"Going Transnational" –
The Activities of Transnational Rebels in Neighbouring Countries

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Paper prepared for presentation at the 7th ECPR Standing Group IR Conference,
September 9-11 2010, Stockholm

Preliminary Draft – Comments are Welcome

Abstract

It has become clear in the last few years that a generalized look at the country-level is not sufficient to understand the complex dynamics of modern civil wars, as important factors often play out at local levels and even beyond the international borders of the state in question. This is especially true for the activities of non-state, or rebel actors in a conflict. As studies have shown, such groups disregard international boundaries more often than not. These "Transnational Rebels" (TNR), as Salehyan has dubbed them, use the territory of neighboring states as safe havens or even for combat operations.
While it has been shown that TNRs in general can prolong civil conflicts, little is known about the precise activities that these actors undertake in their transnational theatres. Drawing on new both geographically and temporally disaggregated data and GIS-Software, this paper seeks to address the questions of where and when TNRs cross into neighboring countries, and what they are doing there. For this purpose, it combines the disaggregated event data of ACLED with data on rebel organizations from the Expanded ACD compiled by Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan. Exploratory results largely confirm expectations on transnational rebel activity: A core element is the establishment of extraterritorial bases and activities take place far from capitals. A transnational strategy enhances the chance of rebels to prevail in the conflict.

Introduction

Despite their defining moniker, many contemporary armed conflicts cannot be adequately described as being "internal". Civil wars affect their neighbors through refugee flows (Gleditsch & Salehyan, 2006), disrupt legitimate and facilitate illicit trade through "shadow economic networks" (Juma, 2007), hamper the economic development of a region (Collier et al., 2003), make conflict in nearby states more likely through demonstration effects (Forsberg, 2009) and by providing cheap weaponry (Killicoat, 2006). But not only does unrest in a country inevitably

affect other states indirectly: Often the actual fighting itself spills over borders, resulting in conflict zones spanning territory of several states. This happens especially when rebel organizations do not limit themselves to the territory of their home state but deliberately operate across state borders, often with the explicit or tacit permission of their hosts. Such "transnational rebels (TNR)" (Salehyan, 2009: 6) use neighboring countries, where national security forces normally cannot follow them, as safe havens and staging areas, to recruit new soldiers and to resupply. This strategy allows even vastly outnumbered rebel actors to avoid being defeated decisively by the government army. For instance, after they were forced out of the country by the United States-supported Northern Alliance, the Afghan Taliban withdrew across the border to the inaccessible areas of Pakistan's tribal areas. In addition to the safety of the rugged terrain the local system of *madrasa* religious schools provided them with a fertile recruiting ground for their later return in Afghanistan (Harpviken, 2006). Sometimes TNRs even become disconnected from their country of origin and roam borderlands (often committing serious atrocities against the civilian population) without clear strategic objectives other than their survival. Examples for this phenomenon include the former Rwandan Hutu-extremists of the Forces Démocratiques de la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (International Crisis Group 2009a) or the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which operated in Southern Sudan as well as in the DRC in addition to their native Northern Uganda (International Crisis Group 2009b).

Research shows that the transnationalization of rebel actors in a civil war can have a major impact on that conflict: Because it is not easy to force them to a decisive battle they are not only difficult to militarily defeat but also less likely to be pressured into a negotiated settlement, as they can always withdraw to their cross-border bases to fight another day when the situation seems more promising. Conflicts involving transnational insurgencies therefore tend to be more protracted. Such conflicts are also prone to diffusion processes and likely to draw in external state actors, which either (maybe tacitly) support the TNRs by granting them access to their territory,

putting them at odds with the home state government, or are forced to fight a new quasi-internal enemy. The first scenario is likely to result in potentially serious interstate disputes and the latter generates new civil war –either way, transnational rebels can be a powerful mean of the spread of armed conflict.

Studies on transnational insurgencies line up not only with other current research on transnational aspects of civil war but are also part of efforts to disaggregate conflicts to the level of its individual components, by focusing on the characteristics of specific actors and dyads. While they in this way free themselves from constrains of national-level data, they still rely on aggregate data on the actor and conflict-level. Consequently, little is known about the precise activities that these actors undertake in their transnational theatres. In this paper I will try to get a glimpse on the specific who, where, when and what of transnational activities of rebel organizations by drawing on both temporally and geographically disaggregated data in the form of events. This kind of disaggregation is another major trend of current research on civil wars, but has so far been limited foremost to studies focusing on the sub-national level. By applying this kind of data to a question regarding transnational dimensions I want to contribute to the "vertical integration" of civil war research called for by Nils Weidmann (Weidmann 2009).

