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An Empirical Investigation of How Civil Society Affects Mass Killings

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Abstract: Why do some state-led mass killings end quickly while others endure for over a decade? And why do some states murder millions of constituents during the course of mass killings, whereas other states seem to “retreat from the brink” after killing thousands (Straus 2012)? A large body of work has focused on the important role played by civil society and non-governmental actors in initiating different forms of rescue, evasion, and assistance in the midst of different cases of mass killings, as well as the political pressure they have applied in bringing about the ends of civil conflicts. Despite many inspiring and hopeful cases of collective action under systems of intense repression, other research finds civil society can play a much more malevolent force in the context of mass killings. In this paper, we test some basic mechanisms that emerge from the literature on more general relationships between civil society and mass killings. We find that, in general, a relatively participatory and autonomous civil society is correlated with shorter mass killings. However, we also find that active civil societies are associated with higher rates of lethality, particularly when those civil society sectors are active in highly unequal polities. Because most mass killings are relatively short, our findings suggest that civil societies in states with uneven access to power are more commonly correlated with shorter, deadlier spells of government violence. This conclusion seemingly supports the view of civil society skeptics, at least in contexts where mass killings have already begun.

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Why do some state-led mass killings end quickly while others endure for over a decade? And why do some states murder millions of constituents during the course of mass killings, whereas other states seem to “retreat from the brink” after killing thousands (Straus 2012)? A large body of work has focused on the important role played by civil society and non-governmental actors in initiating different forms of rescue, evasion, and assistance in the midst of different cases of mass killings, as well as the political pressure they have applied in bringing about the ends of civil conflicts (Nilsson 2012; Gbowee 2011; Robinson 2010). In cases as diverse as Nazi Germany (Fein 1979; Phayer 1993), Nazi-occupied Holland (Braun 2016; Varese and Yaish 2000) and France (Moore 2010), Rwanda (Longman 2010), India (Varshney 2002), East Timor (Robinson 2010), Colombia (Kaplan 2017), the Ottoman Empire (Tevosyan 2004), and Eastern Europe (McMahon 2007), churches, civic organizations, labor unions, local community councils, and transnational networks played important roles in halting or foiling killings, providing protection, and reducing the number of killed overall.

Despite these inspiring and hopeful cases of collective action under systems of intense repression, other research suggests that civil society can play a much more malevolent force in the context of mass killings. This perspective falls into two groups - one that sees civil society as *mobilizing* mass killings (e.g. Mann 2005, McDoom 2014; Longman 2010) and another that sees an active civil society as *vulnerable to* mass killings (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018).

Examples of the mobilizing dynamic can be seen among the fascist groups (and parties) that emerged out of the dense and robust civil societies observed in Weimar Germany as well as in post-WWI Italy (Berman 1997). Groups and networks aligned with the Nazi party served as convenient sources of recruitment, information-sharing, and coordination once deportations and killings of Jews and other minorities began. McDoom finds that social capital in Rwanda enabled greater capacity for mass killing (2014). Braun suggests that churches that enjoyed incumbent political power did little to shelter Jews or stop their deportations during the Holocaust (2016). Longman shows that some church communities in Rwanda actively reinforced racist narratives and helped to organize and coordinate, and ultimately perpetrate killings of Hutus (2010).

The vulnerability dynamic has a different impetus. Here, civil society serves as a ready source of information about which opposition groups are most politically threatening to power. Recent work suggests that the existence of a substantial, autonomous civil society makes targeting these oppositionists more efficient. Kopstein and Wittenberg (2018) argue that in locales where Jewish civil society groups began to expand their political power and make claims to equal citizenship in Poland, oppositionists and their sympathizers became easy targets, making anti-Jewish pogroms much deadlier.

What is less known is whether, on balance, civil society is a benevolent or malevolent force in societies during periods of upheaval or national crisis. In this paper, we build upon earlier work that suggests that violence will reach a “higher level when sources of escalation are strong and sources of restraint¹ are weak” (Straus 2012, p. 344). We leverage new data on civil society characteristics from the Varieties of Democracy dataset to test some basic mechanisms that emerge from the literature on more general relationships between civil society and mass killings.

We find mixed albeit theoretically consistent results which suggest that civil society has discernible impacts on the duration and severity of state-led mass killings; these impacts seem to indicate that civil society is likelier to escalate mass killings than to restrain them. We find that, in general, a relatively participatory and autonomous civil society is correlated with shorter mass killings. However, we also find that active civil societies are associated with higher rates of lethality, particularly when those civil society sectors are active in highly unequal polities. Because most mass killings are relatively short, our findings suggest that civil societies in states with uneven access to power are more commonly correlated with shorter, deadlier spells of government violence. Although we cannot fully ascertain whether this is because civil society tends to mobilize in favor of the mass killing, whether civil society tends to provide ready targets of mass killing, or both, this conclusion seemingly supports the view of civil society skeptics, particularly in contexts where mass killings have already set on.

The empirical analysis makes several important analytical contributions. First, our analysis is conditional on the onset of state-led mass killings. We eschew a focus on explaining the *onset* of mass killings directly, and instead focus on variation in the *duration* and *scope* of mass violence. In doing so, we adopt Straus’ admonition that “The outcome in question should not be modeled as a two-stage outcome of policy conception and implementation, but rather as a multi-stage, dynamic process subject to conditions that could cause escalation, de-escalation, or non-escalation” (2012, p. 344). For our purposes, this is especially important because mass killings are exceedingly rare events. By limiting our analysis to comparing cases where mass killings have already set on, we can more easily observe whether civil society’s restraining effects pass the “stress test” of a violent national crisis (Straus 2012).

Second, until the last decade, most scholarship on genocide, politicide, and mass killings fell into one of two categories: either they focused on “macro” societal factors, such as regime type (Rummel 1994), war and instability (Harff 2003), or nationalism (Mann 2005), or they focused on micro-level factors, such as personality type (Oliner and Oliner 1998), obedience to authority (Milgram 1965), and moral cognition or identity

¹ Straus describes forces of restraint as “ideas, interactions, and institutions that prompt leaders and/or citizens to abstain from or moderate the use of extensive violence against civilians” (Straus 2012, p. 344). It is the latter outcome - the moderation of extensive violence against civilians once it has begun - that interests us here.

(Gross 1994; Monroe 2011) in explaining why some people become bystanders, perpetrators, or resisters of genocide. In contrast, more recent works have pushed for highlighting the impacts of meso-level, societal factors on mass killings rather than focusing only on static, state- or international-level conditions or individuals' dispositional traits as the primary drivers of this grisly phenomenon (Braun 2016; Finkel and Straus 2012; Fujii 2011; Longman 2010; McDoom 2014; Straus 2012). Although we are not entirely able to move beyond fairly macro analyses in the first cut of this study, our findings provide ample evidence justifying further research into the conditions under which civil society accelerates or stalls mass killings, and they also point us to some potential directions for refining our hypotheses and analysis in deeper research on particular cases.

Although this project remains at an early stage, we note that a robust empirical investigation of these questions is vital for a number of practical reasons. Crucially, typical policy approaches speculate that a free and active civil society is essential to peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and by extension or implication mass killings. Although on balance such initiatives may have yielded important benefits -- including the prevention of the onset of mass killings (Perkoski and Chenoweth 2018) -- once mass killings set on, the creation or support of civil society in pursuit of reinforcing norms of cooperation may actually create acceleratory and escalatory effects when such groups are mobilized during mass killings (Longman 2010; McDoom 2014). This speaks to the heightened urgency of prevention as a policy goal, rather than civil society capacity-building alone. Indeed, civil society capacity-building may have unintended, perverse effects, because autonomous civil society groups can become the immediate targets of mass atrocities--or they can often align with the state and become complicit in or actively supportive of mass killings.

This remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. First, we discuss the various ways in which civil society could serve as a restrainer or escalator of mass killings. From this discussion, we derive several testable hypotheses. Next, we lay out a basic research design meant to test the aggregate effects of various dimensions of civil society on the duration and lethality of mass killings. We conclude with a discussion of preliminary conclusions, practical dilemmas implied by these findings, and some proposed next steps for our project.

Civil Society: Restrainer, Escalator, or Both?

Within the literature, we observe two different schools of thought regarding the role of civil society in preventing, mitigating, or terminating mass killings. We refer to them, broadly speaking, as civil society optimists and civil society pessimists.

