Spring 2022

The Curvilinear Relationship between Political Terror and Internal Armed Conflict

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I examine the relationship between political terror and the annual incidence of internal armed conflict. Studies have found that other factors associated with violence have a curvilinear relationship to internal conflict, including regime type, GDP, and ethnic fractionalization. I seek to find if political terror has a significant impact on instances of conflict and, more particularly, whether a curvilinear relationship exists between these two variables. I hypothesize that the relationship will be significant and in the shape of an inverse U. If a country uses no political terror, or extensive political terror, then the number of internal armed conflicts will be low. If the level of political terror employed by a regime is somewhere in the middle, I expect to see a greater number of internal armed conflicts. The results of my test do not support my hypothesis. There is a statistically significant relationship between political terror and instances of internal armed conflict, and the relationship is curvilinear. However, the relationship is convex, rather than being concave as I had predicted. This is a relationship I had yet to come across in previous literature. It could add a new dimension of thought for policy makers and scholars, requiring them to consider different roles violence may play in preventing and starting internal conflicts.

Keywords

internal armed conflict, political terror, curvilinear, political terror scale

Disciplines

Comparative Politics | Peace and Conflict Studies | Political Science

Comments

Written for POL 351: Political Economy of Armed Conflict

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POL 351: Political Economy of Armed Conflict

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April 13, 2022

Abstract

I examine the relationship between political terror and the annual incidence of internal armed conflict. Studies have found that other factors associated with violence have a curvilinear relationship to internal conflict, including regime type, GDP, and ethnic fractionalization. I seek to find if political terror has a significant impact on instances of conflict and, more particularly, whether a curvilinear relationship exists between these two variables. I hypothesize that the relationship will be significant and in the shape of an inverse U. If a country uses no political terror, or extensive political terror, then the number of internal armed conflicts will be low. If the level of political terror employed by a regime is somewhere in the middle, I expect to see a greater number of internal armed conflicts. The results of my test do not support my hypothesis. There is a statistically significant relationship between political terror and instances of internal armed conflict, and the relationship is curvilinear. However, the relationship is convex, rather than being concave as I had predicted. This is a relationship I had yet to come across in previous literature. It could add a new dimension of thought for policy makers and scholars, requiring them to consider different roles violence may play in preventing and starting internal conflicts.

Introduction

The 2020 Global Peace Index finds that the level of global peacefulness has deteriorated for the ninth time in the last twelve years. The biggest factors contributing to this deterioration have been terrorism and internal conflict. Armed conflict has undergone a transformation since the beginnings of scholarly research on the topic. Rather than occurring between states, conflicts are now often fought domestically between state and non-state actors. While there has been a lot of discourse on why these conflicts happen, this study will look at the relationship between the level of political terror present in a state and the number of internal armed conflicts in a given year. I ask the question: Does political terror have any significant effect on likelihood of internal armed conflict? And, if so, what is the nature of that relationship? Since internal conflict makes up most of the violence in the world, there needs to be an understanding of the reasons behind the conflict. Although there are a lot of factors that may play a role in sparking internal armed conflict, this research is important because it serves to test whether political terror plays a significant role in this form of conflict.

I hypothesize that the relationship between the level of political terror and the number of internal armed conflicts is curvilinear, in the shape of an inverse U (i.e., a concave curve). If a government uses no political terror, or extensive political terror, then the number of internal armed conflicts will be low. I expect to see a larger number of internal armed conflicts at mid-levels of political terror. States with a low level of political terror will face little resistance because the population will feel little to no repression from the government. As the level of political terror increases, tension between state and non-state actors increase. This tension, along with the state's incomplete use of terror, allows for a greater chance of internal armed conflict.

As governments' use of political terror becomes extreme, internal armed conflict will begin to decrease again. Political terror is present in every aspect of the state and has expanded to the whole population. The state is either too powerful or too ruthless to allow any type of internal conflict.

