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# Determinants of Conflict Severity. How Do Elections Affect Conflict Severity?

Masteroppgave i Masterprogram i Statsvitenskap

Veileder: Charles Butcher

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Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet  
Fakultet for samfunns- og utdanningsvitenskap  
Institutt for sosiologi og statsvitenskap



Kunnskap for en bedre verden



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## **Abstract**

In this thesis I investigate how elections affect conflict severity. The question of interest is whether conflicts become more or less severe during election periods. This paper proposes that elections may reduce conflict severity during the election periods, mainly because both the insurgent groups and incumbents may behave differently during the varying stages of an elections cycle. Insurgent groups and incumbents want to be perceived as responsible and willing to strengthen elections by the voters. Another essential aspect of this paper is to emphasize the election characteristics. Elections *per se* may not affect conflict severity, but some characteristics of elections may, such as the lack of competition, and whether the election is manifesting a transition period.

I employ negative binominal regression models on a dataset of battle deaths between 1986-2016 to the assumptions of this paper empirically. The analysis finds support for that legislative elections reduce conflict severity, and competitive elections result in more battle deaths. The last-mentioned effect applies mainly in military regimes. This paper finds also support for conflict-reducing effects of increasing vote margins between the winning party and second largest party. These findings are robust to various model specifications, and robust to models that eliminates the most influential cases.

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I alone am responsible for the content of this thesis.

Onur Aksoy

## **Content**

Abstract

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## **1.Introduction**

A significant amount of research has focused on examining the extensive margin of civil conflicts, which concerns the causes of civil war onset, duration, and outcome. However, less attention has been directed towards the variation at the intensive margin that emphasizes how many combatants lose their lives during battle. In other words, most of the literature conducts civil war as dichotomous, and explores the conditions under which civil wars begin, prevail, and terminate. The question of interest then becomes why the fighting is much more severe in some civil wars than in some other civil wars and why the fighting becomes so severe in some periods in a civil war compared to other periods. The research that exists on civil conflict severity incorporates mainly country-level factors such as GDP per capita, ethnic and religious fractionalization and population (Lacina 2006), coalition size (Heger & Saleyhan 2007), economic conditions (Chaudoin, Peskowitz & Stanton 2015). Some other studies look at the effects of international factors, such as the effects of international interventions and peacekeeping (Hultman, Kathman & Shannon 2014). There are also some studies looking at conflict specific factors such as the type of resources within the conflict zone (Lujala 2009), the variation in the number of rebel groups fighting against the government, and in the resources available to both the government and rebel groups (Butler, Christopher & Gates 2009). However, a deficient aspect of these studies is their inability to address dynamic factors that are more feasible to account for the dynamic nature of civil conflict severity.

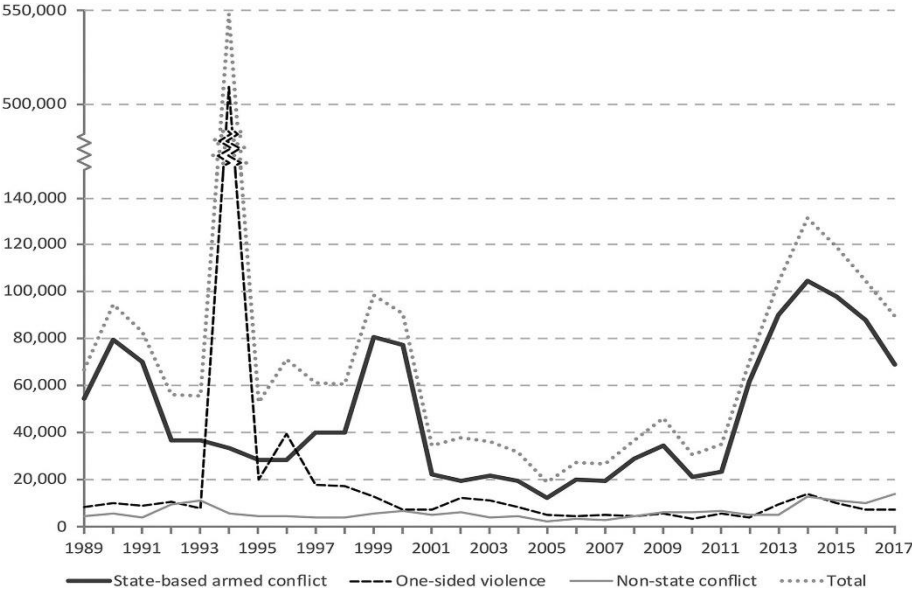
To address the deficiency with the existing scholarly work, this paper will incorporate elections. The fact that elections occur rapidly, distinguish them from many of static factors the literature operates with. In contrast to factors such as ethnic fractionalization, population size, and regime type, which are not prone to much variation over time, elections follow a much steadier pattern. Elections have also a mobilizing and polarizing character, which make them a focal point of tensions and thus carry the risk of violence (Doyle & Sambanis 2006). As Paris argues, conflict and competition are innate properties of elections (Paris 1997, 74). The conflictual and polarizing effect of elections has also been related to the peacebuilding missions in which elections played a key role. With some exceptions, such as Mozambique, Cambodia and El Salvador, the elections that were a part of the peacebuilding missions at the 1990s, are associated with conflict and not peace (Dreef & Wagner 2013, 2). Although, the failure of elections to attain peace may be due to lack of democratic and electoral institutions, this paper will argue that the competitive logic of elections may aggravate tensions in war-prone countries. Besides steady elections as being a dynamic factor, the inherent dimensions

of elections presented so far contain dynamic features that are compatible with the dynamic nature of conflict severity. Hence, this paper will argue that elections may influence decisions of rebel groups and states to escalate or deescalate the fight as elections constitute a form for opportunity for both rebel groups and states. They may also exasperate the existing tensions in society along the ethnic and group-affiliation lines.

**1.1 The Puzzle**

Civil wars vary among a set of factors, including duration, settlement, location, tactics, and even underlying causes. However, a factor that has not obtained comprehensive attention is the variation in conflict severity. Conflicts do not have a stable and consistent level of violence. The severity of a conflict varies greatly, not only between conflicts but also within conflicts. For instance, battle related deaths in the conflict between the state of Sri Lanka and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were 130 in 2005. But the battle-related fatalities increased to 10418 in 2009. A similar trend can be observed by the conflict between Nigerian government and Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād, also commonly known as Boko Horom in which the battle related deaths increased from 3305 in 2013 to 10261 one year after. Figure 1.1 demonstrates the variation of battle-related deaths between 1989 and 2017 (Petterson & Eck 2018). From the figure, we can observe that violence varies greatly over time.

**Figure 1.1: Fatalities in organized violence by type, 1989-2017.**



The interest of exploring this variation of violence has been deficient in literature. In addition, the existing studies that attempt to elucidate the severity of a conflict fail to account for the dynamic nature of severity of a conflict. The variables that are emphasized by the literature have mainly a static nature, which are not suitable for exploring the changing nature of severity of civil wars. Such variables are ethnic fractionalization, variables concerning geography, regime change, cold war to control for the potential effects of international context (Balcells & Kalyvas 2014, Lu & Thies 2011, Lujala 2009, Heger & Saleyhan 2007). A similar critique and the necessity for conducting investigation on severity of conflicts is initiated by Chaudoin, Peskowitz & Stanton (2015). According to these authors:

*“A significant amount of research has sought to explain the extensive margin of civil conflict, that is, the causes of civil war onset and occurrence. Much less attention has been paid to variation at the intensive margin, that is, how many combatants lose their lives during battle. The amount of variation in the intensity of civil conflict is tremendous and multifaceted. Over the last half century, the number of combat deaths during a year of civil conflict has ranged from less than 100 to over 100,000. The intensity of civil conflict is also dynamic. Within conflict spells, the intensity of fighting can rise and fall sharply at some times and remain steady at others. Some conflicts are persistent, with fighting simmering at consistent levels over longer periods of time, while other conflicts become more volatile”* (Chaudoin, Peskowitz & Stanton 2015, 2).

The key inference to acquire from Chaudoin *et al* is the arguments regarding the dynamic nature of civil war severity. Thus, the factors that are emphasized to elucidate the severity of civil war should be dynamic. The nature of the variables that are included to explain the severity of a conflict should reflect the dynamic nature of conflict severity. If we assume that conflicts do not have a consistent and stable pace of violence, the independent variables of interest need to possess a changing and dynamic nature in order to comply with the dynamic nature of conflict severity. In other words, this paper is interested in encapsulating variables whose changes affect the decision to increase or decrease the violence either by rebel groups or states. Such variables that have already been emphasized in literature are rebel capacity, access to natural resources and revenues generated by natural resources and external interventions. We can assume that these variables are prone to changes over time as rebel capacity, revenues generated by natural resources and external interventions do not constitute a static nature. The capability of rebel groups to agonize changes over time as rebel groups are not able to sustain a consistent pattern of violence and battle against their opponents. Based

on parameters such as the efficiency of recruitment and the availability of resources to finance the rebel groups, capacity of rebel groups to challenge their opponents are inclined to change. Similar to rebel capacity, the external interventions in an ongoing conflict are another non-static factor that occurs at different times of a conflict, which may either decrease or increase conflict severity based on the intentions of the intervention. Whether the intervention is intended to collaborate with any side of a conflict or intended to provide a peaceful solution to the conflict may reduce or increase the casualties. The common aspect of factors such as capability of rebel groups and external interventions is the non-static nature of these variables. A similar factor, which has mainly been incorporated in studies concerning the onset of conflict, is the implications of elections on civil conflict. The main attempt has been to explore the implications of elections to cause the outbreak of civil conflicts. However, the elections that have been implemented are elections during democratization periods (Cederman, Hug & Krebs, 2010, Gleditsch & Skrede 2002; Mansfield & Snyder, 2007a). These studies emphasized the effect of elections as a conflict-inducing mechanism and how holding of elections can shape incentives to resort to violence. This study will employ elections to examine the conflict intensifying effects of elections. In other words, elections will be applied to assess how holding elections during an ongoing conflict may affect conflict severity. Elections in the shadow of civil wars may have a critical impact on local conflict dynamics. Sometimes, elections during an ongoing civil war may function as a step towards peace, yet at other times such elections may generate more violence in already disintegrated states. An armed conflict often undermines circumstances that are normally regarded conducive to democratization, such as strong economy and stable institutions (Migdal 1988). In addition, civil society and media, which also are commonly considered as essential factors in democratic electoral processes, are often underdeveloped, politicized and polarized (Hoglund, Jarstad & Kovacs 2009, 535). The insecure environment created by the conflict restricts the establishment of an informed and free choice, and fear of attacks makes it difficult for both politicians and voters to enforce their political right of campaigning and voting. An illustrating example of elections being conflict triggering is the election in Algeria in 1991, in which the Islamic Salvation Front gained enormous support. In response to the victory of Islamic Salvation Front, the government abolished the elections and banned the Islamic Salvation Front. Shortly after, the Islamist military groups initiated a violent campaign against the government, and a brutal and violent civil war started in the 1990s, which an estimated 150,000-200,000 people died. In this case, the mechanism in which the elections led to escalation of violence emphasizes the lack of willingness to accept election

results. The electoral success of a party was opposed by the incumbent government, and hence triggered the escalation of violence. When elections take place amid an ongoing conflict, the electoral contest oftentimes reflects the contradictions that lay the at the core of the war itself (Hoglund, Jarstad & Kovacs 2009, 538). Hence, the belligerent parties may attempt to utilize the election as an instrument for furthering their cause against their opponents on the battlefield. Incumbents may use the elections to legitimize their governance towards domestic and international actors and audience, while simultaneously attempting to undermine the legitimacy and the desires of the opposition. Elections during an ongoing conflict may also pose the risk of spurring violent conflict behavior. Due to social and political polarization at large in society, elections may utilize radical and militant leaders more than moderate and peace-seeking leaders (Prutt & Kim 2004, 117-118). These militant leaders may then escalate the conflict by cultivating a conflictual rhetoric, opposing political reforms and more significantly by increasing the use of military force. An exemplifying case is the conflict between Palestine and Israel. In Israel, which strategies the Israeli government should pursue has been a significant question on the electoral agenda. Many of the critical changes, whether being a change towards cultivating peace or intensification of violence, have emerged based on an electoral outcome and a governmental change (Hoglund, Jarstad & Kovacs 2009, 589). Elections may be the focal point of tensions and thus conveys the risk of violence (Dreef & Wagner 2013, 3). So, these are some arguments and anticipations on why elections may influence the intensity and mainly the intentions of governments and the opposing groups, which is then manifested in structuring how aggressive and violent the actors can be. We should recognize that elections in countries experiencing a civil war function differently than elections in peaceful environments.

## **1.2 The Research Question**

Existing research provides little and insufficient evidence of factors and variables that interact with conflict severity. We already know that conflict severity is prone to fluctuations over time and does not have a static nature. The casualties caused by a conflict may change enormously from a month to another month or from a year to another year. In other words, they do not follow a stable pattern of severity. Thus, the dynamic nature of conflict severity entails the application of non-static variables to be consistent with a rapidly fluctuating dependent variable. An exemplifying variable would be the variation in economic conditions, as elucidated by Chaudoin, Peskowitz and Stanton (2015), who attempt to analyze the effect of variation in economic conditions on intensity of civil conflict. In addition to the dynamic



nature of elections, the competing, mobilizing and particularly, the conflictual nature of elections may condition conflict severity, especially in contexts where the commitment to elections and election results are not consolidated and elections are deprived of maturity. Elections encourage the disclosure of grievances, mobilization of social actors into rival political camps and contention for power (Saleyhan & Linebarger 2013, 3). When elections are held in illiberal states, particularly elections in which democracy is weakly institutionalized, can create incentives to organize supporters along ethnic lines or attempt to secure the election using fraud or voter intimidation. In other words, elections are a contest for power, and are therefore inherently contentious, unless conducted fairly, they can lead to violence (Ndulo & Lulo 2010, 157). As Jeff Fischer observes, an electoral process is *an alternative to violence as a means of achieving governance*. When an electoral process or an election is perceived as unfair, unresponsive, or corrupt, stakeholders are inclined to imply other instruments than the established norms to achieve their objectives (Fischer 2002, 3). In the literature, the application of elections has mainly been demarcated to elucidate the onset of conflict and emphasized as a proxy for democratization. However, the implications of elections during civil wars have attained limited scrutiny even if the elections during an ongoing civil war may entail enormous tensions. This provides the motivation for the following research question:

*Do the elections during an ongoing civil war affect the conflict severity?*

The focus of his research question is mainly directed towards the implications of the elections. So, the question of interest does not concern the outcome of elections, but concern elections per se. This paper is interested in exploring whether civil wars become more or less severe during elections. In addition, the context in which elections are being held must also be accounted for. This study will also examine elections in various contexts to determine the conditions in which polls are most likely to lead to violence.

### **1.3 Findings**

The main finding of this paper is that competitive elections have conflict-intensifying effects. However, this effect of competitive elections is conditioned by the regime type. Competitive elections in democracies reduce the conflict severity, whilst elections in military regimes make a conflict more severe. The conflict-intensifying effect of competitive elections maintains their significance after testing for an alternative measurement of democracy, eliminating non-active battle years and other tests for robustness and specification problems.

Thus, this paper provides the notion that competitive elections in circumstances in which the culture of elections is not established and elections do not warrant a real chance of regime change, may result in more violence.

Another important finding of this paper is the conflict-reducing effects vote margins won by the largest party. Vote margins are applied to test for the informational aspect of elections in which the information elections provides on the support the incumbent regimes and insurgent groups have, may shape the incentives of the incumbents and opposition groups to increase or decrease their violent actions. Hence, this paper finds that a growing vote margin between the winning party and the second largest party reduces conflict severity for the legislative elections.

#### **1.4 Organization**

This thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 gives an overview of literature on conflict severity and discontinues the chapter med reflections on the literature. Chapter 3 develops theoretical arguments and a set of hypotheses is presented. In chapter 4, a quantitative research design is given to test the hypotheses empirically. The results are presented in Chapter 5 that is followed by Chapter investigating the robustness of reported results. A final chapter provides some concluding remarks.

#### **1.5 The Relevance of Examining Severity of a Conflict**

Within the civil war literature, the inquiry of determinants of the variation of violence is deficient compared to other dimensions that have obtained significant attention. Most of the literature in civil war attempts to explore the determinants of the outbreak of a conflict, the outcome of a conflict and the duration of a conflict whilst ignoring what may explain the varying pace of violence in a conflict. The reason for this lack of attention may not be that the variation and intensity of violence does not constitute an important aspect of civil wars. An understanding of what affects the severity of violence can provide the implications that are needed for mitigating the violence of the civil conflicts and for ending the conflicts. The importance of acquiring a comprehensive comprehension of severity of violence is also related to the violence being the most shattering state of civil war as they cost human lives. We already know that civil wars do not have a consistent and stable rate of violence. In some periods, the violence escalates rapidly and deescalates in other periods. We may assume that the variations of the pace of violence do not occur as a coincidence, and there may be some rational patterns that could explain the severity of civil war.

The constrained literature of severity of violence rely prominently on the theoretical accounts that are employed to elucidate the outbreak and duration of civil conflicts. However, the mechanisms that lead to outbreak of a civil war or mechanisms that prolong civil wars may not be sufficient and feasible for examining the severity of civil war. The external interventions or external aid to one of the groups engaging in civil conflict may have determinant implications for duration and severity of civil conflict but not equally determinant for outbreak of civil conflict. In other words, we should be critical to the credibility and validity of applying the same set of assumptions and theoretical accounts utilized by the onset and duration of civil war literature and highlight the need for a comprehensive identification of mechanisms that affect the severity of violence in civil wars.

An emphasis on providing a theoretical account of severity of civil war must constitute an operationalization of severity of civil war as there is a confusion regarding what the severity of a conflict is consisted of. After all, one may define the term in different ways. It could be the duration of the conflict, as the longest conflicts could be understood as the most severe conflicts. Another operationalization could be the amount of internally displaced people as criteria to assess the severity of civil war. The battle deaths could be another operationalization and measurement of civil war. The last-mentioned measurement is mainly employed in the literature of severity of civil war.

## **2.Literature Review**

One of the first attempts to examine the determinants of severity of civil conflict were initiated by Lacina (2006). In her article, titled "*Explaining the Severity of Civil War*", Lacina defines the severity of civil conflicts based on battle deaths. The definition of severity as the total battle deaths implies combatants and civilians killed by means of violence during a military contest, and thus distinguishes such fatalities from other fatalities in unorganized violence or in one-sided violence such as genocide. The hypothesis and assumptions of this article are derived mainly from existent literature on the onset of civil conflict. The existent literature highlights the distinction between variables related to the opportunities to fight and motivation to fight and attempts to conclude which of these variables are most important to understand civil wars. A similar approach is also applied in Lacina`s work on severity of civil wars. The article refers to state capacity, regime type and religious diversity as potential determinants for severity of civil war, which also are variables often utilized to explain the willingness and ability to initiate a civil conflict. State capacity is one of the most widely discussed and employed concepts in the civil war literature and generally in political science

literature. Weak state capacity is often associated with a set of problems confronting many states. Those problems include low economic growth, outbreak of violence and lack of infrastructure. State capacity refers mainly to the ability of the state to penetrate society and exercise territorial control (Koren & Sarbahi 2017, 1). In the literature of civil war, state capacity is employed as the disability of the state to counterinsurgency, the disability to maintain control over isolated territories of peripheral areas and the disability of the state to define, respond and resolve the inequalities and motivations that lead groups to engage in civil war. Fearon and Laitin (2003) highlight the importance of state capacity for prospects of a nascent insurgency as *“the government’s police and military capabilities and the reach of government institutions into rural areas...Insurgents are better able to survive and prosper if the government and military they oppose are relatively weak-badly financed, organizationally inept, corrupt, politically divided and poorly informed about goings-on that local level* (Fearon & Laitin 2003, 80). State capacity in Lacina’s article on severity of civil war assumes that more severe conflicts will occur in weak states. Lacina operationalizes state capacity in terms of military capacity and GDP per capita. The last mentioned variable is also applied by Fearon & Laitin whom emphasises GDP per capita as a proxy for (a) a state’s overall administrative, military, financial and police capabilities, (b) marking developed countries with better infrastructure and a strong persistence of central administration in peripheral rural areas and (c) the potential of recruitment as the recruitment of people is easier when economic alternative are worse. Thus, a capable state measured by its economic welfare is associated with responding efficiently to insurgency, lowering participation by increasing opportunity costs to rebellion and generating institutional strength.

Another theoretical account Lacina incorporates in her article is regime type. The main intuition behind referring to regime type is arguably the assumption that democracies as political systems are less prone to experience civil wars than other types of political systems. Lacina argues for three mechanisms that may relate democracies to conflict severity; selection effects, democratic norms and the political adaptability of institutions. Democratically elected leaders that are accountable and under public pressure are expected to avoid costly wars and to grant concessions when faced with an insurgent threat. The democratic norms a country internalizes, constrains them to use relentless measures against insurgents. The mechanisms in a democracy, such as institutional checks on executive and the openness of the system that enables insurgents and their sympathizers to provide public pressure when governments employ harsh and violent measures, may make civil wars less severe. Democracies are also

better enabled to negotiate and co-opt insurgents, thus allowing insurgents to participate in policy formulation. Such incorporation of insurgents into the system leaves violence as a less considerable option. Based on these propensities of democracies, Lacina assumes that democracies experience less severe conflicts.

The last set of variables Lacina controls for highlights the role of ethnicity and religion on severity of civil war. These types of characteristics may intensify the willingness to endure the costs of conflict as such characteristics establish a collective identity and reduces the problems related to collective action problem. Thus, the author assumes civil conflicts that are both ethnically and religiously polarized are more severe than conflicts that don't constitute such distinctive features. To test for this, the author utilizes the conventional use of Fearon & Laitin's measure of ethnic and religious fractionalization.

To test for these hypotheses, Lacina operates with OLS regressions. The dependent variable is total battle deaths. The results indicate no evidence for state capacity hypotheses operationalized as military quality, GDP per capita income and the percentage of mountainous territory. The study provides no evidence for religious polarizations and finds surprisingly a significant negative effect of ethnic polarization meaning that the total battle deaths decrease as a country becomes more polarized along ethnic lines. Democracy also decreases the battle deaths meaning civil wars are less severe in democratic countries. Lacina controls also for cold war as a proxy variable for examining the impact of external military interventions. A dummy variable for war beginning during the cold war was created as during the cold war there was a greater availability of military assistance to states and rebel groups. As anticipated, cold war is positively related to total battle deaths.

Similar approaches to those of Lacina's article is present in Benson's and Kugler's *Power Parity, Democracy and the Severity of Internal Violence* (1998). The article is engaged in providing some explanations for why some conflicts escalate to the point of widespread violence, whereas others fizzle out. The article attempts to answer the question by referring to power parity, also the shifts in the power relationships between the government and the opposition. The article argues that violent political interactions will break out when there is a lack of authority and when a sufficient opposition exists to threaten the government in power. Benson and Kugler claim that when domestic contenders are effective, conflict is likely to be more severe, and when they are ineffective, conflict should be limited (Benson & Kugler 1998, 198). The underlying logic behind their approach is the relationship between the political capacity of a government to extract resources from the society vis a vis the relative

capacity of the opposition to do likewise. When the capacity of both actors is relatively equal, conflict may become severe. In addition to the argument of parity of power between contenders and government as a determinant for severity, the authors refer also to effectiveness of government as a determinant for severity of violence arguing that government efficiency decreases the internal violence as strong governments are able to persuade or coerce the opposition to accept government policies.

The dependent variable in this article is internal political violence which coded the levels of violence as none, low, moderate, severe, and very severe. The main explanatory variables are the political capacity of government and political capacity of opposition. In Benson's and Kugler's article, political capacity is operationalized as a government's presence and effectiveness of fiscal extraction. This is measured by the ratio of actual revenues obtained by the government over the predicted revenues obtained from an econometric model. The political capacity of the opposition is assessed as the ratio between the government extraction and the extraction of its main opposition. However, the attempt is not to define the strength of the opposition but rather the relative parity between the government and its opponents. The OLS regression of the empirical analysis indicates that political efficiency of the government is negatively related to the severity of violence meaning that severity of violence decreases as the political efficiency of the government rises. The coefficient of the opposition's effectiveness is significant and positive, meaning that severity of violence increases as the capabilities of potential rebels increase. Thus, the findings of this article confirm state capacity hypothesis of Lacina who could not find supporting evidence. A potential explanation for this may be the use of variables meant to control for the effect of state capacity. How to operationalize state capacity differs significantly within literature and acquiring a reliable effect of state capacity suffers from the lack of a well-formulated operationalization.

Inequalities or grievances are also one of leading explanations that have dominated the civil war literature related prominently to the outbreak of civil wars. Theories of relative deprivation and horizontal inequalities attempt to shape a theoretical understanding for outbreak of civil war by referring to inequalities as central for identity and group formation. Lu & Thies (2011) *Economic Grievance and Severity of Civil War* incorporates the inequality approaches to examine the implications of inequalities on severity of civil war. The study defines inequalities in terms of economic inequalities that emerge because of highly skewed and unequal distribution of wealth in a society. Consequently, economic inequality fuels social discontent and causes social disorganization, which leads to the expression of hostility

and criminal behaviour (Lu & Thies 2011, 220). When a substantial portion of citizens are prohibited from allocation of scarce resources that they believe they are entitled to, frustration will occur, and the existing institutions and society will turn into their enemy. However, much of the empirical research cultivated to examine the relationship between economic inequalities and outbreak of civil war fails to provide evidence for these assumptions. The effects of grievances may be different for severity of civil war. Unlike the outbreak of civil war, insurgents are free to determine how violent their actions will be once a civil conflict has started. Thus, the assumption is that their level of grievances may determine the level of hostility and violence. When confronted with such aggrieved opponents, the reaction of their counterpart will be the same level of hostility and violence, which increases the number of deaths. The civil conflict may be more severe in the presence of inequalities inherited within the groups, such as ethnic groups. When inequalities between different ethnic groups are comprehensive, these inequalities may enhance both grievance and group cohesion among the underprivileged groups and enhance mobilization for conflict. Thus, the effect of economic inequalities may be dependent and conditional upon ethnic inequalities.

To test for these assumptions, Lu & Thies applies total battle deaths as the dependent variable. The primary independent variables are Gini Index that is utilized to measure economic grievance and the interaction term of the Gini Index and ethnic grievance as a means of testing the hypothesis related to the economic inequalities being conditional upon ethnic grievances. In addition to the primary independent variables, the article incorporates variables that are meant to examine some other approaches persistent in civil war literature. Three of these variables are mountainous terrain, natural resources, and GDP per capita, which are variables controlling for opportunity approaches. The authors also apply variables that are meant to control for characteristics of civil wars. These variables are duration of the conflict and strength of the rebel group. The article controls also for some country-level characteristics by employing variables of regime type of a country, population size and cold war. To obtain the empirical analysis, the authors run OLS regression models; the first model excluding the interaction term between Gini Index and ethnic dominance and the second model including the interaction term. In both models, economic inequality is positively and significantly related to total battle deaths meaning that economic inequalities make a civil conflict more severe. The results do not provide supporting evidence for the interaction term testing the hypothesis of effects of economic inequalities on civil war severity conditional upon ethnic grievances. Only one variable of the three opportunity variables has a significant effect on

total battle deaths. Mountainous terrain significantly increases the number of deaths whilst the dummy of natural resources and GDP per capita do not significantly shape the severity of civil war. The non-significant findings of opportunity variables, which are often assessed as important determinants for outbreak and duration of civil war, strengthens furtherly the argument presented by Lu and Thies. Both variables of characteristics of civil war are significant and positively related to the severity of civil war. Rebel strength of rebelling groups and duration of the civil conflict increase the number of deaths. Lastly, only one variable of three country-level variables has significant effects. Neither regime type or the size of population is statistically related to the severity of civil wars despite that both variables are often found to significantly predict civil conflict onset. Only cold war is significant meaning that violence during the Cold War was more severe than conflict thereafter.

Another dimension that has acquired great attention in civil war literature is the availability of natural resources. Specially, the apolitical and individualist greed thesis of Collier & Hoeffler (2001), which defines greed by the availability or abundance of capturable natural resource rents, reckons insurgents as economically motivated actors driven by greed and loot-seeking (Murshed & Tadjoeeddin 2008, 89). Thus, the greed thesis disfavours the grievance thesis that emphasizes the motivations for rebellion and advocates opportunities for rebellion as the main cause of civil war. The “greed” model of Collier & Hoeffler considers civil wars as “loot-seeking” wars that are based on the notion that individuals join rebel movements depending on the expected utility of their actions and the availability of lootable income or the payoff (Soysa 2002, 397). Lujala's *Deadly Combat over Natural Resources: Gems, Petroleum, Drugs and the Severity of Armed Civil Conflict* (2009) applies the notion of natural resources to explain the severity of civil war in spite of the natural resources utilized prominently for explaining the outbreak of civil conflict. According to Lujala, natural resources may have different effects in which all these effects directly or indirectly makes civil war more severe; both state and rebel groups with access to natural resource reserves and exploitation may be able to employ more soldiers and provide them with better devices and the promise of future income can motivate people to join the rebellion and increase the intensity of fighting as the only way to secure the revenues from natural resources is to win the war (Lujala 2009, 52). The availability and access to natural resources contribute some rebellions to be dominated by warlords in which different groups struggling for gaining control over the state and natural resources. This struggle for control over territories with reserves may motivate rebellions to engage in an extreme warfare against civilians if these territories are populated by civilians.



