

Caglayan Baser

Conflict and Gender

My research focuses on questions related to conflict and gender, and combines insights from both interpretive and positivist feminist literatures in International Relations. This approach leads me to engage with multiple methods and data collection techniques. In my current research, I use statistical analyses of observational and experimental data, as well as qualitative case studies based on archival research. My dissertation and related projects contribute to the areas of conflict, gender politics, and domestic sources of international relations.

My research shows that gender is central to understanding conflict. As mainstream research on conflict has overlooked gender until recently, our understanding of how conflict is shaped by gendered-dynamics remains limited. My dissertation aims to untangle the strategies of violence that are shaped by societal roles attributed to women and men.

In my dissertation, I argue that participation of women in rebel groups decreases civilian attacks - not because women are inherently peaceful, but because their involvement increases rebel groups' military resilience and the likelihood of receiving support from democratic states. Groups with higher military capacity are less likely to engage in tactics that alienate the civilian population. Similarly, groups backed by democratic states tend to exercise restraint in using civilian violence to maintain the support of their sponsors. Therefore, participation of women decreases civilian violence by rebel groups through these two indirect channels.

Gender stereotypes that view women as peaceful or vulnerable portray an incomplete picture of women's role in political violence. In a paper based on the first two chapters of my dissertation, I show that women's involvement in armed movements affects conflict dynamics in important ways that are different from men. I examine the mechanisms through which women insurgents affect the military effectiveness of rebel groups. I use a variety of empirical sources, including original data on noncombatant women in rebel groups, and the archive of the Kurdistan Workers' Party from 1982 to 2015 for the qualitative case study of the Kurdish armed movement. This entailed engaging with over ten thousand pages of primary source material. Results of the case study suggest that, despite the costs of integrating women into the organization (e.g., disruption of group cohesion), women substantially contribute to rebel organizations' ability to challenge governments. Women provide the most advantages at times of crises, primarily through enabling tactical diversity and appealing to larger audiences. Women can also be instrumental in the organization's coup-proofing strategy against inter-organizational factions. Statistical analysis of data on a global sample of rebel groups further shows that rebel groups with women participants tend to have higher levels of military effectiveness.

Another area where women provide a distinct contribution to rebel groups is foreign support. In a related paper based on my dissertation, I show that rebel groups with women participants, and groups that subscribe to a gender-inclusive ideology, are more likely to attract support from democracies where women's rights issues are more salient. Leaders of these states can more easily justify supporting gender-inclusive rebel organizations to their domestic audiences, since these organizations are perceived as more moderate. To provide evidence for the existence of this causal

mechanism, I complement this analysis based on aggregate observational data with a survey experiment. The experiment investigates public opinion toward leaders' decision to sponsor rebel groups which do or do not subscribe to a gender-inclusive ideology.