In this paper, I start with a review of the literature on political terror. First, I identify how political terror fits within the conversation of greed and grievance. I then lay out how most of the literature focuses on the how political terror has either a positive or negative relationship with instances of violence. I end the exploration of literature with studies that have delved into the possibility of a curvilinear relationship. I then explain my reasoning through the mechanisms by which political terror and conflict are related. Since political terror could fall under grievances, I explore how the function of grievance in the context of conflict motivation would create contradictions when not defined by a curvilinear relationship. Cost-benefit analysis also plays a big role in supporting a curvilinear relationship. The perspectives of rational action, emotional responses, and opportunity to rebel through resource mobilization and economic ability all have elements of cost-benefit analysis. Lastly, the issue of consistency suggests that a state with unchanging policies, even if those polices include terror, will have less dissent than an inconsistent state.

The results indicate that, although there is a statistically significant relationship between political terror and instances of internal armed conflict, as well as the relationship being curvilinear, it is curved in the opposite way than I had predicted.

Positive, Negative, and Somewhere in Between

The connection between political terror and internal armed conflict is finding its place in scholarly literature. But there is a surprising lack of discourse about the direct relationship political terror has with internal armed conflict. As will be seen in my discussion of several studies below, most research examines political terror in the sense of state repression. Scholars have most often been concerned with the relationship political terror has to the presence of violence in general, not specifically internal armed conflict. Additionally, in the cases where it is examined through its relation to internal armed conflict, political terror is almost always studied in conjunction with another factor, not just its individual effect.

There is a multitude of theories lending themselves to why internal conflict erupts, but the greed and grievance arguments, examined by Collier and Hoeffler (2002), are among the most popular. Political terror has a place within this argument. With how greed and grievance have evolved in scholarly work, political terror has become more relevant. It can be associated with the grievance explanation. The greed argument refers to opportunity. It is when individuals rebel against the state because they stand to gain something. Joining violent groups is the result of an individual weighing costs and benefits compared to not joining it. The grievance argument states that people rebel when they are angry at the government. This argument stems from

dissatisfaction with the current society rather than a method to gain. The dissatisfaction could be systemic injustice or inequality, usually towards a specific group.

Initially, literature on grievance and greed was operationalized through vertical inequalities, focusing on the individual's motives. This meant that greed was the focus of early literature. Grievance was measured as total inequality levels within a society. According to Collier and Hoeffler, grievances that motivate rebels can be thoroughly disconnected from the large-scale social concerns of inequality and political rights. More recently, scholarly literature has focused attention on inequalities that pre-exist between different groups. This shift from vertical inequalities to horizontal inequalities claims that civil war is a group activity, so grievances must be contextualized on a group level as well (Østby, 2008). Horizontal inequalities are inequalities among groups of people within societies, where the members of each group share a common identity. A relatively high level of horizontal inequality within society is mainly produced by systemic discrimination favoring some groups over others. Eventually, this discrimination is likely to lead to greater economic disparities between privileged and other groups. This research also draws in social, political, and cultural differences, not just economic. Even though horizontal inequalities and the use of political terror by the government can be conceptualized as separate situations that could result in conflict, political terror has an obvious link to grievances. Political terror can be defined as deliberate repression by the government (Tilly 2003; Moore 2000; Carey 2006). This results in violations of human rights, causing grievance and leading to conflict.

The topic of terror is somewhat controversial when discussing armed conflict. The actual functionality of political violence within a conflict remains a debate to be resolved. Some argue that while socioeconomic conditions rarely lead to violent conflict on their own, violations of personal integrity or security rights provide a clear link to escalation (White; Tilly; Brocket, 1991; Prosterman, 1976; Young, 2013; Gurr and Moore 1997; Carey 2006; Rost 2011). However, there is also a realm of literature that suggests that political terror plays a negligible role in the onset of internal conflict or, in some cases, even prevents public disobedience and defeats opposition (Boix, 2004; Scott, 1976; Thomas and Ron, 2007; Hibbs, 1973; Davenport, 2007).