Lujala's contribution to the literature is to conduct the analysis with conflict-level variables instead of country-level aggregates, which has shown some considerable differences. Another important contribution of Lujala's article is to consider the location of resources relative to the conflict zone. In doing so, the paper intends to examine the effects of the conflict zones that are based in resource rich locations. Thus, the severity of conflict is assumed to vary when the natural resources are in the same region as the conflict. The article differs also between different types of resources and their effects based on how much expertise and sophisticated equipment rebel organizations need for exploitation and production of these resources. Like other studies mentioned so far, Lucina also applies the combat death data from Lacina and Gleditsch (2005). In addition, the article incorporates average daily death rate over the whole conflict to test for intensity of the conflict. To control for the effects of natural resources and to distinguish the effects of location of natural resources relative to the conflict zone, Lujala refers to four main explanatory variables; Gemstone production in the conflict zone, Drug cultivation in the conflict zone, hydrocarbon production (oil and gas) in the conflict zone and hydrocarbon production outside the conflict zone. The paper also includes a set of variables that are meant to control for specific characteristics and conditions to the conflict and conflict zone. These are mountainous terrain, relative strength of the rebel group, internationalized internal conflicts and a cold war dummy for conflicts that started before 1990. Variables of ethnic and religious fractionalization, population size and a democracy dummy are included to control for country-level characteristics. The empirical analysis of Lujala's article confirms the essentiality to control for the site of resource production in relation to conflict location. The effects of natural resources located inside the conflict zone and outside the conflict zone are differing. The results show that the location of oil and gas production inside the conflict zone is associated with severer conflicts, but their location outside the conflict zone is related to fewer combat deaths and less intensive conflicts (Lujala 2009, 67). Oil and gas production in the conflict region tends to more than double the number of combat deaths. Lootable gemstones such as diamonds in the conflict zone more than double the number of battle-related deaths. an interesting finding of Lujala's study is the enormous severity of secessionist conflicts in which the contested territory has hydrocarbon production. The analysis of Lujala confirms the parity of power and the capability of rebel arguments that were presented in the other studies presented here. When both governmental and rebel forces are equally strong, the conflict accumulates over four times more combat deaths. Conflicts that were democracies a year before the conflict experience fewer battle-related deaths, as does ethnically diverse

countries. The last finding is consistent with the analysis provided by Lacina (2006) who also finds a negative relationship between ethnic diversity and battle deaths.

The effects of the structure of political institutions have been mainly examined by incorporating regime type as a dichotomy of democracy vs autocracy. Other mechanisms of institutions and their effects, mainly political institutions such as the form of governance, the form of electoral system and the form of the government such as coalition or single-party governments have been underrated. The article of Heger & Saleyhan (2007) *Ruthless Rulers: Coalition Size and the Severity of Civil Conflict* is an attempt to extend the theoretical approach to include some other governmental and political dimensions. As a point of departure, the authors regard violence not simply as a by-product of war but as a strategic choice made by elites. These elites or state actors are responsible for in what degree governments are violent and repressive. Heger and Slaeyhan (2007) argue that the size of the governing coalition or elites influence the repression strategies and the severity of conflict. In every regime, being an autocratic dictatorial or a democratic regime, leaders and the governing coalitions rely on support from a set of core constituents or groups. No government rely on the support of all citizens. In autocratic and dictatorial regimes, governing coalitions are formed around the leader in a mutually beneficial relationships. In return for their political support, members of these coalitions obtain substantial benefits and goods if they provide support for the incumbent regime (Heger & Slaeyhan 2007, 387). A similar logic can also be observed in democracies which provide the benefits and goods in other forms such as subsidies and targeted projects to their core supporters and constituents. The private benefits and goods that a winning a coalition acquires, is also depended upon the size of the winning coalition. Smaller coalitions yield higher per-person benefits and thus provide a higher degree of political loyalty (Heger & Saleyhan 2007, 388). Such a mechanism is persistent in non-democratic regimes. In democracies, the size of winning coalition is larger as they need to maintain the support of at least median voters to stay in power. This increase in coalition size makes the risks and costs of not supporting a leader fewer and thus the loyalty to the leader wanes. The benefits of being a part of the winning coalition are threatened in the face of a civil war or an insurgency that threatens to topple the government and take control over the government. Consequently, radical adjustments of the incumbent regime may diminish the private benefits and goods that a winning coalition acquire, and members of the winning coalition may be even purged and executed. When these possibilities are present because of a successful insurgency, the winning coalitions may be willing to response to insurgents with a

higher degree of violent repression. However, for coalitions in democracies the risks and costs related to overthrowing a leader or a government is fewer as the coalition size in democracies is smaller and the perceived private benefits are in a more constrained scale. Thus, the operating hypothesis of Heger and Saleyhan are that (1) *the severity of conflict will increase as the size of the leader`s winning coalition decreases*, (2) *conflicts will be less severe in democratic states* and (3) *the effect of coalition size on conflict severity will be different in democracies, with democratic institutions mitigating the effect of coalition size*.

The size of the winning coalition is proxied by the size of the leader`s ethnic group. The reason for referring to ethnicity as the determinant for the size of winning coalition is the role of ethnicity to shape the winning coalition. The ethnicity is also argued to play an important role in determining the allocation of resources. The dependent variable in Heger and Saleyhan`s article is battle-deaths, the number of persons killed during the armed conflicts. The main independent variable is the size of the winning coalition that is measured by the size of leader`s ethnic group. In addition, the articles controls for regime type; (a) a dummy variable of democracy measured by Polity data, (b) a variable of multiplicative interaction between democracy and group size; the assumption being that the effect of coalition size is conditional on regime type, (c) the number of years a conflict persists, (d) GDP per capita to test whether conflict are more or less severe in wealthier countries, (e) external interventions; interventions on behalf of the government, intervention on behalf of the rebels and intervention for both government and rebels and (f) territorial conflicts to test whether conflicts concerning a territory is different from conflicts over the central government and finally (g) controlling for the relative strength of the rebel groups.

The empirical analysis is obtained by OLS regressions. In all the models, the group size has negatively significant effects on total battle deaths, meaning that larger winning coalitions lead to fewer deaths during periods of conflict. When measuring group size by an alternative variable from Bueno de Mesquita et al (2003), the effect of group size is still negative and significant. Rebel strength is positively correlated with battle deaths and is significant across all models. The longer conflicts lead to more deaths. Another finding is the effect of the number of ethnic groups in a country. As the number of ethnic groups increases in a country, the number of deaths decreases. The territorial conflicts generate fewer deaths than governmental conflicts. The interaction term between democracy and group size illustrates that increase of the size of the ruler`s ethnic group in democracies, increases also the fatalities, which is a contradictory to the assumption of increases of ruler`s ethnic group may decrease

the fatalities. When the conflicts are divided alongside government and territory conflicts, the variables of regime type, group size, rebel strength, number of groups and duration of conflicts still hold. Democracies reduce the fatalities. Thus, the significant results of rebel strength, duration and democracy confirm the findings of other articles presented so far. As one of the first attempts to incorporate the political actors into the literature, the study of Heger and Saleyhan necessitates the examination of other political dimensions that may influence the severity of violence such as changes in government and changes of constitutional designs.

The notion of ethnicity has been mainly applied to explain the onset and duration of armed conflict. Kristine Eck's *From Armed Conflict to War: Ethnic Mobilization and Conflict Intensification* is an attempt to examine the effects of ethnicity on the intensity of conflict. The intensity of conflict resembles the use of severity of conflict, so both can be understood as referring to the same issue. Eck is interested in addressing if ethnic conflicts are more likely to experience intensified violence than nonethnic conflicts. However, the distinguishing aspect of Eck's study is to refer to ethnic mobilization rather than other conventional applications of ethnicity such as ethnic fractionalization and ethnic grievance. The argument of ethnic mobilization differs from arguments that concern whether ethnicity itself is inherently conflictual. The arguments of ethnic grievances often highlight the motivational sources of the conflict in which ethnic grievances are considered as motivating insurgency. However, ethnic mobilization argument of Eck concerns the organizational aspect of insurgency and civil conflict. The importance of mobilizing alongside ethnic lines is reflected in utilizing ethnicity in conflicts which do not see ethnic grievances. In such conflicts, ethnicity functions as an organizational factor. In addition, mobilizing alongside ethnicity eases the challenges related to the recruitment. Ethnic mobilization identifies the target group of rebels more easily (Eck 2009, 373). Ethnically mobilized groups are also argued to be more loyal and fixed. A potential reason for that is that rebels make choices based on ethnic affinities rather than material and opportunistic payoffs, which has implications for how dedicated and loyal they are to the rebellion. For ethnically mobilized rebel groups, leaving the rebel groups will be difficult as they may risk vindication and isolation within the larger ethnic community (Eck 2009, 374). Eck applies also brilliantly the notion of security dilemma into the ethnically mobilized insurgencies. The fact that the rebel group is mobilized along ethnic lines affects the entire group in the struggle. Thus, the entire group becomes subjects of state repression. This situation may result in creating incentives to participate the rebellion to

avoid possible governmental violence. In this context, the security dilemma in which each defensive action one side takes, is interpreted as threatening to the other side and thus escalates the conflict. This may result in intensified violence. The advantageous recruitment environment and the security dilemma between ethnically mobilized group and the state result in a stronger military force that may facilitate higher level of violence.

The dependent variable is a dummy variable for whether the armed conflict reached over 1,000 battle-deaths each year. The main independent variable is ethnic mobilization. The variable is coded as a dummy variable for whether ethnicity was used as an explicit mobilization criterion or if the warring parties were organized along ethnic lines. The study also includes several variables to control for spurious effects; the first is ethnic pluralism as measure of the share of the population belonging to the largest ethnic group, the second is Fearon and Laitin's ethnic fractionalization, the third is distinguishing between governmental and territorial conflicts, the fourth is controlling for democracy by using Polity data, the fifth is population size, the sixth control variable is GDP per capita. In addition, military strength measured as military personnel and the persistence of secondary warring party to control for the effect of any external actor is included in the analysis.

To obtain the empirical analysis, the author employs Cox proportional hazards models. In all the models, the variable of ethnic mobilization has positively significant implications on conflict intensification meaning conflicts that are mobilized along ethnical lines are more intensive and severe. Ethnic pluralism has also positively significant effects on the risk of conflict intensification, also countries in which greater shares of the population belong to the largest ethnic groups have a considerably increased risk of civil war. Territorial conflicts experience a lower risk of war than governmental conflicts. the risk of war intensification increases also when an external state intervenes militarily on the side of the rebels. Thus, the findings of Eck suggest that the patterns of rebel recruitment and mobilization may provide us with information on how intensive and severe these conflicts can be. Other patterns of mobilization and recruitment may be alongside the material payoffs that may be the case in conflicts characterized by lootable natural resources. In such conflicts, the pattern of mobilization is arguably identified more by the expected returns of participating in the insurgent group than ethnic mobilization.

Another aspect of civil conflicts is the frequent use of economic and military-specific sanctions against the countries experiencing civil conflicts. This set of interventions and sanctions by external actors may influence the conflict dynamics. Hultman & Peksen's:

*Successful or Counterproductive Coercion? The Effect of International Sanctions on Conflict Intensity* (2017) is one of the first attempts that study the extent to which sanction threats and imposition affect conflict intensity. The intensity is measured as the number of battle-related fatalities in internal armed conflicts, which is the same definition applied in studies of severity of conflict. The effects of external interventions either in favour of rebels or governments were tested in the literature that was presented so far. However, the effects of sanctions as non-military interventions on conflict severity is a non-explored area. The assumed mechanism that is suggested to link the sanctions to the intensity or severity of civil conflict is the effects of sanctions on relative fighting capabilities. Hence, both threat and imposition of sanctions might affect the conflict intensity by influencing the distribution of power.

As a response to threat sanctions aimed at the economic and military capacity of the target, the target countries and governments may mitigate or alter their repressive and violent behaviour. To avoid the economic and military consequences of sanctions, the governments may seek peaceful settlements or de-escalate the conflict. Thus, economic, and military specific sanction threats may reduce conflict violence (Hultman & Peksen 2017, 1319). However, such threat sanctions may also produce some contrary outcomes. To conceding external demands may be comprehended as a weakness by insurgent groups and increase their support within the society. To benefit from this opportunity the insurgent group may increase their violent actions. Therefore, sanction threat may also increase the conflict violence.

Sanctions are argued to be particularly effective in undermining conflict intensity when they are in the form of arms embargoes targeting the military capacity of the target actors. Arms embargoes may be the most effective type of implemented sanctions in reducing violence (Hultman & Peksen 2017, 1321). Thus, such sanctions targeted directly against the military capacity of the government, may reduce violence. the authors propose also that the imposed economic and military-specific sanctions may increase violence as a result of the government becoming more violence and repressive to position itself toward both the international pressure and domestic actors that the sanctions don't affect the determination of the government to fight and defeat the insurgency.

The dependent variable of Hultman & Peksen's article is the monthly conflict intensity measured by the number of fatalities in battle-related violence. the main explanatory variables are a dummy variable of *sanction threat* controlling for whether the country is under any type of sanctions threats in a given month, an ordinal variable of *anticipated cost* testing for potential costs of the imposed sanctions and *threats to military* controlling for only threats of

sanctions intended to impose costs on the military of the target state. To account for the effects of imposed sanctions, a dummy variable of *imposed sanctions* controlling for whether a country is facing imposed economic sanctions in a given month, *sanction cost* a category variable that ranges from minor to major to severe impact to the target, *arms embargoes* to assess whether imposed sanctions meant to constrain the military capacity are more effective than economic sanctions. In addition to these variables, the article controls for population size, the distinction between territorial vis a vis governmental conflicts, the strength of the armed opposition, the number of rebel groups involved in the conflict, the biased intervention capturing whether any state intervened militarily to support one the warring conflicts of the conflict and finally controlling for UN peace-making.

The empirical analysis of the article shows that the sanction threats are associated with higher levels of battle deaths. Both the variables of sanction threat, anticipated cost and military sanction threats are positively related to the intensity of the conflict. Imposed economic sanctions are positively associated with battle intensity. However, arm embargoes reduce conflict violence. Thus, the sanctions that are related to affect the military capability of a government has consequences in the form of leading to fewer battle deaths. The empirical analysis confirms that the democracy decreases the intensity of conflict. The results also show that conflicts are more severe when they are consisted of more rebel groups. Biased interventions increase the intensity of civil war. The findings of Hultman and Peksen`s article emphasizes an important and unexplored dimension of the interaction between civil conflicts and international environment. However, these findings need to warrant more comprehensive theoretical accounts in order to be able to explain why economic sanctions and sanction threats might have conflict-intensifying effects.

Butler, Christopher and Gates (2015) *Explaining Civil War Severity: A Formal Model and Empirical Analysis* have also provided a formal model that examines the variation in severity of civil conflicts. The authors apply a contest success function model that incorporates variation in the number of rebel groups participating in civil war. The model of Butler et al. presumes that in a civil conflict the choice is made between productive economic effort and fighting. Both rebel groups and government engage in productive activity during a civil conflict. However, they face a dilemma: the more resources they devote to fighting, there will be less productivity (Butler, Christopher & Gates 2015, 4). The models attempt to examine the conditions under which groups allocate resources to productive output or to fighting.

The formal model implies three main parameters that affect the severity of civil war; the number of rebel groups, the government's resources and the average resources that rebel groups have. The number of rebel groups is measured as the number of rebel groups from Uppsala/PRIO Armed Conflict Data, the government's resources are measured as the number of government troops and the resources of rebel groups are measured as the average number of rebel troops per rebel group. Hence, by applying these three measurements into the theoretical model, the model predicts battle deaths. The predicted battle deaths are assumed to be positively related with observed annual battle deaths.

The dependent variable of Butler et al is severity of conflict operationalized as the number of battle-related deaths in each conflict year. The predictions of battle-related deaths are then compared to the actual observed battle-related deaths. The empirical analysis is aimed to examine how well the predictions from the theoretical model fit the observed data. In addition, the authors control for incompatibility; the distinction between conflict over territory or government and country-level measures of population and GDP per capita. Two other variables control for both conflict-level and group-level characteristics; a variable indicating whether the conflict is an internationalized civil war and a variable measuring whether there was a negotiated agreement signed in the conflict previous year. The empirical analysis show that predicted conflict severity derived from the theoretical model is a positive and statistically significant predictor of actual conflict severity in these conflicts.

The authors also distinguish the dependent variable between only territorial and only central conflicts. In all conflicts, which consider both territorial and central conflicts, governmental conflicts are more severe compared to territorial conflicts. Internationalized civil wars have significantly higher battle-deaths, which is a consistent finding with other studies presented so far. The predicted severity is also a positive and significant predictor of actual conflict severity in models that considered only territorial civil conflicts and center-seeking civil conflicts. When it comes to the effects of control variables, they explain center-seeking wars better than territorial conflicts. Internationalized civil wars increase the number of battle-deaths in center-seeking conflicts, whilst economic improvement and increasing in population size lower battle related deaths. Thus, the study of Butler et al. illustrates that the severity of conflict is an outcome of the resources available to the parts of the conflict and the amount of resources they allocate to productive economic activity and fighting. The allocation decisions are in turn influenced by the number of rebel groups involved in the conflict and the resources governments and rebel groups possess (Butler, Christopher & Gates 2015, 23). The theoretical



accounts and empirical analysis presented by Butler et al. may be seen as an extension of arguments related to the rebel capabilities and military capabilities of governments, which were highlighted by other studies.

Another study by Balcells and Kalyvas *Does Warfare Matter? Severity, Duration, and Outcomes of Civil Wars* attempts to cultivate an account of different dynamics of civil conflicts. The main contribution of Balcells's and Kalyvas's study is their disaggregating of civil wars based on "technology of rebellion" which is a term consisted of both the relative military capacity of states and rebels and their interaction. Technologies of rebellion considers the relative military capacity of states and rebels and the specific way these two actors interact with each other (Balcells & Kalyvas 2014, 1392). Considering these dimensions, the authors disaggregate civil wars into three basic types of civil war: conventional civil wars that are fought conventionally with clear frontlines in which both sides have the ability to impel heavy weaponry towards each other, irregular civil wars that are fought irregularly when the government's conventional military faces lightly armed rebels, and symmetric nonconventional wars that are fought by governments and rebels who possess a low level of military sophistication. Thus, different types of civil conflicts may produce different amounts of fatalities. The authors argue that conventional wars that constitute heavy weaponry should be more fatal compared to either irregular or symmetric unconventional war. The latter mentioned types of warfare engage in indirect clashes, possess light weaponry and poor organization.

The study applies battlefield deaths by Lacina and Gleditsch (2005) as the dependent variable. The results of empirical analysis show that conventional civil wars produce more fatalities compared to irregular wars. Balcells and Kalyvas also incorporate a set of control variables; population, democracy, oil exporter, ethnic fractionalization, rough terrain, GDP per capita, a post-cold war dummy and dummies measuring external support for rebels and states. Consistent with other studies, democracies reduce the level of battle deaths whilst external interventions increase it. As Lacina (2006) finds, ethnic fractionalization reduced battlefield severity. Balcells and Kalyvas introduce an important dynamic to the literature of severity of conflict. Different natures of civil wars and different capabilities between rebel groups and governments may determine the severity of conflicts.

## 2.1 Reflecting on the Literature

The overall introduction of literature related to examining the severity of civil war encapsulates many different aspects of civil war dynamics. The effects of variables such as democracy, rebel capability and external interventions on severity of conflict appear to be consistent throughout the literature. However, most of the literature on severity of civil war operates with theoretical accounts that are already been established to explain other dimensions of civil war such as outbreak and duration of civil conflicts. The mechanisms, which make a civil conflict more severe may be diverging from the mechanisms leading to the outbreak of a civil conflict or from the mechanisms prolonging civil war. As shown by Eck, ethnicity in itself may not lead to outbreak of civil war as the vast majority of ethnic groups lives in peace, but it may be an important instrument for recruitment and establishing a coherent, determinant and loyal insurgency, which may have implications for severity of civil war. The same intuition may be the case for grievances. The grievances approach which highlight the inequalities as a determinant for outbreak of civil conflict is disfavoured and underrated because of the failure of the proponents of this approach to provide empirical evidence. However, as Lu & Thies illustrated, the economic grievances may contribute to increase the conflict severity once a civil conflict has emerged. The existent literature on severity of civil conflict can be promoted by interpolating variables and proxies that are meant to control for political opportunity structures. Such variables may enable us to control for the implications of changes in political environment on the severity of conflict. In civil conflicts, violence is employed as an instrument, and the escalation or de-escalation of violence may be determined by how the political context is evolving.

Most of the variables and factors that are employed in studies mentioned above have a static nature, which implies that they do not vary much over time. However, the severity of civil war has dynamic prospects as the level of violence in civil wars changes frequently over time. The variability of civil war severity may be best explained by factors and variables that have similar temporal dynamism. These factors and variables should also have a dynamic nature that changes during the civil war. Most of the findings of previous studies provide empirical support for variables that have a static nature, such as democracy and cold war. In addition, the operationalization and measurement of variables that have some dynamic prospects fail to reflect the dynamic aspects of dynamic variables. For instance, most of the studies comprehend democracy as a dichotomy, also whether being a democracy or not. However, democracy is increasingly being interpreted as a question of degree and level rather than a

dichotomous variable. This notion may especially be case for countries experiencing civil wars as democracy in such countries has a very unstable nature and characterized by rapid changes in the level of democracy. In other words, when democracy is characterized as a continuous variable, the changing nature of democracy may be a better application of democracy than aggregating democracy as a dichotomous variable. The same intuition may be implemented for the variable of strength of rebel groups or the military capacity of rebel group. The military capacity and the strength of rebel group is also a dynamic factor that changes over time based on fluctuations on factors such as access to financing and recruitment. A set of changes or new developments may in some periods and contexts strengthen the military and organizational capacity of rebelling groups, whilst in some periods lack of access to finance and lack of recruitment may weaken the overall capacity of rebel groups. In other words, the capabilities of rebel groups are quite dynamic and are prone to fluctuations over time. The existent measurements of rebel capability such as the one provided by Cunningham, Gleditsch & Saleyhan (2009) define military groups as weak, moderate, and strong. Such measurements fail to address the changing capabilities of rebel groups as the capacity of rebel groups changes considerably over time. A similar notion can be observed with the application of cold war as a mean to control for the intervention of third parts into the conflict. The studies of Cunningham (2010) and Elbadamwi & Sambanis (2000) show that the involvement of external actors prolong the duration of civil wars. Thus, the involvement of external actors can be investigated by variables that control for the military and physical presence of external actors in the conflict zone. However, the effects of external involvements need to be distinguished between external interventions that are meant to encourage a peaceful settlement and involvements that collaborate with one of the actors engaging in the conflict. Hultman, Kathman & Shannon (2014) highlight the effects of involvement by United Nations to examine whether interventions motivated to conduct a peaceful settlement reduce the severity of civil war measured as the total number of battle deaths. In addition, the authors problematize a similar aspect as it has been problematized so far. The study of Hultman et al. reacts to previous studies that has relied on dichotomous variables to investigate the implications of peacekeeping attempts. Their study measures the peaceful attempts as a continuous measure by incorporating actual personnel deployments by United Nations. The authors find that increasing number of UN troops in conflict areas reduces the number of battle deaths. When the commitment of UN reaches 10,000 peacekeeping troops, the battlefield violence is reduced by 70 percent. The external involvements either by peacekeeping attempts by actors such as United Nations or by some

third countries could also be comprehended as dynamic processes as their efforts of involvement and interventions change throughout the time. Hultman et al. captures this dynamic aspect of UN peacekeeping by using monthly data on number of peacekeepers deployed. Thus, aggregating the involvement of external actors at a lower level such as aggregating at monthly level done by Hultman et al. and measuring the external involvements as a continuously and changing factor rather than measuring it dichotomously and in terms of cold war may enable us to capture the effects of external involvements in a more accurate and exhaustive way.

At the end of the literature review, when assessing the deficient aspects of the literature, political context has been mentioned. Without further specification and conceptualization, this concept may encapsulate various considerations that are associated with the political context. The political context may imply effectiveness of the state, the form of government, type of election system, regime transitions and many other political aspects that may influence the motivations and the opportunities of the rebellious groups to determine the level of violence. Most of the previous studies define the political context in terms of capacities and abilities of the state in which states have been differentiated between weak and strong states. The argument of state strength has mainly been derived from political opportunity structure which highlights the role of specific changes or events that may encourage people to engage in collective action and take advantages of weakness on the government side (Gleditsch & Ruggeri 2010, 300). Hence, the arguments of state strength are being interpreted to control for approaches of political opportunity structure. However, the political opportunity structures are dynamic processes that emerge as particular events and changes.

## **2.2 State Capacity as an Example of Political Context**

Operationalizing dynamic processes by a static dimension such as state strength and weakness may not be feasible to provide reliable and valid conclusions. The strength or weakness of a state is prominently constant. States that are strong do not become weaker and weak states don't become stronger so rapidly that we may be able to control for changes in state strength. In other words, most of the studies concerning civil war focus on sustained and enduring structural properties of the state rather than more dynamic changes. Another problem associated with arguments about state capacity and state strength is the lack of consensus on how it may be conceptualized and measured despite the theoretical prominence of the concept. Studies employ a set of variables that are meant to assess the implications of state capacity. A study of Hendrix (2010) enumerates fifteen different measurements that are

comprehended to control for state capacity; GDP per capita, Military personnel per capita, Military expenditure per capita, Bureaucratic quality, Investment profile, Primary commodity exports of GDP, Fuel exports, Taxes of GDP, Total revenue of GDP, Relative political capacity, Polity 2, the squared Polity 2, XPolity, XPolity squared and Scalar Index of Polities. These measurements address mainly three theoretical definitions of state capacity: military power, bureaucratic/administrative capacity and the quality and coherence of political institutions (Hendrix 2010, 273).

A comprehensive study of Buhaug (2010) who attempts to explain the risk of civil war and the onset of civil conflict, defines state capacity by a state's military, administrative, and institutional capacity. The military capacity of a state emphasizes the state's ability to discourage and repel challenges directed towards its authority with use of force. Buhaug (2010) measures the military capacity of a state in terms of army size relative to the population, also the number of soldiers per 1,000 citizens. On the other hand, the administrative capacity of a state is meant to control for the capacity of the state to monitor its population, formulate and implement policies, and determine the identities of the potential rebellious groups (Hendrix 2010, 274). Buhaug (2010) measures the administrative capacity as relative political capacity meaning the ability of a government to extract resources from a population given their economic performance. Finally, the institutional capacity of a state is measured by Scalar Index of Polities in Buhaug's study, which defines democracies as strong if they combine competitive recruitment, high levels of participation and extensive checks on the use of executive authority, which also defines autocracies as strong if they combine non-competitive recruitment, low participation and minimal checks on executive authority.

Another study by Thies (2010) adopts a fiscal sociology approach to the measurement of state capacity. In Thies's study, state capacity is operationalized as government share measuring the amount of a society's resources consumed by government in which the argument is that increasing government revenues illustrate an expansion of government responsibility and authority, which again illustrates state strength and capacity (Thies 2010, 325). The second fiscal measure of Thies is total revenue that is a measurement including both tax and non-tax revenue. The third operationalization provided by Thies is tax ratio, also the state's tax revenue as a percentage of GDP. This measurement is expected to reflect the ability of the state to extract resources from individuals and groups in society. The last measurement of state capacity in Thies's study is relative political capacity which is a measurement of the strength of the state compared to other states with similar development and resource

endowments. A study by Hendrix (2011) highlights also tax capacity of a state as the main indicator of state capacity. The study argues that counterinsurgency requires identifying potential rebels, applying coercion, accommodating, and distributing power (Hendrix 2011, 351). Hence, these requirements constitute a mixture of bureaucratic and administrative competency and accumulation and expenditure of state resources. A state's taxation capacity is assumed to present the strength of the state as the tax collection is consisted of policy making, monitoring economic activity and judicial and punitive enforcement. Based on these arguments, tax capacity measured as the total tax share as a percentage of GDP, is meant to control for state capacity.

Another operationalization of state capacity is provided by Fjelde & De Soysa (2009). The authors differentiate state capacity between three notions: coercion, co-optation, and cooperation, which is a similar definition to Hendrix's differentiation between military, institutional and administrative capacity. The notion of coercion refers to the threat capacity that derives from the threat of deterrence and the insurgents' fear of government retaliation. Coercion is consistent with arguments that highlight military capacity that can reach rural areas and to project its force across the territory and impose order within its territory and jurisdiction. A state's ability to coercion is defined as a government's capacity to extract resources from society. The argument for use of resource extraction is the requirement of an effective state penetration to extract resources from society, which again requires efficient administrative apparatus and coercive institutions. Fjelde and Soysa measure the ability to resource extraction as the relative political capacity comparing the actual level of tax revenue extraction to a predicted level of extraction, given the states' economic and natural endowments. The second notion of Fjelde and Soysa is co-optation. This notion implicates the ability of state to co-opt and retain loyalty and support from key segments of the society. According to the authors, the loyalty and co-optation of people is acquired through government spending on political goods such as health, education and other welfare components. To control for this, Fjelde and Soysa measure the co-optation abilities of a state by the share of government expenditure of GDP. The last notion of state capacity utilized by Fjelde and Soysa is cooperation. The cooperation is achieved when the citizenry trusts the state to be the impartial enforcer of societal contract, upholding property rights, being an effective regulator of social exchange and exercising public authority in an impartial and a neutral way (Fjelde & Soysa 2009, 11). The citizenry trust is defined as a measure of the population's perception of property rights and contract enforcement, which measures more

generally people's trust in institutions. The variable employed to control for these arguments is the level of Contract Intensive Money (CIM) in society.

Gibler and Miller (2014) define state capacity as the ability of the government to enforce its sovereignty across all its lands. They also argue that the capacity of a state is prone to changes and varies within states over time. This argument confirms in some extent the critiques related to the literature by this paper which concerns the static comprehension and interpretation of state capacity and thus ignoring the variation and frequent changes of state capabilities over time. The variables employed by Gibler and Miller are the military personnel that is aimed to measure the ability of the state to forcibly repress potential regime dissidents and government consumption that is meant to control the extent of people feeling connected to the state over other groups. A similar standpoint to Gibler & Miller is provided by Rossignoli (2016) who underlines enforcing sovereignty across the whole population and territory as the main understanding of state capacity. To measure this, Rossignoli refers to a quiet newly developed dataset, V-Dem Dataset that provides a variable named state authority over population. The variable aims to assess the extent of recognition of the preminent authority of the state over the population.

