of checkpoints. Once the coalition forces realized that they were fighting an urban war, they needed to create physical barriers so that they could control the movement of people in and around major cities, particularly Baghdad. This is not dissimilar to what the Ukrainian military did in 2022 in Kyiv and other major cities in Ukraine, to prevent Russians from easily maneuvering around the city.

As I described previously, these checkpoints could be extremely dangerous to people's lives, because coalition forces would often shoot first and ask questions later if they felt a pedestrian or driver was acting suspiciously or driving erratically. Sometimes, these checkpoints would be informal, and would therefore be difficult to identify as checkpoints, which is why civilians moving near/toward them did not stop as military forces would have liked them to (Bonds 2019).

These checkpoints were also especially threatening for women, who, in Baghdad, were used to being able to roam the city freely. In their experience, these women went from being able to move around their hometown without any issue to being suddenly surrounded by men with guns, asking to search them, their possessions, and/or their cars, and being commanded in a language they could not understand. The changes in the day-to-day lives and security of Iraqi women had, as I show in this chapter, a significant impact on Iraqi society, and allowed insurgents to exploit these insecurities. Despite the generally "good intentions" of soldiers at these checkpoints, women did not always come away unscathed. Amnesty International interviewed one woman who shared her experience at a checkpoint in Baghdad manned by U.S. military personnel: "Huda Shaker Neimi, a women's rights activist and a political scientist, reported how she was treated by US troops at a check point

[8]This is a very generalized statement and of course ignores the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison. This chapter does not include a very extensive discussion of the atrocities committed by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib, though these are obviously an important dimension of the ways that civilians experienced the security apparatus brought to the conflict by the United States.

in Baghdad at the beginning of 2004. When she objected to a search of her handbag, one of the soldiers pointed a gun at her. "Then he pointed to his penis. He told me: Come here, bitch, I'm going to fuck you," she was reported as saying" (Amnesty International 2005). Learning to navigate checkpoints manned by foreign men pointing guns at civilians while also trying to ensure that they were not appearing as suspicious in any way was a challenge for many Iraqi civilians who had to suddenly contend with swarms of soldiers in the streets.

While these behaviors by the counterinsurgent did not lead to direct targeting of women by the insurgent group, it is important to nonetheless consider them as part of the broader context within which civilians – and especially women – have to make decisions about which actors to support and to what extent. Many scholars, journalists, and activists have written about the tragedy of U.S. behavior in Iraq; I include this discussion here as a reminder that, just because tactics targeting women are not incentivized directly by a foreign counterinsurgent does not mean that the benefits of counterinsurgency as practiced by the West necessarily outweigh the costs to the general civilian population.

5.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have evaluated the mechanisms I propose in my theory, and shown that, because the U.S. domestic population was less responsive to targeting of Iraqi civilians and Iraqi civilian deaths than to deaths of coalition force servicemembers, the military conducted counterinsurgency in a manner that actually increased risks for civilians overall, and also allowed for insurgent targeting of women.

In Iraq, I find that, as expected, there is not strong evidence for the mechanisms, because gender did not become a means of undermining the counterinsurgent. This was exacerbated by the U.S. military's hesitance to engage with Iraqi women, which minimized the violence that they did face from insurgent groups. This happened to such an extent that in my own primary research of interviewing soldiers who had served in Iraq, many of them were unaware that there had ever been systematic gender-based violence conducted by AQI in the Iraq War, although other sources have clearly uncovered that it did occur at some baseline level throughout the war. In addition, while I did find clear evidence that women were used for information gathering purposes, I also found that the U.S. military's professionalism and technological savvy meant that they were, generally, able to keep their sources safe, and, unlike in Nigeria, it did not become easily known who was working with the coalition forces to provide information. As a result, there is not clear evidence that insurgents continued to invest in sustained campaigns of gender-based tactics; instead, they chose to allocate resources to other tactics that better undermined counterinsurgent morale and efficacy, namely, developing more advanced suicide bombing and IED techniques.