The Optimists: Civil Society as Restrainer

Civil society optimists, a group that includes many policymakers, assumes that civilian agency in the midst of armed conflict often leads to pro-social behaviors (de Tocqueville; Varshney 2002; Kaplan 2017; Perkoski and Chenoweth 2018; Staub 2013; Semelin, Andrieu, and Gensberger 2011). The first category of such benevolent effects include acts of help, mutual aid, and rescue. In many cases of mass killing, people who try to flee or evade mass killings are highly dependent on others to share resources, provide shelter, facilitate movement, or appeal to authorities for mercy (Braun 2016; Varese and Yaish 2000). When communities engage in collective action to shelter, hide, rescue, or facilitate the flight of targeted populations, they can have a substantial impact on the survival rates among these communities (Braun 2016).

Second, civil society spreads norms of nonviolent conflict resolution, reciprocity, and community cohesion that may reduce motivations for large-scale participation in mass killings. As Varshney finds in his study of variations in Hindu-Muslim communal violence in India, inter-ethnic civil society organizers actively fostered dialogue and mutual understanding during periods of political crisis (2002). Similarly, Patrice McMahon argues that transnational civil society organizations that took root in Eastern Europe during the 1990s successfully prevented the onset of mass violence by emphasizing inter-ethnic cooperation and peace and offering financial, technical, and moral resources to groups that adopted these principles (McMahon 2007; Straus 2012, p. 347).

The third function of civil society groups concerns the sharing of information. Mass killings are often centralized and organized, although much of the information is deliberately kept hidden from various publics. Civil society groups can serve important fact-finding functions. For instance, during the Holocaust, the Catholic Resistance Circle of Berlin encouraged widespread denunciation and protest of the extermination of Jews within the Catholic Church. Although it failed to convince the broader Church to do this, the group maintained contacts with both Nazi bureaucrats and other German resisters. As a consequence, the Berlin Catholics were able to obtain accurate information on the commission of the Holocaust (Phayer 1993, p. 216). The provision of information can be an essential task in halting mass killings in many cases. For instance, in some instances, civil society groups can organize effective international intervention, or can elicit the threat of international intervention, by communicating information about on-the-ground escalation of events. According to Geoffrey Robinson's account of East Timor, for instance, the coordination of local NGOs with transnational solidarity networks was essential in effectively communicating impending mass violence to policymakers who were in a position to stop the violence (2010).

Fourth, Straus argues that civil society organizations can often shift public and elite opinion away from further escalation of violence (Straus 2012, p. 349). Some civil society organizations are well-connected enough that genocidaires prefer not to alienate them. For example, during the Nazi occupation of Holland, national church leaders were

exceedingly vocal in resisting anti-Semitic policies, coordinating a number of national actions and sermons denouncing anti-Semitism. Because they were such powerful sources of legitimacy in the country, the Nazis feared alienating them and so did not engage in mass retaliation against this show of defiance (Braun 2016, p. 130). In other cases, civil society groups can actively broker arrangements between armed actors and vulnerable populations in ways that spare lives, as happened between village-level juntas and various armed combatants in the Colombian civil war (Kaplan 2017). In some cases, civil society groups can mobilize against security forces to prevent them from committing abuse, reducing the opportunity to persist or escalate mass killings (Chenoweth & Perkoski 2018). This dynamic may be especially likely when there is high social affinity between civil society groups and members of the security forces, on the basis of shared identity or conscription practices (Thurber 2019).

Indeed, early work on the role of civil society in particular cases highlights various promising instances of civil society resistance to mass killing. For instance, Fein's seminal studies shows that where the Catholic church and other churches actively opposed anti-Semitism and, later, deportation, violence against Jews was lower than in cases where Christian organizations were acquiescent or supportive of the violence (Fein 1979; see also Phayer 1993). Similarly, Longman (2010) finds that dissent and non-cooperation by some Christian churches slowed down and displaced genocidal violence in some Rwandan communities. Although such resistance failed to stop the genocide, Longman interprets such effects as indicative of what may have happened had religious communities throughout Rwanda resisted the genocide (Straus 2012, p. 347).

Some scholars argue that the degree to which civil society organizations will be subversive or complicit in mass killings depends upon their ideological orientations or socio-political positions. For instance, groups that promote egalitarianism and unity (Chambers and Kopstein 2001), individualism, modesty, and self-doubt (Chirot and McCauley 2006; Straus 2012) may be associated with greater levels of tolerance. This may lead them to perform a bridging function that reduces the duration or lethality of mass killings. Alternately, those civil society organizations that represent minority groups may be more likely to serve as restrainers of mass killing (Braun 2016). This is because, according to Braun (2016), local minority groups are better equipped to set up "clandestine networks that are immune to individual betrayal" because of the high commitment levels of minority constituents. Moreover, minorities tend to empathize with other victims of mass persecution, making them more likely to take personal risks to protect them (Braun 2016, p. 127; Hoffman 2001).

In the context of national upheavals, civil society optimists would therefore see a robust civil society - especially a robust civil society with egalitarian ideology and a high degree of minority representation - as a benevolent force of restraint.

The Pessimists: Civil Society as Escalator & Accelerator

As Foley and Edwards put it, “if civil society is a beachhead secure enough to be of use in thwarting tyrannical regimes, what prevents it from being used to undermine democratic governments?” (1996, p. 46). Indeed, according to the pessimists, civil society organizations are often complicit, cooperative with power, or actively engaged in the commission of mass killings. Careful case studies on mass killings suggest that civil society groups sometimes mobilize to collaborate with or even perpetrate pogroms that can escalate to mass killings (Longman 2010; McDoom 2014)--a *mobilizing* logic. Alternately, civil society groups often provide the basis for more easily identifying dissidents and oppositionists, thereby providing efficient targets for perpetrators of mass killings (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018)--a *vulnerability* logic.

The *mobilizing* mechanisms that can tie civil society organizations to mass killings are legion. First, civil society organizations often mirror, recreate, or reinforce existing political cleavages, increasing the motivation for extended mass killings. When civil society is “vertically organized” (Putnam 2000), associational life serves the purpose of (or at least acquiesce to) existing power. For instance, Longman (2010) finds that in Rwanda, Catholic and Presbyterian churches, which were dominant in that country’s politics and social life, actively legitimized the genocide by “practicing ethnic politics, promoting subservience to state authorities, and failing to condemn the ethnic violence that had occurred in the years before the 1994 genocide” (Straus 212, p. 347).

Second, acquiescent civil society groups reduce the costs of mobilizing collective action in opposition to a group, increasing the opportunity for mass killings. McDoom, for instance, suggest four functions of social networks, including civil society groups, which fostered violent mobilization during the Rwandan genocide: (1) diffusion, in which individuals transfer information and resources among those to whom they are in routine contact; (2) influence, in which people influence one another’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; (3) regulation, in which civil society organizations constrain or promote different activities; and (4) cohesion, in which organizations build solidarity among members and reinforce divisions and differences with those excluded from the group (2014, p. 870). On this latter point, civil society can involve groups that reinforce exclusionary practices and bigotry, even when not in power. Many examples of “bonding” social capital, for example, are inward-looking and tend to “reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups” as opposed to bridging connections across societal fault-lines (Chambers and Kopstein 2001, p. 841). Fujii (2011) similarly found strong ties among social networks and the survival imperative to be much stronger predictors of violence than other commonly-cited factors in her analysis of the Rwandan genocide. On diffusion, McDoom’s findings echo work by Pierskalla and Hollenbach (2013), whose study of communal violence in Kenya finds that cell phone penetration served as a powerful catalyst of political violence there, as groups were able to more efficiently share information and coordinate collective action in mobilizing violence.

The *vulnerability* logic is similarly straightforward. Here, oppositional civil society organizations often try to confront the incumbent regime directly, threatening the status quo and increasing the motivation for mass killings. Yet oppositional civil society groups make efficient targets, as identification of key opposition members is easier (e.g. Kopstein & Wittenberg 2018). This increases the opportunity for mass killings, especially when oppositional civil society organizations actively and openly mobilize against security forces who have already begun engaging in mass killings. In Nazi Germany, for example, the regime efficiently deported, detained, and/or executed perceived enemies of the state, such as members of the progressive or radical left, intelligentsia, and other oppositionists, as a function of their associations with related civil society groups.