An often-cited study of Fearon & Laitin argue that the most prominent factors for a nascent insurgency are the military capabilities of the government and the reach of government into rural areas (Fearon & Laitin 2003, 80). The military capability and reach of government are meant to control for the strength of state. Fearon and Laitin measure strength of the state by GDP per capita which is a proxy for a state's overall financial, administrative, police and military capabilities. GDP per capita is also interpreted as marking the development of a country as countries with high per capita income have better infrastructure, roads and rural society that is more penetrated by central administration. The studies presented so far illustrate the lack of a coherent comprehension of state capacity. The literature suffers from providing a consensus regarding what state capacity constitutes. However, another underlying problem is the validity of state strength or capacity as the defining aspect of political opportunity structures. State strength which mainly highlights the enduring features, may not be appropriate in explaining civil war severity that has dynamic features. Narrowing political opportunity structure to state strength as the prominent conceptualization may fail to account for other more dynamic aspects of political context and opportunities that can influence the strategies and motivations of insurgent groups and governments to increase or decrease the level of violence. A similar critique can be observed in Gleditch & Ruggeri's study, *Political*

*Opportunity Structures, Democracy and Civil War*. Their study questions the overall focus on state strength and emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between political opportunity structures as phases and more enduring features of state strength (Gleditch & Ruggeri 2010, 302). The authors apply leader entry as the measure of political opportunities and state weakness as weak states are expected to experience irregular means of regime changes in contrast to strong states that experience regular means of regime change. By irregular regime changes, the authors mean regime transitions that do not emerge in accordance with rules and practices. Such changes in irregular fashion are the seizing power through a coup or a violent overthrow of the previous leader. Thus, defining state strength by highlighting regime transitions is better suited to incorporate the implications of state strength more directly on strategic choices made by the actors involved in the conflict. When irregular regime transitions occur, this may reflect a weakness of the state, which will also be understood as a weakness by insurgent groups. The strategic and rational insurgent groups may interpret the irregular regime transitions as an opportunity that strengthens the probability of achieving a successful outcome and thus may resort to more violence.

### **3. Teori**

This chapter develops the theoretical argument on the relationship between political opportunity structures and conflict severity. The theoretical argument will emphasize elections as an opportunity as the electoral process provide information of the support of the incumbent regime and opposition groups, information regarding the openness and closeness of the regime, and the mobilizing and polarizing effect of inherent characteristics of elections may contribute to make elections conflictual. Both the inherent characteristics of elections and the information elections provide, may influence decisions of the actors of a civil war to engage in violence.

The theory section of this paper proceeds by presenting main elements in political opportunity structure, and then followed by demonstrating the role of elections in different regime context and some inherent features of elections. A set of studies that examine the relationship between elections and civil war will be mentioned. Finally, this paper will attempt to clarify how elections can be comprehended as an opportunity.

#### **3.1 Political Context: Political Opportunity Structure**

Political opportunity structures are defined as “consistent, but not necessarily formal or permanent dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to



undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for their success or failure (Tarrow 1994, 84). This definition is mainly provided for explaining social movements. However, the notion of political opportunity structures has been extended to the literature of civil war. The idea that dynamic changes in political environment or political opportunities has implications for mobilization and emergence of collective action may also have relevance and influence on civil wars. The strategies employed by resistant groups, also the instruments of violence and the severity of violence, are influenced by the political environment which provides opportunities for weakening the government, seizing political power, or acquiring ultimate control over a territory. Hence, the changes in political environment such as in forms of institutional adjustments or some reconstructions of the elite, may be perceived as an opportunity by resistant groups and thus lead to an escalation of civil war. The same intuition can be applicable for the states as well. When states observe that insurgent groups experience some organizational modifications or the leadership of insurgent group is being replaced, the state may interpret this situation as a strategic moment to weaken or even end the insurgency. However, in such contexts the challenge is to identify the moments that the actors perceive as opportunities and to identify what is being interpreted as opportunities.

Tarrow who primarily considers social movements argues that the most salient changes in opportunity structures are the opening up of access to participation, shifts in ruling alignments, the availability of influential allies and cleavages within and among elites (Tarrow 1994, 86). Such changes in political opportunity structures are often implemented to explain the fall of Soviet Union. The change in leadership of the Communist Party in 1985 was the beginning of a new era in Soviet and Russian politics. The newly elected leader Gorbachev was convinced that his country had to make a set of reforms to survive as a world leader (Tarrow 2011, 157). Thus, the newly elected leadership engendered a process of liberalization. The first phase of the reforms considered a partial liberalization in official thinking and policy on questions related to the independent association. Gorbachev introduced the concept of social pluralism which was meant to consolidate the toleration of some small and non-state organizations (Fish 1995, 32). This constrained opening of the regime by allowing the establishment of some small independent groups can be perceived as an opportunity. Around the 1989s popular participation in independent associations increased enormously, informal groups whose activities were mainly concentrated on discussion acquired other roles and became serious political actors and labour in a crucial sector of the economy ruptured the longstanding passiveness (Fish 1995, 35). Fish refers specifically to

March ballot for USSR Congress of People`s Deputies in 1989, which was the first open and competitive election in Soviet history, as the moment or the opportunity where the opposition began to organize itself. The liberalization attempts in Soviet Union were also perceived by its far-flung minority republics. In many of these minority republics such as Georgia, Baltic states, Armenia, Ukraine, and the central Asian republics began to mobilize separatist movements and agendas (Tilly & Tarrow 2007, 104). Fish describes the transformation of Soviet Union as following;

*“The center and the party could prevent, obstruct and coerce; but they could no longer even pretend to initiate, create and convince. A motley conglomeration of autonomous societal organizations, spearheading a popular movement for democracy, had rendered power visible: that is, they had exposed the illegitimacy, brutality, and ineffectiveness of the existing political system. In doing so, they had begun to push it towards its demise”* (Fish 1995, 51).

A similar notion that utilizes opportunities is highlighted by Doug McAdam who incorporates expanding political opportunities as an important component of his interactive political process model. This approach, which is cultivated to examine social movements, interprets social movements as a political and as a continuous process of interaction between movement groups and the larger socio-political environment. A similar understanding can also be applied in explaining severity of civil conflicts. The severity of a conflict between a state and a non-state actor is mainly determined by the interactions between these actors, by factors internal to the rebel groups such as available resources to the rebel group and by the changes of the context and environment that the conflict is based on. The changes of the structure of political opportunities are comprehended as the first stage of this continuous and interactive process of social movements. McAdam argues that under ordinary circumstances, excluded groups and challengers face enormous problems and obstacles to advance and express their group interests (McAdam 1999, 41). The challenging groups are excluded from the decision-making processes and their political and bargaining position is weak and marginalized. However, the political environment and structure that defines power relations within a society is not immutable. According to McAdam these power relations can be changed as the opportunities emerge for excluded and challenger groups to engage in collective action. As already mentioned, these opportunities are not fixed. They change considerably over time, which enables challenger groups to engage in collective action and other forms of contention to alter their political, societal, and economic position. This argument is articulated by McAdam as following: *“and it is these variations that are held to be related to the ebb and flow of*

*movement activity* (McAdam 1999, 42). Hence, the variations of opportunity structures are expected to influence the abilities of challenger groups to engage in collective action. However, the unanswered question or the most deficient aspect of modelling opportunity structures as essential determinant of social movements is the clarification of what accounts for changes in political opportunity structures. To McAdam, these political opportunities are “*any event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured occasions a shift in political opportunities. Among the events and processes likely to prove disruptive of the political status quo are wars, industrialization, international political realignments, prolonged unemployment, and widespread demographic changes* (McAdam 1999, 42). The changes and shifts in political opportunities are expected to facilitate increased political engagement by excluded groups by disrupting the stability of the entire political system or by increasing the political leverage of an insurgent group. To demonstrate these expectations and theoretical accounts, McAdam investigates civil rights movement in United States.

As the shift in environment and opportunities, McAdam refers to marked decline of the cotton economy after 1930, which resulted in a massive migration from south to northwards (McAdam 2004, 213). The important aspect of this demographic change is the political consequences of it. The black migrants settled overwhelmingly in northern industrial states that were considered as essential cities for electoral success in presidential contests. This electoral significance of the black population was an important factor for election of Democrat candidates Roosevelt and Truman. Facing the determinacy and significance of the black votes, the presidency of Roosevelt and Truman could not ignore the racial politics and injustices in the country. The increasing black votes, which emerged because of demographic changes, in important cities in terms of industry and winning elections influenced the calculations and programmes of presidency candidates who could no longer ignore the segregation of the black community. To acquire victory, the candidates had to provide legislations and acts that regarded altering the racist treatment of black population. Otherwise, the accountability mechanisms presented by elections would mean the punishment of candidates ignoring the problems of black population and the impossibility of winning elections. This is evident in Truman`s presidency who has charged and appointed a committee on Civil Rights with investigating the current solutions of civil rights in the country and recommending appropriate legislative solutions for the defects that are uncovered (McAdam 2004, 214). Later, Truman issued two executive orders that were motivated to establish a fair

employment board within the Civil Service Commission and an order for desegregation of the armed forces.

The exodus to cities created also conditions favourable for protest and other actions for the black population. The amassing of large numbers of people with similar grievances, a slight economic improvement over rural poverty so that people could be less concerned about their daily bread, a nucleus of organizations through which communication and mobilization could occur, and a cultural support system for black pride militancy constituted the changed conditions of black population who was in a better position to express their grievances as the rural black settlement has been increased (Blumberg 2006, 16). The mass migration to northern cities provided a stronger base for coping racism. These large concentrations of people had easier access to each other and mass communication media, which made the interchanging of experiences and ideas better. It also created a sense of oppression and community. The black community, who has now obtained better conditions of mobilization and easy access to one another became more aware of the systematic and institutional segregation inherited in the system and the notion of challenging the system has become inevitable.

Both examples presented above, the fall of Soviet Union and Civil Rights Movement highlight how shifts in opportunities and political context created a process of changes and creation of new opportunities that lead to new establishments and dramatic transformations. These opportunities, the demographic changes in US and settlement in politically important cities and the attempts of liberalization in the case of Soviet Union presented windows of opportunities that created conditions feasible for challenging groups to mobilize and express themselves. However, the nature of the studies such as the Civil Rights movement in US or the fall of Soviet Union providing evidence for political opportunity structures cannot be generalized to other settings. Many of the studies that incorporate political opportunity structures approach tend to be highly context specific and idiosyncratic. This characteristic of political opportunity structures disables us to provide reliable evidence in studies that concern many cases and contexts as there is not a clear understanding of what these opportunities and structures are. McAdam et al enumerates a list of political opportunities which they assume as highly consensual dimensions of political opportunities. These dimensions are:

- The relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system.

- The stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity.
- The presence or absence of elite allies
- The state's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald 1996, 26).

On the other way, Kitschelt adds a distinction between political input structures and political output structures. The input processes of opportunity structures resemble the first dimension mentioned by McAdam et al. The openness or the closeness of the regime constrains the challenging groups and constructs the strategies adopted by those groups. Kitschelt argues for a curvilinear relationship between openness and mobilization. The very closed regimes are expected to repress challenging groups, the very open and responsive regimes are conducted to assimilate and co-opt them and the moderate regimes which are neither open or closed allow movements to articulate themselves at a certain degree but do not willingly approve their demands (Kitschelt 1986, 62). This argument resembles arguments highlighting the relationship between democracies and political violence and civil war. The relationship between degree of democracy and risk of conflict is argued to be non-linear and non-monotonic (Gleditsch & Ruggeri 2010, 301). More specifically, the relationship between democracy and the risk of conflict is expected to take an inverted-U, with the greatest risk of conflict and violence among semi-democratic countries that combine inefficient responsiveness to discourage violence and inefficient regime openness to encourage the mobilizing groups in engaging in non-violent activities. The analysis of Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates & Gleditsch (2001) confirms the inverted-U relationship between democracy and the risk of conflict onset. Regimes that are in the middle range on the democracy-autocracy index have significantly better probability of experiencing civil war than democracies and autocracies (Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates & Gleditsch 2001, 42). There was no significant difference between harsh autocracies and strong democracies when it comes to risk of civil conflict. The intermediary regimes seem to be the most vulnerable countries. These findings are consistent with the curvilinear relationship between openness and movements mobilization, which was provided by Kitschelt. In addition to the input processes that address the access to the political system, Kitschelt also argues for output processes that concern the capabilities of the political system to implement policies demanded by mobilizing groups. According to Kitschelt, the openness of political regimes is determined by; 1. The number of political parties, factions and groups that efficiently articulate diverse demands in electoral

politics has implications for openness, 2. The capacity of legislature to develop and control policies independently of executive increases openness as legislature whom are electorally accountable to the electorate, are much more sensitive to public demands, 3. The patterns of intermediation between interest groups and the executive branch influences the openness of the system and affects in what degree the access for new interest to the centres of political decision-making is facilitated, 4. Finally, an open system requires viable procedures to build policy coalitions. This is an important element for new demands to find their way into the processes of forming policy compromises and consensus (Kitschelt 1986, 63). The output processes, on the other hand, which assess the capacity of political systems to implement policies are determined by; 1. What degree a state apparatus is centralized, 2. The degree of state control over the finance sector, the size of the public sector's share of GNP and its share of total employment and the state's ability of coordinating, controlling and excluding of economic interest groups in policy making determine the ability of the state to influence policy effectiveness, 3. The degree of relative independence and authority of the judiciary in the resolution of political conflict (Kitschelt 1986, 64). Thus, the openness of a system and the capacity of the state to implement policies determines the strategies and the nature of mobilization. When the access to the system is broadly open and there are multiple ways and points of access, the strategies of mobilizing and challenging groups become non-conflictual and these groups work through established institutions. In contrast, when the system offers few or any opportunities for challenging groups to articulate their grievances and when the state has considerable capacities to deter threats, the strategies of challenging groups are likely to be conflictual and disruptive. A similar account of political opportunity structure is outlined by Kriesi who argues that the core of structures is constituted by the formal political institutions. The degree of openness or closeness of a political system is a function of the territorial centralization and the functional separation of power (Kriesi 2008, 70). Again, decentralization implies multiple points of access and decision-making, which makes a system more open. In addition to the formal institutional structures, Kriesi refers also to informal procedures and strategies that are typically employed by the authorities regarding challengers. These procedures and strategies are argued to be either exclusive, also being repressive, confrontative and polarizing, or integrative, also being facilitative, cooperative, and assimilative. The nature of these informal procedures constructs again the mobilization of challenger groups. The last property of political opportunity structures mentioned by Kriesi is configuration of power. Applied in social movement theory, the configuration of power incorporates policymakers, public authorities, political parties, interest groups, media, and

related movements. The configuration of power is applied to understand the interaction between various actors and the implications of forming alliances. Referring to Tarrow, he argued that the shifts in the configurations of political actors and the instability of political alignments create opportunities for successful mobilization. The interaction between movements and its antagonists, also the forming of coalitions between actors of the movement and the governing elites affects the conduct of movement, the action repertoire, and the properties of successful outcome.

The account of political opportunity structure given so far was aimed to illustrate the broad and comprehensive nature of the concept. The aim was to demonstrate the lack of a coherent and well-formulated conceptualization of the concept. The notion of political opportunity structures encapsulates so many aspects that people often associate a concept stretching problem with it. Gamson and Meyer highlight this danger as:

*The concept of political opportunity is in trouble, in danger of becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment-political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts...It threatens to become an all-encompassing fudge of factor for all the conditions and circumstances that form the context for collective action. Used to explain so much, it may ultimately explain nothing at all (Gamson & Meyer 1996, 275).*

The most essential problem related to political opportunity structures which was originally an approach utilized to understand the exogenous factors of social movements and other types of instruments of contention is the multiple functions and definitions of the concept. Each study within the political opportunity literature refers to different variables. The variables implied in the literature encapsulate many different aspects, such as the openness and ideological positions of political parties, changes in public policy, international alliances and the constraints on state policy, state capacity, the geographic scope and repressive capacity of governments, the activities of countermovement opponents and potential activists' perceptions of political opportunity (Meyer 2004, 135). In other words, the content of the approach of opportunity structures ranging from the international context, the strength of state institutions, the number of political parties and the organizational strength of opposing groups illustrates how diversified the concept is and how distant the defined aspects are from each other. This is again illuminated by an overview provided by McAdam who sums up various authors' conceptions of the dimensions of political opportunity. McAdam refers to studies cultivated by Brockett (1991), Kriesi (1992), Tarrow (1994) and Rucht (1996) and argues that these

studies distinguish between formal institutional legal structure of a given political system from the more informal structure of power relations that feature the system at a given point of time (McAdam 1996, 26). Brockett (1991) defines opportunities as presence of allies, meaningful access points, elite fragmentation and conflict and level of repression, Kriesi (1992) mentions formal institutional structure, informal procedures in relation to a given challenge, the configuration of power as regards a given challenger, Rucht (1996) refers to access to the party system, the state's policy implementation capacity, the alliance structure as regards a given challenger and the conflict structure, finally Tarrow (1994) highlights openness or closure of the polity, stability of political alignments, presence/absence of elite allies and division within elite as the conceptualizations of political opportunity structures. The conceptual confusion associated with political opportunity structure becomes more problematic and visible when we employ this approach to examine multiple cases and observations, mainly because of the lack of a generalized comprehension of the concept. To avoid the problems related to the conceptual confusion of political opportunity structures, being explicit about which dependent variable is to be explained and which dimensions of political opportunity are related to that explanation is critical (McAdam 1996, 31). In other words, the concept of political opportunity as such is not an explanatory tool (Giugni 2011, 273). Which aspects of political opportunity structures matter for an issue need to be specified as these structures are often based on context and issue in question. The structures that are expected to influence the outbreak of a social movement or a civil war may not be as valid and influential for other aspects of civil wars and social movements.

The political context and changes in structures of a system may also influence the level of violence when a civil war has emerged. In contrast to the outbreak of a civil conflict, the actors involved in a civil conflict have a more efficient role in determining the features of the civil conflict. Both rebel groups and the state as the main opponent have the main role in determining how violent, severe, and disruptive their actions will be. The decisions of increasing or reducing the level of conflict may be influenced by the changes of political context, which thereafter will be perceived as opportunities by the rebel groups. The importance of the approach of political opportunity structure becomes prominent in that case. It provides a tool for investigating the implications of political context on determining how severe and intense a civil war will be. From the perspective of rebel groups, changes in political context may imply an opportunity to acquire some achievements and thus may influence the decision of escalating the conflict. However, the critical question in such a



context is what changes of political context matter most. The argument of McAdam on specifying the aspects that may explain the dependent variable should be applied here. What aspects of political context matter most in influencing the decision of rebel groups to reduce or increase their actions is the critical question that should be appropriately justified. Potential changes of political context, which may be interpreted as windows of opportunity, might be regime transitions, shifts in alliance structure, divisions within elite and support of an external actor or a country. Divisions within elite may be interpreted as decreasing the stability of political alignments and as a sign of political instability, which again may be perceived as the regime being weakened. To capitalize on these changes, rebel groups may escalate their actions as they see their chances of victory being more prominent. The support of external actors, which is materialized either in terms of military assistance or financial assistance, can be another factor or opportunity making a civil war more severe. The assistance provided by some external groups may strengthen the capabilities of rebel groups and make them more capable of fighting. In other words, when highlighting the importance of opportunities and context, the international dynamics that may have potential influences for the features of a civil war, must be emphasized.

One of the main objectives of this paper is to establish a set of connections between the approach of political opportunity structures and severity of civil war. The notion of opportunities, which presume opportunities as affecting the nature of strategies and the nature of mobilizing structures undertaken by insurgent groups, will be argued to influence the severity of civil wars. The implication of opportunities on constructing the nature and the timing of an action may be utilized to understand why both rebel groups and the state as their counterpart engage in conflict at a certain period and thus makes the civil war more severe. Both by the state and rebel groups, some opportunities may be perceived as increasing the probability of winning or acquiring some forms of achievement. These opportunities may seem as essential for partners to capitalize on. In a such context, violence becomes the most efficient instrument and tool for the partners of a civil war to take advantages of emerging opportunities. Here, violence should be understood as an instrument emphasized to achieve something and its use being understood mainly as a strategic and rational use. We may assume that partners in a civil war are aware of the costs associated with the use of violence and warfare and they are aware of the difficulties of a longstanding warfare which follows a stable and consistent pattern of violence. As rational actors, the partners in a civil war will attempt to avoid engaging in a conflict that has a stable rate of violence. Thus, we may argue

that the use of violence and the escalation of warfare occurs in certain periods and circumstances when either insurgent groups or the state realize that their chance of winning or acquiring a form of success is present. From a standpoint of a rational actor, increasing the violence and tolerating the costs associated with the increase of warfare may be justifiable and legitimate when potential outcomes of increasing the engagement are preferable to the costs. In this situation, the implementation of violence is primarily strategic and closely related to the calculations of winning. The increase of actions initiated by one of the actors in civil war has also escalating implications for the civil war by shaping the reactions of the counterpart. In other words, the process of increasing or decreasing the severity of civil war is an interactive process in which the severity of civil war is determined by how they react to the actions of each other. The importance of reacting immediately when one of the partners engages in action is essential as being perceived as capable and strong are of enormous importance for both rebel groups and the state. To be able to react in same scope and frequency, the partners of a civil war tend to show that they are strong enough and have capabilities to maintain the loyalty and support of the people. For both insurgent groups and the state, it is crucial to be perceived as strong and capable as the allegiance of people is often based on whom they assume as having the highest probability of achieving success. The interactive process of determining to increase or decrease the violence implies that when rebel groups increase their actions, its counterpart, also the state intends to respond with the same pace. The same notion applies also in an opposite direction; when the state increases its actions towards the rebel group, the rebel group will engage in equivalent actions. As a result, a cycle of violence occurs, which makes the civil war more severe and disruptive. However, the difficulty is to identify the circumstances and opportunities that make use of violence and escalation of violence an optimal strategy. What changes of the political circumstances and context constitute an opportunity that affects the intentions of partners of a civil war as these opportunities are perceived as increasing the chance of success? These types of opportunities may be persistent for both insurgent groups and the state. A set of changes or transformations that occur within the organization of rebellion, may be perceived as an opportunity for the state to take advantage of. The same intuition can be applied for the rebel groups who want to take advantage of changes that occur in the political context the rebellion is located in. Types of changes, which may occur within the rebellious groups and may be perceived as opportunities by the state, could be the arrest or the fall of rebellion's leader, the reduction of financial sources of the rebel group and the decreasing support for the rebellion. Such potent changes may have implications for stability, capacity, and organizational strength of the rebel

groups. This ensures an incredible opportunity for the state to inflict enormous damages on the rebel group. In other words, increasing the pace and scope of violence becomes an optimal and a rational strategy from the perspective of a state. The potential gains that can be obtained from an environment in which the rebel group experience some changes and is weakened outweigh the potential costs of engaging in more violence, also both the human, financial and infrastructural costs associated with advancing warfare. In other words, violence which has mainly an instrumental function in civil wars becomes an optimal and rational strategy when the situation and context of the civil war increases the chance of success and increases the probability of acquiring a set of achievements. This paper argues for a situational use of violence and attempts to identify what situation or context provides the opportunities that motivate the parts of a civil war to enhance more warfare.

An important element that should be present within a situation or a context that provides opportunities is the situational or contextual effects on the capability and stability of the actors of a civil war. The opportunities which emerge from a set of changes in the context, should accentuate a rebel group that is being weakened or a state that experiences some instability. In other words, the effects of opportunities are expected to reduce the capabilities of actors in a civil war to engage in warfare. We are interested in changes of aspects in the context of both rebel groups and the state, which influence their capability to wage war and weaken one of the partners against the another. Those changes may affect a government`s financial, military, and political efficiency on the government side, but changes at the side of rebel group may also affect the financial and military efficiency of the rebel group. Opportunities are provided both to the rebel groups and governments, which encourage them to resort to more violence when opportunities make the chance of achieving some success higher. Thus, the opportunities must be controlled for both at the level of rebel group and the level of government. These opportunities can be a variety of opportunities that help rebel groups and governments maintain their relative capability and help them to consolidate their capacity vis a vis the other. Another important aspect that should be emphasized when it comes defining the potential opportunities are whether these opportunities are static or dynamic. As already been mentioned earlier in this paper, the severity of civil war is a dynamic process that is characterized by considerable fluctuations over time. This characteristic of severity of civil war cannot be explained by variables that are constant over time. Thus, the opportunities that are meant to affect the severity of civil war need to have a changing and dynamic nature. Opportunities that this paper intend to highlight, are expected to affect the capabilities of both

the state and rebel groups to fight and these opportunities should constitute a dynamic nature. The specifications of opportunities need to contain these elements. The first element is important for examining opportunities that make the partners of a civil war more capable of fighting whilst the other element concerns time sensitive changes and define variables that are more suited to the dependent variable of this paper, also the severity of civil war.

### **3.2 Elections**

A well-known and extensively accepted notion associated with civil wars is that political violence tends to occur in semi-democracies and not in neither pure democracies nor pure dictatorships (Vreeland 2008, 401). The influential study of Hegre *et al.* (2001) provides empirical analysis that confirms the U-curve relationship between regime type and civil war. Semi-democracies are regimes that constitute a mix of democratic and autocratic features. Diamon, Linz & Lipset (1990) defines semi-democratic regimes as

*“a regime in which a substantial degree of political competition and freedom exist, but where the effective power of elected officials is so limited, or political party competition is so restricted, or the freedom and fairness of elections are so compromised that electoral outcomes, while competitive, still deviate significantly from popular preferences; and/or civil and political liberties are so limited that some political orientations and interests are unable to organize and express themselves”.*

In other words, these regimes have characteristics that are democratic and others that are distinctively authoritarian. In these regimes, the elections that are meant to encourage people to address their grievances by participating in elections and voting for parties appealing to them and to encourage people to refrain from employing violent measures to express themselves, may have detrimental effects on alleviating the intensity of civil war if elections are not appropriately held and if they do not constitute many of the liberties associated with competitive and multiparty elections. In such circumstances where elections do not function to mitigate the conflictual relationships between different groups but exacerbate these relationships, elections as the most significant dimension of contemporary democracies may serve to escalate civil war. Although, there is lack of studies considering the implications of elections on severity of civil war, the notion that elections in countries that experience transitions from an authoritarian regime to democracy lead to higher risk of civil war is quite acknowledged.

Referring to elections should not implicate that democratic governance concerns primarily elections. But competitive elections constitute a central role in identifying democracies. Most of the definitions and operationalisations which address democracy, encapsulates the role of competitive elections. An often-referred definition of Alvarez *et al* (1996) assesses mainly dimensions that are related to elections. The requirements they provide to maintain if a regime is to be classified as democratic are all associated with the competitiveness and quality of elections. These requirements are: 1. “Chief executive are chosen by popular election or by a body that was itself popularly elected”, 2. “The legislature is popularly elected”, 3. “There are more than a party competing in the elections”, 4. “An alternation in power under electoral rules identical to the ones that brought incumbent to office must have taken place”. Another influential study of Dahl (1971) presents a set of institutional guarantees that would enable us to compare different regimes according to the extent of permissible opposition, public contestation, and political competition. These institutional guarantees are; freedom to form and join organizations, freedom of expression, right to vote, right of political leaders to compete for support, alternative sources of information, free and fair elections and institutions for making governmental policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences (Dahl 1971, 3). Most of the conditions cultivated by Dahl address elections either directly or indirectly by containing elements that are meant to advance the competitiveness, fairness, responsiveness, and representativeness of the elections. Another influential definition provided by Schumpeter highlights also the indispensability of elections in defining democracy. Democracy articulated by Schumpeter is “*institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will*” (Schumpeter 1942, 250). As can be derived from this definition, elections play a central role in implementing democracy. The importance of elections has been so widespread and conventional that they are also implemented in countries experiencing democratic deficit and lacking democratic institutions. Typologies of hybrid democracies, competitive authoritarian, and electoral authoritarianism have been cultivated to describe elections that are hold in non-democratic regimes (Diamond 2002, Levitsky & Way 2002, Schedler 2006). For instance, in competitive authoritarian regimes, violations of democratic criteria are both frequent and serious to establish an uneven playing field between government and opposition, which worsens the propensity of the opposition to acquire successful election outcomes (Levitsky & Way 2002, 53). Even if the elections are hold regularly and are not prone to widespread fraud, “*incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage,*

*harass opposition candidates and their supporters and in some cases manipulate election results...Journalists, opposition politicians and other government critics may be spied on, threatened, harassed or arrested...Members of opposition may be jailed, exiled and even assaulted and murdered* (Levitsky & Way 2002, 54). Thus, elections that are held in such circumstances, do not satisfy two of the most essential functions of elections. According to Manin, Przeworski & Stokes (2012) elections serve to select good policies and policybearing politicians and serve to hold governments responsible for the results of their past actions. In other words, they highlight representation and accountability as the main functions of elections operating in democratic countries. However, elections in authoritarian settings are employed to satisfy other functions that are not motivated to account for representation and accountability but motivated to mitigate the opposition towards the incumbent regime and ensure the survival of the incumbent regime. Summarized by Gandhi & Okar (2009), elections in authoritarian settings are the most convenient way to spread the spoils of office broadly among members of the elite; elites may sense elections as a fair and efficient way of distribution in contrast to appointment and thus their chance of obtaining political office and gains is dependent on how effective they are to persuade and buy voters. In this way, dictators can warrant that the most popular elites are associated with the regime and that they do not become uninterested in serving the ambitions of the regime (Gandhi & Okar 2009, 405). Another use of elections provides authoritarian leaders with information to identify their supporters and opposition strongholds. Although these elections are not being held under conditions that are neither free or fair, elections in non-democratic settings provide information about rulers, their critics and the support competing factions command in wider population (Brownlee 2007, 9). The availability of this information enables regime incumbents to target the opposition strongholds, penalizing them with less government generosity after the election, buying their support, threatening them to switch allegiances before the next elections or forcing them to not go to the polls at the election day (Gandhi & Okar 2009, 406). Thus, the determinant role of elections in democracies and their functions which diverge from what elections are meant to utilize in consolidated democracies make elections per se an interesting aspect to investigate. Elections, which provide information regarding popularity and power relations between incumbent regime and the opposition may also influence their decision in employing other instruments of expression including violence when elections do not really have meaningful consequences. The following section of this paper will demonstrate an overview of conflict studies that examine the relationship between elections and conflicts.