In the following sections, I will first provide a short overview over recent attempts in the literature to overcome the problem of methodological nationalism in civil war research before I address the phenomenon of transnational rebels in more detail. After that, the methods and datasets used are described. At this stage, the aim of this paper is largely exploratory in nature, due to both the state of research and limited data availability. Thus, I will not test specific hypothesis or present any conclusive findings but rather limit myself to descriptive information about various aspects of transnational activities of rebel groups in Africa.

Away from Methodological Nationalism – Recent Trends in the Study of Civil War

For the most part of its history, conflict studies – like any other social science discipline – took nationally bounded societies as the naturally given unit of analysis, expressed in the typologies of war differentiating basically between contests fought *between* states and struggles *inside* states. These categories were treated as conceptually distinct – for international relations, civil wars were merely domestic affairs, while for studies on internal conflict "the web of social life was spun within the container of the national society, and everything extending over its borders was cut off analytically" (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002: 307). In the wake of the increasingly complex ethnic wars of the 1990s however, gradually an understanding developed that "studies of intranational conflict were hampered by a focus on national-attribute analysis" (Moore 1995: 162) and in the last few years there has been considerable effort to address the long-standing "blind spot […] of existing research to treat civil wars as purely domestic phenomena" (Cederman, Girardin & Gleditsch 2009: 404). One the one hand, cross-border or transnational elements are taken into account, and on the other hand scholars increasingly acknowledge that there is considerable variation within states and conflicts.

The interdependence of domestic political developments has been studied foremost in the field of policy analysis, where a variety of terms such as "demonstration", "bandwagoning", "convergence", "contagion" and "diffusion" have been used (see Elkins & Simmons 2002 for an overview). This concept has been adapted for the study of international conflict by Most and Starr in their work on international conflicts as "events of a given type in a given polity [that] are conditioned by the occurrence of similar events in other polities at prior points in time" – in this case, war being the "event" (Most & Starr 1981: 10). Following the call of J. David Singer that "the direction should now be to focus on such variables as diffusion and contagion" (Singer 1981: 1), both terms were used, albeit not very consistently, in a lot of further studies (e.g. Starr & Most 1983; Vasquez 1992; Siverson & Starr 1990). An important insight gained from that research is that interdependence is stronger for entities within closer range of one another,

particularly for continuous states (O'Loughlin 1984; Siverson & Starr 1991). While this is true for interdependence in general – "All international politics is local", as Kristian Gleditsch remarked (Gleditsch 2002) –, questions of war and peace are especially prone to geographic factors. A quick glance on a map reveals that civil conflict is not evenly distributed around the world but tends to cluster spatially in certain regions (Anselin & O'Loughlin 1992; Gleditsch 2002). The phenomenon of conflict clusters has attracted considerable attention in quantitative studies of internal conflict since Sambanis, in a study on ethnic wars, discovered that civil war in a neighboring country is a significant predictor for a conflict outbreak (Sambanis 2001). This finding, often referred to as the "neighborhood effect" of civil war, was replicated in a lot of following studies (e.g. Ward & Gleditsch 2002; Marshall & Gurr 2005; Salehyan & Gleditsch 2006; Gleditsch 2007) as one of the most robust results of civil war research at all (Hegre & Sambanis 2006). In so called "bad neighborhoods" (a term going back to Weiner [2006]), low levels of democracy, instability of state apparatuses and weak economic growth are mutually reinforcing, making states structurally prone to an domestic outbreak of civil strife. But "the spatial clustering of intrastate conflicts cannot be dismissed as a mere product of a clustering in similar country characteristics associated with conflict" (Buhaug & Gleditsch 2008: 230). Rather, civil unrest produces negative externalities that might trigger the outbreak of hostilities in a neighboring country, a process that is known as "contagion" (see Forsber 2009). Such effects were examined extensively through case studies focusing on particular conflicts (e.g. Brown 1996; Pugh & Cooper 2004; Byman & Pollack 2007; Weinbaum 2006) or potential transmitter mechanisms like refugees (Weiner 2006; Posen 2006), international diasporas (King & Melvin 2006) or demonstration effects mediated through ethnic linkages (Lake & Rothchild 1998; Gurr 2000). This research was backed up by large-N analyses, confirming that both direct as well as indirect cross-border variables have a significant effect on the risk for conflict onset in a given country. Among the factors tested are refugee populations (Salehyan & Gleditsch 2006) as well as refugee flows (Forsberg 2009), transnational ethnic linkages (Buhaug & Gleditsch 2008; Forsberg