As such, civil society pessimists generally see such organizations as malevolent forces - or at least unwittingly provocative ones - in the context of mass killings. Indeed, some scholars even argue that across many episodes of mass killing, a mobilized civil society was necessary to carry out genocidal violence. Chambers and Kopstein point out, for example, that Weimar Germany's extensive and robust civil society birthed the Nazi movement, while newly-established civil societies in Russia and Eastern Europe produced the proto-fascist Russian National Unity and the Romanian National Union. The former Yugoslavia "arguably had the most developed civil society of any Eastern European country," yet descended into genocidal violence and war nonetheless (Chambers and Kopstein 2001, p. 842). And it is worth mentioning that the United States, which possesses a large and diverse civil society, also has the dubious distinction of hosting a number of white power and white supremacist groups, the Ku Klux Klan, countless armed militias, and any number of hate groups who have openly speculated that their role in any national crisis would be escalatory rather than restrained.

Among those who argue that bridging networks serve important restraining functions on violence, micro-level studies cast further doubt. For instance, McDoom (2014) found that even though some genocidaires had inter-ethnic social networks through intermarriage, friendship, or neighborhood, such "bridging" relationships did not exert restraint on killing during the Rwandan genocide. Such findings cast doubt on the possibility of bridging social capital to serve as an adequate restraint when bonding social capital is dominant in the context of a mass killing.

Duration and Lethality as Indicators of Restraint and Escalation during Mass Killings

We follow Straus' (2012) suggestion that researchers consider factors that both restrain and enable or motivate mass killings. We rely on both macro and meso levels of analysis (Finkel and Straus 2012) in our empirical analysis, although the focus of this paper is more specifically on the role of civil society organizations as a source of restraint or escalation.

In assessing the dynamics of state-led mass violence, we turn to variation in both the duration and scale of mass killings killing. For instance, in China's Cultural Revolution, there were reportedly over 3 million people killed during a 9-year spell of mass killing. We can compare such cases to the mass killing recorded in Iran, where the Islamic Republic unleashed killings of political opponents - including dissident Muslims, Kurds, and Baha'i people - during its consolidation phase between 1981 and 1992. Although this violent episode lasted 11 years, the Iranian government killed far fewer people than Mao's China.

Of course, mass killings do not need to endure for long periods to escalate to highly lethal levels. The Rwandan genocide, for instance, resulted in the mass murder of 600,000 people in just an 8-week period in 1994. But such cases are exceptional; among the data we use here, mass killings last an average of 6 years and kill between 16,000 and 32,000 people. We therefore consider both duration and lethality to get a fuller picture of the dynamics of violence.

Table 1: Effects of Restraint and Escalation on Dynamics of Mass Killings

		Sources of Restraint	
Sources of Escalation		Strong	Weak
	Strong	Medium duration / Medium lethality	Long duration / High lethality
	Weak	Short duration / Low lethality	Short duration / Low lethality

Table 1 summarizes our theoretical expectations. We articulate various sources of restraint and escalation derived from the extant literature as well as our discussion above. We build on Straus' (2012) logic to speculate that when sources of restraint from within civil society are strong, mass killings end more quickly and with lower levels of lethality. For violence to persist and expand in lethality, the sources of restraint "must be marginalized, overwhelmed, or destroyed" (Straus 2012, p. 344). When sources of restraint are weak or weakened, mass killings may endure longer and escalate to higher rates of lethality.

There are many macro-level factors associated with the escalation of mass killings (for excellent summary overviews, see Straus 2012 and Uğör 2012). We list them alongside the sources of restraint in Table 2 below, although we do not spend considerable space discussing them here. Needless to say, we can assume that in each case of mass killing under study, sources of escalation were sufficient to generate a mass killing in the first place, although the strength of these influences can vary over the

course of an episode. When sources of escalation maintain their strength, we expect mass killings to persist and to kill larger numbers of people, all other things being equal.

Table 2: Summary of Variables

Sources of Restraint				Sources of Escalation			
Macro	Source	Meso	Source	Macro	Source	Meso	Source
Manufacturing & agriculture dependent economy	Straus 2012	Elite calls for unity*	Straus 2012	Extractive industry dependent economy	Straus 2012	Elite manipulation	Gagnon 1995; Straus 2012
Democracy	Rummel 1994	Bridging social capital	Staub 2013; Chambers and Kopstein 2001	Unemployment*	Chambers and Kopstein 2001	Bonding social capital	McDoom 2014; Chambers and Kopstein 2001
Large middle class*	Straus 2012	Minority civil society institutions*	Braun 2016	Poverty	Straus 2012; Chambers and Kopstein 2001	Vertically-organized civil society	Chambers and Kopstein 2001
Low military capacity*	Straus 2012	Women's participation in civil society	Gbowee 2011	Inequality	Chambers and Kopstein 2001	Minority civil society institutions	Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018
International justice system (ICC)*	Straus 2012	Oppositional civil society orgs	Perkoski and Chenoweth 2018	Authoritarianism	Berman 1997; Rummel 1994	Organic nationalism*	Mann 2005
Impartial international intervention*	Wood & Kathman 2011			Militarized public institutions	Straus 2012	Oppositional civil society orgs	Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018
Trade openness*	Harff 2003						

*Covariates not yet included in our modeling are marked with an asterisk.

From this discussion, we derive the following hypotheses. We note that we were not able to test all of these hypotheses for the purposes of this study (hypotheses not yet tested are marked with an asterisk).

Hypothesis 1_{restraint}: A robust civil society reduces the duration and lethality of mass killings.

Hypothesis 2_{restraint}: A high degree of bridging civil society organizations reduces the duration and lethality of mass killings relative to bonding civil society organizations.

**Hypothesis 3_{restraint}: A dense minority civil society sector reduces the duration and lethality of mass killings.*

Hypothesis 4_{restraint}: Women's participation in civil society reduces the duration and lethality of mass killings.

Hypothesis 5_{restraint}: The presence of oppositional civil society organizations reduces the duration and lethality of mass killings.

Hypothesis 5_{escalation}: A robust civil society increases the duration and lethality of mass killings.

**Hypothesis 6_{escalation}: A dense minority civil society sector increases the duration and lethality of mass killings.*

Hypothesis 7_{escalation}: The presence of oppositional civil society organizations increases the duration and lethality of mass killings.

Hypothesis 8_{escalation}: A vertically-organized civil society increases the duration and lethality of mass killings.

We next turn to our research design.

Research Design

We test our hypotheses about the relationship between civil society and the intensity and duration of mass killings against data from multiple sources and using a variety of statistical methods.

The first set of tests relate to the duration of mass killings. Here, we leverage two data sources. The first is data from Ulfelder and Valentino.² This data set was not explicitly designed for studying the duration of mass killings, and the dependent variable simply takes on a value of one when “the actions of state agents result in the intentional death of at least 1,000 noncombatants from a discrete group in a period of sustained violence.” Other important characteristics of mass killings in this data set include the perceived groupness of civilians – that is, the perpetrators must view victims as

² Data available at: <https://github.com/ulfelder/earlywarningproject-statrisk-2014/blob/master/masskilling.data.handbook.txt>

belonging to a single group – and the clear intent by states to eradicate or coerce a particular population either by direct (e.g. using the armed forces to attack) or indirect (e.g. withholding food and medical supplies). Mass killings are coded as starting in the first year in which at least 100 civilian noncombatants are killed, and ending when fatalities drop below 100 for three consecutive years.³ Thus, we can construct rough timelines of mass killings, separating out discrete events that are separated by at least three years.

Table 3: Coding of Mass Killing Severity

Variable Level	Civilian Fatalities
0.0	less than 300
0.5	300 - 1000
1.0	1000 - 2000
1.5	2000 - 4000
2.0	4000 - 8000
2.5	8000 - 16,000
3.0	16,000 - 32,000
3.5	32,000 - 64,000
4.0	64,000 - 128,000
4.5	128,000 - 256,000
5.0	256,000 +

We also explore the duration of mass killings using data from the Integrated Network for Societal Conflict Research (INSCR). Here, the inclusion criteria for mass killings are slightly higher. While a similar groupness is necessary – either an actual or “politicized non-communal group” – this data emphasizes the “systematic, lethal” and intentional nature of political violence to eradicate a population.” Incidences of starvation and withholding water and medicine would therefore not be included. This, understandably, yields fewer incidences of mass killing. Episodes are coded as beginning in the month in which systematic killings begin, and terminating at the

³ Here, the first of the three years is when the mass killing is considered over.
<https://github.com/ulfelder/earlywarningproject-statrisk-2014/blob/master/masskilling.data.handbook.txt>

“occurrence of the last serious atrocities, the end of a military campaign that targets civilian areas, or simply the absence of any further reports.”⁴ As before, we utilize this information to construct approximate timelines of mass killing campaigns.