### **3.3 Elections in the Literature of Conflict Severity.**

A study attempting to illustrate a relationship between elections and conflict is initiated by Saleyhan & Linebarger (2015). Their study highlights Africa that has experienced violent and conflictual postelection phases. Instead of focusing directly on civil war or military conflict, they emphasize a broad range of contentious events such as protests, riots, strikes and armed attacks. Their study assesses three questions that are interrelated; the first question addresses if there is a general association between election periods and political unrest, the second question considers the uncovering factors that mediate or exacerbate the effect of elections on conflict and in addition to the contextual attributes of countries holding elections, the study of Saleyhan *et al* addresses the features of elections themselves that may contribute to conflict. The type of elections that are considered in the analysis of Saleyhan *et al* are elections of the executive; presidential elections in presidential systems and parliamentary elections in parliamentarian systems. Election periods which are defined as months before, during and after the election with non-election periods as the comparison-category, are argued to associate with greater social conflict. Elections are marked by high degrees of political engagement and rival parties competing for office. The highly mobilizing nature of elections often leads to polarize people and a political atmosphere that is confrontational. Such circumstances are observable even in most democratic societies. In this article, Saleyhan *et al* (2015) argue that the weakness of institutions such as police forces, electoral commissions and judiciary, widespread illiteracy and poverty and deep ethnical cleavages, which characterize most of the communities in Africa exacerbate the detrimental effects of election-related violence.

Elections may occur in different phases of a civil war, also both during the civil war and after the civil war. During these phases of a civil war, the trust between insurgents and the incumbent regimes is low and the institutions that are meant to warrant the legitimacy and competitiveness of the elections have had no time to develop and mature. The type of the regime is also an important element for the analysis of Saleyna and Linebarger (2015). Most of the regimes in Africa, which is their concern of investigation, constitute democratic institutions that coexist with autocratic institutions. The outcomes of these elections are often manipulated by the means of intimidation and fraud. The lack of guarantees that are provided by democracy, such as rule of law and accountability to the people, which are guarantees needed to constrain the ability of authorities to engage in corruption and repress dissidents may increase the incentives for violence. In other words, while strong and consolidated

democratic institutions make countries more peaceful, the political competition that features elections may foster violence. However, argued by Saleyhan and Linebarger the effect of elections is especially evident when factors that trigger instability are present, such as weak states, weak bureaucratic capacity, and poor countries. To account for the contextual factors that may influence the effect of elections, the authors expect the elections during and immediately following civil wars, elections in autocratic regimes and elections in poor countries to be more conflict prone than elections in democratic and wealthier countries.

The last aspect emphasized by Saleyhan & Linebarger is the specific attributes of the elections. These attributes are interpreted to give rise to social unrest during election periods. The authors refer to three factors; 1. The effect of fraud and harassment, 2. The effect of electoral observers and 3. The competitiveness of elections. The authors expect that the allegations of electoral fraud and harassment of opposition groups will be associated with higher levels of social conflict and elections that are monitored by international observers are argued to experience higher levels of social conflict. To control for these effects the study of Saleyhan *et al* applies a time series cross-sectional negative binomial model for estimating the models. The authors report incidence rate ratio instead of standard coefficients to interpret their results as incidence rate ratio has a more simple and intuitive interpretation. The results show that there is a positive relationship between election months and social conflict. The study also finds that elections in wealthier countries are correlated with fewer conflict incidents. The interaction terms between democracy and elections shows that the rate of conflict events is greatly diminished when countries are democratic and have the additional institutional features of democracy. The attempt of Saleyhan *et al* to extend the definition of conflict to incorporate other contentious issues such as riots, protests and strikes, employing factors that condition the quality of elections and incorporating specific features of elections themselves makes their study an important contribution to the literature and provides a starting point for studies utilizing similar topics and questions. However, a shortcoming of this study is to demarcate the focus of the study on Africa.

Another comprehensive study that attempts to relate elections to civil wars is provided by Cederman, Gleditsch & Hug (2012). In their study, elections are interpreted as the causal mechanism in which democratization may lead to conflict. Another element that is highly utilized by Cederman *et al* is involving the ethnicity into the conflict dynamics. Elections are argued to stimulate the essentialities related to ethnicity because of the mobilizing effects of elections and thus causing ethnic civil wars. As been mentioned earlier, elections often



produce a conflictual and polarizing atmosphere and context. When mobilized alongside ethnic attributes, elections are argued to generate ethnic conflicts. The authors also underline the competitiveness vis a vis non-competitiveness of the elections. The intuition behind the emphasize on elections is the argument that different types of elections can have distinct consequences as the causal mechanisms linking elections to conflicts are expected to operate differently depending on the nature of the elections (Cederman, Gleditsch & Hug 2012, 393). Based on these assumptions and arguments, they expect the likelihood of civil war to increase after elections and this increase is claimed to be highest for ethnic wars. In addition, their study interprets competitive elections to increase the likelihood of both ethnic and nonethnic civil war and non-competitive elections to increase the likelihood of ethnic civil wars more than nonethnic civil wars.

The dependent variable of Cederman *et al*'s study is the onset of ethnic and non-ethnic civil wars. Conflicts are comprehended as ethnical if there is a clear link between rebel organizations and ethnic groups. Elections to the national office are considered as the elections of interest. The competitiveness of elections is identified if the opposition was allowed, if there was more than one legal party and if there was a choice of candidates on the ballot. The empirical analysis of their study demonstrates that elections generate primarily ethnic civil wars and the problem of postelection violence arises prominently in the first two competitive elections.

Another study that aims to examine the relationship between elections and conflict is provided by Brancati & Snyder (2010). The contribution of their study is the focus on post-conflict area and how the timing of elections influences the stability of the post-conflict area. Their study reacts to a datable that has obtained considerable attention and scrutiny in recent years, namely the attempts of establishing democracy in countries experiencing transition towards democracy. The view of the international community has been to encourage for early elections and providing the new leaders with legitimacy. However, these democracy advocate attempts have troubled the transitions to democracies and raised the doubts regarding whether early elections are beneficial for peace and democracy. The study of Brancati & Snyder can be comprehended as a reaction to the debate between early elections opponents and early elections proponents. Their own argument implies that early elections are more likely to reignite conflict than elections that are held later. The main mechanism behind this argument is the nature of the environment early elections take place, is one in which previously belligerent factions are the most powerful political actors and continue to mobilize supporters

along wartime constituencies. However, a set of favourable conditions are argued to make early elections less likely to result in a renewed conflict. These favourable conditions are decisive military victories, peacekeeping, power sharing arrangements and the development of robust political, administrative, and judicial institutions.

The empirical analysis of Brancati & Snyder underscores the risks of pressing early elections, which can intensify the political struggle between former enemies that are still armed.

However, the results also illustrate that the effect of elections are mitigated when conditions are favourable. Decisive military victories, UN intervention and power sharing arrangements significantly reduce the likelihood of early elections leading to violence and renewed conflict. In addition, the analysis implies that a stronger bureaucracy, a higher level of law and order and a lower level of corruption in the year the post-conflict election is held reduces the likelihood of a new civil war to occur.

A similar study to the study of Brancati & Snyder is provided by Flores & Nooruddin (2012) whom investigate how elections affect post-conflict peace and reconstruction and how the timing of elections is related to the recovery from the conflict and the recurrence of the conflict. As a starting point, the authors illustrate that post-conflict elections are held increasingly often and early after civil conflict end have yet a mixed record of promoting peace and economic recovery. Their study claims that post-conflict elections are politically more destabilizing when they are held in new democracies and when they are held earlier. Flores and Nooruddin argue that in post-conflict settings there is an absence of an authority capable of enforcing agreements between an armed opposition groups and the state. The absence of a capable authority creates a commitment problem which complicates the resolution of civil conflict in resolving civil conflicts. Post-conflict elections worsen the commitment problem as voters find it hard to identify and support politicians who are sincerely committed to democracy and recovery and the fear of losing elections derive politicians to commit themselves to elections (Flores & Nooruddin 2012, 561). However, well established institutions are argued to disable politicians to cheat during elections, renew violence when they lose elections and subvert democratic norms when they win.

The study of Flores and Nooruddin operates with two dependent variables; the recovery and the recurrence. The aim with these variables is to examine if post-conflict elections are related to recovering from conflict or if they lead to a renewal of the conflict. The results of the empirical analysis show that post-conflict elections lengthen the recovery period. However, democratic experience and extended period of institution building, which are factors

contributing to strengthen institutions, influences the effect of post-conflict elections. Elections become more beneficial in countries with previous democratic experience. In addition, the length of the preparation before the election has a large positive effect on reducing recurrence and the length of the preparation is longer in new democracies in contrast to established democracies. The results and assumptions of this study is quite similar to the findings and claims provided by Brancati and Snyder. Both studies highlight the importance of favourable conditions and context the elections are held in.

A study of Collier, Hoeffler & Soderbom (2008) reacts also to the notion of elections being treated as a systematic solution to the problem of post-conflict risk. Their study aims to investigate several instruments that are utilized to recover the economy and reduce the risk of a recurring conflict. These instruments are negotiated settlement, presence of peacekeeping troops, encouraging a constitution, post-conflict elections and withdrawal of international peacekeeping troops. The empirical analysis of Collier *et al* (2008) shows that an election reduces the risk of a conflict in the election year, but this risk increases in the year following the election. The mechanism which is elaborated by their study is that the dissidents allocate their efforts from violence to political contest in the election year. However, once the election is concluded, the losers are perceived to have a stronger incentive to return to violence (Collier, Hoeffler & Soderbom 2008, 470). Thus, elections as an instrument for reducing the recurrence of a conflict should not be treated as a systematic solution for promoting peace and stability in a post-conflict context.

The literature review given so far demonstrates almost a consensus on detrimental implications of elections when implemented in non-competitive and nondemocratic settings. However, what are the aspects with elections that contribute to recurrence of a conflict and make these elections prone to conflict? An informational theory cultivated by Cheibub and Hays (2017) may enable us to construct a theoretical framework on how elections may influence the incentives of partners engaging in a civil war. The theoretical account provided by Cheibub & Hays attempts to elaborate the relationship between multiparty elections and civil conflict in weakly institutionalized regimes, also in authoritarian regimes. The most significant function of elections is argued to be the informational function of elections. Elections provide both the opposition and incumbent with information about domestic political strength of the opposition and leaders of the incumbent regime. The main argument of Cheibub & Hays (2017) implies that when the outcome of elections demonstrates that the opposition is relatively strong, this information facilitates power sharing among elites. The

same logic applies also when elections provide information to opposition about their own strength and capability. When opposition is relatively weak and unable to remove the incumbent leaders by force, this information acquired by the outcome of elections deter opposition from waging war. The incentives for incumbents to hold elections and share power are strongest when the opposition is powerful enough to take power by force and willing to tolerate the costs associated with warfare. The undemocratic and unelected leader always face a threat of removal by force. This threat becomes a reality when the incumbent leaders are weak due to a stagnated economy, international pressure or other elements that may weaken the ability of leaders to govern. Aware of the threat of removal by force, incumbent leaders may incorporate multiparty elections as a way to appease the possibility of being removed by force. The elections and the outcomes provided by these elections enable both the incumbent leaders and the opposition to evaluate how capable and powerful they are in terms of the popular support they have.

Cheibub & Hvas (2017) operate with a set of theoretical assumptions. The first assumption is that dictators apply multiparty elections to avoid costly fighting and maintain their survival. Secondly, the political support for incumbent authoritarian leaders detects the probability that they prevail in civil war. Thirdly, the authoritarian leaders are more informed about their level of political support than the opposition. Fourthly, in authoritarian settings elections do not determine who will rule, but potentially serve as a focal point for political negotiations about who will rule. Fifthly, civil war occurs when the incumbent authoritarian leaders and opposition do not manage to attain a peaceful agreement about who will govern. From these assumptions, *“it follows that civil war begin when the opposition underestimates the probability that it will lose a civil war or the incumbent either reneges on a power-sharing agreement or cannot credibly commit to one”* (Cheibub & Hvas 2017, 87). The election returns will signal the strength of the incumbent regime and dissuade the opposition from initiating war. This informational role of elections can also be applied to examine how multiparty elections held in authoritarian settings may influence the severity of a civil conflict.

Although the elections in conflict-plagued countries lack the decisiveness of changing the incumbent leaders and lack many of the attributes that are highlighted in consolidated and developed democracies, elections still matter for both the incumbent regime and insurgent groups who are engaging in a military struggle. Both partners may wish to acquire considerable support from elections as the scope of support affects their decision to defuse an

existing and simmering conflict. From the perspective of a rebel group, highlighting electoral politics and establishing popular support are essential when rebel groups are exposed to a transition from a military struggle towards a non-military and political struggle. On the other hand, by allowing multiparty elections incumbent regimes signal their willingness to make participation in politics and articulation of people's views through elections available and accessible. As a result, incumbent regimes contribute to establishment of a democratic culture and norms that emanate from participating in multiparty elections. This democratic culture materializes itself as making people more capable of articulating themselves and making them more tolerant in accepting the election results. Allowing multiparty elections also demonstrates the commitment of the incumbent regimes to appease the conflict, which will be perceived by resisting groups as honest attempts from incumbents. Thus, elections will be assessed highly both by the resisting groups and the incumbent leaders. These important functions of multiparty elections and the information provided by elections regarding the support of the opposition and incumbent leaders may enter the calculations and timing of employing violence. Motivated by performing well on the elections, the level of violence may be reduced for partners in a civil war to signal their willingness to promote elections as a mechanism for warranting power-sharing and participation. Reducing their military actions both during and in pre-elections periods, the rebel groups and incumbent leaders wish to be perceived responsible towards the people as elections function to reward or punish those whose actions are incompatible with the interests and priorities of the people. Thus, we may expect that the use of violence will be mitigated in pre-election and during elections phases, which lead us to cultivate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis A: The severity of a civil war reduces in both pre-election periods and during election periods.

The informational theory of Cheibub & Hays (2017) is more feasible for explaining the effects of elections in after-election periods. Because there is the outcome of elections that produce the information which affects the decision of initiating war. Cheibub & Hays (2017) argue that elections may prevent the eruption of a civil war that is already imminent. This occurs through two mechanisms: they may dissuade a weak opposition from initiating a war they are likely to lose, and they may persuade a weak dictator to offer ways to share power with the opposition (Cheibub & Hays 2017, 100). In this context, elections are comprehended as reflecting the level of the strength of a leader and opposition. When the outcome of the election demonstrates that the opposition lacks support, this information will affect their

incentives to initiate war. The same logic applies also for how the incumbent leaders react when the outcome of an elections indicates a strong opposition. To avoid this strong opposition to engage in a military struggle, which is likely to result in considerable achievements for the opposition, the incumbent leaders will be willing to provide power sharing arrangement and other instrument to incorporate the opposition into the system and thus discourage the incentives of the opposition to engage in a war. Thus, in both ends whether the election produces a strong opposition or a weak opposition, election serves to deter the likelihood of a conflict. These arguments are also consistent with some other studies that highlight the role of elections in defusing conflict. Cox (2009) argues that committing to elections reduces the asymmetries of information between various competitors for power and hence diminish the chance of recourse to violence, committing to elections offers also an alternative route to power for those who might otherwise employ other violent alternatives such as coup and revolt, and committing to elections may decrease the expected utility of initiating a coup or revolution before and after an election (Cox 2009, 10). According to Cox, allowing elections reduces the risk that the ruler will be violently removed from power and reduce the costs of staying in power in the terms reducing the costs of repression and bribery in order to stay in power. Hence, we may expect that the information provided by elections on strength of opposition and strength of incumbent leaders derive them from utilizing violence. When applied in examining the severity of a civil war, post-election periods are characterized by an uncertainty associated with how consequential the outcomes of elections will be and if the results of elections will have meaningful and tangible implications. Thus, post-election periods will be a period of reconciliation in which the partners will be motivated to conduct a peaceful and non-violent framework. These arguments and expectations lead us to define the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis B: The level of violence and conflict will be reduced in post-election periods.

One of the shortcomings or critical aspects of the informational theory of elections cultivated by Cheibub & Hays (2017) is the argument that the deterrent effect of elections will be the same even when the elections are characterized by some very problematic aspects. Cheibub & Hays articulate this as following:

*“If the incumbent is able to use intimidation, bribery and its control of institutions, such as the press, to prevent the opposition from winning a meaningful share of the vote, the deterrent effect will be the same”* (Cheibub & Hays 2017, 87).

This claim undermines the importance of conditions and context that has obtained considerable attention and focus on the literature presented above. Elections by themselves are not sufficient to warrant a democratic process. To obtain reliable and valid findings the context and nature of the elections has to be contained in the analysis. The practices such as bribery, intimidation and control of institutions contribute to not reflecting the real support of the opposition. Such practices, which manipulate elections in favour of the incumbents, are employed as instruments to consolidate the power of the incumbent regime. In such circumstances, when the opposition feels that its chance of successful elections is reduced, the very outcome of the elections may arise the level of violence. This may occur either because of actual and perceived irregularities or if some competitors of elections reject election results that are perceived as manipulated and uncompetitive (Cederman, Gleditsch & Hug 2012, 391). In other words, the unestablished and uncompetitive nature of elections creates a tension between losers and winners in which the losers are inclined to reject the outcomes of the elections. Here, the arguments of Anderson and Mendes (2005) on how the elections may create unequal outcomes and how this inequality conduct the view of citizens in political institutions can be highlighted. While democratic political systems provide equal opportunities for citizens to participate in election, they unavoidably produce unequal outcomes by ensuring that some will be in majority and that other will be in minority (Anderson & Mendes 2005, 93). The losers, also those that feel being minority, will have stronger incentives to bring about change than the winners. Thus, the legitimacy and stability of political systems is more likely to be challenged by those feeling as a minority than those feeling as a majority. In other words, this distinction between minority versus majority, which is produced by the elections, affects the actors` incentives to pressure for institutional change. Anderson & Mendes (2005) argue that people`s views of political process and their views of the outcomes of political process are result of two interrelated phenomena; the first is the tendency of the minority to believe that the political process is not fair and tendency to doubt that the government is interested in and responsive to their needs, the second phenomena is the believe that democratic systems are more likely to produce policies close to the preferred outcomes of the majority`s than the minority`s as in democracies political majority makes public policy (Anderson & Mendes 2005, 94). This distinction between minority versus majority or loser versus winners manifests itself differently based on the political context. In democracies, we expect that the tensions between winners and losers to be manifested in nonviolent activities such as protests. After all, citizens in established democracies are more passionately committed to the democratic political system through social-group or interest-

group memberships or their preferred political party. However, elections in new democracies or in countries experiencing a transition towards democracy are associated with high levels of uncertainty and low levels of legitimacy. In such an environment, electoral losers' subjective probability estimates of whether, when and under what conditions another election will be held in the future are relatively low (Anderson & Mendes 2005, 97). As a result, being on the losing side in unestablished democracies creates a more acute sense of lacking a stake in the system, which creates incentives for engaging in protest and other contentious behaviours. This argument is also closely related to the Przeworski who argues that democracy is not established if the losers of the election are not ready to accept the result of elections (Przeworski 1991). Thus, the likelihood of conflict increases since electoral outcomes are unlikely to be accepted by the losing parties. The problematic nature of elections in countries passing through a transition and the institutional inconsistencies in these countries leads us to define the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis C: Civil wars will be more severe in countries that experience a transition towards establishing democratic institutions.

Hypothesis D: The higher degree of uncompetitiveness of an election makes a civil war more severe.

In other words, unless there are no other institutional stability-promoting guarantees that strengthen the competitiveness and quality of the elections, the political competition and inconsequential elections may trigger the violence. Collier (2009) argues that elections may only help peaceful competition over political power when rule of law is plausibly warranted. In the contexts where there are enormous deficits of necessary preconditions, the attempts to push states to democratize may lead to violence. This is the "sequencing" argument of Mansfield and Snyder (2007a), which contains that the process of democratization starts with building the institutions that democracy requires, and then encouraging mass political participation and free electoral competition only after these institutions have taken place (Mansfield & Snyder 2007, 6). In states where democratization has been successful with little if any internal or external violence, a set of prerequisites were in place before the transition began. The citizens in these states had the resources and skills to build the institutions and civil society that democracy needs, there were well-developed state institutions and administrative bureaucracies that functioned in an efficient way, and some of these states enjoyed the advantages of past experience with independent legal and journalistic institutions (Mansfield & Snyder 2007, 8). In these states, the fear of powerful elites to be eliminated



from power by force is minimized as they don't feel threatened by a successful transition to democracy, partly because trusted state institutions made plausible guarantees that reduced the resistance by powerful elites. The circumstances are different in incomplete democracies and in democracies that experience a deficient transition. Such states are argued experience a discrepancy between rising demands for broad participation in politics and insufficient institutions to manage those popular demands ((Mansfield & Snyder 2007, 9). In contexts where the institutions of democratic accountability have not yet been constructed and institutional authority is lacking, political leaders frequently turn instead to ideological and charismatic sentiment to promote their rule. Both elites whom are left over from the old regime and rising elites whom try desperately to establish a supporting base, implement nationalism as a strategy to rally the support of the masses instead of winning people's loyalty by providing responsive institutions that protect their interests. Although, the arguments of Mansfield and Snyder are intended to elucidate if incomplete democracies go to war against other democracies, the same notion may be applied into why incomplete elections in incomplete democracies may be triggering violence. The utilization of nationalism, which helps elites to define "the people" against their external enemies, may also be highlighted by either incumbent leaders or rebel groups to bolster their support as the concept and the content of the nationalism suffers from a specific and common understanding in undemocratic and incomplete democracies. Appealing to nationalist sentiments during the election periods becomes a defining aspect of politics in countries that experience either a transition to democracy or suffer from inefficient state institutions as the mobilizing and polarizing effect of nationalist appeals is enormous. The effect of such nationalist appeals during elections may be more prominent and severe in contexts where the comprehension of the nation is diverged between the incumbent regime and rebelling group and in contexts where there are clear ethnical and historical divisions between incumbent regime and rebel group.

### **3.4 Elections as a Political Opportunity**

In this paper, elections will be interpreted as opportunities that affect the decisions of the partners in a civil war to increase their military activities. Recalling the main intuition behind the political opportunity structures, this approach provides a framework for relating the effects of institutional adjustments, elite alignments, alliance shifts and the state capacity on people's incentives to engage in collective action. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, the stability or instability of elite alignments, presence or absence of elite allies and state's capacity and propensity for repression has been argued by

McAdam, McCarthy & Zald (1996) as the main set of opportunities that may emerge in a political context, which may enable or disable people in challenging status quo or engaging in collective action such as protests or social movements. However, this paper employs the approach of political opportunity structures to investigate when civil war becomes more severe, also when the partners of a civil war decides to increase their military engagement. These questions will be related to the opportunity structures by arguing that opportunities provided by political context may influence decision-making as the opportunities influence the probability of partners of a civil war to obtain any form of achievements. However, the deficiency of utilizing this approach was its idiosyncratic and context-specific features, which disables us from executing studies concerning multiple cases and units. Another problematic aspect of political opportunity structure was mentioned to be its comprehensive content that was incorporating almost everything concerning conditions and circumstances of the context of a collective action. To overcome these problems, this paper interprets elections as providing an opportunity that may influence the partners of a civil war to increase or decrease their military struggle and thus make the civil war severe.

The informational nature of elections can be operationalized as an opportunity. The information provided by the outcomes of the elections regarding the strength of the opposition groups and incumbent leaders constitutes a context which may influence the incentives of either rebel groups or the incumbent leaders to increase their military efforts. Although, this may not be a conventional political opportunity structure such as considerable institutional changes, demographic changes or other sudden changes that decrease the state's capacity of repression, the information provided by elections exposes the support of the incumbent and opposition groups. This information displays again the potential capacity of the incumbent and opposition's potential for mobilization and recruitment. If the election outcomes reveal that the support for the incumbent leaders is declined and the support for the opposition is considerably high, this information may be perceived by the incumbent leaders as an opportunity to improve the possibilities of the opposition to participate in order to eliminate or at least mitigate the threat imposed by the opposition.

The nature of elections, also whether elections are competitive or not, has been argued as affecting how these elections will be assessed. As has been argued, the elections in non-established democracies lack many of the preconditions and prerequisites that elevate the quality of the elections. This deficiency of elections contributes to not reflect the real support of the opposition that may perceive elections as serving to consolidate the power of

incumbents. The outcomes of manipulative and uncompetitive elections constitute a justification for rebel groups who emphasize the incomplete and inconsequential nature of elections to legitimize the use of violence. Thus, we may interpret the post-election periods of such elections as providing an opportunity for particularly rebel groups to increase their military action and as a result intensify the conflict, because the uncompetitive and manipulative function of elections demonstrates the closeness of the political system for those challenging the incumbent regime. The elections which expose the willingness and ability of the incumbent regimes to incorporate oppositional groups into the system, are instruments that enable us to assess the relative openness or the closure of the institutionalized political system. In addition to forming when opposition groups or other insurgent groups engage in collective action, opportunity structures have also been argued to construct the repertoire of action, also what type of actions is taken by groups challenging the status quo. Conducting elections in a way that diminishes the possibility of the opposition to achieve any success and the possibility of any considerable institutional changes affects the forms of actions that insurgent groups can take. In such a context, the employment of violence may seem unavoidable to groups who have a very restricted repertoire of action. Thus, both the atmosphere of pre-election periods whether opposition and insurgent groups are free to articulate their political vision or not, and the atmosphere of post-election periods whether the election outcomes have some real and tangible consequences or not, provide the information regarding the openness and closure of the system and the elite stability as elections reflect the strength of the incumbent leader. In other words, elections provide important information on a set of aspects that are interpreted as opportunities. Elections may not be comprehended as direct forms of opportunities, but they clearly demonstrate the political context and the strength of the leaders, which are often included in conceptualizations of political opportunity structures.

#### **4. Research Design**

This paper develops a quantitative research design aimed at testing the proposition that elections and characteristics of elections may affect the severity of a civil conflict. This chapter thus fills the gap between the theoretical expectations and the empirical data which are analysed at the results sections of this paper. This section will firstly outline how the dataset covering the 1989-2016 period was assembled. Secondly, some key variables will be operationalized. The third section will present the statistical technique applied in this paper to analyse empirical data.

#### **4.1 Dataset and Unit of Analysis**

This paper used the information in UCDP Georeferenced Event Dataset to construct a dataset of battle-related deaths. UCDP defines an event as an incident where armed force was used by an organized actor against another organized actor, or against civilians resulting in at least 1 direct death at a specific location and a specific date (Croicu & Sundberg 2018, 9). A death relating to either combat between warring parties or violence against civilians is defined as an event. An armed force is conceptualized as use of arms to promote the parties' general position in the conflict, resulting in deaths. On the other side, organized actor consists of government of an independent state, which is defined as the party controlling the capital of a state, a formally organized group, which is defined as any non-governmental group of people having announced a name for their group and using armed force against a government (state-based), another similarly formalized group (non-state conflict) or unarmed civilians (one-sided violence). The focus of UCDP is on armed conflict involving consciously conducted and planned political campaigns rather than spontaneous violence, and informally organized groups, which are any groups without an announced name, but which uses armed force against another similarly organized group (Sundberg & Melander 2013, 524).

The unit of analysis in this paper is country year. The outcome variable is yearly severity of civil war measured in the number of fatalities in battle-related violence. This includes government troops and rebels killed as well as civilians killed in battle-related activities and unknown deaths that are fatalities where the identity of the victims could not be established. The UCDP GED, which is an events dataset, was collapsed to a country year dataset by taking the sum of battle related deaths. In other words, the events that are registered in different dates and months each year for a given country is collapsed into yearly data for a given country. Using monthly data might be more suitable to analyse the immediate impact that elections are likely to have on the dynamics of violence. This is a shortcoming of this paper, which will also be mentioned in the upcoming parts of the paper. In addition, all event types have been aggregated into years count. Event types include battle deaths related to both state-based violence, non-state violence and one-sided violence.

#### **4.2 Operationalizations**

Testing the predictions made by the theoretical model empirically requires operationalization of the theoretical concepts. Constructing indicators that make it possible to capture the theoretical assumptions empirically is an important part of the research process (Adcock and

Collier 2001). The results and conclusions may plausibly be driven by the choices made when moving from theoretical constructs to empirical indicators. In this section, the effort will be directed towards identifying operationalizations of concepts that fit well with the theoretical assumptions of this paper. In addition to the key independent variables, a set of control variables are also identified.

#### **4.2.1 Independent Variables**

The hypothesis derived from the theoretical model are concerned with two main independent variables. These are elections and characteristics related to these elections. This paper concerns two type of elections; elections that consider legislature and elections that consider the direct elections of executive. The main independent variables of interests are coded one for election years and zero otherwise. Most of the literature addressing the effect of elections on conflicts emphasize one type of election. The literature often refers to executive elections that determine the outcome of the executive as the most significant elections to consider. They argue that executive elections mobilize large segments of the population, are of higher profile and are of higher stakes. However, there is little guidance in the literature on why one type of election should matter more than another type of election. Legislative elections may mobilize population and may affect people by the same magnitude as executive elections. During conflicts, legislative elections may warrant representation to excluded and insurgent groups. The representation of marginalized groups may reduce their incentives to employ violence or other extreme means to express their problems and grievances. In other words, the representational function of legislative elections may matter as much as mobilization effect of executive elections. This paper therefore uses a variable for legislative elections years coded 1 for legislative election years and 0 for non-legislative election years and a variable that examines presidential election years coded 1 for presidential election years and 0 for non-presidential election years. The observations on these two variables are provided by V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Project that collects information on elections by a variety of sources including NELDA (National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy), IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), Chronicle of Parliamentary Elections and Polity IV.

#### **4.2.2 Variables of Characteristics of Elections**

In the theory section of this paper, I have argued that elections *per se* may not determine how actors react to the process and outcome of elections. The context in which elections are being held and their features are also important dynamics determining how elections are assessed.

The first feature considered by this paper is the freeness and fairness of an election. The freeness and fairness of an election is measured by two variables; (1) freeness and fairness of a legislative election and (2) freeness and fairness of a presidential election. The measurements for these variables were sourced from the V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) Project. Taking all aspects of the pre-election periods, election day and the post-election process into account, the dataset assesses the extent to which an election in a given year was free and fair. The variable on free and fair elections is at ordinal level converted to interval level. Free and fair elections are based on five responses:

0. Elections were fundamentally flawed and the official results had little if anything to do with the will of the people.
1. While elections allowed some competition, the irregularities in the end affected the outcome of the election.
2. There was substantial competition and freedom of participation but there were also significant irregularities.
3. There were deficiencies and some degree of fraud and irregularities, but these did not in the end affect the outcome.
4. There was some amount of human error and logistical restrictions but these were largely unintentional and without significant consequences.