2009; Cederman, Girardin & Gleditsch 2009), regional trade (Gleditsch 2007) or regional state weakness (Lambach 2007). In addition to that kind of more indirect effects, civil wars can also be "the result of discrete, deliberate decisions by governments to trigger conflicts in nearby states for political, economic or ideological purposes of their own. […] Such conflicts, one could say, are caused by 'bad neighbors'" rather than bad neighborhoods (Brown 1996: 580). External intervention has been identified in many case studies "as a key factor in civil war onset" (Sambanis 2004a: 270) and found to have a prolonging effect on its duration (Elbadawi & Sambanis 2000; Regan 2002). States that meddle in the affairs of their neighbors causing or influencing domestic conflict usually act in an alliance with domestic armed groups to advance their goals, either in joint operations with their own troops or as proxy forces which they materially sustain (Harbom & Wallensteen 2005; Salehyan 2010a). Under this condition, the setting of the conflict becomes increasingly complex as the external intervener may have interests diverging from that of its domestic opposition ally, exacerbating the problem to find a solution acceptable to all parties (Cunningham 2010). All in all, it is now commonly accepted that transnational dimensions "can be at least as important as the profile of individual states" (Gleditsch 2007: 304).

The second major trend in overcoming the limitations of methodological nationalism strives to disaggregate the information on civil wars. Until recently, the bulk of the literature has treated civil war as basically a "general state-level condition" (Cederman, Buhaug & Rød 2009: 500) that ought to be explained by attributes of the nation-state as a whole. This approach ignored not only cross-border factors but also "all variation within states, actors, and regions experiencing conflict" (Cederman & Gleditsch 2009: 487). Studies suffer from the problem of overaggregation at the national level in two ways: One the one hand, conflicts very seldom engulf the entire territory of a country but usually take place in considerably smaller areas often in the periphery (Buhaug & Gates 2002). Consequently, to understand the dynamics of these conflicts it would be misleading to look at data from the national level rather than the characteristics of the

actual conflict zone. Using national-level averages to substitute for the actual – social or geographical – conditions in the areas where the fighting really takes place has shown to be an often poor approximation (Buhaug & Rød 2006). For example, Fearon & Laitin (2003) famously postulated that civil wars are primarily the result of factors making insurgencies feasible, including natural conditions like mountainous terrain. They measured this on the national level using the share of mountains of a state as a proxy – regardless of whether the conflict really played out in the actual mountains. The same problem of unrecognized sub-national variation applies to a range of other variables that are commonly associated with the risk of civil wars, including ethnicity, demography or natural resources (Buhaug 2003). The use of national-level proxies was of course partly a result of available data sources, which largely mirrored the conceptual problem of methodological nationalism. Considerable effort has therefore been devoted to the gathering of new, fine-grained data on the local level and the development of appropriate methods of analysis.[1] Geographically disaggregated data have been coded for violent events itself (Buhaug & Gates 2002; Raleigh & Hegre 2005; Chojnacki & Metternich 2008) as well as for potentially influencing factors like diamond deposits (Gilmore et al. 2005) or settlement areas of ethnic groups (Weidmann, Rod & Cederman 2010). Employing this data in conjunction with modern GIS-software, pioneering studies were able to use sub-national administrative regions or grid cells as units of analysis rather than whole states. Buhaug & Lujala (2005) show that conflicts tend to be longer when they occur further away from the capital. In a study on African civil war between 1970 and 2001, Buhaug & Rød could not support the above mentioned rough terrain proposition or for the importance of natural resources using localized measures. Analyzing the sub-national effect of poverty in Liberia, Hegre, Østby & Raleigh (2009) found that relatively richer regions were actually more affected by violent events than poorer ones. Finally, regarding the established finding that civil wars are more likely in populous countries, Raleigh & Hegre (2009) show that

[1] See Stephenne, Burnley and Ehrlich (2009) for an overview of the evolution of the use of geographic concepts in quantitative research.

this holds true on the local level where the risk of conflict events increases with population size, especially when large populations are concentrated in regions far away from the capital.