After exploring patterns in the duration of mass killings, we turn our attention towards their severity. We begin with data from INSCR that provides the clearest approximation of what we are interested in. Specifically, for every year of a mass killing, INSCR codes its severity according to an interval scale ranging from zero to five in increments of one half. The precise measurements are displayed in the table below.

Unfortunately, other data sets do not provide information on the severity of mass killings (including Ulfelder and Valentino). To bolster our analysis, however, we examine the severity of violence contained the Uppsala Conflict Data Program’s (UCDP) Georeferenced Event Dataset which captures incidences of one-sided violence perpetrated by the government against civilians. While therefore similar in nature to mass killings, UCDP captures instances of violence resulting in at least one fatality. This marks a significant difference since the vast majority of these events would neither merit inclusion in INSCR nor Ulfelder and Valentino. Nonetheless, analyzing this data should shed light on whether the mechanisms we theorize extend to lower levels of violence, or whether they are limited to more lethal confrontations.⁵

We analyze the duration and severity of mass killings using two different statistical methods. First, for duration, we utilize the Cox proportional hazards model, a semi-parametric form of survival analysis that tells us how our variables influence the odds of failure – here, the end of the mass killing. We cluster standard errors by the mass killing event. Then, for severity, we utilize linear regressions for the INSCR data (owing to its interval scale), and negative binomial regressions for the count data from UCDP. For both, we cluster standard errors by country.⁶

Across our models of duration and severity we include roughly the same model specification. We choose these particular covariates for their ostensible, theoretical relation to the outcomes of interest. To begin with, we include several variables relating to regime type. This includes dichotomous indicators of autocracy and democracy using Polity scores,⁷ and dichotomous measures of military, party-based, and personalist regimes from data by Geddes, Wright, and Frantz (2014).⁸ We include these because

⁴ <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/PITFProbSetCodebook2017.pdf>

⁵ UCDP Codebook. https://pcr.uu.se/digitalAssets/666/c_666956-l_1-k_ucdp-one-sided-violence-dataset-codebook-v.1.4-2016.pdf

⁶ We also cluster standard errors by the specific mass-killing event to gain even more leverage over the unobserved factors specific to these particular events. Few differences are observed when compared to clustering by country.

⁷ We do not utilize this data for investigation into the duration of mass killings because of the fundamentally different nature of this violence, and because the low threshold means that violence is coded as ongoing for extended periods of time. This makes it difficult to discern discrete events.

⁸ 7 and above for democracy, -7 and below for autocracy. The reference category is anocracies.

existing research finds a strong link between regime type and mass violence. We also include a dichotomous measure of whether an internal war is occurring, whether a coup has occurred in the past five years, and the number of ongoing civil wars bordering a country. These factors may incentivize mass killings, as is the case with internal wars, or they may possibly deter them, as is the case with coups. In the latter, ruling elites may question the allegiance of their armed forces especially when ordered to crack down on fellow citizens (Chenoweth and Perkoski 2018). As for internal characteristics, we also control for institutionalized subgroup discrimination, levels of ethnic fractionalization, population size, and infant mortality rates. All of these variables are included in our models of both severity and duration, although for severity we also include a count of how long the mass killing has lasted.⁹

Our primary theoretical interest, however, concerns the effect of civil society on mass killings, and we obtain civil society data from the extensive Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project.¹⁰ We narrow our focus to seven variables in particular that capture some of the civil society dimensions we are most interested in. These are listed in Table 4 along with definitions. For every analysis that follows, we include all of the control variables listed above while varying the particular measure of civil society.¹¹ Importantly, we measure the level of civil society -- across each of the seven variables -- for the first year in which the mass killing takes place. Understandably, these factors will change over time and in response to the mass killing itself; to avoid reverse causality, we focus on their initial values.

Table 4: Operationalization of Civil Society

V-DEM Civil Society Variable	Motivating Question	Related Hypotheses
Core Civil Society Index	"How robust is civil society?"	H1, H5
Civil Society Participation	"Are major CSOs routinely consulted by policymakers; how large is the involvement of people in CSOs; are women prevented from participating; and is legislative candidate nomination within party organization highly decentralized or made through party primaries?"	H2

⁹ All of these analyses are run at the country-year unit of analysis.

¹⁰ https://xmarquez.github.io/democracyData/reference/gwf_all.html

¹¹ <https://www.v-dem.net/en/reference/version-8-apr-2018/>

Civil Society Women's Participation	"Are women prevented from participating in CSOs?"	H4
Civil Society Organization Entry and Exit	"To what extent does the government achieve control over entry and exit by CSOs into public life?"	H8
Civil Society Organization Repression	"Does the government attempt to repress CSOs?"	H5, H7
Civil Society Anti-System Movement	"Among civil society organizations, are there anti-system opposition movements?"	H5, H7
Civil Society Participatory Environment	"Which of these best describes the involvement of people in CSOs?" Ranges from "Most associations are state-sponsored" to "There are many diverse CSOs."	H8

The specific operationalization of these variables is as follows:

- *Core Civil Society Index*: generated through a Bayesian factor analysis of the indicators for CSO entry and exit, CSO repression, and CSO participatory environment. Ranges from zero to one with one representing stronger, robust, and more independent civil society.
- *Civil Society Participation*: generated through a Bayesian factor analysis, ranges from zero to one with one capturing more autonomous and more free civil society.
- *Civil Society Women's Participation*: ranges from zero, where women are prevented from joining CSOs, to four, where women are almost never prevented from joining and participating in civil society.
- *CSO Entry and Exit*: ranges from zero, where governments have full control and repress unsanctioned groups, to four where CSOs form and operate independently of the government.
- *Civil Society Repression*: ranges from zero, where the government "violently and actively pursues all real and even some imagined members of CSO, to four, where civil society is free of government interference.

- *Civil Society Anti-System Movement*: ranges from zero, where there is no anti-system movement, to four, where a high level of anti-system action “[poses] a real and present threat to the regime.”
- *Civil Society Participatory Environment*: ranges from zero, where most CSOs are state-sponsored and participation is not entirely voluntary, to three, where there are many CSOs and people often belong to one or more.

Finally, after running the baseline models described so far on the duration and severity of mass killings, we turn our attention towards exploring meaningful interaction effects. Perhaps civil society does not yield monotonic effects (e.g. Hypotheses 3 and 6), but instead interacts with regime type or political inequality to shape mass killings in different ways. We explore this possibility in a series of additional models. The particular interactions we explore include civil society with Polity scores, dichotomous measures of autocracy (from Polity), and measures of political inequality obtained from V-DEM. The variable assesses the extent to which political power is distributed by socioeconomic position. This runs along a five-point scale where zero means that “political power is more or less equally distributed across economic groups,” and four that “average and poorer people have almost no influence.”

Results

Duration of Mass Killings

As noted above, we rely on two separate data sources to study the duration of mass killings as it relates to characteristics of civil society: data from INSCR and Ulfelder and Valentino. Beginning with the former, we find little in the way of meaningful associations between these two dynamics. Only two of the seven civil society measures yield statistically significant findings: the participatory environment, and the extent to which the state represses civil society organizations. This suggests that in states where there are more CSOs that are free to organize and relatively independent of the government, and where there is little to no government repression of them, then mass killings tend to be shorter. This provides baseline evidence that a robust, free civil society can perhaps be mobilized for good to end episodes of mass violence. Otherwise, four of the other six CSO measures generate positive point estimates, none reach traditional significance levels.