Another relationship that was highlighted in the theory section of the paper was the vote margins that an election was won by. Elections have been argued to provide information about the support of incumbents and opposition. This information also addresses people's overall satisfaction and consent of policies initiated by incumbent leaders and oppositional groups. Based on the magnitude of the support either incumbent regimes or opposition groups have, the actors engaging in violence may realize the probability of acquiring success and realizing the popularity of the instruments they have utilized in order to suppress insurgents by the state or express grievances by insurgent groups. Thus, the vote margins may contribute to shape the incentives to engage in conflict. The V-Dem (Varieties of Democracy) project provides observations on what percentage of the vote was received by the largest party and second largest party in legislative elections and what percentage of the vote was received by the candidate actually winning office and by the second most successful candidate.

I have also hypothesised that the reactions of actors may be divergent in pre-and post-periods of elections. In order to investigate the effects of pre-election and post-election periods, this paper operates with a dummy variable for pre-election period, which codes the year before an

election as 1. For post-election periods, a dummy variable is coded 1 for the year after an election. Variables of pre-election and post-election periods are separately coded for both legislative and presidential elections.

The final variable, which is intended to examine the contextual implications of elections, is the effects of transitional periods on severity of a conflict and elections. Transition periods may influence both the stability of a country and the nature of elections. Elections in countries experiencing a transition function to manifest the incentives of transitions whether by warranting a broad representation of people or by ensuring the survival and consolidation of incumbents' power. To acquire the effects of transition periods, this paper employs regime transition variable that is provided by Polity IV project. According to this measurement, a regime change is defined simply as a three-point change in either the polity's democracy or autocracy score and may be either a negative or a positive value change. This paper has recoded the regime transitions to a dichotomous variable which codes transition periods as 1 and 0 for non-transition periods. In other words, countries that have experienced a three-point change in either the democracy or autocracy score have been defined as experiencing a transition period.

#### **4.2.3 Control Variables**

In addition to these explanatory variables, a set of central variables are included in the baseline statistical model. This is necessary to avoid omitted variable bias. The problem of omitted variable bias emerges when a variable that is correlated with both the dependent and the independent variable is excluded from the analysis. To avoid the problem of omitted variable bias, this paper employs a set of control variables found to be important predictors of severity of conflict and variables often highlighted by similar studies to the study of this paper. Important controls thus include the natural logarithms of population, GDP per capita, incomes generated by natural resources, ethnic diversity, and regime type.

Natural resources are one of the most highlighted aspects of conflict literature. Some main studies, such as studies provided by Collier & Bannon (2003), Fearon & Laitin (2003) and Ross (2003 & 2004) have already created a consolidated knowledge of natural resources as increasing the risk of civil conflict onset. The wealth of natural resources has been argued to materialize its effect through providing finance for rebellion and through influencing the quality and efficiency of a state's institutions. The availability of natural resources strengthens the incentives of participating the rebellion as such resources present enormous revenues and

rewards for rebel groups once the control of these resources is claimed. From a rational point of view, potential revenues and rewards that can be acquired by natural resources exceed the costs associated with participating the rebellion. The effects of natural resources on motivating people to organize violence against a state contributes also to overcome challenges related to collective action. The private gain to rebels helps them overcome collective action problems (De Soysa & Neumayer 2007, 203).

Another main implication of natural resources is argued to be related to effects of natural resources on state institutions. Natural resources, particularly oil is thought to have corrosive effects on state institutions, allowing patterns of patronage and weak political control (Soysa & Neumayer 2007, 2004). The term `Resource Curse` is often utilized to label the implications of natural resources. The term is used to describe the failure of resource-rich countries to benefit from their natural wealth (Humphreys, Sachs & Stiglitz, 2007). The term portrays how countries with substantial natural resources failed to use the wealth of natural resources to improve their economies, and how these countries had lower economic improvement than countries with scarce natural resources (Moses & Betnes 2017, 5). The lack of state capacity in resource dependent countries increases the risk of conflict by affecting the ability of a state through the corrosive effects of resource wealth on state institutions. To summarize, resource wealth is argued to influence conflicts by creating private material interests for insurgent groups, motivating people to participate insurgent groups because of the rewards that can be provided by controlling the natural resources, financing the insurgent groups to engage in war and finally having erosive effects on state institutions and allowing weak political control. This is consistent with the findings of Weinstein (2007) who argues that access to natural resources creates material benefits and opportunistic rebellions, which are disrupted by indiscipline and tend to commit high levels of indiscriminate violence. Thus, resource wealth and access to natural resources may influence the variation of level of violence in civil wars. To control for the effects of natural resources, this paper incorporates oil rents as a percentage of GDP provided by World Bank data.

Another important control variable is GDP per capita. There are prominently two comprehensions of employing GDP per capita. Fearon & Laitin (2003) apply GDP per capita as a proxy for state capacity, as low levels of GDP imply incapable and inefficient states, whilst high levels of GDP imply capable and efficient states. In contrast to Fearon & Laitin, Collier and Hoeffler define GDP per capita as a proxy for foregone income. In situations where the foregone income is low, which is measured by GDP per capita in which low levels



of GDP per capita purport low foregone income, people may be more likely to participate in rebellions as the opportunities for generating income are very restricted. Collier & Hoeffler (2003) illustrate this by referring to an example of Russian Civil War; *Reds and Whites, both rebel armies, had four million desertions. The desertion rate was ten times higher in summer than in winter: the recruits being peasants, the income foregone were much higher at harvest time.* Like Fearon & Laitin (2003), Sambanis (2004) also implements GDP per capita as a proxy for state strength. Fearon & Laitin whom emphasises GDP per capita as a proxy for (a) a state's overall administrative, military, financial and police capabilities, (b) marking developed countries with better infrastructure and a strong persistence of central administration in peripheral rural areas and (c) the potential of recruitment as the recruitment of people is easier when economic alternative are worse. Thus, a capable state measured by its economic welfare is associated with responding efficiently to insurgency, lowering participation by increasing opportunity costs to rebellion and generating institutional strength. Whether there is the mechanism of foregone income, the institutional strength, or a capable state, we may expect economic wealth to reduce the intensity of a conflict. To control for the economic wealth, this paper incorporates GDP per capita provided by World Bank data.

Ethnic diversity is another variable that is often included in the studies of conflict literature. In literature the main interest of incorporating the ethnic diversity has been to examine if ethnically diversified countries were more prone to conflicts. Most of these studies do not find any clear and strong effects of ethnic diversity on either the risk or durability of a conflict (Fearon & Laitin 1996; Hegre & Sambanis 2006; Reynal-Querol 2002; Sambanis 2001). The question of whether ethnicity is indeed a factor that leads to make a conflict more severe has not obtained a complete scrutiny. Given the existence of an ongoing conflict, may ethnic diversity increase the severity of a conflict? The role of ethnicity in conflicts and how ethnicity should be expected to influence severity of a conflict and other aspects of conflicts generally, may be related to the level of aggregation. When interpreted at country level, ethnic diversity may examine if the conflicts are severe in ethnically diversified countries. There is little guidance in the literature of severity of conflict on how ethnicity and ethnic diversity may influence the severity of conflict. Of the few studies that attempt to elaborate determinants of severity of a conflict, Lucina (2006) finds no indication that cultural diversity makes a civil war more severe, Lu & Thies (2011) finds no support for three indicators of cultural grievance, that is, the share of the second largest ethnic group, ethnic-linguistic, and religious fractionalization, Balcells & Kalyvas (2014) finds ethnic fractionalization reduces

battlefield severity and Lujala(2009) finds also that ethnically diverse countries seem to experience conflict with fewer battle-related deaths. These studies provide some mixed results on how ethnic diversity may affect severity of a conflict. We also infer from these studies that there is lack of profound theory and convincing arguments why and how ethnic diversity should influence severity of a civil war. In addition, the studies employed ethnic diversity at country level. In contrast to these studies, Eck (2009) attempts to give a more comprehensive examination of ethnic diversity. Eck emphasizes ethnic dimension on both country level and rebel group level and provides a more convincing argument of how ethnically mobilized rebel groups may be more likely to intensify a conflict than groups that do not mobilize along ethnic lines. Thus, we may argue that the choice of employing ethnic diversity either at country level or rebel group level may affect the results of ethnic diversity. This paper employs the conventional use of ethnolinguistic fractionalization provided by Fearon & Laitin. The variable measures the probability that two randomly selected people from a given country will belong to different groups. The variable ranges from 0 (perfectly homogenous) to 1 (highly fragmented). Note that this variable is at country level and may not be best suited to account for the effect of ethnicity and ethnic diversity. A similar strategy to Eck who conceptualizes ethnicity at rebel group level and in terms of the role of ethnicity in mobilizing insurgent groups might provide more significant and accurate results. Ethnic diversity also has implications for the context of elections. In ethnically diverse countries the politics, voting and issues of interest during elections may primarily highlight ethnic rivalries (Long & Gibson 2015, 830). Ethnicity, which is an important source of social differentiation such as race, plays a considerable role in shaping people's political attitudes and voting behaviours (Just 2017). Elections that fail to reflect the ethnic diversity of a society may not be perceived as legitimate and representative, which thus influences the quality of an election. The regime type will also be included as a control variable in this paper. The regime type of a country may affect both elections, characteristics of elections and severity of a conflict. Regime type of a country is related to if a given country holds an election or not and related to the attributes of elections in a country. The elections in democracies are free, fair and multiparty elections, whilst in non-democratic settings there may be multiparty elections but the probability of government change may be very small as there is not a real competition and the incumbents may be favoured against others. There is also a considerable variation of regime types. Distinguishing regime types across democracies versus non-democracies may not be feasible for controlling the variety of regime types. This paper employs a four type of

regime variable; democracy, military, monarchy and multiparty. The conceptualizations of these regime types are provided by Hadenius, Teorell & Wahman (2013) who attempt to develop, and detail two other widely used classifications, those introduced by Geddes *et al* (2012) and Cheibub *et al* (2010). Hadenius, Teorell & Wahman (2013) conceptualize monarchies; «*as those in which a person of royal descent has inherited the position of head of state in accordance with accepted practice and/or the constitution*». Cases in which the monarch possesses limited political powers and is not the effective head of government are not classified as monarchies. These are ceremonial or constitutional monarchies. Military regimes are defined as: «*states in which military officers are major or predominant actors by virtue of their actual or threatened use of force*». In these regimes, the armed forces control politics directly or indirectly by directing civilian leader behind the scenes. To acquire a definition of democracy, Hadenius *et al* refer Freedom House and Polity scale, which are two of the most used indicators of democracy. Their main incentive is to find a threshold that could provide them with a tool to define a country as a democracy. To find this threshold, they combine Freedom House and Polity scale. Thus, they classify all countries with a democracy score of 7 or above as democratic. In the upcoming paragraph, an elaboration of how Freedom House and Polity IV conceptualizes democracy is presented. Both indicators are used by Hadenius *et al* to provide a scale for democracy.

The last category of regime type that this paper employs, is multiparty regimes. Multiparty regimes will be controlling a regime setting that is becoming quiet dominant. The category corresponds to the regimes labelled as «electoral authoritarian» by Schedler (2006) or «competitive authoritarian regimes» by Levitsky & Way (2010). The common aspect for these categorizations is that a certain level of competition is allowed, and some opposition candidates can participate in national elections. Elections are held in these settings, but the chance of the opposition to win the elections is almost non-existent.

The last control variable of this paper is the size of population, which is a typical variable in conflict intensity-related research. The population is the source of both insurgents and government soldiers. Countries with a rich source of combatants due to large populations result in rebel and government commanders who are less concerned about casualties, since combatants are replaceable (Lu & Thies 2011, 223). Following this logic, we may assume larger populations to intensify a civil war and make it more severe. Previous empirical works provided by Lucina (2006), Lujala (2009) and Lu & Thies (2011) support this claim. To

control for the effect of population size, this paper employs a logged variable of population size obtained by World Bank.

### 4.3 Statistical Technique

The nature of dependent variable in this paper can be identified as a count variable or count data. The yearly battle deaths between central governments and rebel groups, which constitute the dependent variable in this paper, count the deaths that have occurred at a location and time. Similar types include how many patients died at a hospital within the last month, counts of doctor visits, absenteeism in the workplace, absenteeism at the school for each student or the count of terrorist attacks towards a country. In statistics, count data implies observations that have only nonnegative integer values ranging from zero to some greater undetermined value (Hilbe 2014, 2). A potential problem with count data that applies to conflict severity, specifically of the dependent variable of this paper is overdispersion. The problem of overdispersion occurs due to large number of zeros in combination with high counts of battle deaths in other instances. For instance, battle deaths for a country may have enormous variations from a year to another. Whilst battle deaths may be zero for year  $t$  for country  $n$ , the battle death for the same country in year  $t+1$  may be thousands. In other words, overdispersion refers to excess variability of the data. The problem of overdispersion occurs where the variability of the data is greater than the mean of the data (Hilbe 2014, 9). Overdispersion in general is the occasion when the observed variance in a model is greater than its expected variance. Overdispersion is caused by a positive correlation between responses or by an excess variation between response probabilities or counts (Hilbe 2014, 82). When the data exhibits greater variability than is predicted by the implicit mean-variance relationship, the problem of overdispersion emerges. According to Hilbe (2014) overdispersion occurs when:

- The model omits important explanatory predictors,
- The data includes outliers,
- The model fails to include needed interaction terms or terms,
- The model fails to transform a predictor to another scale
- The assumed linear relationship between the response and the link function and predictors is mistaken.

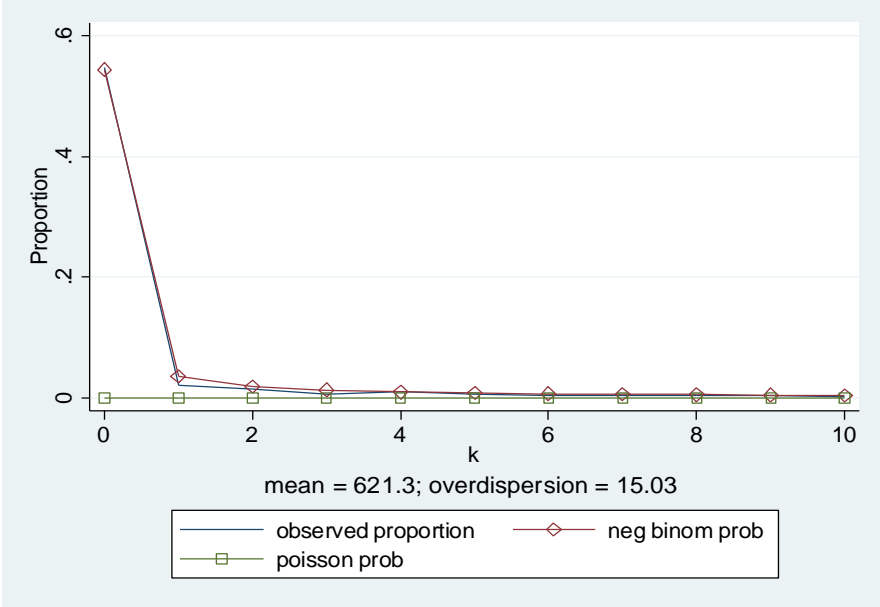
Thus, not-accounting for this problem may lead to underestimation of standard errors and misleading inference for the regression parameters. Similar studies to the study of this paper,

which have dependent variables as a count such as the number of fatalities, the counts of civilian deaths, the counts of terrorist attacks directed against a country or a count of battle deaths, have referred to techniques that account and correct for the problems associated with overdispersion.

The study of Hultman & Peksen (2017) that incorporates the number of fatalities in battle-related violence as the dependent variable utilizes negative binomial regressions as their estimation technique. Another study of Fjelde & Hultman (2014) which has civilian deaths as the dependent variable, uses negative binomial regression as their estimation method. The use of negative binomial regression as the estimation method is motivated by the ability of this estimator to account for overdispersion of the dependent variable. The negative binomial regression has an extra parameter which adjusts to accommodate the extra variability or the heterogeneity in the data (Hilbe 2014, 10). The extra parameter in negative binomial models provides a wider shape to the distribution of counts than is allowed under Poisson distribution method that has a single parameter to be estimated and interprets the mean and the variance of a distribution as the same. In other words, the assumption of the Poisson distribution is that the mean and variance is the same. The higher the value of the mean of the distribution, the greater the variance or variability in the data. This assumption of Poisson distribution is referred to as the equidispersion. The challenge is that when modelling real data, equidispersion assumptions is rarely satisfied (Hilbe 2014, 9). Thus, the extra parameter allows the variance of the data to increase as the mean of the data increases.

Dependent variables that are discrete and not continuous violate basic assumptions of OLS, which require the dependent variable to be continuous and residuals to be bell-shaped. Count variables violate the assumption of normal distribution. STATA software provides a practical command that graphs the observed proportions along with the Poisson and negative binomial probabilities for a count type variable. The Poisson probabilities are computed using an estimate of the Poisson mean. The negative binomial probabilities use the same means and an estimate of the overdispersion parameter. Figure 4.1 illustrates how well Poisson and negative binomial probabilities fit the observed proportions. From the Figure 4.1 we can observe that there is not enormous difference between Poisson probabilities and negative binomial probabilities. However, the negative binomial looks to be a much better fit than Poisson probabilities.

**Figure 4.1: The observed proportions versus Poisson and negative binomial probabilities**



A critical assumption of Poisson distribution is that events are independent (Long 1997, 219). This means that when an event occurs it does not affect the probability of the event occurring in the future. Long (1997) demonstrates this by referring to an example of publication of articles by scientists. The assumption of independence suggests that when a scientist publishes a paper, the rate of publication of a scientist does not change. In other words, past success in publishing does not affect future access. This problem is also highlighted by Fjelde & Hultman (2014) who study a count variable as the dependent variable. One of their reasoning is the feasibility of utilizing negative binominal regressions when there is contagion in the dependent variable. In their case, contagion means that the rate at which civilians are killed in one location is no independent from how many civilians have already been killed in that location in the same year. A similar feature may also be persistent in this paper. The battle deaths in one country is not independent from how many battle deaths there were in that country in the same year. Hultman, Kathman & Shannon (2013) employ a count variable, which is the number of civilians killed in a conflict month and highlight the problem of contagion and refer to negative binominal model to estimate the results.

The graph, which is demonstrated by Figure 4.1, shows that the fitted Poisson distribution under-predicts 0s. The pattern of under-prediction is argued to be a feature of fitting a count model that does not consider heterogeneity among sample countries in their rate  $\mu$  (Long & Freese 2001, 228). The univariate Poisson distribution assumes that all conflicts have the same rate of severity, which is clearly unrealistic. The negative binominal regression model

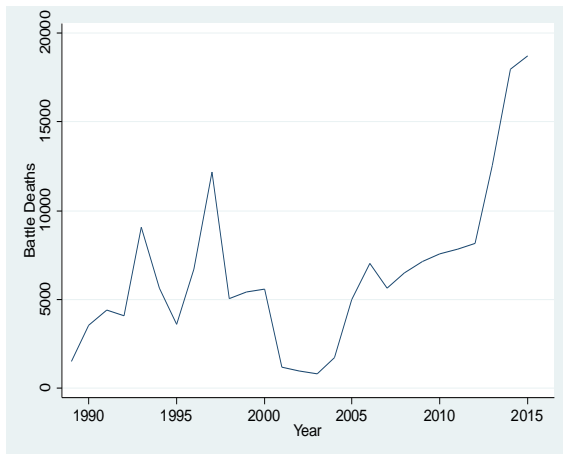
addresses the failure of the Poisson distribution by adding a parameter that reflects unobserved heterogeneity among observations. Negative binomial regression adds an error parameter that is assumed to be uncorrelated with the independent variables. Thus, negative binomial regression provides a more feasible technique for estimating over-dispersed count variables. In addition, this paper will estimate all the models with robust standard errors clustered on countries that have observations of battle deaths due to potential correlation between observations within the same country.

#### **4.4 Demonstrating the variation of conflict severity**

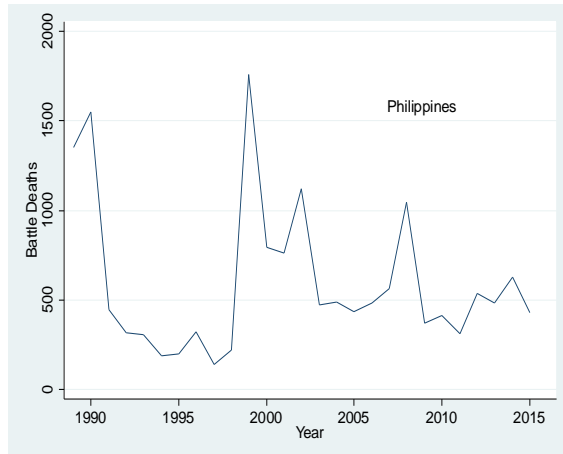
Civil conflicts vary greatly in their intensity. Over the last half-century, the number of combat deaths during a year of civil conflict has ranged from less than 100 to over 100,000 (Chaudoin, Peskowitz & Stanton 2017, 57). The variation of severity of a conflict is present both across countries and within conflicts. The severity or intensity of a conflict is also dynamic, which implies that the severity of fighting can increase and decrease sharply at sometimes and remain steady at others. Some conflicts are persistent, with fighting occurring at consistent levels over longer periods of time, while other conflicts become more volatile. Figure 1.1 which is provided by Petterson and Eck (2018) demonstrates the variation of battle deaths between 1989 and 2017 across different types of violence. We can observe from the figure that violence varies greatly over time across different type of conflicts. State-based armed conflict presented by the solid line in Figure 1.1, which is also the type of conflict that this paper utilizes, is defined by a considerable variation over time. We can demonstrate the variation of severity of a conflict by referring to a set of cases that had long-standing and violent conflicts.

As illustrated by the figures demonstrating a set of cases that have experienced long-standing and violent conflicts, the variation between countries and within countries is enormous. For instance, in Afghanistan the lowest number of battle deaths is 817, whilst the highest number of battle deaths was 18707, in Ethiopia the lowest number of battle deaths was 12 whilst the highest number has reached 49856 battle deaths. Figure 4.9 plots the distribution of the logged number of battle deaths for country years with positive battle deaths, showing the magnitude of this variation. The figure demonstrates kernel density plot and histogram of log number of battle deaths for conflicts during years with positive numbers of battle deaths. The number of battle deaths from civil conflict ranges from 0 to 501961. The standard deviation for the number of battle deaths is almost over 15 times large as the sample mean.

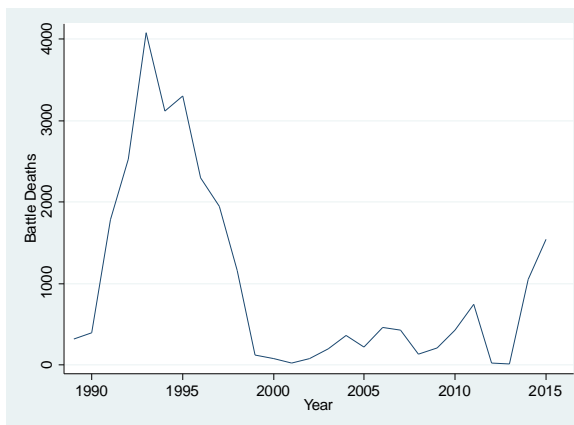
**Figure 4.2: Conflict severity in Afghanistan**



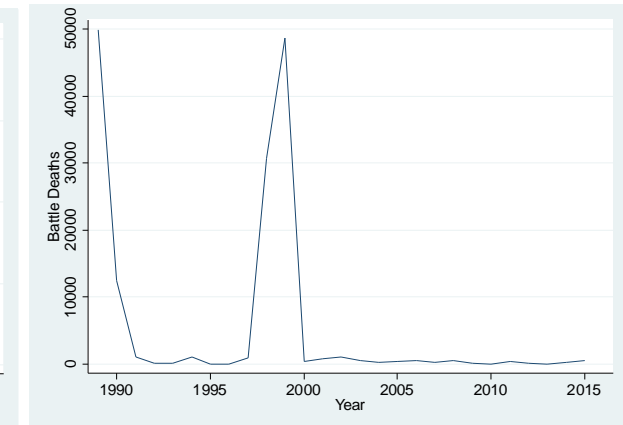
**Figure 4.3: Conflict severity in Philippines**



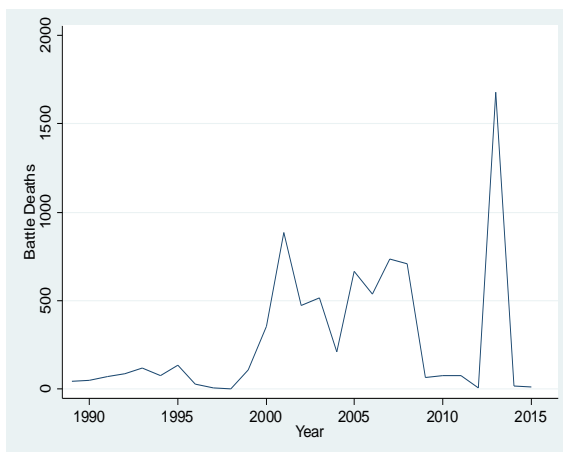
**Figure 4.4: Conflict severity in Turkey**



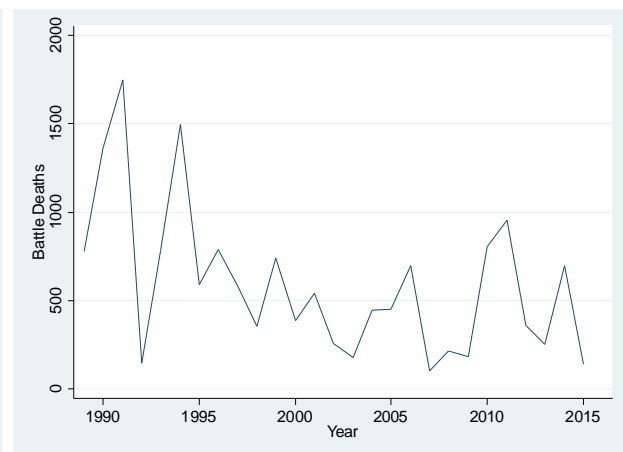
**Figure 4.5: Conflict severity in Ethiopia**



**Figure 4.6: Conflict severity in Israel**

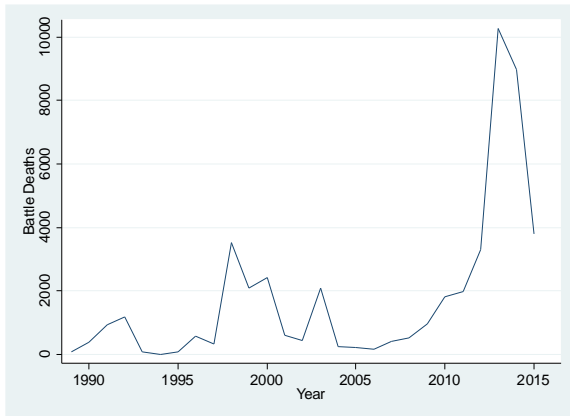


**Figure 4.7: Conflict severity in Myanmar**



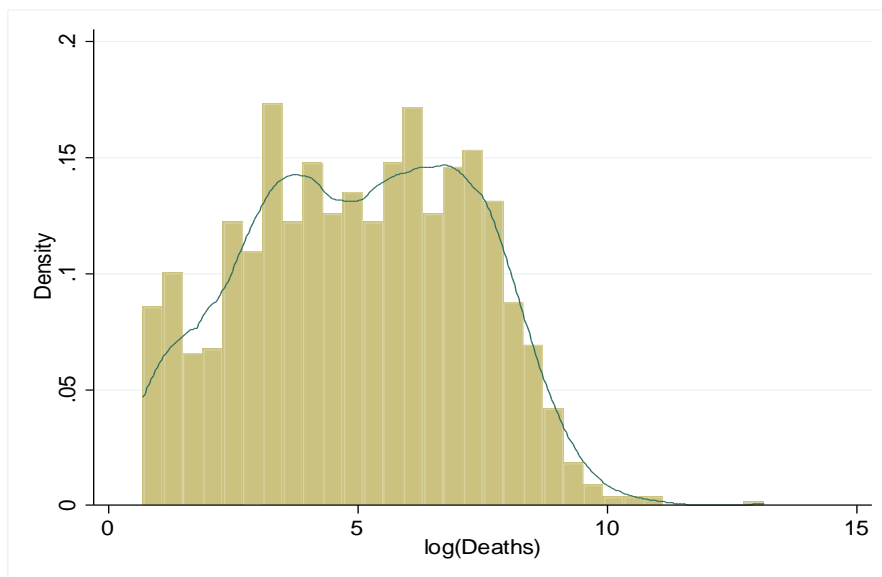


**Figure 4.8: Conflict severity in Nigeria**



This variation both between conflict in different countries and within conflicts has not obtained enough scrutiny and examination. The literature on conflicts has prominently addressed the issues associated with the onset, duration and outcome of a conflict.

**Figure 4.9: Histogram of logged battle deaths**



## 5.Results

The results of the first model are presented in Table 5.1. This model includes the main independent variables related to elections and the attributes of elections and a set of control variables that are considered to affect both elections and severity of a conflict. In all the models in this paper, election years are separated between legislative and presidential elections. In contrast to other studies that focus on one type of election, or aggregate types of elections, this paper examines both types of elections separately. There is little guidance in the existing literature as to why legislative elections should matter more than the executive elections or why should executive elections matter more than legislative elections. However, by incorporating two types of elections, we can analyse the effects of different types of elections on conflict severity.

The variables ‘legislative election years’ and ‘presidential election years’ estimate how an election in a given year is related to battle deaths. Table 5.1 suggests that legislative election years are negatively related to battle deaths, which implies that election years reduce the conflict severity. However, this negative effect of legislative election years on battle deaths is not significant. The share of oil rents and population size are also negatively and significantly related to battle deaths. In addition, regimes have different effects on conflict severity. Democracies and monarchies reduce the severity of a conflict, whilst military regimes increase battle deaths. Figure 5.1 demonstrates the effects of regime types on severity of a conflict. Figure 5.1 presents a situation in which continuous variables are held at their means, there is an election year and the type of election is legislative. The freedom and fairness of the legislative elections is also held at its mean. From the figure, we can observe that battle deaths increase from approximately 109 in non-military regimes to 1057 in military regimes when legislative elections are held. In contrast to military regimes, both democracies and monarchies reduce battle deaths. The predicted number of battle deaths decreases from 223 battle deaths in non-democracies in election years to roughly 59 battle deaths in democracies when legislative elections are held, which is equivalent to a 73% decrease of battle deaths. The same relationship applies also to monarchies in which the predicted number of battle deaths is reduced from approximately 173 battle deaths in non-monarchies to 11 battle deaths in monarchies, which corresponds to a 93 % decrease of battle deaths.