It is intuitive to think that if terror plagues a nation, there will be efforts to fight back, increasing the incidence of internal armed conflict. Past research reflects that in certain cases, this could be true. The literature outlines many mechanisms that may connect political terror to increasing the risk of civil war. Multiple studies suggest that political terror, when existing in a state that is already experiencing a potential mechanism of conflict, will lead to war. For example, Rost (2011) finds that, in conjunction with state weakness, there is a strong relationship between state repression and the risk of civil wars. This coincides with research that claims that when a government is organizationally weak, it invites non-state or sub-state actors to challenge state authority through violence (Tilly, 1985; Job, 1992; Skaperdas, 1992; Bates et al., 2002). Political terror in administratively weak states only serves to enrage the people while the weakness reduces the relative cost of organizing rebellion (Fjelde and De Soysa, 2009).

Additionally, You and Khagram (2005) find that, in some cases, poorer countries, as well as highly corrupt countries, have a greater potential of engaging in political terror. They conclude that these situations increase the possibility of groups rebelling. Lastly, when political terror is directly tied to systematic oppression, the victims of that oppression are likely to blame their government. Under some circumstances, this dissatisfaction among the members of the out groups will lead to rebellion (Cederman et al. 2013). This idea is expanded by Thomas and Ron (2007), who look at how the difference between violations of civil, political, social and economic rights can affect how repression is received by the people. They find that violations of civil and political rights are more obviously linked to conflict than economic and social rights. While discrimination of social and economic rights can act as an underlying cause of grievance and in some cases fuel violence, discrimination of civil and political rights is more directly related to triggering conflict. In the case where oppression comes in the form of systemic denial of political participation and basic needs, repression has a higher likelihood pushing the victims to a violent response.

Other scholars posit that state repression in response to protests generates violence. Repression is defined as actions taken by the government that raise the costs of disagreeing with the regime in power, including all forms of human rights violations (Tilly 2003; Moore 2000; Carey 2006). Much of the literature examining repression concludes that governments that engage in long-term repression of human rights will see a significant increase in grievances from the people. As these grievances spread and grow in intensity, it can lead to an outbreak of violence and fuel internal conflict (Gurr and Moore 1997; Carey 2006). This agrees with Prosterman's (1976) argument that states with very repressive institutions may outrage the public, either leading to a rebelling or pushing citizens to join a rebel group. Examples of this come from Mason (1998), who, investigating Peru and El Salvador, argued that the repression exercised by the state against peaceful demonstrations generated violent uprisings. If there had been a path of meaningful dialogue between the state and the people, especially for the people who did not benefit from land reforms, he asserts that there would have been a lower likelihood of armed rebellion. Others turn to the widespread violent protests in Syria and Tunisia. Syrians demanded the removal of President Bashar Hafez al-Assad right before the country devolved into civil war and the Tunisia's 2010 protests sparked the Arab Spring, eventually resulting in former President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali's overthrow. Both protests eventually resulted in violence, an outcome that some scholars propose was due to the use of repression as a response to the dissent (Cingranelli, David et al. 2019). Their findings indicate that if a state responds to violent protests with repression, then the violence is likely to escalate.

There is also literature arguing that high levels of political terror are not a major factor in increasing the likelihood of civil war, and may, in some instances, even lower it. Boulding (1989) outlines three faces of power – threat power, economic power, and integrative power. It is his assumptions on threat power that are relevant to this study. Boulding defines power as the ability to get what we want. In the case of threat power, it is legitimized through fear of a

government's response to dissent and the state's ability to use that fear to deter any potential violent uprisings. Throughout his book, however, Boulding argues that without the support of economic and integrative power, threat power is ultimately ineffective at influencing the people in any significant way. However, the notion of a state using its strength to force compliance has been shown to be effective in some cases. For example, a state's capabilities in military, policing, and administrative powers influence the government's ability to monitor, deter, and suppress dissent, reducing the opportunity for potential rebellions to form an armed insurgency against the state (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Collier and Hoeffler, 1998).

Scott (1976) also evokes the power of a state's ability to use repression as proportional to the likelihood that rebellion will occur. A state that has adequately created a fear of the consequences of dissent will experience a lower likelihood of civil war. Scott brings up the example of Southwest Asia, and how the people did not rebel despite exploitation by the state and landlords. He argues that they remained compliant because memory of past repression and the fear it created lead to inaction.