On the other hand, in addition to the geographic aggregation bias national-level approaches to the study of civil war also suffer from an overaggregation of conflict processes between different actors. Sometimes countries experience more than one armed conflict simultaneously, which may be fought in different regions and against different rebel groups. Lumping these different quarrels together as "civil war in state X" distorts our understanding of specific conflict dynamics significantly. Especially, there is a "considerably mismatch between the dyadic nature of theories of conflict and the actual research designs used in testing hypotheses" (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan 2009: 571). Armed conflict is a social process between certain parties – not a "condition" that somehow affects a country in general. Using national-level proxies for dyadic relations can tell us something about their structural determinants, but not much about the actors involved or their interactions with each other. Hence the confusion about the interpretation of the correlation between low national GDP and civil war: While Collier & Hoeffler (2004) see this as evidence that low opportunity costs make fighting attractive, Fearon & Laitin (2003) interpret the same finding in terms of state capacity, arguing that low GDP-figures proxy for a higher feasibility of civil war due to a weak state. In the end, "the failure to specify *who* fights in civil wars ultimately makes it difficult to come up with good answers as to *why* we see civil wars" (Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan 2009: 571). In an effort to counter these problems Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan (2009) have compiled dyadic data with a special focus on characteristics of rebel organizations. Using this data they find that conflicts last longer when more than one dyad are involved, insurgents are weaker than the government but control territory (mostly in the periphery) or can count on the support of external actors (Salehyan, Gleditsch & Cunningham 2008). Additionally, they find that rebels who have access to the territory of neighboring states last also longer. Likely explanations for this are explored in the next section before I continue with my own research on the topic.

Transnational Rebels

Transnational rebel groups and the conventional perception of civil war as a purely internal affair are an inherent contradiction. It seems surprisingly that this phenomenon has only recently attracted the attention of quantitative scholars, considering its magnitude. As Salehyan finds in his groundbreaking study, it is by no means a rare or novel event that non-state opposition groups organize transnationally – in fact in the last decades "a majority of rebel groups have utilized territory outside of their target state's borders in mobilizing and sustaining their activities" (Salehyan 2009: 8).

There are many reasons why rebels would decide to cross borders. First and foremost, such a move offers them protection from repression from their home government. Because even weak states that are in reality not able to effectively control their borderlands insist on the international norm of sovereign territorial control, state security forces are principally confined by international borders. This makes it difficult for them to fight an adversary that slips back and forth over that very border, even when the host state not actively supports the insurgents. So while Thailand provided no direct assistance to Burmese Karen rebels hiding on its territory, it resolutely reacted with force when the army of Myanmar tried to attack those bases. But not only would a strike against TNRs on foreign soil be a potentially dangerous violation of the host state's sovereignty. Government counterinsurgency operations in another country would also be hampered with operational difficulties, because of unreliable intelligence, an unfamiliar environment and a possibly hostile local population. Moreover, unless the state decides to draw on the extreme measure of occupying foreign territory (as for example Israel did in 1982 to establish its Lebanese security zone), even successful cross-border strikes are unlikely to solve the problem for good (Salehyan 2010b: 5-6). To be able to use sanctuaries in neighboring states is therefore an immense tactical advantage especially for weak insurgents that would not be able to effectively secure bases in their home state. Cross-border safe havens allow rebel forces to organize and stage new offensives without the constant fear of a government attack. In many

cases TNRs use foreign territory not only to hide from government forces but also to train, resupply and recruit new fighters. Sometimes they are supported in this regard by the host state that might provide weapons and training. The Contra rebellion in Nicaragua for instance was never able to strategically control significant parts of their homeland and relied almost entirely on access to bases in Honduras as well as on assistance from the Honduran and US-governments. In addition to sponsorship by states TNRs may also enjoy the support of border-straddling ethnic kin or diaspora groups, serving as a much larger base than available in the home country (Staniland 2005). In this manner, the Kosovar UCK could count on the support of Albanians all over Europe, enabling it to sustain a fighting force much larger than the sole reliance on Kosovo had allowed. Refugee camps are another potential source of protection and materiel or for the recruitment of "refugee warriors" (Zolberg, Suhrke & Aguayo 1989), the prime example being the former Hutu-militias that fled into then Zaire in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide and regrouped under the cover of the refugees into a new rebel organization determined to reconquer their home country. This prompted the new Rwandan Tutsi regime to proactively invade Zaire, triggering the most costly war in human terms since World War II (International Rescue Committee 2007). Finally, TNRs may not limit themselves to use foreign territory as sanctuary but commit violence there in addition to fights in their homeland, be it in the form of military operations or atrocities against the civilian population. Rebels may prey on the local population when the host state is unable or unwilling to protect its citizens, like the LRA does in the Eastern DRC.