Another important and prominent finding presented by Table 5.1 is the positively significant effect of free and fair legislative elections. In general terms, we may expect that more free and

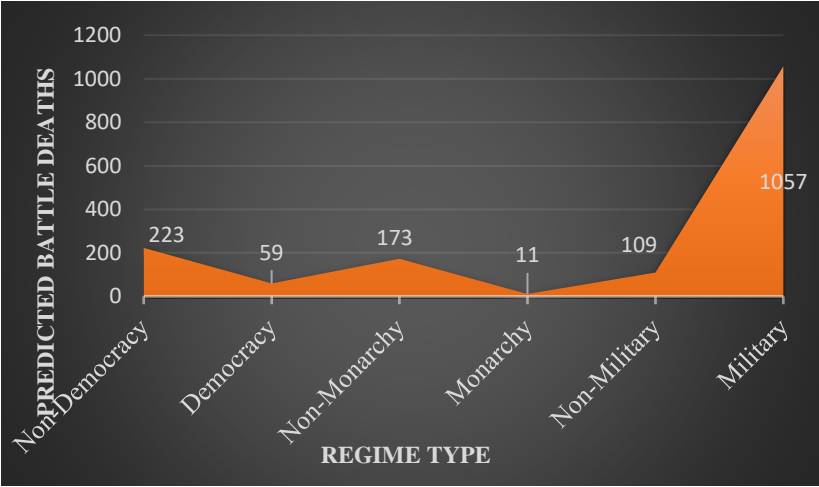
**Table 5.1: Negative Binominal Regressions 1989-2016. Severity of a Conflict and Elections.**

	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.231 (-1.20)
Presidential Election Years.	0.0885 (0.46)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.457*** (3.32)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0852 (0.60)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0289* (2.13)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.765*** (4.95)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.324 (-1.70)
Ethnic Diversity	0.734 (0.83)
Democracy	-1.320* (-2.46)
Monarchy	-2.755*** (-4.03)
Military	2.270** (2.63)
Miultiparty	-0.0628 (-0.14)
Constant	-5.053* (-2.22)
Ln Alpha	2.519*** (23.03)
N	2787

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

fair elections will deter opposition and insurgent groups from utilizing violence as a mean to express their grievances. Free and fair elections create a level playing field in which parties have a reasonable chance of succeeding, which may reduce the incentives of expression through violence that is costlier than participating in free and fair elections. However, the results obtained in Table 5.1 contradict this narrative. Free and fair legislative elections are significantly and positively related to the severity of a conflict, which means that free and fair elections make a civil war more severe. The positive effect of free and fair legislative elections is highly significant.

**Figure 5.1: The Effects of Regime Types on Battle Deaths.**



In a situation in which we only consider legislative elections and all other variables are held at their means<sup>1</sup>, the predicted battle deaths for the least free and fair elections are approximately 32. As elections become more free and fair, the predicted battle deaths also increase. The predicted battle deaths for the most free and fair elections are approximately 397. Figure 5.2 illustrates the effects of free and fair legislative elections on severity of a conflict. Further in this chapter, I explore what might be driving this effect.

Table 5.2 presents the results of Model 2 that includes variable indicating the margin that the winning party won by for both legislative and executive elections. These variables measure the difference of vote shares gained by largest and second largest party. As has been argued in the theory and argument section of this paper, it has been assumed that the informational role of elections may shape incentives of both insurgent groups and incumbent regimes to resort to violence. In order to account for the effect of the informational role of elections, two other variables are added to the Model 1 presented in Table 5.2: the margin by which the winner of the election won. The argument is that as the margin of the winner becomes larger, this provides stronger information regarding the incumbents` and oppositions` support and popularity. Aware of this information provided by elections, opposition groups or insurgent groups may relate this information to the strength, capability, and support of the incumbent leaders.

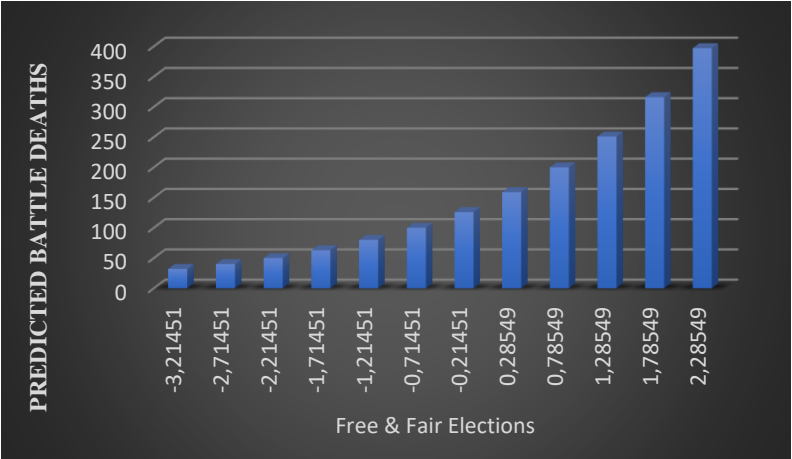
<sup>1</sup> The prediction eliminated presidential elections and avriables associated with presidential elections.

**Table 5.2: Negative Binominal Regressions (1989-2016): Effects of Vote Margins.**

	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.241 (-1.18)
Presidential Election Years.	0.0848 (0.44)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.442** (3.13)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0623 (0.45)
Vote Margins Presidential (t-1)	-0.00294 (-0.59)
Vote Margins Legislative (t-1)	-0.0182* (-2.12)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0276* (2.12)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.756*** (4.94)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.342 (-1.83)
Ethnic Diversity	0.726 (0.84)
Democracy	-1.222* (-2.27)
Monarchy	-2.740*** (-4.06)
Military	2.230** (2.64)
Miultiparty	-0.0178 (-0.04)
Constant	-4.755* (-2.09)
Ln Alpha	2.515*** (22.99)
N	2781

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

**Figure 5.2: Effects of Free and Fair Legislative Elections on Conflict Severity.**

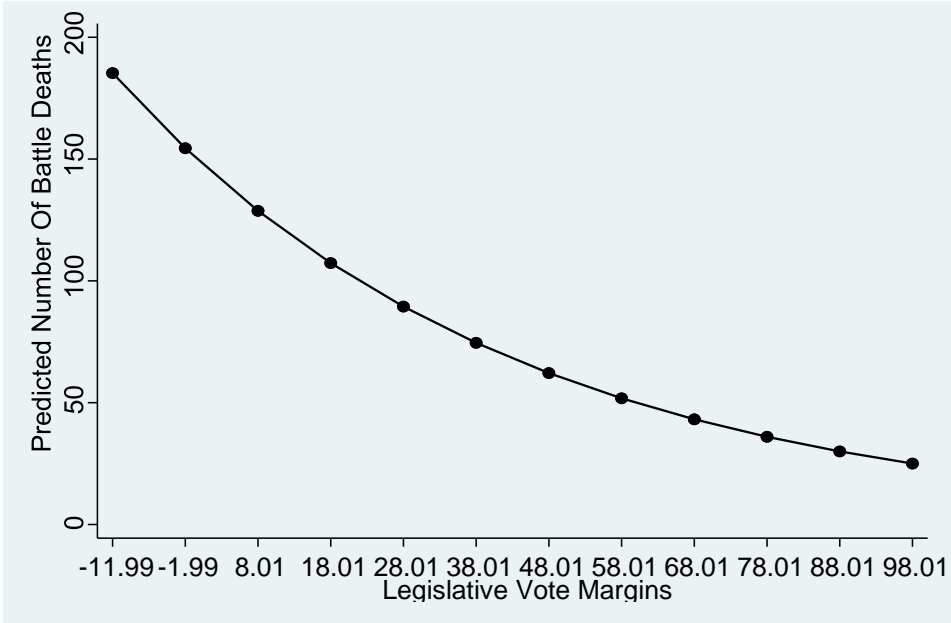


A large margin may imply a strong and popular regime that reduces the probability of an insurgent group or opposition group realising further success in elections or being able to defeat the government militarily. This may reduce their incentives to utilize violence and thus reduce the intensity and severity of a conflict.

From the results presented by Table 5.2, we can observe that both variables are negatively related to battle deaths, which means that they reduce battle deaths, but only the difference of vote shares for legislative election years is significant. Adding the variables for margin differences does not change positive and highly significant effect of free and fair legislative elections on severity of a conflict. In addition, oil rents, the size of population, democracy, monarchy, and military maintain their significant effects. GDP per capita is also significant at the 10-percentage level. The significant and negative effect of vote margin differences in legislative elections between incumbents and main opposition may confirm informational approach of elections, albeit for legislative elections only.

Figure 5.3 demonstrates a simple relationship between vote share differences and the severity of a conflict when there was a legislative election in a given year. As can be seen from the Figure 5.3, the increase of vote share differences between the largest and the second largest party, reduces the battle deaths quite moderately. In a case in which the opposition party won the election by almost 12 percent, referred by the figure as -11.99 vote share difference, the predicted number of battle deaths is approximately 185, whilst the predicted number of battle deaths decrease to almost 62 when the incumbents win the election by a 50 percent difference. In other words, we observe a 16 percent reduction in battle deaths when the vote share differences in legislative elections increase by 10 percentage points.

**Figure 5.3: The Effect of Legislative Vote Share Differences on Battle Deaths.**



These predictions were obtained for a scenario where there was a legislative election year and holding other variables constant at their means. Do these results vary across types of regimes?

**5.1 The Conditional Effects of Regime Types**

In this section of this paper, the effects of free and fair elections and vote margin differences will be examined across different regimes. The incentive is to elucidate whether the effects of free and fair elections and vote margin differences are conditioned by the regime type. The regime type of a country has implications for the nature of elections that are being held. The nature of elections in democracies versus military regimes, multiparty regimes and monarchies will be quite different as the functions of elections differ based on the regime type. In democracies, elections may serve to ensure accountability, representation and responsiveness whilst in other regime types elections may serve to warrant the survival of the incumbent leaders and provide few chances for the opposition to win the elections or to be a real and challenging alternation to those in power. The degree of freeness, fairness and competitiveness of an election is closely related to the regime type as there are the institutions of a regime such as the independence of media and the freedom of expression, which determine the freeness, fairness and competitiveness of an election.

**5.1.1 The Conditional Effects of Regime Types on Free & Fair Elections**

After controlling for several alternative explanations, the positively significant effects of free and fair elections maintain their effects for legislative elections. The effect of free and fair

elections is consistent and stable throughout the different models. Although we assumed that free and fair elections may mitigate the use and intensity of violence, the findings present a contradictory situation. What aspects of free and fair elections may make sense of the positive effect of free and fair elections given that it is negative effects that were predicted?

The positive relationship obtained by the analysis of this paper may be a result of the function of competitive elections during democratization and incomplete democracies. Recalling the theory section of this paper, the nature of the regime was argued to be an element that could both affect the emergence and characteristics of an election. Cederman, Gleditsch & Hug (2012) identify two mechanisms considered to be conflict-inducing. Even if these mechanisms are utilized in exploring the effects of democratization on civil war, they may also be applicable for analysing the effects of elections. The first proposed mechanism by aforementioned authors concerns the attempts by political entrepreneurs to make *demos* encounter with a given *ethos*. In other words, the political entrepreneurs in democratizing countries attempt to make the citizenship of a state to comply with a certain ethnicity. To accomplish this, political actors may resort to various forms of active discrimination, intimidation, nepotism and ethnic cleansing to serve the interests of particular ethnic groups that are considered to compose the *demos*, also the citizenship. As argued by Mann (2005), ethnic cleansing may be more likely in regimes that are at the starting phases of democratization than stable authoritarian and stably institutionalized democracies. The second mechanism concerns states that are newly embarked on democratization are argued to mainly address issues associated with nationalist sentiments and ethnicity rather than issues often concerned in stably institutionalized democracies, such as the economy, welfare and education. In democratizing countries where there is lack of a well-formulated definition of what the *ethos* and *demos* of a country is composed of, most of the defined policies are concerned with satisfying a particular group or a particular ethnicity and thus makes public goods provision policies and access to state resources a contention issue (Cederman, Gleditsch & Hug 2012, 390). The incentives of political actors to ensure their survival and hold on power can encourage them to stimulate ethnic and nationalist sentiments and thus provoke hostility toward other groups under increasing political competitiveness. Relying on arguments derived from Snyder (2000) and Mansfield & Snyder (1995), the second mechanism implies that elites strengthen their core support by raising tension with, or attacking, other groups, whilst the first proposed mechanism implies the efforts to create a citizenship in terms of ethnicity. Since mobilization efforts by elites emphasize groups



differences and allegiances, the political competition may intensify tensions between different groups. Mansfield and Snyder articulate the implications of political competitiveness in democratizing states as following:

*“Democratizing states are war-prone not because war is popular with mass public, but because domestic pressures create incentives for elites to drum up nationalist sentiment...Democratization typically creates a syndrome of weak central authority, unstable domestic coalitions, and high-energy mass politics. It brings new social groups and classes onto the political stage...Elites need to gain mass allies to defend their weakened positions. Both the newly ambitious elites and the embattled old ruling groups often use appeals to nationalism to stay astride their unmanageable political coalitions...Democratization creates a wider spectrum of politically significant groups with diverse and incompatible interests...In principle, mature democratic institutions can integrate even the widest spectrum of interests through competition for the favor of the average voter. But where political parties and representative institutions are still in their infancy, the diversity of interests may make political coalitions difficult to maintain. Often the solution is a belligerent nationalist coalition (Mansfield & Snyder 1995, 88-89).*

Another argument by Snyder is that democratization produces nationalism. Under democratization, elites may often use their control over the government, the economy and mass media to promote nationalist ideas. As a by-product of elites` efforts to persuade the people to accept divisive nationalist elites, conflicts may arise (Snyder 2000, 32). In other words, nationalism is assumed to arise during the earliest stages of democratization when nationalism is instrumentalized by elites to compete for popular support and to acquire mass support. Competitive elections in such contexts may not produce the desirable outcomes as long as the agenda during competitive elections appeal to nationalist emotions and ethnicity. If we interpret elections as a tool for democratization in which elections are characterized by a nationalist rhetoric and appeals to a particular group, which exclude and estrange other groups, the elections may lead to intensified tensions between different groups rather than mediate the tensions between diverse groups. Hence, to investigate the positive relationship of free and fair elections furtherly based on the arguments presented so far, this paper intends to control for interaction terms between free & fair elections and regime transitions and free & fair elections and democracy. The first interaction, also the interaction between free & fair elections and regime transitions is meant to control for how free and fair elections in countries experiencing a transition, whether there is a transition towards democracy or towards

autocracy, affects the severity of the conflict, whilst the second interaction is aimed to test for the effect of free and fair elections in democracies vis a vis non-democracies on conflict severity. The effects of interaction terms are presented in Table 5.3.

There is an interaction term between democracy and free & fair legislative elections, an interaction term between monarchy and free & fair legislative elections, an interaction term between military and free & fair legislative elections and an interaction term between multiparty and free & fair legislative elections in separate models. None of these interaction terms have significant effects on conflict severity. The conflict-intensifying effects of free and fair elections maintain their significance in the models that consider the interaction terms of military, multiparty and monarchy. However, the effect of free and fair elections in the model that includes the interaction term of democracy and free and fair legislative elections is non-significant. The negative coefficient of the interaction term of democracy and free and fair legislative elections indicates that free and fair legislative elections in democracies have less conflict-intensifying effects than free and fair legislative elections in non-democracies.

**Figure 5.4: The Effect of Free and Fair Legislative Elections in Democracies.**

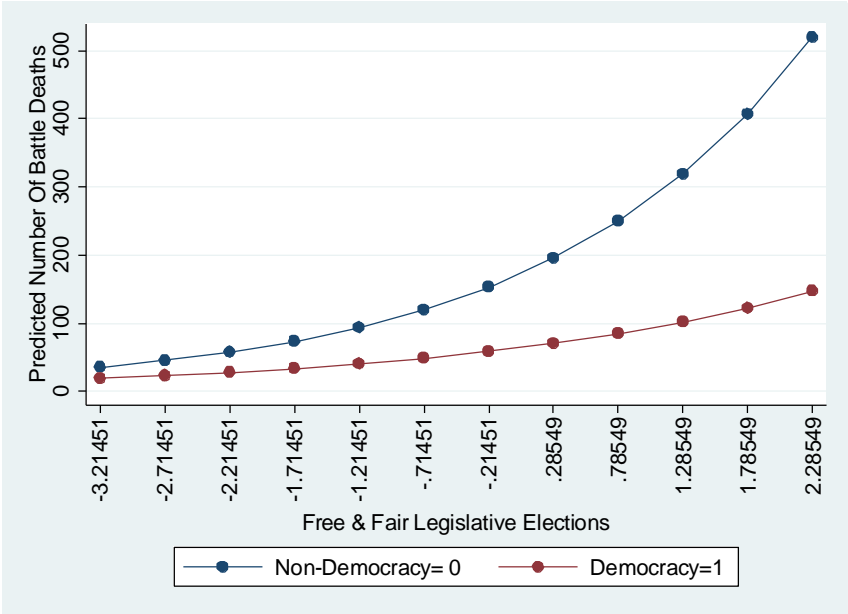


Figure 5.4 demonstrates the effect of free and fair legislative elections in democracies. At low levels of free and fair elections, there is not a considerable difference between democracies and non-democracies. here, we should be aware of low likelihood of democracies to hold elections that are not free and fair. However, the freeness and fairness of elections differ from

**Table 5.3: Negative Binominal Regressions (1989-2016): The Conditional Effects of Regime Types and Legislative Elections Years.**

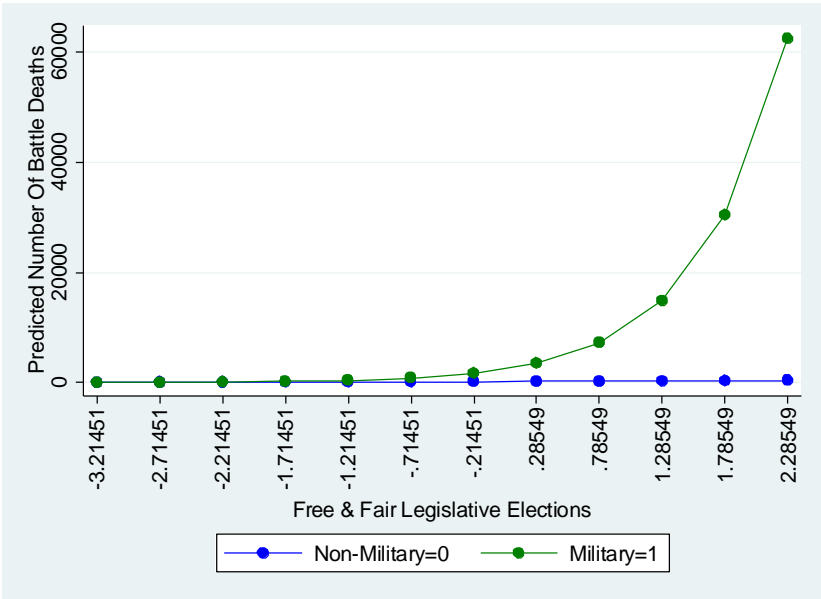
	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.196 (-0.58)	-0.179 (-0.82)	-0.354 (-1.39)	-0.326 (-1.68)
Presidential Election Years.	0.0335 (0.17)	0.0523 (0.28)	0.109 (0.55)	0.0663 (0.35)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.489 (1.57)	0.357* (2.36)	0.593** (3.18)	0.423** (2.97)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0390 (0.28)	0.0278 (0.20)	0.0411 (0.29)	0.0447 (0.32)
Vote Margins Presidential (t-1)	-0.00270 (-0.53)	-0.00369 (-0.70)	-0.00391 (-0.77)	-0.00246 (-0.46)
Vote Margins Legislative (t-1)	-0.0189* (-2.14)	-0.0181* (-2.02)	-0.0179* (-2.02)	-0.0197* (-2.20)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0246* (1.97)	0.0246 (1.88)	0.0251 (1.90)	0.0211 (1.66)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.762*** (5.15)	0.770*** (5.19)	0.773*** (5.28)	0.791*** (4.98)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.319 (-1.66)	-0.306 (-1.62)	-0.311 (-1.61)	-0.342 (-1.71)
Ethnic Diversity	0.676 (0.75)	0.736 (0.87)	0.726 (0.82)	0.493 (0.54)
Democracy	-0.987 (-1.86)	-0.998 (-1.89)	-1.063* (-2.02)	-1.001 (-1.89)
Monarchy	-2.454*** (-3.64)	-2.446*** (-3.65)	-2.440*** (-3.64)	-2.678*** (-3.73)
Military	2.499** (2.91)	2.614** (2.96)	2.502** (2.93)	2.401** (2.80)
Multiparty	0.159 (0.39)	0.156 (0.38)	0.118 (0.29)	0.130 (0.31)
Democracy*Free & Fair Legislative Elec.	-0.120 (-0.23)			
Military*Free & Fair Legislative Elec.		1.080 (1.71)		
Multiparty*Free & Fair Legislative Elec.			-0.426 (-1.05)	
Monarchy*Free & Fair Legislative Elec.				4.782 (1.59)
Constant	-5.257* (-2.29)	-5.520* (-2.45)	-5.484* (-2.44)	-5.414* (-2.41)
Ln Alpha	2.512*** (22.95)	2.510*** (23.03)	2.511*** (23.01)	2.509*** (22.91)
N	2781	2781	2781	2781

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

democracies to democracies. in countries such as Thailand, Philippines, Mexico and Kenya, which are measured as democracies, the freeness and fairness of elections in these countries are quite different from elections in more established countries such as Argentina and Brazil. In addition, observations on free and fair legislative elections and those on regime types are provided by different sources, which may imply that they have different strategies way of measurement. As elections become more free and fair, battle deaths increase both in democracies and non-democracies. the baseline number of expected battle deaths is different across democracies and non-democracies as the expected battle deaths are 35 for non-democracies and 19 for democracies. The rate at which predicted battle deaths change with free and fair elections is higher for non-democracies compared to democracies. There is approximately 20 % increase of battle deaths with a 0.5 unit change of free and fair elections in democracies, whilst the increase of battle deaths is almost 27 % with a 0.5 unit change of free and fair elections in non-democracies. However, the difference between democracies and non-democracies is not significant.

The interaction term of military regimes and free and fair elections has a positive coefficient and significant at 10 percentage level. The positive sign of the interaction term implies that free and fair legislative elections in military regimes are more conflict-intensifying than election in non-military regimes. Figure 5.5 demonstrates the implications of free and fair legislative elections in military regimes.

**Figure 5.5: The Effects of Free and Fair Legislative Elections in Military Regimes.**



As elections becomes free and fair, the difference between military and non-military regimes gets larger. With a 0.5 unit change of free and fair legislative elections, predicted battle deaths in military regimes increase from 54 to 64, which is equivalent to a 10 % increase, whilst in military regimes predicted battle deaths increase from 23 to 47, which corresponds to a percentage increase of 24. In other words, the rate at which predicted battle deaths change with a 0.5 unit change of freeness and fairness of elections is higher for military regimes than non-military regimes.

Finally, the interaction term of multiparty regimes and free and fair legislative elections has a negative coefficient, which implies that free and fair legislative elections in multiparty regimes has less conflict-intensifying effects than free and fair legislative elections in non-multiparty regimes.

**Figure 5.6 The Effects of Free and Fair Legislative Elections in Multiparty Regimes.**

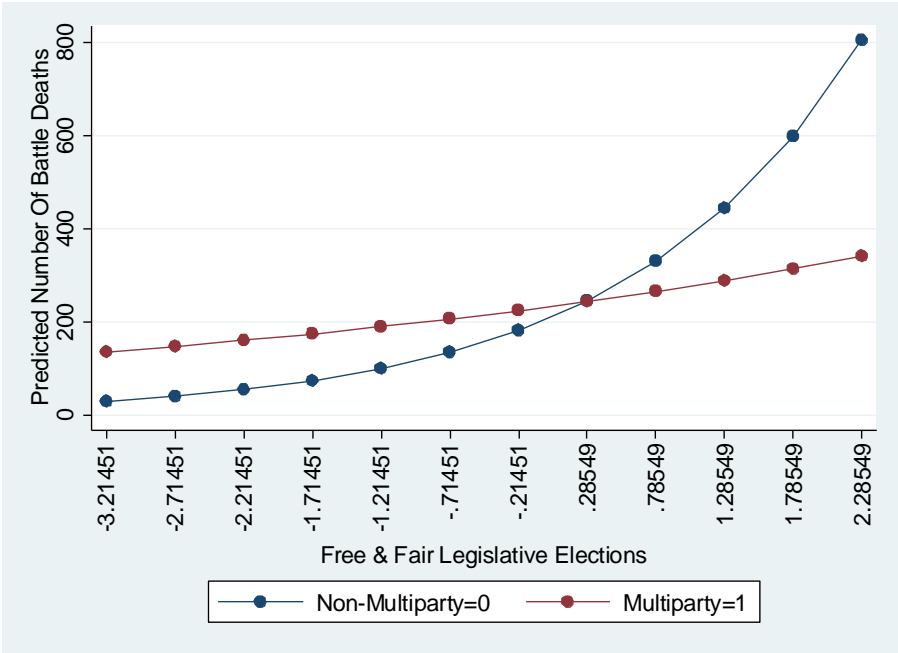
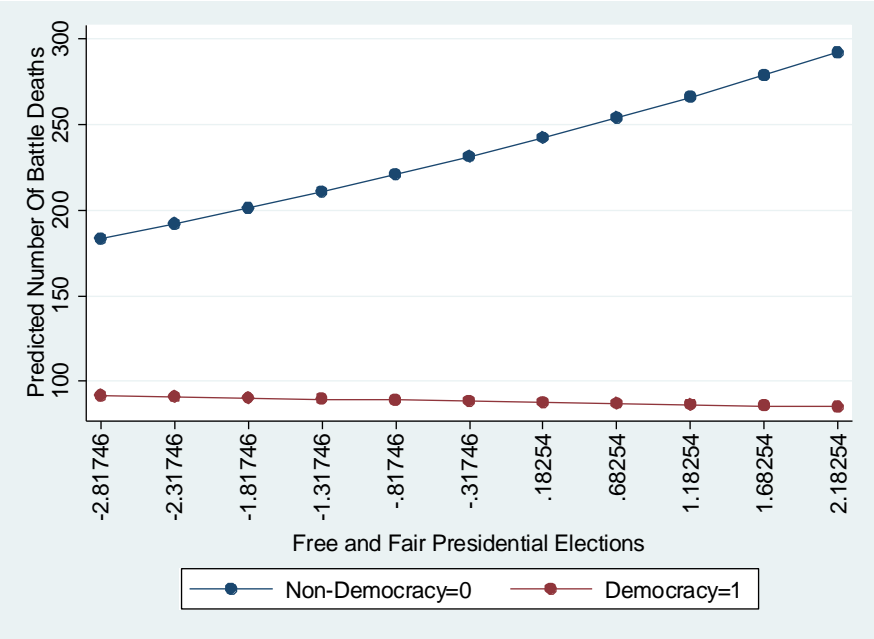


Figure 5.6 demonstrates the interaction terms of free and fair legislative elections and multiparty regimes. We can observe that at lowest level of free and fair legislative election, the number of battle deaths is approximately 31 in non-multiparty regimes, whilst the battle deaths in multiparty regimes is 136. The number in non-multiparty regimes increases 41 battle deaths with a 0.5 unit increase of free and fair legislative elections. As illustrated by the Figure 5.6 the conflict-intensifying effects of free and fair legislative elections are more prominent for non-multiparty regimes than multiparty regimes.

Could the same be the case for presidential elections as well? Free and fair elections in presidential elections have also positive effects on severity of a civil war. Despite insignificant effects of presidential elections years, free and fair elections in presidential systems tend also to increase battle deaths and make a conflict more severe. In order to investigate the positive effects of presidential elections further, a similar approach to free and fair legislative elections could be taken. The effects of these elections in presidential systems may differ in terms of the nature of regimes these elections are held in. The interaction terms of regime types and free and fair presidential elections are presented in Table 5.4. Results in Table 5.4 indicate that free and fair legislative elections maintain their positive and significant effects, whilst free and fair presidential elections become negative when the interaction term of military regimes and multiparty regimes are included, but these effects are not significant. Figure 5.7 demonstrates the effects of free and fair presidential elections in democracies.

**Figure 5.7: The Effects of Free and Fair Presidential Elections in Democracies.**



We observe from the Figure 5.7 that free and fair presidential elections reduce conflict severity in democracies, whilst free and fair presidential elections increase conflict severity in non-democratic countries. although the negative effect of free and fair presidential elections is not enormous, as battle deaths decrease from approximately 91 at the lowest level of free and fair elections to 85 at the highest level of free and fair presidential elections.