The most important takeaway from this chapter should not be, however, that ignoring the experiences of women keeps them safe in a war between insurgents and counterinsurgents. As I showed in the first section of this chapter, the presence of coalition forces was a significant cause of insecurity for Iraqi civilians generally, and women specifically. Due

to the scope of this chapter, I have not discussed the myriad other ways in which women were specifically impacted by the Iraq War, but other important dimensions to consider and study in further research include the fate of widows in Iraq – there were tens of thousands of women who were widowed and therefore bereft of the typical family support that might help them survive the war – as well as the significant erosion of rights following the U.S. invasion. In particular, Jerry Bremer's apparent disinterest in codifying women's rights that had been part of Iraqi law under Saddam Hussein meant that women actually had fewer rights under the new Iraqi constitution than they had had before. This was a result, in part, of the U.S. orientation toward certain tropes about women's rights in the Middle East; as I have mentioned, these tropes – including that women in Iraq were not allowed to own property, which is incorrect under Iraq's previous Family Law – surfaced again and again in my interviews, demonstrating that the training that soldiers received, at least in the first several years of the war, clearly reinforced the notion that Iraq was inherently patriarchal and that there was no way to change that. Instead, I hope that readers of this chapter come away with the understanding that the project of counterinsurgency itself makes civilians a pawn in the war between counterinsurgent and insurgent. There is no other way to do counterinsurgency without the aid and cooperation of the civilian population, as decades of security studies literature have demonstrated. However, a less considered piece, especially coming from a Western perspective that casts the counterinsurgent as always being "the good guy" and the insurgent as "the bad guy," is how the project of counterinsurgency securitizes civilian populations, increases the risks they face, opens up rifts in society for violent actors to exploit, and fails to account for actual social norms and mores in replacing existing social, political, and legal structures with new ones.

Of course, this is not to say that insurgencies are "good" or that they should be left alone. But it can be true both that insurgents are causing death and destruction and also that traditional counterinsurgency may only increase the risks that civilians face. As both this chapter and the previous ones have shown, broad brush counterinsurgency tactics are not necessarily the best response to the rise of violent local insurgencies, and each case should be carefully considered. Most importantly, the costs of doing "effective" counterinsurgency should be weighed carefully, with the full knowledge and understanding that the people who will most heavily bear those costs are the local civilians themselves, who will, at the end of the day, be left with little to no recourse after being battled, bruised, and in many cases, abused by both counterinsurgent and insurgent. In the policy recommendations of the concluding chapter, I discuss in greater detail alternatives to traditional, Western-style counterinsurgency when dealing with violent actors such as al-Qaeda in Iraq, Boko Haram in Nigeria or al-Shabaab in Somalia.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Restatement of Central Theory

This project has examined three different cases of insurgency and counterinsurgency. At its core, one of the major contributions of this project is to underscore the extent to which there is substantial variation in the intensity of violence against women during conflict – both between conflicts with similar actors and within conflicts, over time. Conflicts are a push-and-pull between belligerents – in these cases, between insurgents and counterinsurgents, and the dynamics within a given conflict can shift over time, even when the actors involved remain the same. The goal of this project has been to demonstrate the varying incentives that insurgents are faced with at different moments in a counterinsurgency, how this leads to changes in their decisions about how to allocate resources to different tactics, and to highlight how those incentives might vary across conflicts, depending on who exactly is conducting the counterinsurgency.

By focusing on variation over time within the same conflict, this project produced novel insights about when in a conflict insurgents are most likely to change tactics. I showed that the actions of the counterinsurgent and its reaction to insurgent violence can be a core motivator for insurgents to perpetrate violence against women. I found that the extent to which insurgents will select into tactics targeting women depends largely on the actor conducting the counterinsurgency. Because counterinsurgents need a mandate from their own electorate and citizenry to allocate resources to war-fighting, they are responsive to the metrics that their citizens set for success in the counterinsurgency mission. Domestic counterinsurgents, I argued, are more likely to have home audiences who hold them accountable for protecting women while waging counterinsurgency within their own borders. On the other hand, foreign counterinsurgents' domestic audiences are likely to prioritize servicemember safety over local civilian safety, leading counterinsurgents to pursue tactics that increase risks to civilians, but which also limit incentives for insurgents to allocate resources to upsurges in violence against women.