Other studies have drawn connections between regime type and the use of repression. Many scholars have concluded that as a state becomes less democratic, repression tends to increase. However, Davenport (2007) argues for alternate paths to reducing repression and fostering peace. He calls it a tyrannical peace and finds that some state regimes generally characterized as increasing the likelihood of civil war experience less civil war than other regimes. Examining 137 countries from 1976 to 1996, he finds that single-party regimes are generally less repressive than other autocracies. Additionally, his results suggest that military governments decreased restrictions on civil liberties and repression has varied influences, depending on its specific form and interactions with other variables. This shows that repression is not inherent in certain regimes, and in cases where it is, there is still a place for it among efforts to foster peace.

Within the debate of the function of political terror on the occurrence of internal conflict, another argument has begun to gain some traction. Extending from the literature explored above, other scholars have found that excessive amounts of state repression do not lead to increased violence. Instead, states with semi-repressive regimes are more likely to experience internal conflict. However, the literature on this possibility is not extensive. Gurr (1968, 1970) was first to propose what he considered an inverted U relationship between acts of coercion and political violence. Gurr focuses on how deprivation caused by socioeconomic conditions affects the prevalence of political violence within a state, dismissing other causes of violence. His work was enlightening but limited. He ignores other causes of violence, claiming that unless relative deprivation is present, other causes will not have an impactful effect. Only in their interactions with deprivation do other factors change the state's relationship to violence. Critics have noted that this assumption led Gurr to construct his research design in a manner that favors the deprivation hypothesis, skewing the results (Zimmerman 1983; Weede 1986).

Other studies done at the time support Gurr's curvilinear relationship theory. Muller and Seligson (1987) found such a relationship when examining regime repressiveness and political

violence. However, the repressiveness variable is operationalized by inequality, leaving out other forms of political terror. Additionally, it is limited by the available data in the 1960's on inequality, resulting in a small case size. Muller and Weede (1990) expand on the research through a rational actor perspective, whereas previous research explored the deprivation theory. They acknowledge that, according to rational action, the relationship between governmental repression and coercion and political violence should be curvilinear in the shape of an inverted U. They consider state repression and coercion, defining repression as institutionalization of repression through legal restrictions on political rights and civil liberties of individuals; and coercion as negative sanction carried out by incumbent political authorities to punish dissidents and deter dissent. This distinction between structural and behavioral repression accounts for all relevant aspects of political terror. In both cases, the inverted-U shape is found across all states they examined. Unfortunately, the dependent variable is death rate from political violence, without the restriction of being defined as an armed conflict. Armed attacks are a factor within the variable of death rate from political violence, along with other factors like riots, and assassination. Muller and Weede are looking at a much broader variable then instances of armed conflict. While there is likely overlap between the two, it is still not a viable answer to the relationship between political terror and instances of armed conflict.

Hypothesis and Explanation

I hypothesize that countries with extremely low and high levels of political terror will experience fewer instances of internal conflicts than countries that experience levels of political terror in the middle of the political terror scale.

The shift of focus from the individual to the group changes the place political terror has in the literature. Grievance focuses on horizontal inequalities, or the inequalities within a state experienced by a certain group. Previous research shows that horizontal inequality alone makes the onset of violent internal conflict more likely (Cederman et al. 2013; Østby, 2008). This works because the oppressed can see their oppression through the lack of it in another group. It is in blaming the government for the inequalities that they find the motivation to rebel. The theory that inequalities across groups increase the likelihood of civil war can be applied to most levels of the political terror scale. I use the political terror scale in my data research so understanding how it fits in the realm of conflict research is relevant. The PTS identifies five levels of political terror that a government can fall under: level 1 being little to no use of political terror and level 5 being indiscriminate and constant use of political terror. Up to level 4, there exists some groups experiencing a greater level of terror than others; however, on the political terror scale, level 5 extends the terrors to the whole population indiscriminately. Complaints of injustice can no longer come from comparing oneself to others, but from recognizing one is being denied human rights. If terror is being experienced by everyone, then it becomes an individual grievance.