**Table 5.4: Negative Binominal Regressions (1989-2016): The Conditional Effects of Regime Types and Free and Fair Presidential Elections Years.**

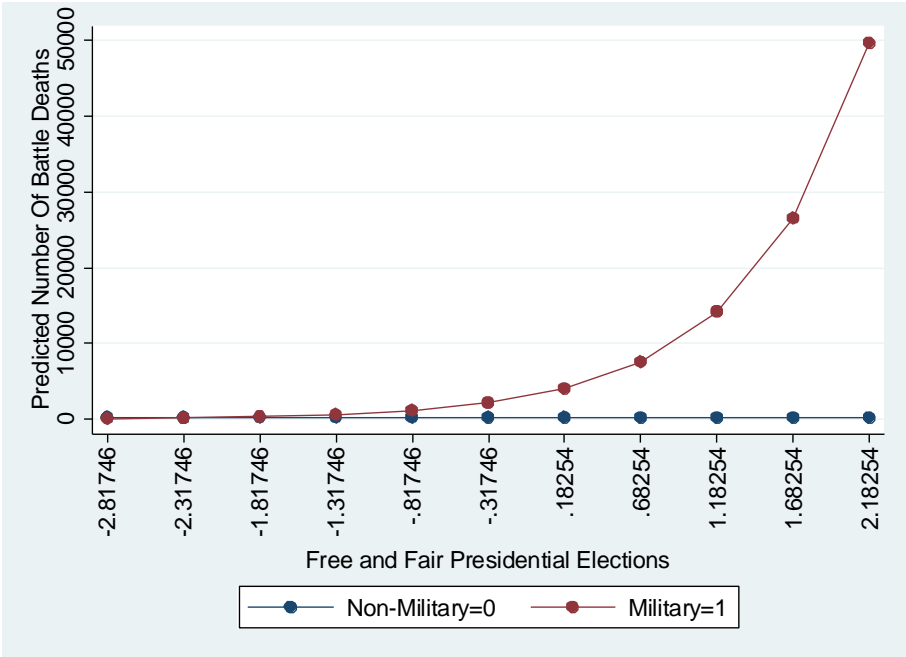
	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.250 (-1.20)	-0.237 (-1.14)	-0.259 (-1.22)
Presidential Election Years.	0.0873 (0.34)	0.113 (0.59)	0.111 (0.48)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.427** (2.88)	0.409** (2.86)	0.422** (2.95)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0932 (0.38)	-0.0424 (-0.30)	-0.0268 (-0.16)
Vote Margins Presidential (t-1)	-0.00290 (-0.53)	-0.00323 (-0.64)	-0.00214 (-0.40)
Vote Margins Legislative (t-1)	-0.0187* (-2.07)	-0.0186* (-2.06)	-0.0187* (-2.07)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0250 (1.89)	0.0246 (1.87)	0.0247 (1.88)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.762*** (5.14)	0.767*** (5.15)	0.760*** (5.10)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.316 (-1.70)	-0.307 (-1.62)	-0.312 (-1.65)
Ethnic Diversity	0.689 (0.78)	0.747 (0.87)	0.703 (0.79)
Democracy	-0.997 (-1.88)	-0.982 (-1.86)	-0.970 (-1.82)
Monarchy	-2.438*** (-3.63)	-2.417*** (-3.62)	-2.401*** (-3.56)
Military	2.503** (2.90)	2.610** (3.01)	2.538** (2.94)
Multiparty	0.155 (0.38)	0.173 (0.42)	0.195 (0.46)
Democracy*Free & Fair Pres.	-0.108 (-0.27)		
Military*Free & Fair Pres.		1.294* (2.47)	
Multiparty*Free & Fair Pres.			0.384 (0.81)
Constant	-5.285* (-2.32)	-5.487* (-2.43)	-5.308* (-2.33)
Ln Alpha	2.512*** (22.95)	2.510*** (23.01)	2.512*** (22.93)
N	2781	2781	2781

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

The interaction term of military regimes and free and fair presidential elections is positive and significant, which implies that free and fair presidential elections in military regimes are more conflict-intensifying than free and fair presidential elections in non-military regimes. Figure

5.8 demonstrates the effects of free and fair presidential elections in military regimes. Free and fair presidential elections in military regimes constitute conflict-intensifying effects, whilst free and fair presidential elections reduce conflict severity. The same effect is also present with free and fair presidential elections in multiparty regimes as free and fair presidential elections in multiparty regimes increase conflict severity, whilst they reduce conflict severity in non-multiparty regimes.

**Figure 5.8: The Effects of Free and Fair Presidential Elections in Military Regimes.**



To further examine the implications of regime types for free and fair elections, this paper intends to control the effect of regime types with another definition and operationalization of democracy.

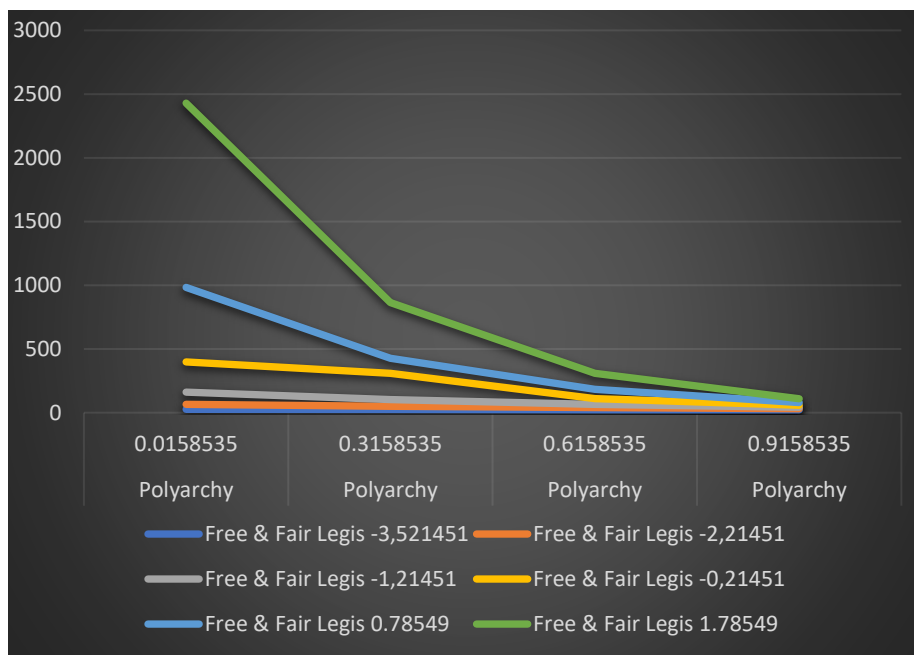
**5.1.2 Conditional Effects of Free and Fair Elections with An Alternative Measurement of Democracy.**

Table 5.5 presents the results when regime types are replaced by polyarchy which defines democracy in terms of the electoral dimensions of a democracy. This conceptualization of democracy incorporates electoral competition, the responsive of rulers to citizens, the extensiveness of suffrage, the freedom of civil society organizations to operate freely, the absence of fraud or other systematic irregularities, the freedom of expression and an independent media. Including polyarchy as the operationalization of regime type does not change the positive and significant of free and fair legislative elections. Free and fair



legislative elections are significant at 10 percentage level in the model that includes the interaction term of polyarchy and free and fair legislative elections. In addition, the negative effect of legislative election years becomes significant, which means that conflicts become less severe when there is a legislative election in a given year. When we only consider legislative election years and variables concerning legislative election years, holding continuous variables and polyarchy at their mean, the predicted battle deaths for non-legislative election years are approximately 283. The battle deaths decrease to roughly 146 when there is a legislative election year in a given year. Free and fair legislative elections maintain their significantly positive effects on severity of a conflict when an alternative definition of regime type is included in the models. The coefficient of both interaction terms is negative. The negative interaction term implies that positive effect of free and fair elections declines as states become more democratic. This effect is present for both legislative and presidential elections. Figure 5.9 demonstrates the effects of free and fair legislative elections

**Figure 5.9: The Conditional Effects of Polyarchy on Free and Fair Legislative Elections.**



as countries become more democratic. At the lowest level of free and fair legislative elections, a 0.3 unit change of polyarchy decreases battle deaths from 26, 25, 23 and to 22 when there is a high level of polyarchy. When the value of free and fair legislative elections is about -2, which indicates elections considered as not being free and fair, a 0.3 unit change of

**Table 5.5: Negative Binominal Regressions (1989-2016): The Conditional Effects of Polyarchy on Free and Fair Elections**

	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.411 (-1.42)	-0.563*** (-3.45)
Presidential Election Years.	0.0257 (0.13)	0.0591 (0.17)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.914 (1.86)	0.572*** (4.34)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0812 (0.66)	0.104 (0.15)
Vote Margins Presidential	-0.00191 (-0.34)	-0.00156 (-0.27)
Vote Margins Legislative	-0.0299*** (-3.77)	-0.0298*** (-3.75)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0154 (1.08)	0.0164 (1.13)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.813*** (4.57)	0.825*** (4.69)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.674** (-2.72)	-0.683** (-2.76)
Ethnic Diversity	-1.452 (-1.21)	-1.469 (-1.22)
Polyarchy	-2.275 (-1.67)	-2.247 (-1.66)
Polyarchy*Free & Fair Legis.	-0.653 (-0.70)	
Polyarchy*Free & Fair Pres.		-0.00537 (-0.00)
Constant	-1.010 (-0.34)	-1.167 (-0.40)
Ln Alpha	2.591*** (21.86)	2.592*** (21.88)
N	2781	2781

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

polyarchy decreases battle deaths from 65, 50, 39 and to 31 at the highest level of polyarchy.

### 5.1.3 Conditional Effects of Regime Types on Vote Margin Differences.

Similar to the effects of free and fair elections, the implications of vote margin differences may also be distinctive based on the type of the regime of a given country. Table 5.6 incorporates interactions between regime types and legislative vote share differences. The interaction between democracy and vote margins in legislative elections has a positive sign, which basically indicates that the effect of legislative vote share on conflict severity increases

**Table 5.6: Negative Binominal Regressions (1989-2016): The Conditional Effects of Regime Types on Vote Margins Differences.**

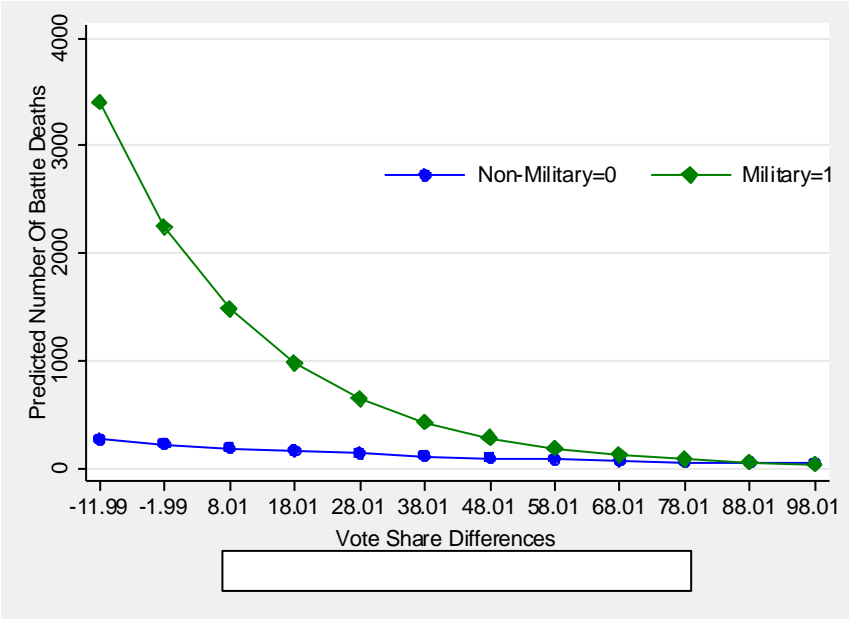
	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.237 (-1.17)	-0.244 (-1.20)
Presidential Election Years.	0.103 (0.53)	0.0826 (0.43)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.466*** (3.31)	0.444** (3.15)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0745 (0.54)	0.0636 (0.46)
Vote Margins Presidential (t-1)	-0.00304 (-0.62)	-0.00225 (-0.45)
Vote Margins Legislative (t-1)	-0.0243** (-3.15)	-0.0172 (-1.96)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0267* (2.07)	0.0275* (2.11)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.752*** (4.95)	0.758*** (4.96)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.333 (-1.79)	-0.337 (-1.80)
Ethnic Diversity	0.699 (0.82)	0.759 (0.88)
Democracy	-1.346* (-2.54)	-1.236* (-2.30)
Monarchy	-2.758*** (-4.08)	-2.745*** (-4.08)
Military	2.214** (2.65)	2.260** (2.61)
Miultiparty	-0.00480 (-0.01)	-0.0257 (-0.06)
Democracy*Vote Margins Legis.	0.0245 (1.33)	
Military*Vote Margins Legis.		-0.0245 (-0.87)
Constant	-4.723* (-2.11)	-4.845* (-2.13)
Ln Alpha	2.514*** (22.93)	2.515*** (23.02)
N	2781	2781

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

slightly faster in democracies than non-democracies and the effect is declining for increasing vote share in military regimes. We should be aware of the coefficient being negative,

confirming that the effect of margin differences in legislative elections on severity of a conflict for both groups is decreasing. However, the decrease is of greater extent for military regimes than non-military regimes. In a situation in which we only consider legislative elections and variables that account for characteristics of legislative elections, vote share differences in legislative elections between incumbents and opposition party reduce battle deaths from approximately 264 in non-military regimes when the opposition win an election by 12 percentage difference to almost 94 battle deaths in non-military regimes when the incumbents win the election by 50 percentage difference. Applying the same scenario in military regimes, the battle deaths are reduced from 3402 battle deaths at the minimum value of vote share differences to 278 battle deaths at 50 percentage vote share difference between incumbents and the opposition. In other words, incumbent losses make conflicts more severe. Figure 5.10 demonstrates the interaction term of vote share differences and military regimes.

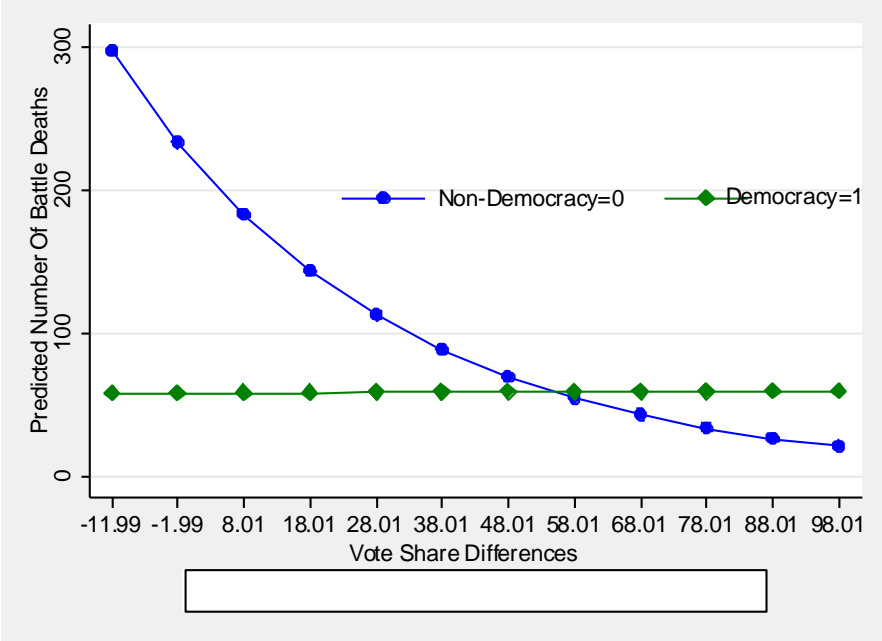
**Figure 5.10: The Effect of Vote Share Differences in Military versus Non-Military Regimes.**



From the figure 5.10, at the low levels of vote share differences, there is an enormous difference between non-military and military regimes. As vote share differences increase, the gap between non-military and military becomes smaller and smaller. We also observe that the effect of vote share differences is more prominent for military regimes than non-military regimes. The deterrent of vote share differences is slightly divergent when democracies versus non-democracies are concerned. In the same context as described earlier, in which we only considered legislative elections, vote share differences reduce the severity of a conflict from

approximately 297 battle deaths at the minimum value of vote share difference to 69 battle deaths at 50 percentage vote share difference in non-democracies. However, in the same situation when the regime type is a democracy, there is a very small increase of battle deaths. this relationship is illustrated by Figure 5.11 We observe that the effect of legislative vote

**Figure 5.11: The Effect of Vote Share Differences in Democracies versus Non-Democracies.**



share differences on severity of a conflict is stable in democracies, whilst in non-democracies there is a negative effect. In other words, there are diverging effects of legislative vote share differences in non-democracies versus democracies. The legislative vote share differences have a very small positive effect on conflict severity in democracies.

**5.2 Contextual Effects of Transition Periods**

In addition to election characteristics, the context of which elections are being held, needs to be considered. The regime type variables are meant to emphasize the contextual effects on both elections and severity of a conflict. However, as has been argued in theory section of this paper, another aspect that may account for contextual effect is the transitional periods of a political unit. Earlier in this paper, we argued that civil wars tend to occur in semi-autocratic and semi-democratic regimes where the regime is not a completely established autocracy or democracy. Such regimes, which are located somewhere between a democracy and autocracy are often prone to fluctuations of regime stability and have often-changing structures. Regime transitions are likely to be correlated with both elections and conflict severity. Countries that

experience a transition towards democracy will attribute enormous emphasis on holding elections as elections are often interpreted as a milestone for implementing democracy. regime transitions may also intensify tensions between different groups and between opposition groups and incumbent regimes. The intensified tensions may be caused by the impacts that regime transitions have on the existing and established configurations of power between different groups including opposition groups and incumbent regimes. A regime transition may result in altering the existing power relations between governing elites and opposition groups as transitions of regimes suppose providing opposition groups access to power. A lack of willingness of incumbent elites to relinquish both the collective and individual advantages and benefits of maintaining power during the transition periods may trigger opposition groups or the state to implement violent measures to either ensure staying in power or to ensure acquiring access to power.

In countries experiencing a regime transition the norms and patterns are less established and an uncertainty is related to the future of elections. In such contexts where there is a lack of democratic norms and democratic culture, the elections may serve to intensify tensions between different groups and between incumbents and opposition because these different groups have not yet internalized democratic norms such as tolerance and respect for outcomes produced by elections. In order to account for the effect of transition periods and effects of elections during the transition periods, this paper has included a set variables and interaction terms. These variables are presented in Table 5.7. Transition periods is a dichotomous variable that measure if there was a transition in a given year. Transition in election years measures elections that have been held during the same year as the transition period. In addition, two interaction terms, one of transition periods and legislative election years and the other of transition periods and presidential election years are included. We observe that transition periods are positively related to conflict severity and this effect is statistically significant. This effect means that transitions increase battle deaths. Figure 5.9 demonstrates the effects of variables included in Table 5.7. The transition in election years variable that estimates the impact of elections in the same years as the transition periods. Elections that are being held during a

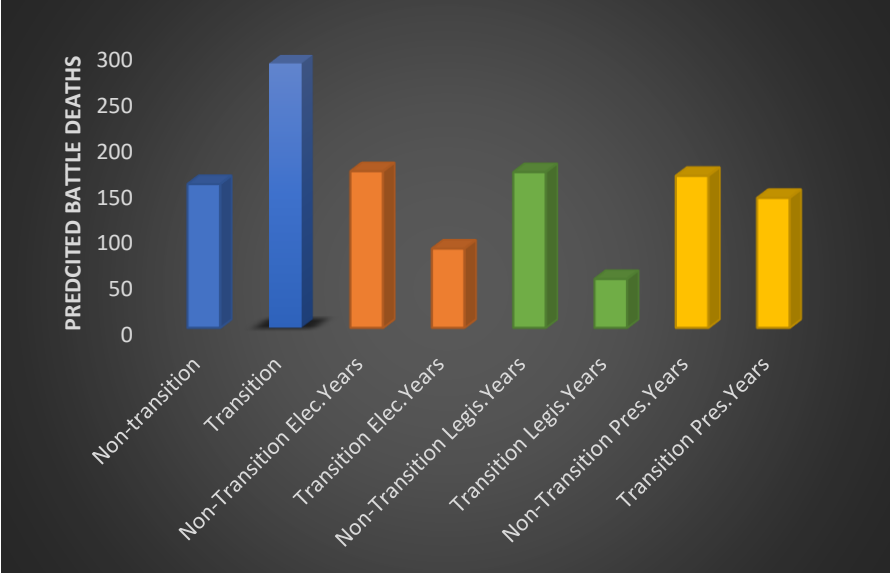
**Table 5.7: Negative Binominal Regressions (1989-2016): Transition Periods and Contextual Effects of Transition Periods.**

	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.244 (-1.15)	-0.199 (-0.93)	-0.127 (-0.51)	-0.243 (-1.15)
Presidential Election Years.	0.0497 (0.26)	0.135 (0.74)	0.0858 (0.45)	0.0978 (0.52)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.429** (2.93)	0.403** (2.68)	0.374* (2.33)	0.426** (2.88)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0401 (0.28)	0.0266 (0.19)	0.0291 (0.20)	0.0302 (0.22)
Vote Margins Presidential (t-1)	-0.00278 (-0.53)	-0.00293 (-0.58)	-0.00446 (-0.85)	-0.00263 (-0.50)
Vote Margins Legislative (t-1)	-0.0187* (-2.08)	-0.0186* (-2.09)	-0.0177* (-1.98)	-0.0189* (-2.09)
Transition Periods	0.587* (2.21)	0.804** (2.68)	0.777** (2.75)	0.647* (2.30)
L.OilRents	0.0250 (1.89)	0.0255 (1.89)	0.0261 (1.91)	0.0249 (1.88)
L.logpopu	0.764*** (5.12)	0.777*** (5.17)	0.774*** (5.16)	0.768*** (5.12)
L.lnGDPpercapita	-0.318 (-1.68)	-0.308 (-1.61)	-0.308 (-1.61)	-0.314 (-1.65)
Ethnic Diversity	0.691 (0.78)	0.668 (0.75)	0.686 (0.77)	0.700 (0.79)
Democracy	-0.992 (-1.88)	-1.023 (-1.93)	-1.055 (-1.95)	-1.007 (-1.89)
Monarchy	-2.432*** (-3.62)	-2.452*** (-3.63)	-2.518*** (-3.64)	-2.436*** (-3.63)
Military	2.508** (2.91)	2.521** (2.90)	2.495** (2.85)	2.510** (2.90)
Multiparty	0.161 (0.39)	0.137 (0.33)	0.0985 (0.23)	0.147 (0.35)
Transition in Election Years.		-0.616 (-1.28)		
Transition Periods*Legislative Elec			-0.835 (-1.21)	
Transition Periods*Presidential Elec				-0.275 (-0.47)
Constant	-5.303* (-2.34)	-5.576* (-2.43)	-5.518* (-2.41)	-5.395* (-2.35)
Ln Alpha	2.512*** (22.96)	2.511*** (23.00)	2.511*** (22.99)	2.512*** (22.98)
N	2781	2781	2781	2781

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

transition period has negative implications for conflict severity. From the Figure 5.12 we observe that conflict severity decreases from 170 predicted battle deaths in non-transition election years to 86 in transition election years.

**Figure 5.12: The Effects of Transition Periods, Elections During Transition Periods and Interactions of Legislative and Presidential Election Years and Transition Periods.**



The interaction coefficient of both transition periods and legislative election years and transition periods and presidential elections years is negative. The negative coefficient suggests that elections, both legislative and presidential elections, during transition periods have stronger conflict-reducing effects when they are held in transition periods than non-transition periods. In other words, elections that are being held during in a given year where there has been a transition reduce conflict severity more than elections in non-transition as periods. as illustrated by Figure 5.9, battle deaths reduce from 169 in non-legislative election years during the transition periods to 53 battle deaths in legislative election years during a transition period. Although transition periods have positive and intensifying effects on a conflict, the elections that occur during a transition period reduce the severity of a conflict. however, more scrutiny could be conducted to reveal how the direction of a transition, whether a transition towards more democracy or a transition towards autocracy is related to conflict severity. This would enable us to assess if a particular set of transitions are more suitable for decreasing conflict severity.



### **5.3 What Do These Results Mean?**

The most interesting and unexpected finding of this paper is the positive implications of free and fair elections on conflict severity. Free and fair elections have conflict-intensifying effects, which is a contradictory finding to the conflict-reducing assumption of free and fair elections made by Dunning (2011) whom argue that electoral and free competition may incentivize participation in elections by increasing oppositions probability of success of maintaining power through electoral means and thus making violent action less attractive, Harish & Little (2017) whom suggest that elections generate suitable opportunities for mobilization, thereby increasing the effectiveness of non-violent action, Flores & Nooruddin 2012; Brancati & Snyder 2013; Matanock 2017, whom all highlight that fair electoral competition conducted by institutions warranting adherence with elections may mitigate commitment problems associated with respecting the formal processes of elections, and maintaining power through electoral means and thus making violent action less attractive, Harish & Little (2017) whom suggest that elections generate suitable opportunities for mobilization, thereby increasing the effectiveness of non-violent action, Flores & Nooruddin 2012; Brancati & Snyder 2013; Matanock 2017, whom all highlight that fair electoral competition conducted by institutions warranting adherence with elections may mitigate commitment problems associated with respecting the formal processes of elections, and finally Bartusevicius & Skaaning (2018) argue that electoral contestation is positively related to civil peace, implying that “elections and associated institutions reduce violent incentives, probably because they offer alternatives to violence, facilitate autocratic divide-and-rule strategies, and diminish the acceptance of anti-government violence (Bartusevicius & Skaaning 2018, 638). The positive effect of free and fair elections is in compliance with findings provided by Cederman, Gleditch & Hug (2012) whom find that competitive elections increase the likelihood of both ethnic and nonethnic civil war even if the positive effects of competitive elections on civil conflict are weak. The authors propose that the sore-losers mechanism may play a role in both competitive and non-competitive elections. This mechanism implies the propensity of losers to accept the results of elections. Sore losers are often argued to be former combatants in civil wars and thus engaging in conflict after electoral defeat reignites ethnic civil wars. Sore-loser mechanism may also be applied when there exist groups that have been excluded from the electoral competition at the outset and thus excluded from any meaningful potential access to political power (Cederman, Gleditsch & Hug 2012, 394).

The findings of this paper showed also that elections *per se* do not cause violence, at least not legislative elections. This may mean that the process of competing for political power and overall process of an election is the mechanism which contributes to whether a conflict becomes more severe or not. The process of competing for political power is argued to often exacerbate existing tensions and underlying social grievances and escalates them into violence (Motsamai 2010, 9). Political competitiveness during elections in countries that experience a civil war, may worsen the already volatile and vulnerable tensions between partners and groups engaging in a conflict. In order to acquire the support of the people actors will have to refer to sentiments that categorize people whether in terms of nationality, ethnicity, religion or culture. This categorization may thus create a polarization which may revive the differences between people and make the political process more conflictual and factious. Political competition during elections in countries that wrestle with problems associated with violence also lacks the commitment to the process of political competitiveness and the process of election. The commitment problem is reflected in the actors' inability to trust each other, which makes it more difficult to keep the political process ongoing, as both actors will fear that compliance will be taken advantage of. In other words, there is a certain degree of uncertainty related to what political competition may generate. The actors are uncertain about elections being held in the future and what the nature of these elections will be. The ex ante uncertainty of elections and the lack of commitment to elections deter either insurgent groups or the state from giving up arms and eliminating the use of violence as an option. Some scholars assume that a set of power-sharing institutions and arrangements may matter more than democratic competition as power-sharing institutions warrant some form of representation at the political center and the opportunity to take part in decision making is what serves to mitigate conflict (Hartzell & Hoddie 2003, 320). There are also aspects of democracy that may resolve the commitment problems to elections and the uncertainty related to the future of elections. These are the institutions that regulate the political process and provide opportunities for insurgent groups to react against reneged promises without having to go back to conflict. When political and legal structures that place constraints on those in power exist, the commitment to political competition during elections may not matter as much as there are institutional constraints on executive power (Walter 2010). Even if insurgent groups don't acquire enormous success and formal governance during elections, the presence of political and legal institutions ensure insurgent groups that elections may not lead to a majority rule or a tyranny. The expected utility of committing to political competitiveness even without realistic chance of gaining power through the electoral channel should be higher

if there are institutions that protect the rule of law and constrain those in power. In the absence of such institutional guarantees, political competition may mean exclusion from state power. The exclusion from state power and competition over the spoils of government is seen as an important source of conflict. In other words, the conflict-intensifying effects of competitive elections may be diverging based on the regime structure. The findings of this paper support the claim that the effect of free and fair elections differ across different regime types, as the conflict-triggering effects of free and fair elections are observable mainly in military regimes. This finding is consistent with the conflict onset study of Fjelde (2010) who demonstrates that military regimes run a higher risk of conflict than other forms of authoritarian regimes such as single-party authoritarian regimes. According to Fjelde, the higher risk of conflict in military regimes is due to their institutional and organizational inability to reach into society that would make them able to monitor and identify disruptive activity in a way that prevents promiscuous purge (Fjelde 2010, 200). In other words, military regimes lack mechanisms needed for co-optation strategies to turn potential opponents to remain loyal by integrating them to regimes and by creating vested interests in the regime's survival. Magaloni (2008) emphasises that the survival and longevity of authoritarian rules can be maximized when they are able to co-opt rivals by implementing power-share arrangements that warrant a share of power over the long run. The absence of power-sharing arrangements that could minimize the risk of overthrow of authoritarian rules, and could maximize the interests of potential rivals in supporting the survival of incumbents, forces military regimes to rely on coercive strategies and terror strategies with a high risk of backfiring (Fjelde 2010, 200). Thus, the coercive strategies utilized by military regimes, may lead to more severe conflicts as military regimes fail to implement non-violent and co-opting strategies regarding interacting with opponents. In contrast to military regimes, free and fair elections in democracies appear to reduce conflict severity. This finding is compatible with assumptions and findings highlighting the conflict-reducing effects of democracies and with democratic civil peace theories arguing that democratic governments reduce the incentives to engage in an insurgency by facilitating non-violent action, and regimes that are highly democratized have a significantly lower probability of civil war than so called hybrid regimes conceptualizing regimes scoring in the middle range of autocracy-democracy index (Fjelde 2010; Hegre, Ellingsen, Gates & Gleditsch 2001; Henderson & Singer 2000). A more appropriate way of identifying in which circumstances and regime structures elections make conflicts more severe would be an elaboration of whether military regimes where the conflict-intensifying effects of elections are more prominent, encompasses and display some

superficially democratic institutions alongside with autocratic institutions. The lack of this elaboration can be emphasized as a shortcoming of this paper and as a theme to be explored furtherly.

## **6. Robustness**

The main reason that this paper applies negative binominal regression over a Poisson model is to cope with problems related to overdispersion on the dependent variable. In order to observe how the results might change when there were active battle deaths in a given year, this paper aims to test the main values presented by Table 5.1, Table 5.2, Table 5.3, Table 5.4 and Table 5.6 by eliminating the zero values of the dependent variable. The results of the models with only years where there was more than one active battle death are presented by Table 6.1. This results in a considerable reduction of observations. In these models, legislative election years are negatively associated with the severity of conflict. For most of the models, the conflict-detering effect of legislative election years is non-significant. Free and fair legislative elections maintain their positively significant effects. Free and fair legislative elections remain significant across different models even when we only consider active battle years.