I further argued that if gender becomes salient as a dimension on which insurgents can at-

tempt to undermine counterinsurgents, it operates through three mechanisms. I called these (1) Information Transmission Suppression, (2) Emasculation, and (3) Bargaining Leverage. I found that the Information Transmission Suppression mechanism operated in every case, demonstrating (contrary to popular belief) that even in regimes where women are severely oppressed by rebel groups, they nonetheless collect and can share critically important information (or not, if they so choose). Because domestic counterinsurgents are most affected by sex-selective targeting, I showed that in the case of Nigeria, where the Nigerian military was fighting Boko Haram within its own borders, mechanisms two and three (Emasculation and Bargaining Leverage) also operated, resulting in the Nigerian government paying millions of euros to Boko Haram and releasing jailed fighters in exchange for the abducted schoolgirls. I also examined a case of a regional counterinsurgent – AMISOM in Somalia – that has high incentives to prevent spillover violence and can therefore sometimes be susceptible to sex-selective targeting, but which was not willing to make major concessions to the insurgent group. In that case, I showed that while al-Shabaab did change tactics as a means of coercing civilians, they did not allocate substantial resources to targeting women, preferring instead to pursue tactics that provoked AMISOM into severe overreactions that they then used as propaganda against AMISOM.

In this chapter, I focus on three types of implications of this project. First, I examine the implications for the existing literature on sex-selective violence of my findings – what we can confirm, and what might need to be reassessed. Second, I focus on implications for future research – the questions and avenues for future research that are opened up by the findings of this project. Finally, I walk through some of the policy implications of this research, with some specific ways that these findings can help policymakers make better-informed decisions and implement policies that mitigate suffering for civilians caught in the crossfire between insurgent and counterinsurgent. Because the model of counterinsurgency that is almost universally used is the Petraeus Doctrine articulated in the 2007 Counterinsurgency Field Manual, I target most of these policy-oriented comments toward the U.S. foreign and national security policy apparatus. It is important to note that the Counterinsurgency Field Manual has become the canonical approach to counterinsurgency worldwide and certainly in cases where the U.S. provides training and/or equipment. The fact that counterinsurgency is operationalized in similar ways despite the important contextual, social, and political differences identified in this project is something for policymakers and scholars alike to consider when designing policies to mitigate and address political violence around the world.

6.2 Implications for Existing Literature

As I have mentioned elsewhere in the book, there is an increasing focus on variation in sex-selective violence, and the literature that takes gender dynamics seriously is growing consistently. This project is built on the foundation that was laid by feminist and conflict scholars alike – including Catherine MacKinnon, Laura Sjoberg, Cynthia Enloe, Sarah Parkinson, Dara Kay Cohen, Elisabeth Wood, Amelia Hoover Green, and others. Without

these scholars opening up space to study gender in political science, this book would not be possible. And in many ways, my work builds upon the findings of prior research, underscoring that sex-selective targeting is not, to use Elisabeth Wood's framing, "inevitable" in conflict. In terms of addressing this broad corpus of literature, my research highlights the importance of continuing to examine the ways in which violence against women is strategic for insurgents. In particular, my research also joins the feminist and rationalist traditions by highlighting all the ways that women are symbolic within the community, but also how targeting those symbols can be strategic vis-à-vis the counterinsurgent.

My research also touches on and builds on research in the field of international security and civilian targeting more broadly. In general, this literature does not include considerations of gender, as decisions from the perspective of the insurgent are framed as "whether or not to target civilians," rather than about targeting specific groups of civilians selectively, or using different tactics against certain groups along with indiscriminate tactics. My research challenges the notion that the major decision point for insurgents is whether to target civilians or to be more restrained. In addition, I show that conflict dynamics can change over time and that therefore incentives for particular behavior can change over time as well, highlighting the importance of investigating conflicts – and the ways they change – deeply in order to understand insurgent incentives.

Finally, there is a growing literature on the role that ideology plays in insurgent decision-making. Particularly with respect to Islamist groups, there is often an outsized emphasis on the extent to which ideology drives key decisions. This project challenges the idea that ideology is the main explanatory factor in insurgent decision-making, as I show that even when ideology remains the same, insurgents make different targeting decisions at different points in a given conflict. While I do not disagree that ideology is an important factor to take into account, it is important to engage deeply with the ways in which groups instrumentalize their ideology before making causal claims about the role it plays in a given conflict. The literature in political science that examines ideology deeply is still in its infancy, and I hope that this will be an area for substantial growth in the literature in the coming years.