In many cases, the decision to cross into neighboring territory will be made based on operational considerations during the conflict. It can become necessary when government forces are advancing and rebel groups have to withdraw to a safe position, or when resources on neighboring territory are needed to fund the continuation of the struggle. Such cross-border incursions can range from sporadic and short-lived to being a frequent tactical instrument (Salehyan 2010b: 9); in some instances, non-state actors even shift their activities entirely to

foreign territory, like the Rwandan FDLR in the DRC or the Ugandan LRA in Sudan, Central African Republic and also the DRC. Insurgencies may also mobilize on a foreign countries soil in the first place, making them transnational rebels right from the beginning. Access to extraterritorial safe havens can be crucial especially in the early stages of a rebellion, because newly formed insurgent groups are still vulnerable to government repression (Salehyan 2009: 36). In most cases this will require that rebels enjoy hospitality from host state's governments, which may have an interest in weakening a rival neighbor (**???**). However, TNRs can also have a transnational background without being a receiver of direct state support. When identity-groups straddle the boundaries of nation states they can serve as a basis for rebel groups that originate in the very borderlands they use as sanctuaries. The Taliban movement for example has their roots in the Pashto belt along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and recruited its fighters for the conquest of Afghanistan in the 1990s predominantly in religious schools in Pakistan (Harpviken 2006). Another case in point are the several Kurdish rebel organizations, the Turkish Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) being the most notable, fighting for the same goal of an independent Kurdistan straddling the territories of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. Such TNRs can count on their transnational constituency for assistance, even when the host state's government is reluctant to tolerate foreign insurgents on its soil. While the PKK profiteered from a power vacuum in Northern Iraq after the regime of Saddam Hussein lost the second Gulf War, Pakistan was pressured by the United States to forcefully engage Taliban militias operating in its Northwestern tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, where government forces found themselves battling in a rather hostile environment.

Whatever their origin or mode of operation, with their access to foreign territory transnational rebels enjoy a significant strategically advantage in a civil war. It protects them from government security forces, helps with supplies and "provides the insurgents with a measure of control over momentum, enabling them to compensate for a temporary loss" (Staniland 2005: 25). In contrast to purely domestic opposition groups, who risk a potential conclusive defeat in a

decisive battle, TNRs by withdrawing to their external bases are able to outlast difficult times and prepare to fight another day. This has not only an impact on the military situation: Because rebels know (or at least perceive the situation that way) that the government poses no credible threat to their very survival, they have less incentives to enter in a negotiated settlement. Likewise, the state cannot be sure that appeased rebels will really demobilize or just preserve their fighting capacity on foreign soil, able to reactivate it at any time (Salehyan 2009: 47-50). Considering these mechanisms it is no surprise that research shows that rebels with access to external bases increases the duration of civil conflicts (Salehyan 2007; Salehyan, Gleditsch & Cunningham 2008).

In addition to this effect on the conflict with their home government, transnational non-state actors have also a considerable impact on relations between states, being both a result and a potential source of interstate disputes (Salehyan 2010b: 12). TNRs rely on the condition that their host state does not actively engage them, be it due to incapacity, unwillingness or active support. In fact, the latter is not an exceptional but a regular feature of internal conflicts (Salehyan 2010a: 497). A quite common situation is that rival states, instead of facing each other off directly, support rebel groups in the other country to do the actual fighting. This tactic of deliberately building up an insurgent group as a proxy force can be called "delegation" (Salehyan 2010a). Rebels are in this logic primarily an agent of their government principal which hopes to pursue foreign policy goals through them. By shifting responsibility for the actual fighting to non-state actors, rebel patrons avoid potential costly interstate confrontations and violations of international norms. It is for instance widely known that Palestinian resistance groups fighting Israel were always sponsored by (among others) Iran and Syria. This indirect conflict tactic made it difficult for the superior Israeli forces to retaliate directly, as that would have started a full-blown interstate war. Delegation reflects usually long-standing regional rivalries. It is especially prevalent in instable regions, in which states are too weak to engage their enemy directly and may be plagued by armed opposition groups themselves. So patronizing rebel groups through the