Table 5: Cox Proportional Hazards Model, Duration of Mass Killings (U & V)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Internal War	-0.257 (0.260)	-0.262 (0.260)	-0.278 (0.256)	-0.280 (0.257)	-0.262 (0.258)	-0.320 (0.284)	-0.245 (0.261)
No. Bordering Civil Wars.	0.075 (0.112)	0.057 (0.116)	0.065 (0.121)	0.068 (0.113)	0.069 (0.114)	0.036 (0.123)	0.062 (0.114)
Subgroup Discrim.	-0.419* (0.234)	-0.390* (0.235)	-0.371 (0.236)	-0.411* (0.231)	-0.441* (0.232)	-0.415* (0.227)	-0.477* (0.247)
IMR	-0.404 (0.299)	-0.357 (0.293)	-0.292 (0.282)	-0.374 (0.295)	-0.392 (0.299)	-0.355 (0.292)	-0.402 (0.295)
Population	-0.241** (0.112)	-0.241** (0.113)	-0.254** (0.114)	-0.234** (0.112)	-0.259** (0.121)	-0.219* (0.119)	-0.237** (0.115)
Ethnic Fractionalization	-0.199 (0.567)	-0.067 (0.599)	-0.027 (0.600)	-0.145 (0.560)	-0.204 (0.542)	-0.112 (0.571)	-0.114 (0.587)
Polity 2	0.030 (0.043)	0.045 (0.038)	0.059* (0.031)	0.036 (0.041)	0.025 (0.042)	0.055* (0.032)	0.025 (0.040)
Military Regime	0.392 (0.459)	0.390 (0.451)	0.445 (0.450)	0.394 (0.465)	0.353 (0.465)	0.343 (0.475)	0.308 (0.458)
Party-Based Regime	0.966*** (0.363)	0.936** (0.370)	0.794** (0.380)	0.953*** (0.362)	0.965*** (0.372)	0.898** (0.383)	0.997*** (0.374)
Personalist Regime	0.351 (0.299)	0.378 (0.303)	0.306 (0.312)	0.311 (0.305)	0.397 (0.290)	0.338 (0.313)	0.309 (0.309)
Recent Coup Attempt	0.123 (0.276)	0.135 (0.278)	0.148 (0.277)	0.108 (0.277)	0.104 (0.277)	0.147 (0.277)	0.137 (0.273)
1.Core CS Index	1.254 (0.855)						
1.CS Participation		0.751 (0.811)					
1.CSO Women's Partic.			0.175 (0.150)				
1.CSO Entry and Exit				0.200 (0.161)			
1.CSO Repression					0.291* (0.166)		
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt						0.051 (0.136)	
1.CSO Partic. Environment							0.266* (0.150)
Observations	1176	1176	1176	1176	1176	1176	1176
Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by mass killing event).							
Region and decade fixed effects omitted from the table.							
* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$							

We find slightly different although conceptually similar effects when examining the data from INSCR. Recall that INSCR is distinct from Ulfelder and Valentino insofar as the threshold for inclusion is higher. That is, a higher degree of confidence in the intentionality of the government's actions to kill civilians is required, and it is based upon

direct violence as compared to starvation and punitive policies that might result in civilian deaths. Under these conditions we find a much greater link between our CSO measures and the length of mass killings. The core civil society measure, the level of government involvement in CSO formation and dissolution, and the participatory environment all generate statistically significant, positive coefficients. This implies that greater levels of each – freer civil societies – are linked with shorter mass killings. Interestingly, the only variable significant in both analyses captures the participatory environment of civil society organizations. The highest level of this coding means that “there are many diverse CSOs, and it is considered normal for people to be at least occasionally active in at least one of them.”

Our control variables also help to explain some of the variability among the duration of mass killings. Across both analyses there is some evidence that states with institutionalized subgroup discrimination experience longer mass killings, with the likelihood of their termination being significantly lower when discriminatory policies are in place. And interestingly, we find staunchly divergent effects when it comes to regime type, though one that perhaps makes sense in light of the serious differences in data collection and coding. When the coding criteria are less strict and intentionality is lowered, mass killings appear to be longer in autocracies and shorter in democracies – a finding that on face value appears intuitive. Among the mass killings collected by Ulfelder and Valentino, this finding is robust across model specifications. Yet, when studying cases with greater intentionality and only fatalities through direct acts of violence (as with INSCR data), the relationship with regime type becomes less clear. There is a weak correlation between autocracies and shorter mass killings in fewer than half of the models, though no relationship with democracy is identified.

Taken together, the implication is that civil society measures do exhibit a meaningful connection to the duration of mass killings. While controlling for a variety of potentially confounding factors, it appears that the freedom with which civilians can join, exit, and form civil society organizations is linked to shorter mass killings. Evidence to support this conclusion is found across both data sets. When mass killings begin in societies marked by strong, robust, and popular civil societies, then spates of violence appear shorter while holding constant a variety of factors that might also plausibly influence these dynamics. This indicates either a plausible restraining effect of civil society, or it indicates support for the vulnerability strand of the escalating effect. To untangle whether this accelerant effect is linked to less or more lethality, we next probe how civil society shapes the severity of these events.

Severity of Mass Killings

As described above, we are somewhat limited by the availability of data on mass killing severity. We therefore focus our analyses on the severity of mass killings as coded by the five-point scale from INSCR, and we supplement this analysis with data from UCDP. Although UCDP uses a distinct coding criteria that is less focused on mass killings per se, it nonetheless sheds light on the dynamics of civilian victimization at the hands of the state. Of course, we carefully consider what effects this different criteria might have on our results.

Our models of mass killing severity are virtually identical to those presented above – in terms of control variables – save for one expectation: we now include a count of how long the mass killing has persisted to account for the possibility that mass killings may become more or less severe over time.

First, with regards to the INSCR data, we find that the civil society measures related to participation generally yield a positive association. Recall that the participation variables aim “to provide a measure of a robust civil society, understood as one that enjoys autonomy from the state and in which citizens freely and actively pursue their political and civic goals, however conceived.” They are created through a Bayesian factor analysis of variables indicating whether policymakers routinely consult CSOs; how many people are involved in CSOs; are women prevented from getting involved; and are legislative candidates chosen through centralized or decentralized processes. Women’s participation in particular examines whether women are prevented from joining CSOs, ranging from almost always (0) to almost never (4). It is interesting that the two significant variables (both $p < .025$) relate to participation. While this gives some indication that women’s participation is particularly salient, the two exhibit only moderate correlation across the entire data set ($\text{corr.} = .671$). Both participation in general and women’s participation in particular are linked to significantly more severe mass killings--either because of complicity in the violence, or because of easier targeting by the state.

The CSO participatory environment variable--which captures whether the state controls most CSOs, or whether they are totally autonomous--is important in teasing out which mechanism is at work. If CSOs were complicit in the violence, we would expect this variable to be negative; if CSOs were the targets of the violence, we would expect this variable to be positive. The variable is notably insignificant in this model, suggesting that the net effect is not distinguishable from 0. This could mean that civil society is functioning in both ways - that some civil society groups support mobilization of mass killings and that other oppositionist civil society groups are singled out for targeting.

Table 7: Linear Regression, Severity of Mass Killings (INSCR)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Duration	-0.026 (0.029)	-0.025 (0.032)	-0.036 (0.026)	-0.026 (0.030)	-0.029 (0.028)	-0.027 (0.030)	-0.024 (0.032)
Internal War	0.257 (0.196)	0.275 (0.199)	-0.017 (0.226)	0.302 (0.202)	0.272 (0.201)	0.264 (0.214)	0.306 (0.210)
No. Bordering Civil Wars.	0.231** (0.094)	0.207** (0.095)	0.268*** (0.076)	0.217** (0.094)	0.226** (0.094)	0.214** (0.093)	0.217** (0.094)
Subgroup Discrim.	0.518* (0.256)	0.574** (0.240)	0.933*** (0.264)	0.516* (0.267)	0.532** (0.260)	0.569** (0.246)	0.529* (0.267)
IMR	0.471 (0.395)	0.614 (0.436)	1.286*** (0.360)	0.353 (0.375)	0.408 (0.391)	0.350 (0.361)	0.381 (0.404)
Population	-0.219 (0.229)	-0.155 (0.219)	-0.210 (0.186)	-0.231 (0.229)	-0.212 (0.240)	-0.182 (0.271)	-0.223 (0.238)
Ethnic Fractionalization	0.794 (0.840)	0.546 (0.772)	0.953 (0.624)	0.936 (0.863)	0.865 (0.857)	0.834 (0.949)	0.870 (0.908)
Polity 2	-0.031 (0.025)	-0.038 (0.023)	-0.014 (0.022)	-0.021 (0.026)	-0.022 (0.024)	-0.020 (0.023)	-0.024 (0.025)
Military Regime	0.714* (0.397)	0.434 (0.329)	0.658** (0.304)	0.773* (0.429)	0.778* (0.421)	0.779* (0.424)	0.754* (0.423)
Party-Based Regime	0.767** (0.325)	0.788** (0.350)	-0.257 (0.328)	0.619 (0.373)	0.715** (0.327)	0.564* (0.318)	0.644* (0.338)
Personalist Regime	0.518 (0.344)	0.568* (0.323)	0.377 (0.305)	0.492 (0.357)	0.548 (0.352)	0.478 (0.371)	0.497 (0.348)
Recent Coup Attempt	0.278 (0.227)	0.221 (0.205)	0.385 (0.234)	0.268 (0.234)	0.287 (0.231)	0.268 (0.237)	0.268 (0.232)
1.Core CS Index	1.115 (0.836)						
1.CS Participation		2.103** (0.896)					
1.CSO Women's Partic.			0.642*** (0.118)				
1.CSO Entry and Exit				0.020 (0.205)			
1.CSO Repression					0.101 (0.130)		
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt						0.062 (0.156)	
1.CSO Partic. Environment							0.049 (0.148)
Constant	-0.115 (0.749)	-0.357 (0.747)	-0.604 (0.500)	0.439 (0.672)	0.399 (0.666)	0.427 (0.647)	0.432 (0.663)
Observations	259	259	259	259	259	259	259