6.3 Avenues for Future Research

This project is just the beginning of a larger research agenda that examines the role of gender in insurgency and counterinsurgency. It has provided an entry point into the broader question of why insurgents allocate resources to the costly action of targeting women. Naturally, the next phase of exploration will be to understand why certain insurgents select into particular forms of targeting over others. For example, in the Nigeria and Somalia chapters, I demonstrated that when faced with a robust counterinsurgency, both Boko Haram and al-Shabaab changed the tactics they used against women. However, in Nigeria, this took the form of abduction, which the group then leveraged into extracting concessions from the Nigerian government. On the other hand, in Somalia, al-Shabaab pivoted to add sexual violence to its general repertoire of violence against women. Investigating why these two

groups made different decisions about how to change their targeting behavior will help peel back another layer of understanding when it comes to insurgent decision-making. This is also a research area where the growth of available data on sex-selective violence is helpful; for example, Dara Kay Cohen's Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC) data systematically covers most countries and many years. Similarly, ACLED's Violence Targeting Women data is a helpful reference point for studying different patterns and group characteristics that may be associated with specific forms of targeting. However, it is important to remember that quantitative data on gender-based violence are almost always underreporting the actual phenomenon, and that supplementing with qualitative research and, if possible, fieldwork, is critical. Remember, for example, that ACLED's Violence Targeting Women dataset counted only twelve instances of sexual violence in Somalia between 2012 and 2014, which was clearly disputed by interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch and other non-governmental organizations. Data collection difficulties aside, this project has made clear that targeting women is strategic behavior for insurgents; the next step will be understanding what incentivizes insurgent groups to use particular forms of targeting over others. This layer of understanding will also help policymakers craft better policies that address specific forms of sex-selective targeting as well.

Another area for future research is to address the other side of the conflict and begin to understand if there is a way that counterinsurgents can empower women that will bolster societies against infiltration by insurgent groups. There is an increasing emphasis in the peacebuilding literature (and in actual peacebuilding activities) on "empowering women," building off findings that peace processes that include women are more durable (for a discussion of existing research, see Crespo-Sancho 2018). However, this is a relatively superficial understanding of the role that women play in the community. My own broader research agenda includes plans to study the micro-level ways in which women's presence and behavior in the public and private sphere contributes to a strong social fabric, and what it might look like to design policies that are not formulaic, or which do not necessarily focus on the Western ideals of gender equality, and how meeting women – and the societies in which they live – where they are might itself be an effective way to understand how and why women might be key to helping make communities strong against insurgent groups.

Finally, this project opens up many other methodological avenues for continued research on this same question. This book argues that counterinsurgency can change incentives for insurgent behavior. I was lucky enough to virtually connect with a number of counterinsurgents, and spoke to at least one for each case in this project. However, another way to confirm my findings with larger samples might be something like a lab-in-the-field experiment, or larger-scale interviews at an actual military base, both domestically and internationally. Surveying counterinsurgent fighters – as well as the broader apparatus they represent – would be an interesting way to build upon the initial research findings of this project. This of course was not possible during the duration of this project, as in-person research was disallowed by the University of California, Berkeley, during the data collection portion of this project. However, with these restrictions removed, many other methods might also be possible.

6.4 Policy Implications

For a policymaker, the most important findings from this research are twofold. First, that the presence of the counterinsurgency itself creates a substantial security risk for civilians, even if the stated goal of the counterinsurgency is to keep civilians safe. This was very clear in the Iraq chapter of this project, which showed that, even if the U.S. and coalition forces fighting against al-Qaeda there did not specifically increase incentives to target women, the fact of the counterinsurgency opened up social and security rifts that nonetheless created substantial risks for civilians, especially women. Understanding these risks is critical to making counterinsurgency/counterterrorism policies that do not destroy civilians' lives and the social fabric that keeps them safe.

Second, I show that different types of counterinsurgency missions can affect insurgent incentives differently. From a Western (largely U.S.) perspective, this is critical because the U.S. government often provides training, equipment, and advice to domestic counterinsurgents, urging them to conduct counterinsurgency in the same manner that the United States uses in international counterinsurgency conflicts. However, as I have shown here, the risks to women from counterinsurgency conducted by a domestic actor are different from the risks to women from counterinsurgency conducted by the United States abroad. The U.S. government must be aware of these risks in terms of its advising.