Some research suggests that indiscriminate state violence against the population can still push civilians to take up arms, thereby exacerbating political conflict and feeding the rebellion (Mason and Krane 1989; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). However, this contradicts the previous

research that war is a group activity. A curvilinear relationship could explain this contradiction. The proliferation of horizontal inequalities and human rights violations increasing the risk of civil war may be true up until a certain point. Then, once a threshold is surpassed to a point that these can no longer be viewed as group grievances (i.e., level 5 on the political terror scale), the indignation required to take action is no longer there. Admittedly, this is a relatively weak mechanism, as there are no states that have practiced political terror or the extent that level 5 describes.

A driving mechanism for the curvilinear theory is the role of cost-benefit analysis in decision making. Muller and Weede (1990) assume a rational action approach. According to this approach, even when people have grievances, it is only a factor in conflict when the cost-benefit analysis finds violent rebellion more beneficial than submission. According to them, when repression is low, peaceful action will exceed expected benefits of violent rebellion. A state that does not engage in political terror allows for high opportunities of collective action of any kind. In these situations, peaceful actions have a higher chance of success, and the costs are significantly less than violent action. When repression is high, benefits of rebellion or peaceful action will be low because of high costs and low expectancy of success. High levels of repression will make opportunities for collective action low, so even if there are individuals who wish to fight, they will often choose not to. However, when repression is somewhere in the middle, the expected benefits of rebellion will exceed those of peaceful collective action. Opportunities for collective action against the government will exist to a certain extent, but the probability of a peaceful approach being successful is low, pushing more extreme responses to be seen as the only viable option. If an actor is rational, they will consider the most beneficial way to approach a government about concerns over policy. Because of this consideration, under a semi-repressive regime, violence is more likely.

Another mechanism is how the economic abilities and accessibility of resources affect how potential rebel group can respond to political terror. Rebellions are expensive and time-consuming. As stated above, if there are viable opportunities to engage in peaceful interactions with a government, then resource mobilization is a non-issue, since rebel groups are less likely to form. On the other extreme, mass repression can restrict resource and monetary flow, inhibiting resource mobilization by dissident groups. If there is a complete lack of access to resources or no room for a rebellion to grow, then it is less likely for civil war to break out. Generating and maintaining a rebellion under these conditions would be close to impossible. This makes violent rebellion optimal in the context of a state that allows resource mobilization to be possible, but peaceful shows of protest are ignored. In other words, a state that engages in mid-levels of political terror (Muller (1985) and Muller and Seligson (1987).

Lichbach (1987) proposes that consistency, and lack thereof, in government policies play a part in the people's likeliness to rebel. Consistency from a state, even while engaging in repressive policies, reduces dissent, while inconsistent policies tend to increase it. Consistency is much easier to maintain when a state sits firmly at either end of the political terror scale, using it often or not at all. Governments who turn to repression only occasionally will find it more

difficult to maintain a consistent policy that people can grow used to (Muller and Weede, 1990). This is backed by claims that citizens who expect to be repressed may decide to not express grievances, let alone rebel, because they know the potential risk and choose to forgo the consequences (Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Hibbs, 1973; Moore, 1995). Inconsistent use of terror may lead rebels to not expect it, so the risk it not preventing action. Additionally, if repression is used only sparingly, any instance of it could be used to confirm a rebel group's perception of the government and cause even more dissent.

Rival explanations that have offered evidence of a curvilinear relationship between a variable and internal conflict have focused on regime type, economic development measured by GDP, and ethnic fractionalization. There have been multiple studies that examine how regime type influences political violence. Intuitively, its assumed that democratization and governance reform will lead to a unilateral decrease in violence, but few studies support this claim. Research on the topic has not found a simple linear effect; instead, there is evidence of a curvilinear relationship. The two ends of the spectrum are often cited as democratic and autocratic, with violence being a larger risk to regimes that reside somewhere in the middle (Fjelde and De Soysa, 2009). This may occur for a few reasons. One, states that are somewhere in the middle are often in a time of transition, and transition is risky. Regime change boosts conflict risk while stability dampens it, and interestingly, the direction of change does not seem to matter (Thoms and Ron, 2007). According to Reynal-Querol (2002), the most important political cause of ideological civil wars is a presidential system with a low level of democracy, once again invoking the dangers of a hybrid regime.