Both monarchies and democracies, which have negative effects on severity of a conflict, are not significant in the models of only active years of battle. The only regime type that maintains its significant effect is military regimes that have significant and positive implication on severity of a conflict. However, the findings from the main models are still confirmed by the models concerning only active year of battle deaths. Legislative election years reduce the severity of a conflict, free and fair elections make a conflict more severe, the deterrent effect of democracies and the intensifying effects of military regimes and large populations, have all significant effects as they were in the models that incorporated the zero values of the dependent variable.

A distinguishing finding in Table 6.1 is the significant effect of GDP per capita that is aimed to control for the effects of economic prosperity on severity of a conflict. In the main models including the zero values of the severity of a conflict, the negative effect of GDP per capita did not meet the conventional levels of statistical significance. The negative effect of economic prosperity, which implicates that economic well-being reduces the severity of a conflict, becomes significant when the zero values of dependent variable is eliminated from the models.

**Table 6.1: Negative Binominal Regressions (1986-2016): Models in Table 4.1, Table 4.2, Table 4.3, Table 4.4 and Table 4.6 With Only Active Battle Years.**

	Table 4.1	Table 4.2	Table 4.3	Table 4.3	Table 4.3	Table 4.3	Table 4.4	Table 4.4	Table 4.4	Table 4.6	Table 4.6
Legislative Election Years.	-0.229 (-1.72)	-0.196 (-1.42)	0.0218 (0.10)	-0.122 (-0.83)	-0.191 (-1.18)	-0.225 (-1.60)	-0.222 (-1.59)	-0.183 (-1.36)	-0.236 (-1.75)	-0.186 (-1.36)	-0.196 (-1.42)
Presidential Election Years.	0.214 (1.05)	0.204 (1.03)	0.132 (0.67)	0.200 (1.04)	0.200 (1.01)	0.217 (1.08)	0.410 (1.71)	0.254 (1.25)	0.331 (1.36)	0.223 (1.12)	0.203 (1.02)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.456*** (4.00)	0.413*** (3.58)	0.701** (3.02)	0.305* (2.26)	0.405* (2.53)	0.408*** (3.58)	0.400*** (3.39)	0.388*** (3.42)	0.402*** (3.70)	0.442*** (3.78)	0.414*** (3.57)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0165 (0.09)	0.0361 (0.19)	-0.000753 (-0.00)	0.00630 (0.03)	0.0360 (0.19)	0.0392 (0.21)	0.360 (1.84)	-0.0809 (-0.37)	-0.162 (-0.69)	0.0445 (0.24)	0.0360 (0.19)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0174 (1.43)	0.0152 (1.32)	0.0145 (1.28)	0.0150 (1.34)	0.0152 (1.32)	0.0144 (1.23)	0.0153 (1.33)	0.0152 (1.32)	0.0153 (1.36)	0.0145 (1.27)	0.0152 (1.32)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.261* (2.52)	0.251* (2.45)	0.241* (2.35)	0.255* (2.49)	0.250* (2.45)	0.261* (2.48)	0.242* (2.35)	0.251* (2.45)	0.245* (2.40)	0.253* (2.49)	0.251* (2.45)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.341** (-2.90)	-0.349** (-3.02)	-0.351** (-3.01)	-0.341** (-2.99)	-0.350** (-3.01)	-0.357** (-3.02)	-0.341** (-2.95)	-0.343** (-2.99)	-0.350** (-3.03)	-0.338** (-2.96)	-0.349** (-3.01)
Ethnic Diversity	-0.565 (-0.68)	-0.549 (-0.69)	-0.583 (-0.73)	-0.517 (-0.68)	-0.551 (-0.69)	-0.585 (-0.73)	-0.557 (-0.70)	-0.504 (-0.65)	-0.576 (-0.71)	-0.554 (-0.70)	-0.543 (-0.68)
Democracy	-0.581 (-1.22)	-0.547 (-1.16)	-0.514 (-1.09)	-0.526 (-1.12)	-0.543 (-1.16)	-0.565 (-1.19)	-0.540 (-1.14)	-0.516 (-1.10)	-0.479 (-1.04)	-0.695 (-1.46)	-0.550 (-1.16)
Monarchy	-1.062 (-1.70)	-1.086 (-1.78)	-1.145 (-1.84)	-1.071 (-1.74)	-1.085 (-1.78)	-1.343 (-1.89)	-1.091 (-1.77)	-1.059 (-1.74)	-1.020 (-1.67)	-1.107 (-1.80)	-1.086 (-1.78)
Military	1.542** (2.66)	1.516** (2.67)	1.510** (2.71)	1.616** (2.67)	1.517** (2.68)	1.488** (2.61)	1.521** (2.70)	1.599** (2.71)	1.556** (2.75)	1.513** (2.66)	1.522** (2.65)
Multiparty	0.301 (0.69)	0.313 (0.72)	0.311 (0.72)	0.322 (0.75)	0.316 (0.74)	0.295 (0.68)	0.308 (0.70)	0.335 (0.78)	0.390 (0.92)	0.311 (0.72)	0.312 (0.72)
Vote Margins Presidential		-0.00877* (-2.17)	-0.00848* (-2.14)	-0.00946* (-2.32)	-0.00873* (-2.15)	-0.00865* (-2.13)	-0.00944* (-2.19)	-0.00896* (-2.32)	-0.00791 (-1.88)	-0.00852* (-2.09)	-0.00859* (-2.09)
Vote Margins Legislative		-0.00827	-0.00886	-0.00790	-0.00830	-0.00852	-0.00813	-0.00823	-0.00864	-0.0156*	-0.00785

Democracy*Free & Fair Legislative Elec.	(-1.06)	(-1.15)	(-1.02)	(-1.08)	(-1.09)	(-1.05)	(-1.05)	(-1.12)	(-2.35)	(-0.93)	
		-0.597									
		(-1.50)									
Military*Free & Fair Legislative Elec.			0.760								
			(1.50)								
Multiparty*Free & Fair Legislative Elec.				0.0222							
				(0.07)							
Monarchy*Free & Fair Legislative Elec.					9.071**						
					(2.81)						
Multiparty*Free & Fair Pres.						-0.769					
						(-1.84)					
Military*Free & Fair Pres.							0.837				
							(1.63)				
Democracy*Free & Fair Pres.								0.827			
								(1.65)			
Democracy*Vote Margins Legis.									0.0319*		
									(2.10)		
Military*Vote Margins Legis.										-0.00339	
										(-0.16)	
Constant	4.694*	4.953**	5.144**	4.782**	4.962**	4.870**	5.058**	4.837**	5.013**	4.857**	4.936**
	(2.50)	(2.65)	(2.72)	(2.61)	(2.65)	(2.61)	(2.70)	(2.62)	(2.68)	(2.64)	(2.65)
Ln Alpha	1.123***	1.115***	1.113***	1.112***	1.115***	1.113***	1.113***	1.113***	1.113***	1.112***	1.115***
	(17.26)	(17.44)	(17.52)	(17.94)	(17.44)	(17.43)	(17.47)	(17.74)	(17.33)	(17.34)	(17.46)
N	1224	1221	1221	1221	1221	1221	1221	1221	1221	1221	1221

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

Most of the variables included in the models so far to explain severity of a conflict addresses characteristics at country and state level. Elections may be interpreted as an element that may affect the decisions of both states and insurgent groups, and thus may be comprehended as a characteristic of both at country or state level and rebel group level. However, the actions and decisions taken by rebel groups influence also the pace of violence as much as factors at the state level do. Similar to governments and states, the strategic decisions rebel groups make, and the changes rebel groups experience directly affect conflict severity. If we assume that the process of increasing or decreasing the pace of violence during a conflict is determined by a strategic interplay between governments and rebel groups, the factors that directly affect rebel groups will have implications for their capability and decisiveness to sustain violence. In this context, a factor that is often highlighted by other studies is the capacity of rebel groups (Lu & Thies 2011, Lujala 2009, Heger & Saleyhan 2007 and Hultman & Peksen 2017). The fluctuations of the strength and capability of a rebel groups may have considerable effects on how capable a rebel group is to challenge a state militarily. A rebel group is more challenging to defeat once rebel groups have mobilized a sizeable force and demonstrated their ability to endure the costs of conflict (Clayton 2013, 611). Relatively strong rebel groups are more likely to produce high intensity violence, challenging core government interests and threaten the survival of the regime. Thus, I test the relative strength of rebel groups as a control variable. The relative strength of rebel groups is measured by UCDP database. The variable is constructed by calculating the scaled value of the state forces divided by the number of troops in a rebel movement. The scaled value of the state force is calculated by multiplying the total number of government forces by the proportion of troops. However, a shortcoming of the variables concerning the capabilities of rebel groups is the lack of updated and recent observations. The observations of relative strength of rebel groups of the variable utilized by this paper provide data only from 1989 to 2003. Table 6.2 presents the findings when rebel capacity is included in the models. The observations of the models are decreased to 317, which demonstrates the shortcoming of the data available on rebel groups strength and capability. Rebel capacity is positively related to severity of civil war and the positive effect of rebel capacity is significant. The positive effect of rebel capacity means that conflicts tend to become more severe as rebel groups are more capable of fighting. In this context, the capability of rebel group is measured as the number of troops in a rebel movement. As rebel groups become stronger in terms of increases in their troop, conflicts become more intense. From Table 6.2, we observe that legislative election years maintain their negative effects on severity of a

**Table 6.2: Negative Binominal Regressions. The Effect of Relative Rebel Strength As A Control Variable.**

	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.481 (-1.78)	-0.455 (-1.72)	-0.518 (-1.92)
Presidential Election Years.	0.837* (2.07)	0.850* (2.15)	0.750 (1.85)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.272 (1.67)	0.267 (1.70)	0.360 (1.95)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.115 (0.37)	0.112 (0.36)	0.137 (0.46)
Vote Margins Presidential		-0.0133* (-2.20)	-0.0146* (-2.50)
Vote Margins Legislative		0.0104 (0.79)	0.00956 (0.83)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.263 (-1.38)	-0.243 (-1.25)	-0.222 (-1.17)
Ethnic Diversity	-0.722 (-0.83)	-0.659 (-0.76)	-0.566 (-0.67)
Democracy	0.0845 (0.11)	0.0530 (0.07)	-0.101 (-0.14)
Monarchy	1.508** (2.91)	1.520** (3.06)	1.378** (2.83)
Military	1.539** (3.06)	1.604** (3.29)	1.490*** (3.37)
Miultiparty	0.765 (1.33)	0.796 (1.46)	0.683 (1.35)
Rebel Capacity	1.436* (2.40)	1.446* (2.50)	1.482** (2.69)
Transition Periods			-0.410 (-0.76)
Constant	-0.609 (-0.15)	-0.631 (-0.15)	-0.676 (-0.17)
Ln Alpha	0.978*** (8.39)	0.971*** (8.36)	0.966*** (8.29)
N	317	317	317

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

conflict. In the first two models, legislative election years are significant at 10 percent-level, which is not reported in Table 6.2. In the third model in Table 6.2, legislative election years are significant at 10 percentage level at the last model of Table 6.2. In contrast to legislative



election years, presidential election years have positive effects on battle deaths, which means that battle deaths increase when there is an election concerning executive and presidents. For the first two models, the effect of presidential elections is significant at 5 percentage level. Free and fair legislative elections maintain their positive effects also in models concerning rebel groups strength. For the first two models of Table 6.2, free and fair legislative elections are significant at 10 percentage level. The significance of free and fair legislative elections at the last model is 0.051, which is a significance of almost at 5 percentage level.

In the theory and hypothesis section of this paper, some arguments distinguished pre-and post-election periods. The arguments suggested that incumbents, opposition groups and insurgent groups may behave differently during the varying stages of an election cycle. Efforts of incumbents and opposition groups to create a peaceful pre-election periods in order to be perceived as responsible and willing to promote elections by the voters may be associated with the period prior to the elections. The reactions of the incumbents or insurgent groups in a post-election period may be different. In addition, we have argued that the information provided by elections regarding the popular support of either incumbent regimes or opposition groups will influence the decision to engage in violence, but this information is only revealed after an election. To test these arguments, two variables will be included in the models. The variables are intended to investigate the effects of post-and pre-elections on severity of a conflict. The pre-election periods estimate the impact of elections one year prior the election, whilst post-election measures whether there was an election the year before (i.e the post-election period). The results of the model that included post-and pre-election periods for both legislative and presidential elections are presented by Table 6.3. From Table 6.3, we can observe that pre-election periods in both legislative and presidential elections are negatively related to severity of a conflict, which means that violence of a conflict is reduced in the year before the election. the negative effect of pre-election periods is present for both types of elections, but only the effect of pre-election period of legislative elections is significant. On the other hand, post-election periods are positively related to the severity of a conflict, which purports that violence of a conflict increases the following year of an election. However, this finding lacks a significance coefficient that precluded us from inferring the positive effect of post-election periods. Legislative election years become significant when the model accounts for pre- and post-election periods. On the other hand, free and fair legislative elections maintain its positive and significant effect on severity of conflict.

**Table 6.3 Negative Binominal Regressions. The Effects of Post-and Pre-Election Periods.**

	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.530* (-2.03)
Presidential Election Years.	-0.169 (-0.78)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.658*** (5.50)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.162 (1.06)
Vote Margins Presidential	-0.0114 (-1.68)
Vote Margins Legislative	-0.0240* (-2.41)
Regime Transitions	0.543* (2.13)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0228 (1.70)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.769*** (5.60)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.222 (-1.20)
Ethnic Diversity	0.649 (0.76)
Democracy	-1.147* (-2.18)
Monarchy	-2.531*** (-3.60)
Military	2.394** (2.91)
Miultiparty	0.0499 (0.13)
Legislative Post-Elections	0.0111 (0.04)
Presidential Post-Elections	0.362 (1.19)
Legislative Pre-Elections	-0.532* (-2.12)
Presidential Pre-Elections	-0.184 (-0.68)
Constant	-5.777** (-2.78)
Ln Alpha	2.501*** (22.88)
N	2779

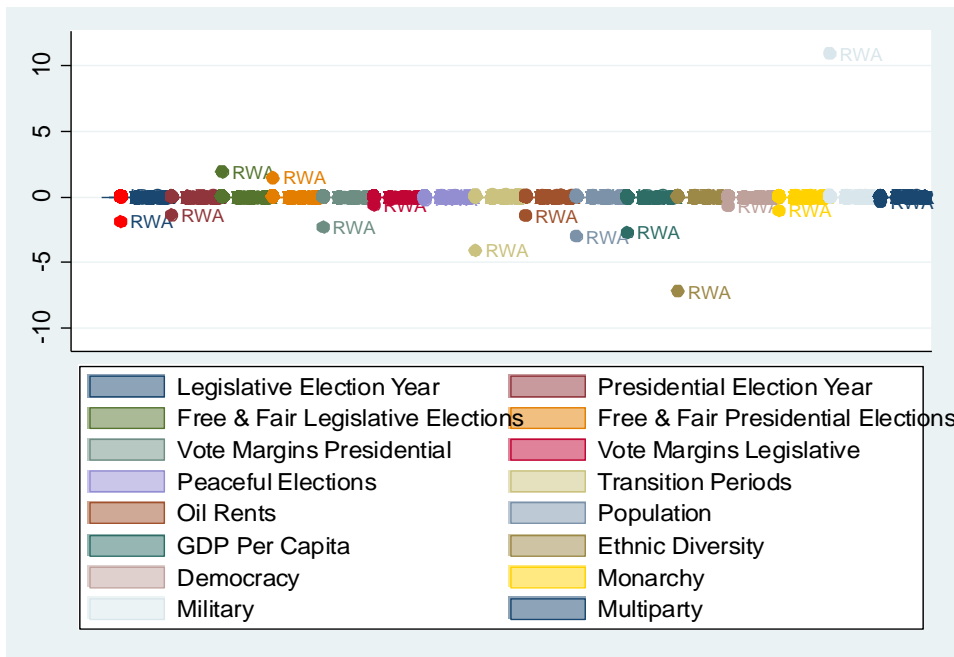
## 6.1 Influential Observations

Another interesting question, which provides also a robustness to the positive effects of free and fair elections, is whether the results are driven by some influential observations or if the models are successful in capturing what a more general relationship is. In other words, how much would the estimated coefficients change if one observation or a set of observations were removed from the data. An observation can be described as being influential if its exclusion alters the results of the regression substantially (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen 2017, 153). Such outliers, also observations that have either unusual values on one or more variables or unusual combinations on several variables, can affect the calculations of the slope coefficients and standard errors. The command of *dfbeta* and Cook's distance will be utilized in order to obtain observations that exhibit substantial influence on the dependent variable. *Dfbeta* measures each observation's effect on each regression coefficient. If the reported value for an observation is positive the unit pulls the coefficient upwards, if the value is negative it pulls it downwards. The *dfbeta* values of the variables highlighted in this paper are demonstrated by Figure 6.1.

As can be seen in Figure 6.1 Rwanda is a unit that has more influence on dependent variable than other units. We can also observe that the greater influence of Rwanda is persistent across different variables. Especially, for the variables of ethnic diversity and military, Rwanda has substantial effects. Rwanda pulls the coefficient of ethnic diversity downwards, whilst it pulls the coefficient of military upwards. Would the results change if the observations on Rwanda are excluded from the models? The results of the model excluding Rwanda is presented by Table 6.4. The observations on ethnic diversity became significant as Rwanda has been removed from the models. Free and fair legislative elections maintain their significant and positive effects and were not prone to substantial changes as influential observations of Rwanda were removed from the models.

Another way of detecting influential observations is to employ *Cook's distance*. According to the Stata 12 Manual, "Cook's distance measures the aggregate change in the estimated coefficients when each observation is left out of the estimation. A size-adjusted cut-off, that is influential cases having a Cook's distance greater than  $4/N$ , is employed as a rule to identify influential observations.

**Figure 6.1: Dfbeta Plot of Each Variable.**



In this paper, the cut-off will be  $4/2781$ , which corresponds to a cook's distance of 0.00143833. Thus, cases that will have higher values than 0.0014 may be identified as exhibiting considerable influence on the dependent variable. We can also identify all the observations that fall above the size-adjusted cut-off. Figure 6.2 illustrates the observations that fall above 0.0014 size-adjusted cut-off. As can be seen from the Figure. Rwanda exerts the most influence on the regression model, whilst Afghanistan in 2014, Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1995 and Ethiopia in 1998 & 1999 are among the cases which have higher values than 0.0014 size-adjusted cut-off. The observations on these particular cases and periods refer to some extreme events that attributed high values of dependent variables on these countries. The influential observations in Ethiopia in period 1998-1999 refer to the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which resulted in almost 80.000 battle deaths.

**Figure 6.2: Influential Cases provided by Cook's distance.**

	ccode	cooksd
26.	AFG	.0015552
603.	COD	.0044364
886.	ETH	.0017721
887.	ETH	.0047587
1258.	IRQ	.0015192
2269.	RWA	.7035355

**Table 6.4: Model Excluding Rwanda (1989-2016)**

	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.297 (-1.51)
Presidential Election Years.	-0.116 (-0.58)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.500*** (3.92)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.109 (0.69)
Vote Margins Presidential	-0.00306 (-0.67)
Vote Margins Legislative	-0.0156 (-1.95)
Transition Periods	0.719** (3.14)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0235 (1.80)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.793*** (6.03)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.166 (-0.94)
Ethnic Diversity	1.479* (2.09)
Democracy	-1.197* (-2.42)
Monarchy	-2.552*** (-4.04)
Military	0.897* (2.08)
Multiparty	0.0737 (0.19)
Constant	-7.206*** (-3.77)
Ln Alpha	2.463*** (22.30)
N	2755

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

The influential observations in Democratic Republic of Congo in 1995 address First Congo War between Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zaire, which resulted in approximately 34.530 battle deaths. Influential observations of Rwanda in 1993 represent the genocide in Rwanda and observations in Afghanistan in 2014 demonstrate the increase of insurgency as the process of withdrawal of international forces had begun.

These events lead to enormous increases of battle deaths in these countries, which may have made them influential cases. However, a closer scrutiny of these cases does not reveal whether the elections have been the main explanation for the increase of battle deaths in these countries. There was only an election in Afghanistan in 2014, which may be emphasized to explain the increase of battle deaths. In other influential observations, we can observe that a set of international dynamics may have intensified the conflicts. In the case of Democratic Republic of Congo, the foreign invasion of Zaire led by Rwanda to replace the regime and the Rwandan genocide which sparked a mass exodus of refugees to Democratic Republic of Congo are the most highlighted explanations for the intensification of the conflict in Congo in 1995, also labelled as the First Congo war. The influential observations in Afghanistan in 2014 may also be explained by an international dynamic such as the withdrawal of international forces, which created a power vacuum and a weakened Afghani military and police force. However, the challenge is related to measurement of changes such international and contextual dynamics that may matter for the intensity of a conflict.

In order to deal with influential observations, Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen suggest employing the absolute cut-off of 1 rather than the size-adjusted cut-off, which means to identify observations greater than 1 as influential. Another suggestion provided by Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen is to run the regression with the most influential cases removed. The first suggestion has already been utilized in the model presented by Table 5.5. This paper has also performed the model in which most of the influential cases in Figure 5.2 were removed. The results are presented by Table 6.5. The removal of these cases does not alter coefficients considerably. Free and fair legislative elections maintain their significantly positive effects on battle deaths.

In other words, we may argue that the results are not driven by some influential observations or cases. Most of the variables maintain their significance even after the potentially influential observations are removed from the models.

**Table 6.5 : Model Excluding Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq and Rwanda.**

	Battle Deaths
Legislative Election Years.	-0.218 (-1.08)
Presidential Election Years.	-0.0783 (-0.38)
Free & Fair Elections Legis.	0.448*** (3.46)
Free & Fair Elections Pres.	0.0781 (0.49)
Vote Margins Presidential	-0.00165 (-0.36)
Vote Margins Legislative	-0.0124 (-1.57)
Transition Periods	0.739** (2.82)
Log Oil Rents (t-1)	0.0181 (1.27)
Log Pop(t-1)	0.743*** (5.39)
Log GDP per capita (t-1)	-0.168 (-0.96)
Ethnic Diversity	1.333 (1.96)
Democracy	-1.163* (-2.35)
Monarchy	-2.450*** (-3.82)
Military	0.831 (1.83)
Miultiparty	-0.0881 (-0.23)
Constant	-6.356*** (-3.30)
Ln Alpha	2.510*** (22.01)
N	2677

t statistics in parentheses \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

## 7. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have investigated the question of how elections during a civil war affect conflict severity. My main proposition has been that elections can be utilized as an opportunity for both insurgent groups and incumbent regimes to escalate or deescalate the violence because of the informational role of elections. This follows from an understanding that elections provide information on the support incumbents and insurgent groups have, and thus the information about the strength or weakness of any party enters the calculations of engaging in conflict and implementing other strategies than violence. When the results of elections show that the opposition is strong, this information may facilitate power sharing among elites. The same intuition applies for insurgent groups; when the outcomes of elections demonstrate that the opposition is weak, this information deters opposition from engaging in violence.

Conflict severity has been argued to have a dynamic nature which is prone to the often-changing fluctuations as shown by Figure 1.1, Figure 4.2, Figure 4.3, Figure 4.4, Figure 4.5, Figure 4.6, Figure 4.7, and Figure 4.8. However, the literature of conflict severity operates mainly with determinants that do not correspond to the dynamic nature of conflict severity. Such determinants are ethnic and religious fractionalization, international factors in terms of international interventions and peacekeeping measures, availability of natural resources, and rebel capacity (Lacina 2006, Heger & Saleyhan 2007, Chaudoin, Peskowitz & Stanton 2015, Hultman, Kathman & Shannon 2014, and Lujala 2009). Most of these factors have a static nature, and thus does not coincide with the dynamic nature of conflict severity. In addition, most of the conflict severity studies incorporate either country-specific variables or rebel group-specific variables. However, implementing violence and the decision process of increasing or decreasing the use of violence is a reciprocal process in which the incentives of a party to engage in more violence is affected by the actions and intentions of the other party. Hence, this paper argues that elections contribute to shape and least affect the incentives of both insurgent groups and states to engage in violence in equal terms.

In addition, this paper demonstrated that some features of elections, such as the mobilizing and polarizing character of elections may increase tensions between different groups, and thus increase the risk of conflict. These features became especially determinant if there are ethnical and religious grievances. The context of elections that are being held in war-prone countries lack also democratic and electoral institutions, which makes these elections conflict-inducing. There has already been demonstrated by several studies that elections increase the risk of



conflict recurrence (Brancati & Snyder 2012, Flores & Nooruddin 2012, Jarstad 2009, Paris 2004, Collier 2009, Cederman, Gleditsch & Hug 2012, Linebarger & Saleyhan 2012, and Strand 2007). These studies demonstrate that elections are likely to produce recurrent conflict the sooner they are held after a conflict, holding elections in conflict-prone countries is an important determinant for violence and renewed conflict, and the transitional elections are related to civil conflicts. Considering the imminent employment of elections in the literature of conflict onset and post-conflict area, this paper intended to apply elections in elaborating conflict severity to examine how elections affect the conflict in elections years, but also in post-election and pre-election periods.

However, the effect of elections during an ongoing civil war is argued to be different based on the role of elections as a reward vis a vis punish mechanism. Both rebel groups and state actors are interested in being perceived as responsible by their willingness to promote elections for guaranteeing power-sharing and participation. Hence, this paper has hypothesized that conflict severity will be reduced during elections periods, in pre-election and post-election periods. The studies of conflict onset that was highlighted in the previous paragraph highly consider the role of elections as manifesting the transition from a civil conflict, and these elections occur as a post-conflict institution. Thus, elections that function as transition elections will still be characterized as fragile and inherit enormous tensions. Based on these assumptions, this paper argued that elections during a transition period may result in more severe conflicts. This paper has also argued that the nature of elections may matter as well. The lack of institutional guarantees that strengthen the competitiveness and quality of the election, may trigger violence. The context in which the elections are being held in must be competitive and fair so that all parts obtain equal chance of winning the elections. The importance of free and fair circumstances of elections lead to an assumption emphasizing that the higher degree of competitiveness and fairness of an election makes a conflict less severe.

The aforementioned hypotheses have been tested empirically for a dataset of battle deaths during the 1986-2016. The empirical testing has relied on the indicators of legislative election years, presidential election years, vote margins won by the largest party, freeness and fairness of legislative and presidential elections, pre-election and post-election periods and other control variables. Legislative election years, which examines whether conflict become more or less severe during the election year, is negatively related to conflict severity in all models. However, these results are not significant. The negative effect of legislative election years become significant only when controlled for post-election and pre-election periods. In

contrast to the negative effect of legislative elections, presidential elections years are positively related to election years. However, this finding lacks a significance coefficient. An interesting finding by this paper is the effect of vote margins the winning party won by in legislative and presidential elections. The vote margins are applied to test the informational features of elections. Vote margins for both legislative and presidential elections are negatively related to conflict severity, which indicates that conflicts became less severe as the margin the winning party won the election by increases. The effect of vote margins in legislative elections is significant, confirming the informational theory of elections. However, in the models including only active battle years, which means eliminating the zero values of the dependent variable, vote margins of presidential elections become significant and maintain the conflict-reducing effect.

The most prominent finding of this paper is the significant and positive effect of free and fair legislative elections on conflict severity. This finding contradicts with the assumption of conflict-reducing effects competitive and free election could have. However, we observe that the conflict-intensifying effect of free and fair elections applies mainly in military regimes after testing for the contextual implications of free and fair elections in form of regime types. As observed by Table 5.3, when the interaction term between democracy and free and fair legislative elections enters the model, the effect of free and fair elections becomes insignificant. Thus, this paper finds that the positive effect of free and fair elections is conditioned by the regime type. As shown by the Figure 5.7, more democracy in form of higher score on the polyarchy index decreases the effect of free and fair elections on conflict severity. The employment of polyarchy as a measurement of democracy also addresses implications specification problems may have for the results as countries such as Thailand, Philippines, Mexico, Turkey, and Kenya which still have low levels of freeness and fairness are categorized as democracies.

The findings of this paper resemble the findings provided by Cheibub & Hays (2017) who highlight that there is not a causal relationship between holding multiparty elections and the onset of conflicts even if some conflicts have occurred as a result of holding multiparty elections in transitioning countries. Hence, the authors argue that proponents of democracy should have less reason to concern about holding elections, than is commonly believed (Cheibub & Hays 2017, 101). Both policymakers and insurgent groups may well keep their faith in elections and attempt to promote elections as a tool for mitigating conflict severity, because this paper indicates that elections *per se* do not make conflicts more severe. The

contextual and conditioned effects of the regime structures elections are being held in matter more. The positive effects of competitive elections on conflict severity apply mainly in military regimes in which the armed forces control politics directly or indirectly by directing civilian leaders. Hence, there are low chances that competitive elections lead to a real representation of the insurgent groups. In a such contest, competitive elections do not function to warrant representation of the people rather than increasing the already existing tensions between diverse groups.

The findings of this thesis are also important for the scholarly understanding of the relationship between election and conflict severity and more generally determinants of conflict severity. Most of the previous studies operate with determinants that are not compatible with the changing nature of conflict severity. These determinants possess a static nature. This paper contributes to the literature by incorporating a new set of mechanisms and a new determinant into literature. Certainly, there is a considerable literature on the relationship between elections and conflict-onset, but there are almost no studies exploring the relationship between conflict severity and elections. Hence, this thesis may be identified as one of the first attempts to elucidate the relationship between conflict severity and elections, and more generally as one of the first studies to provide a comprehensive scrutiny of determinants of conflict severity. In addition, this paper did not constrain itself just to a dichotomous variable of election years, such many studies of conflict onset and elections do. This paper attempted to give a more comprehensive exploration of how elections may affect conflict severity by testing for pre- and post-election periods, free and fair elections to test for the effects of competition and vote margins won by the largest party to test for the different levels of support affect conflict severity.

A shortcoming of this study, which should be emphasized more by the upcoming studies, is to explore which institutions may ensure the conflict-reducing effects of elections. The institutions of interest are more specifically the institutions that could prevent the positive effects of free and fair elections in military regimes. Another aspect that could be utilized more comprehensively, is identifying the source of violence. This paper does not distinguish between violence provided by the state vis a vis violence provided by the insurgent group. The distinction between different sources of violence may enable us to observe how the parts of a conflict react to different situations and determinants. From a scholarly standpoint, examining whether the increase of the violence is caused by the state or the insurgent group would enable us to assess which factors matter most for states and insurgent groups.

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