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by mass killing event).
Region and decade fixed effects omitted from the table.
* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 8: Negative Binomial Regression, Severity of One-Sided State Violence (UCDP)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Duration	0.012 (0.021)	0.014 (0.025)	0.026 (0.023)	0.009 (0.020)	0.018 (0.027)	-0.008 (0.028)	0.018 (0.023)
Internal War	1.546*** (0.346)	1.749*** (0.348)	1.781*** (0.345)	1.534*** (0.344)	1.734*** (0.367)	1.420*** (0.324)	1.707*** (0.341)
No. Bordering Civil Wars.	0.168* (0.093)	0.218** (0.093)	0.211** (0.096)	0.132 (0.088)	0.240** (0.095)	0.307*** (0.105)	0.212** (0.082)
Subgroup Discrim.	1.022*** (0.302)	1.035*** (0.311)	1.083*** (0.300)	0.981*** (0.309)	1.065*** (0.318)	0.940*** (0.291)	1.182*** (0.296)
IMR	0.585 (0.363)	0.530 (0.406)	0.426 (0.381)	0.587* (0.333)	0.621 (0.377)	0.754** (0.344)	0.534 (0.370)
Population	-0.125 (0.118)	-0.094 (0.123)	-0.120 (0.110)	-0.114 (0.109)	-0.109 (0.122)	0.005 (0.103)	-0.117 (0.121)
Ethnic Fractionalization	-1.338* (0.810)	-1.545* (0.889)	-1.620* (0.848)	-1.332* (0.772)	-1.641* (0.896)	-1.363** (0.686)	-1.372* (0.826)
Polity 2	-0.025 (0.045)	-0.061 (0.044)	-0.080* (0.042)	-0.019 (0.039)	-0.088* (0.049)	-0.078** (0.039)	-0.044 (0.042)
Military Regime	-0.950 (0.602)	-0.626 (0.592)	-0.381 (0.532)	-1.209** (0.614)	-0.534 (0.609)	-0.089 (0.527)	-0.493 (0.561)
Party-Based Regime	-1.647** (0.667)	-1.515** (0.772)	-1.251* (0.699)	-1.626*** (0.624)	-1.409* (0.842)	-0.764 (0.709)	-1.457** (0.692)
Personalist Regime	-0.540 (0.427)	-0.527 (0.448)	-0.233 (0.379)	-0.474 (0.400)	-0.317 (0.402)	-0.191 (0.403)	-0.378 (0.413)
Recent Coup Attempt	-0.377 (0.330)	-0.395 (0.347)	-0.520 (0.332)	-0.400 (0.318)	-0.518 (0.344)	-0.571 (0.359)	-0.359 (0.352)
1.Core CS Index	-2.866*** (1.089)						
1.CS Participation		-1.906 (1.184)					
1.CSO Women's Partic.			-0.307 (0.206)				
1.CSO Entry and Exit				-0.680*** (0.203)			
1.CSO Repression					-0.151 (0.239)		
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt						0.503*** (0.125)	
1.CSO Partic. Environment							-0.418** (0.194)
Constant	5.982*** (1.215)	5.559*** (1.469)	4.500*** (0.908)	4.612*** (0.745)	4.234*** (0.887)	3.611*** (0.617)	4.408*** (0.824)
/							
lnalpha	0.858*** (0.076)	0.877*** (0.076)	0.880*** (0.076)	0.845*** (0.076)	0.886*** (0.077)	0.836*** (0.071)	0.869*** (0.075)
Observations	551	551	551	551	551	551	551

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by country).
Region and decade fixed effects omitted from the table.
* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$

When we examine data from UCDP, which captures a much broader range of state-based violence, the results yield somewhat contradictory findings. All but one of the CSO measures generate negative coefficient estimates, whereas they are all positive in the previous analysis. The one variable generating a positive and statistically significant estimate refers to CSO anti-system movements. This makes sense: when civil society is activated against the state, then governmental repression increases. Although this was insignificant when studying INSCR, it also generated a positive effect. But what might explain these results? It could have to do with the lower threshold for inclusion in UCDP data. There is no intentionality needed; rather, sporadic violence would count. Indeed, fifty percent of UCDP violent events (when collapsed to country-years) exhibit 17 or fewer casualties. Therefore, this might indicate that civil society operates differently across the spectrum of violence: it is somewhat effective at reducing and perhaps even preventing low-level violence, but once violence crosses a certain threshold and escalates, it is linked to greater severity.

Taken Together: The Duration and Severity of Mass Killings

Our initial findings suggest that particular dimensions of civil society are linked to more lethal but less enduring mass killings. In other words, they are shorter but more severe. Inspecting the data reveals that basic patterns in the data support this conclusion.

Figure 1: The Duration and Average Lethality of Mass Killings

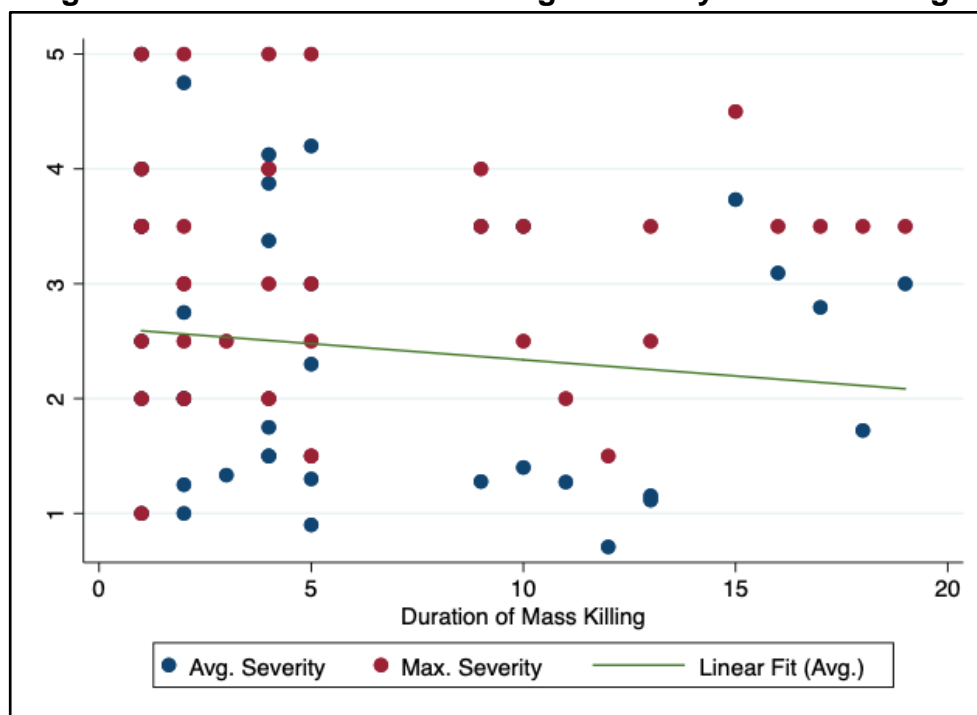


Figure 1 plots the average and maximum-achieved lethality of mass killings according to how long they ultimately lasted. The green line plots a linear fit of average severity against duration. This shows a clear, negative relationship: shorter mass killings tend to have a more sustained, higher level of severity. This also appears true for the maximum severity: some of the most severe mass killings, where the pinnacle of severity was reached (5), were short events lasting fewer than 5 years.