One way that the U.S. government can do a better job of understanding the risks to women and creating policies that take these risks seriously is by stopping the outsourcing of considerations of gender to the State Department and USAID. When Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State, she did a great deal of innovation in terms of including considerations of gender into foreign policy, even going so far as to create an Office of Global Women's Issues at the State Department. By many accounts (e.g. Leidl and Hudson 2015), gender was a core tenet of the "Hillary Doctrine" and Secretary Clinton ensured that, during her foreign travels, she met with women's groups to try to understand their unique perspectives and needs. However, not every part of the Obama administration's foreign policy team took gender seriously – by one account, a senior official in the administration complained about Clinton's emphasis on gender, arguing that women's rights in Afghanistan were "pet rocks" that were "weighing down the rucksack" (Rothkopf 2014).[1]

In 2011, more than a decade after the UN Security Council passed resolution 1325 – the Resolution on Women, Peace, and Security, the United States implemented its first U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, under the Obama administration. This was the first formalization of a focus on women by the U.S. government, and was an important step forward. However, the NAP also made clear that the authority to address women's issues would lie almost exclusively with the Department of State and USAID – of the tasks it assigned to particular agencies in terms of implementation, 57 were assigned to

[1]For full disclosure, I was the research assistant on this project, and this was not a one-off assessment from foreign policy officials not working at the State Department – the attitude that Hillary Clinton "only" worked on gender and women's rights while the "important" foreign policy was made at DoD and the NSC was not unusual.

State, 53 to USAID, but only 18 to Defense, and even fewer – 5 – to Homeland Security. This lays the bulk of the burden at the feet of State and USAID, and further cements the notion that women's issues are "soft" concerns that the "hard" security agencies do not need to take into consideration.[2]

The updated NAPs have not shifted from this initial distribution of labor. Although the 2019 Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security moved away from the original model of assigning tasks to specific government agencies, it is nonetheless clear that the vast majority of the responsibility will fall on State and USAID.[3] For example, the State Department's implementation plan is more than double the length of the Department of Defense's, and includes much more granular detail in how considerations of gender should be incorporated into foreign policy (e.g. "expand and apply gender analysis to policy and program design to enhance outcomes in gender equality and women's empowerment"). The Defense Department's implementation plan, on the other hand, focuses on high-level principles and almost exclusively advocates for gender-equality in terms of active duty military. If the U.S. foreign policy apparatus is to take both gender and the findings of this research seriously, DoD must be required to incorporate considerations of gender into its policy implementation.

Much ink has been spilled on how to get the U.S. government to focus on policy using a whole-of-government approach, since policy coordination across the U.S. government can be quite difficult, as each agency has its own priorities and objectives. In this brief conclusion, I do not offer a solution to this, except to suggest one change. The National Security Council was designed to be the point of coordination across executive agencies, and the Senior Director for a given substantive area or geographical region is the coordinator of the U.S. government's effort on a particular issue set. Senior Directors also manage and participate in interagency policy committee (IPC and sub-IPC) meetings. Therefore, any issue set that is overseen by a Senior Director at the National Security Council has a more natural means of coordination, and bringing together the key players across the government who are working on those issues is much smoother and easier. Creating a position of Senior Director of Women's Issues will elevate these concerns to a much higher level, establish gender as a legitimate U.S. national and international security priority, and provide a medium for deeper and more efficient coordination between the multiple agencies whose agendas are touched by gender concerns (i.e. all of them).

There are many things about civil conflicts that are not within the control of the counterinsurgent, and seeing all the ways that civilians suffer is heart-wrenching. This research is not a panacea to the problem of civilian suffering, but has instead shed light on the ways that the counterinsurgent might understand and work to mitigate the changes to the incen-

[2]These numbers were tabulated during a paper I wrote while completing my Master's degree at Yale University; however, this paper has not been published anywhere.

[3]When this chapter was drafted, the 2019 Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security was the most recent version. However, on October 31, 2023, just before this project was submitted, the Biden Administration released it's own updated Women, Peace and Security Strategy and National Action Plan. However, given that most executive agencies have not yet released their implementation plans for this updated NAP, I use the 2019/2020 implementation plans in my analysis in this chapter.

tives that their presence creates. In addition, I have shown that neither is ideology the sole explanation, nor is a formulaic response as useful or efficient. Understanding the processes taking place underneath the surface will, it is my hope, help decisionmakers craft better and more responsive policies when faced with violent actors who want to overthrow the central government, with the overall goal of mitigating the terrible violence that civilians – but often women specifically – face in conflicts caused by violent extremist groups like those I have examined in this project.

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