Similar to assumptions about regime type, many studies of economic development are based on the idea that the relationship between GDP and conflict is linear. In this case, scholars reason that as a state's GDP increases, the likelihood of conflict decreases (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). This, however, has been contested. Olson (1963), later supported by Huntington (1968), indicated that rapid economic growth can be dangerously destabilizing. Along with this claim, they suggest an inverted U-shaped relationship. Rapid economic growth is not occurring in countries that are perpetually low income, and high-income countries are not greatly affected by sudden rapid growth. The middle-income countries are in the most danger because the rapid increase in wealth can be mishandled in ways not present at the two other ends. Olson identifies several reasons for this danger, including unequal distribution of wealth, heightening grievances; increases in the capacity and aspirations of groups and individuals, and thus the strength of dissent; as well as rising expectations of the poor at a much faster rate than the reduction of poverty. An example of this is the situation in Afghanistan after the Obama administration pumped more money into the state than it could handle. The massive influx of wealth only leads to widespread corruption and did very little to further any nation-building goals.

Finally, ethnic fractionalization has been stated to have a curvilinear relationship with the onset of armed conflict (Fjelde and De Soysa, 2009). Bakkan, Jakobsen, Jakobsen and Moghaddam (2016) establish that ethnicity itself is a mechanism that explains the onset of internal conflict, rather than being connected to another concept. They conclude that the

relationship between ethnicity and conflict is positive but admit that is it slightly curvilinear. Warren and Troy (2015) explore the conditions that promote violent, fragmentary conflict within states with politically active ethnic minorities. They draw a connection to violence being instigated by the interaction between subgroup entrepreneurs and the suppressive actions of the state. A curvilinear relationship is strongly predicted between the relative size of an ethnic minority and its probability of experiencing large-scale intra-ethnic conflict.

Research Design

Because I seek to determine how political terror affects conflict frequency within a state, I employ longitudinal data. This means I have data that span many years, and I can investigate whether the cause predates the effect. The available data only allowed the study of the years between 1976 to 2019 with 5,848 observations. Previous research has identified real GDP, regime type, and ethnic fractionalization as being strongly related to the level of internal conflict so, in this study, these factors are controlled for. The unit of analysis is country by year, utilizing a cross-section time-series dataset

Data for this research comes from the QOG Standard Dataset. In this study, the independent variable is a state's position on the Political Terror Scale, or gd_ptss, and the dependent variable is the number of internal armed conflicts in a given year or ucdp_type3. To test for a curvilinear relationship, the variable for political terror scale is squared. The analysis considers both coefficients. I also include the squared variables of real GDP and regime type to test against the central explanatory variable.

The QOG uses the Political Terror Scale as the political terror variable. Political terror refers to violations of basic human rights to the physical integrity of the person by agents of the state within the territorial boundaries of the state in question. This includes state-sanctioned killings, torture, disappearances, and political imprisonment. The PTS is sourced from annual reports from the US State Department and is measured on a 5-point ordinal scale.

Level 1 is defined as countries under a secure rule of law. At this level, people are not imprisoned for their views, torture is rare or exceptional, and political murders are extremely rare. Level 2 means there is a limited amount of imprisonment for nonviolent political activity. However, few people are affected, torture is exceptional and political murder is rare. At level 3, there is extensive political imprisonment, and execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention for political views is accepted, with or without a trial. Level 4 expands civil and political rights violations to many in the population. Murders, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. Despite the greater expanse, on this level terror affects primarily those who interest themselves in politics or ideas. Level 5 consists of the behaviors characteristic of Level 4, but extended to the whole population. The leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.

The internal armed conflict variable is sourced from the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. UCDP dataset records every armed conflict possible in a given year accounting for over twenty-five variables. It defines conflict as: "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths." It distinguishes between four different types of conflict: extra systemic, interstate, internal, and internationalized internal. For the purposes of this research, a disaggregated version of the dataset is used, accounting for only the number of internal armed conflicts specifically.

Regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis because the dependent variable is continuous. I am also looking to see the shape of the relationship between the number of conflicts and political terror level, and when applied correctly, a regression analysis will reveal it.

Results and Analysis

Based on previous research and potential mechanisms, I argue that there is a curvilinear relationship, in the shape of an upside-down U, between political terror and internal armed conflict. My data reveals interesting results. Table 1 confirms that there is a statistically significant relationship between my central explanatory variable and instances of internal conflict. The political terror level variable as well as its squared variable have a p-value of 0.000. While this is expected, the results when looking for the curvilinear relationship are not. Table 1 demonstrates the existence of a nonmonotonic relationship; however, the curve is not in the direction I predicted. The coefficient for political terror level is negative, while the coefficient for the square of political terror level is negative. This suggests that the relationship would look more like right-side up U, or a convex curve, which is not what I had hypothesized. According to the results, as political terror goes up, instances of internal armed conflict go down, eventually reaching a point somewhere in the middle. At this point, the relationship flips, suggesting that as political terror continues to increase, so do the instances of internal armed conflict. Countries that experience the lowest levels of political terror, as well as the highest level, are more likely to experience internal armed conflict then those who reside in the middle.

Nearly all the control variables were statistically significant, both the normal variable as well as its squared variable. The only two that are not are ethnic fractionalization and the squared coefficient of regime type and, with a p-value of 0.089 and 0.916 respectively. Interestingly, the control variables follow the relationship to instances of internal conflict that I originally predicted. Both coefficients for regime type and GDP are positive while their squared coefficients are negative. This suggests a curvilinear relationship resembling the upside-down U.

I had not come across this result in any of the studies I looked at, so if my results are found to be replicable, scholars and policy makers would have to seriously reframe the role political terror has previously been given. If the lowest frequency of armed conflicts is in states that on an occasion use terror against their citizens, and the goal is to prevent armed conflicts,

then it would seem terror in some cases is effective. Policy makers may have to take into consideration which type of violence is acceptable and which is not. These results propose that when there is less violence from the state, there will be more armed conflict, but when there is some violence from the state, there will be less. Policy makers will have to choose whether they wish to strive to limit the amount of terror exercised by a state at risk of increasing chances of internal conflict or limit the possibility of internal conflict by allowing occasional use of political terror. This also means that an absence of political terror as well as excessive political terror are not effective at preventing conflict. Future scholars would have to shift their focus to finding the balance between the two. Ideally, a state would have to find the minimal amount of terror to use as possible, while still being sure to limit the potential of conflict.

The reason for the results is unclear, especially considering that the control variables produced the expected results. Based on the research and mechanisms connected to political terror, the curve should be concave, rather than convex. Potentially, the reason for these results is because other factors that usually coincide with political terror are being controlled for. This research is creating a situation the has never and likely will never happen, where response to political terror is completely independent to other conflict mechanisms. This acts as evidence that political terror itself is not a sufficient mechanism to instigate conflict, instead requiring other factors to properly measure its effects.

Table 1: Political Terror and Instances of Internal Armed Conflict 1976-2019

Political Terror	-0.307***
	(.0384)
Political Terror squared	0.113***
	(0.007)
Regime Type	0.327*
	(0.157)
Regime Type squared	-0.284
	(0.167)
GDP	1.56e-07***
	(1.67e-08)
GDP squared	-1.19e-14***
	(1.43e-15)
Ethnic Fractionalization	0 .004
	(0.0378)
Constant	0.0840
	(0.056)
Observations	5,848
R-squared	0.244

***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05. Standard errors in parentheses.

Conclusion

Both generalized and specific research have their purpose in literature. Most of the previous studies I found focused on specific aspects of political terror with rather limited data sets. In this paper I wanted to get an understanding of the bigger picture. I asked if political terror has any significant effect on likelihood of internal armed conflict. Much of the literature regarding political violence suggested that as political terror increases, so does the probability of conflict. However, after looking at research on widely accepted mechanisms of conflict, some of

which I controlled for (regime type, GDP, and ethnic fractionalization), as well as other (greed, grievances, state capacity, and strength), I found that some scholars were finding a curvilinear relationship between these variables and armed conflict. There were only a couple studies exploring this relationship with political violence as the independent variable, and none used internal armed conflict as the dependent variable. So, to address this gap in the literature, I analyzed the nature of the relationship between political terror and internal conflict, hoping to find this curvilinear relationship.