Thus, the associations we identify between civil society and characteristics of mass killings find some support when examining broader, descriptive patterns in the underlying data. Rather than being a statistical artefact, shorter mass killings do appear to be more lethal. Our results indicate that the underlying link is civil society.

Does Civil Society Operate Differently Across Contexts?

From the above analyses, and from our hypotheses, it is worth considering whether civil society has different effects depending on the context in which it exists. That is, does civil society in democracies operate differently from civil society in autocracies? In the following analyses, we replicate earlier models of mass killing duration and severity (both from INSCR) while interacting our measures of civil society with indicators capturing important dimensions of the sociopolitical environment.

First, we begin with the duration of mass killings. We interact each of the seven civil society measures with a country's Polity scores for a particular year. Here, we aim to understand how the effect of civil society changes across a range of regime types. Interestingly, we find that the interaction largely muddies the associations identified earlier with the duration of mass killings. Many of the main effects and interactions are not statistically significant. But one interaction is highly meaningful: that between polity scores and the strength of CSO anti-system movements. The results indicate that anti-system movements are linked to prolonged mass killings in autocracies, but shorter mass killings in democracies. This makes sense as democracies may be more likely to accommodate or be coerced by activated, engaged dissent from civil society.

Next, we apply the same model specifications to study the severity of mass killings, focusing again on data from INSCR. As before, we find that none of the interaction terms between civil society measures and Polity scores return significant findings. Some of the main effects are significant and correspond to earlier findings. Again, this suggests that the effect of civil society is not conditioned by regime type.

Table 9: Cox Proportional Hazards Model, Duration of Mass Killings (INSCR), Interacting Civil Society with Regime Type (Polity Scores)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Military Regime	-0.408 (0.684)	-0.772 (0.655)	-0.522 (0.760)	-0.522 (0.652)	-0.341 (0.815)	-0.041 (0.629)	-0.606 (0.728)
Party-Based Regime	0.188 (0.467)	0.099 (0.512)	0.204 (0.561)	0.385 (0.511)	0.063 (0.506)	0.201 (0.378)	0.320 (0.521)
Personalist Regime	-0.629 (0.720)	-0.601 (0.724)	-0.520 (0.785)	-0.681 (0.775)	-0.563 (0.699)	-0.651 (0.894)	-0.640 (0.811)
Recent Coup Attempt	0.087 (0.648)	0.100 (0.671)	0.043 (0.626)	0.142 (0.648)	0.056 (0.638)	0.171 (0.563)	0.221 (0.628)
1.Core CS Index	-0.282 (2.241)						
Polity 2	0.059 (0.139)	0.008 (0.129)	-0.034 (0.051)	-0.051 (0.056)	-0.068 (0.062)	-0.152** (0.062)	-0.069 (0.053)
1.Core CS Index × Polity 2	-0.292 (0.351)						
1.CS Participation		1.086 (1.844)					
1.CS Participation × Polity 2		-0.137 (0.315)					
1.CSO Women's Partic.			-0.079 (0.291)				
1.CSO Women's Partic. × Polity 2			0.017 (0.051)				
1.CSO Entry and Exit				0.429 (0.659)			
1.CSO Entry and Exit × Polity 2				-0.000 (0.089)			
1.CSO Repression					-0.264 (0.254)		
1.CSO Repression × Polity 2					-0.041 (0.046)		
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt						-0.170 (0.424)	
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt × Polity 2						0.111*** (0.028)	
1.CSO Partic. Environment							0.548 (0.353)
1.CSO Partic. Environment × Polity 2							0.005 (0.059)
Observations	222	222	222	222	222	222	222

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by mass killing event).
Region and decade fixed effects omitted from the table.
* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Perhaps it is not regime type that is most important to civil society's effect, but some other societal characteristic. To assess this possibility, we interact the CSO measures with a new variable that captures the extent of political inequality in a given country-year. This measure, from V-DEM, captures whether political power is distributed by socioeconomic position. This runs along a five-point scale where zero means that "political power is more or less equally distributed across economic groups," and four that "average and poorer people have almost no influence."¹² The intuition behind this test is the argument by Chambers and Kopstein (2001) that CSOs that reinforce pre-existing societal inequalities tend to serve as escalatory functions in times of mass killing. It also allows us to conduct a nominal test of Hypotheses 3 and 6, which suggest that as minority groups organize in CSOs, they may be better or less able to effectively resist during mass killings.

Four of these seven interactions generate statistically meaningful findings, and all operate in the same direction (positive). Taken together, it appears that civil society significantly increases the lethality of mass killings in states where political power is distributed according to economic wealth. This is true for the core index participation, participation, entry and exit, repression, and the participatory environment. Only the interactions with women's participation and the anti-system movement yield no meaningful effects.

Overall, we find little evidence that civil society operates differently across political regimes. Few meaningful effects were uncovered when we interact measures of civil society with Polity scores. Instead, and more importantly, civil society seems to affect mass killings differently in contexts with and without political equality. When political power is highly uneven and distributed according to wealth, civil society is linked to even more lethal episodes of mass violence. Yet, additional tests do not reveal evidence of similar patterns when it comes to the duration of mass killings.

Next Steps

The next steps for us are fourfold. First, we aim to conduct further hypothesis tests, both to test the robustness of our findings across different model specifications and to analyze the effects of different covariates that we have not yet been able to include. In particular, we need to ascertain whether our results hold up if we consider additional domestic variables, such as unemployment (Chambers and Kopstein 2001), or international variables such as trade integration (Harff 2003), international intervention (Wood and Kathman 2011), and whether the country is a signatory to the Optional Protocol to the ICCPR.

¹² We reverse this coding from its initial, inverse scale to facilitate interpretation. Varieties of Democracy, codebook. https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/e0/7f/e07f672b-b91e-4e98-b9a3-78f8cd4de696/v-dem_codebook_v8.pdf

Table 10: Linear Regression, Severity of Mass Killings (INSCR), Interacting Civil Society with Regime Type (Polity Scores)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Duration	-0.022 (0.030)	-0.025 (0.032)	-0.034 (0.026)	-0.018 (0.030)	-0.026 (0.029)	-0.027 (0.030)	-0.024 (0.032)
Military Regime	0.742* (0.395)	0.426 (0.318)	0.689** (0.295)	0.832* (0.423)	0.760* (0.428)	0.843* (0.466)	0.817* (0.470)
Party-Based Regime	0.752** (0.326)	0.789** (0.348)	-0.238 (0.313)	0.537 (0.369)	0.688** (0.329)	0.561* (0.314)	0.626* (0.336)
Personalist Regime	0.571 (0.346)	0.565 (0.335)	0.421 (0.300)	0.554 (0.347)	0.573 (0.349)	0.485 (0.371)	0.507 (0.349)
Recent Coup Attempt	0.311 (0.230)	0.218 (0.213)	0.395 (0.236)	0.285 (0.239)	0.302 (0.233)	0.280 (0.238)	0.296 (0.244)
1.Core CS Index	1.944* (1.037)						
Polity 2	-0.085 (0.053)	-0.034 (0.061)	-0.008 (0.019)	0.016 (0.030)	-0.010 (0.024)	-0.033 (0.029)	-0.020 (0.028)
1.Core CS Index \times Polity 2	0.151 (0.126)						
1.CS Participation		2.060* (1.089)					
1.CS Participation \times Polity 2		-0.010 (0.137)					
1.CSO Women's Partic.			0.785*** (0.164)				
1.CSO Women's Partic. \times Polity 2			0.027 (0.016)				
1.CSO Entry and Exit				0.432 (0.348)			
1.CSO Entry and Exit \times Polity 2				0.069 (0.046)			
1.CSO Repression					0.181 (0.158)		
1.CSO Repression \times Polity 2					0.017 (0.017)		
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt						0.115 (0.151)	
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt \times Polity 2						0.012 (0.018)	
1.CSO Partic. Environment							0.115 (0.198)
1.CSO Partic. Environment \times Polity 2							0.013 (0.030)
Constant	-0.591 (0.795)	-0.340 (0.776)	-0.800* (0.464)	0.122 (0.652)	0.476 (0.697)	0.308 (0.651)	0.393 (0.671)
Observations	259	259	259	259	259	259	259

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by mass killing event).
Region and decade fixed effects omitted from the table.
* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 12: Linear Regression, Mass Killing Severity (INSCR), Interacting Civil Society Measures with Political Inequality