In analyzing political terror as factor of grievance, I suggest that once political terror spreads through the whole population indiscriminately, it can no longer be used to adequate justify conflict. Grievance requires a group to feel repressed through seeing another group not experiencing those repressions. If political terror penetrates the entirety of a nation, as level 5 on the political terror scale suggests, there is no one to compare situations to, and so no opportunity to spark of indignation. I also argue that a cost-benefit analysis would result in the curvilinear relationship. The lens of rational action, as well as economic opportunity and resource mobilization all use a cost-benefit model to predict is dissent will lead to conflict, and all suggest a curvilinear relationship. Finally, I bring up the idea of consistency. States that practice consistent policies will more likely have the trust of the people and dampen dissent, even in non-democratic states. Consistency is difficult to maintain if political terror is only used only on some occasions instead of not at all or quite frequently.

These factors lead me to hypothesize that countries with extremely low levels of political terror as well as countries with extremely high levels will both experience fewer instances of internal conflicts than countries that reside in the middle of the scale. My test failed to provide support for my hypothesis. According to the results, as political terror goes up, instances of internal armed conflict go down, eventually reaching a point somewhere in the middle. At this point, the relationship flips, suggesting that as political terror continues to increase, so does the instances of conflict. Countries that experience the lowest levels of political terror, as well as the highest level, are more likely to experience internal armed conflict than those who reside in the middle.

The findings contradict what is found in much of the literature. While there has not been much empirical research regarding the relationship between political terror and instances of armed conflict, multiple studies have touched on it as control variables or in slightly different contexts. These studies suggest a curvilinear relationship similar to that seen in regime type or GDP. These odd findings may suggest that conflict factors are extensively interconnected, making it difficult to examine one outside the context of others.

My research offers an unexpected perspective that will certainly need more testing. It is unclear if the results hold any significant presence in the realm of internal armed conflict, but if they do, then this is a new potential outcome that policy makers need to be aware of. Rather than research lending itself to eliminating all forms of violence, perhaps there should be research into what the minimal amount of state terror is that is needed to curb rebellion while still allowing for peaceful dialogue with the people.

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   Source |       SS       df       MS      Number of obs   =     5,848
-------------+------------------------------   F(7, 5840)     =    269.20
       Model |  828.803202         7  118.400457   Prob > F      =    0.0000
    Residual |  2568.5429     5,840  .43981899   R-squared     =    0.2440
-------------+------------------------------   Adj R-squared   =    0.2430
       Total |  3397.3461     5,847  .581040893   Root MSE      =    .66319

------------------------------------------------------------------------------
  ucdp_type3 | Coefficient  Std. err.      t    P>|t|     [95% conf. interval]
-------------+----------------------------------------------------------------
     gd_ptss |  -.3067237    .03841    -7.99   0.000    -.3820215   -.2314258
       ptss2 |   .1133053   .0066634    17.00   0.000     .1002426    .126368
vdem_polyar~y |   .3265138   .1568557     2.08   0.037     .0190186    .6340091
       poly2 |  -.2840034   .1671096    -1.70   0.089    -.6116001    .0435933
     pwt_rgdp |   1.56e-07   1.67e-08     9.34   0.000     1.23e-07    1.88e-07
       rgdp2 |  -1.19e-14   1.43e-15    -8.35   0.000    -1.47e-14   -9.14e-15
al_ethnic2000 |   .0039676    .037726     0.11   0.916    -.0699893    .0779245
       _cons |   .0840099   .0562248     1.49   0.135    -.0262116    .1942314
          ------------------------------------------------------------------------------
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