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Duration	-0.033 (0.030)	-0.033 (0.031)	-0.038 (0.026)	-0.030 (0.030)	-0.030 (0.029)	-0.026 (0.030)	-0.025 (0.032)
Polity 2	-0.021 (0.024)	-0.023 (0.024)	-0.014 (0.022)	-0.020 (0.026)	-0.013 (0.021)	-0.016 (0.022)	-0.010 (0.024)
Military Regime	0.856** (0.384)	0.499* (0.282)	0.687** (0.338)	0.801* (0.417)	0.944** (0.436)	0.850* (0.479)	0.834** (0.382)
Party-Based Regime	0.462 (0.325)	0.297 (0.404)	-0.715* (0.418)	0.476 (0.323)	0.477 (0.335)	0.719* (0.397)	0.272 (0.423)
Personalist Regime	0.743** (0.358)	0.838** (0.309)	0.399 (0.327)	0.534 (0.351)	0.608 (0.365)	0.403 (0.345)	0.656* (0.325)
Recent Coup Attempt	0.211 (0.225)	0.111 (0.209)	0.355 (0.241)	0.346 (0.238)	0.177 (0.242)	0.334 (0.245)	0.300 (0.235)
1.Core CS Index	0.667 (0.840)						
Pol. Inequality	-0.626** (0.266)	-0.729** (0.285)	-0.182 (0.126)	0.422* (0.226)	0.367 (0.259)	0.035 (0.168)	0.294 (0.182)
1.Core CS Index × Pol. Inequality	2.136** (0.803)						
1.CS Participation		1.545 (1.067)					
1.CS Participation × Pol. Inequality		2.101*** (0.758)					
1.CSO Women's Partic.			0.711*** (0.141)				
1.CSO Women's Partic. × Pol. Inequality			-0.069 (0.083)				
1.CSO Entry and Exit				0.179 (0.208)			
1.CSO Entry and Exit × Pol. Inequality				0.433** (0.190)			
1.CSO Repression					-0.069 (0.177)		
1.CSO Repression × Pol. Inequality					0.287** (0.123)		
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt						0.006 (0.181)	
1.CSO Anti-System Mvmnt × Pol. Inequality						0.151 (0.112)	
1.CSO Partic. Environment							-0.021 (0.148)
1.CSO Partic. Environment × Pol. Inequality							0.314** (0.123)
Constant	0.269 (0.837)	0.146 (0.784)	-0.575 (0.513)	0.714 (0.730)	0.553 (0.672)	0.228 (0.750)	0.594 (0.603)
Observations	259	259	259	259	259	259	259

Standard errors in parentheses (clustered by mass killing event).
Region and decade fixed effects omitted from the table.
* $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Second, we aim to develop or identify additional measures of characteristics of civil society in our cases. In particular, we have not yet found a viable indicator of minority group civil society organization, so we may need to construct that variable ourselves or find a suitable proxy beyond those we have already located.

Third, we aim to analyze some comparative cases to understand why lethality in particular was so varied across our cases of interest, including whether different sectors of civil society act at cross-purposes with one another during such episodes. We will aim to do this in a way that compares cases on both macro and meso-level factors, both across and within cases.

Fourth, we may consider developing a more straightforward interval-level coding scheme for identifying lethality in historical cases of mass killings, as well as updating the data to include more recent cases such as Syria and Myanmar. This will allow us to explore different threshold effects as well as to test the validity of our hypotheses on more current cases.

Conclusion

We have found that various dimensions of civil society affect the duration and lethality of mass killings differently. For the purposes of this paper, we took seriously the possibility that civil society groups can be just as active in propelling and intensifying mass killings as they can be in de-escalating or terminating them. Importantly, there are some mixed effects depending on the sensitivity of the measures used, and some key nuances among the mechanisms that we have not yet been able to untangle. Yet the preponderance of evidence presented here confirms the suspicions (or fears) of civil society pessimists. We find that, on average, countries with relatively participatory and autonomous civil societies are correlated with shorter mass killings with higher rates of lethality, particularly under conditions of inequality. Because most mass killings are relatively short, our findings suggest that civil societies in states with uneven access to power are more commonly correlated with shorter, deadlier spells of government violence.

Crucially, as Chambers and Kopstein note, among policy circles in particular, “there remains a lingering neo-Tocquevillian enthusiasm for participation as such, especially when it is conceived, as Putnam conceives it, as a choice between civic engagement and individual apathy” (Chambers and Kopstein 2001, p. 842). Indeed, for several decades, the United States has adopted a policy of actively promoting civil society as a way to increase capacity for liberal democracy as well as the spread of trust and norms of mutual respect and reciprocity as a way to prevent conflict. Although on balance such initiatives may have yielded important benefits, particularly regarding prevention of the onset of mass killings, such benefits may evaporate or reverse course once mass killings set on. During episodes of mass killings, the creation or support of civil society in pursuit of reinforcing norms of cooperation may create acceleratory and

escalatory effects when such groups are targeted (Kopstein and Wittenberg 2018) or mobilized during mass killings (Longman 2010; McDoom 2014). The creation or support of civil society in and of itself does not necessarily result in egalitarian or pluralistic norms. As we continue to explore which mechanisms are dominant in different cases, our findings point to the importance of not lionizing “ordinary people,” particularly during national crises or episodes of mass violence, during which the exercise of collective agency often results in exceedingly lethal outcomes (Browning 1991; Chambers and Kopstein 2001; Longman 2010; McDoom 2014; Waller 2002).

However, given these findings, we are left with more questions than answers about what viable alternatives are available from a practical perspective. What is needed is a way to expand and reinforce the public benefits of social capital and civil society while reducing the risk that such institutions become fundamentally illiberal in nature. Scholars who recognize these tensions are often at a loss of how to establish clear pathways forward (e.g., Chambers and Kopstein 2001).

But some findings from the peacebuilding literature, which focus largely on institutional design approaches, show promising paths toward designing and implementing bridging social capital even in deeply-divided societies. Staub (2013) identifies a number of successful peacebuilding projects that involved long-term intergroup cooperation and that seemed to reduce tendencies toward violence during crises. For instance, many rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust had diverse and cross-cutting social relationships, including with Jews (Oliner and Oliner 1998). In a study conducted in Sri Lanka, Sinhalese and Tamils engaged in co-ethnic educational activities for four days; one year later, they displayed more empathy for members of the other group and donated more to poor children in the other group, compared with members of the control group (Malhotra and Liyanage 2005). Ethnic groups in the Ivory Coast successfully remained nonviolent when violence flared up there in 2011 after working together on agricultural projects (Chirof and McCauley 2006, in Staub 2013, p. 580). Hindus and Muslims in India who had worked together in both commercial ventures and civic institutions brought pressure on political leaders to avoid inciting violence during periods of political tensions (Varshney 2002). Positive attitudes between Israeli and Palestinian students emerged after their spending time together in summer camps; however, these affinities wore off after a year, reinforcing the need for repeated, enduring interactions alongside supportive environments (Hammack 2011).

Yet there are reasons to be skeptical of the durability (or scalability) of these restraining factors once mass killing has already begun. McDoom (2014) finds that, at least in the Rwandan case, such ties easily fade away in comparison to strong networks of fellow perpetrators, whose influence overwhelms inter-group goodwill or altruism.

Another possible solution is implied based on Braun’s (2016) findings. Investing in civil society empowers minority groups rather than groups that are already positioned close to power. Such groups could provide powerful sources of resistance and rescue

during periods of mass violence. Yet Kopstein and Wittenberg (2018) also note that investing in and empowering minority civil society organizations may make them more vulnerable to pogroms and mass killing in times of crisis. In other words, the dilemmas regarding promoting civil society - and which kinds - are real and substantial if policymakers are attempting to use them as beachheads against escalation in societies at risk of mass killings.¹³

Ultimately, the only way to resolve these dilemmas may be one that is unrelated to civil society and more related to resolving the underlying inequalities that lead people to segregate into exclusionary civil society organizations in the first place. Unfortunately, we offer this grandiose policy implication without a concrete recommendation about how to realize it. Regardless, we can say with assurance that our findings speak to the heightened urgency of prevention as a policy goal, rather than civil society capacity-building alone.

¹³ A parallel policy dilemma is present with regard to international criminal accountability mechanisms, which appear to have the effect of both deterring atrocities and prolonging conflicts once they have set on (Kcmaric 2018). We thank Lawrence Woocher for this observation.

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