provision of sanctuary can be a relatively cheap foreign policy instrument, substituting for interstate dispute behavior. But transnational rebels can also be reason for interstate hostilities rather than a product of them (Salehyan 2010b). Even when neighboring states have no history of unfriendly relations, the harboring of insurgents – even when not intentional – is likely to spark tensions between governments. Likewise, cross-border incursions in pursuit of transnational rebels my provoke strong countermeasures, like the border skirmishes between Thai and Burmese forces over Karen bases in Thailand or the mobilization of troops in Ecuador and Venezuela in reaction to an attack of Colombia on extraterritorial FARC-bases.

Although I will not set up specific hypotheses to test in this paper, the considerations above lead to some expectations regarding the following exploration of disaggregated data on activities of transnational rebels:

(1) As the predominant function of neighboring states is to provide sanctuary, extraterritorial activities of TNRs should be more about setting up bases and non-violent behavior rather than actual battles.

(2) TNRs should tend to be weaker than their government adversary, because otherwise they probably would not need to hide behind the border. Nevertheless, TNRs should be more persistent and less likely to enter in a negotiated settlement than purely domestic rebels.

(3) TNRs are likely to receive support either from their host state or from transnational constituencies.

(4) Extraterritorial activities of TNRs will be concentrated along the border and in areas far away from their host state's capital. Even if the host state is tacitly allowing the use of its territory, because of potential international repercussions it will be reluctant to openly receive foreign rebel groups in its center and rather would like them to keep a low profile in remote regions. Also, conflicts are generally more likely to play out in the periphery of states. For TNRs, moving away from their home theatre of operations reduces their

capacity for quick cross-border raids[2] and entails the risk of losing touch with the local population.

(5) Lastly, extraterritorial bases are probably set up in strategically valuable areas, giving them access to infrastructure and possibly natural resources.

Going within and beyond – Disaggregating Transnational Rebels

The basis for my exploration of transnational activities of rebel organizations is provided by the Armed Conflict Locations and Event Dataset (ACLED) that is one of the first attempts to disaggregate civil war temporally and geographically (Hegre & Raleigh 2005). ACLED provides exact locations and dates of battle-related *events*, based on the conflicts recorded in the Uppsala/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (ACD). In this paper I use a consolidated version of the dataset covering conflicts in the eight African countries of Angola, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda in the 1960 to 2004 period. The coding of additional countries for conflict events from 1997-2009 is currently underway and this data will be available shortly.[3] The unit of analysis of ACLED is an event which usually involves two actors (side A and side B), or just one actor in the case of one-sided violence. In addition to date and location (in terms of precise latitude/longitude coordinates and sub-national region) a variable codes what actually happened. There are seven types of events in ACLED:

- Battles resulting in no change in territory;
- battles were rebels gain territory;
- battles were the government gains territory;
- the establishment of rebel bases;
- non-violent rebel activity;
- one-sided violence against civilians.

[2] Especially for rebels groups who normally do not have heavy weaponry and are bound to the ground, the opportunity to fight naturally decreases with distance (Vasquez 1993: 207)
[3] See http://www.acleddata.com

A further category denotes territorial transfers to rebels having occurred at an unknown date, used for purposes of consistency when some information about territorial transfers is unknown (Hegre & Raleigh 2005: 7). Altogether, ACLED gives information about 4746 distinct events. There are, however, some limitations to the data in this version: Only event types are coded but no further information, e.g. on fatalities is given, which makes it difficult to assess the intensity and importance of an event. Upon closer inspection it also becomes clear that ACLED cannot account for a really complete picture of civil war events, especially in earlier periods. For example, the armed wing of the secessionist Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda, the Forças Armadas de Cabinda (FLEC-FAC), fighting for the independence of the Cabinda exclave from Angola since it became independent from Portugal, account for just six events in the whole period under study – and three of them are even coded under the same date. This definitely seriously underestimates the impact of that group. There are also some dubious categories like the specification of "opposition militias" in the DRC, active for almost the whole 1960-2004 period. As no further information is given, it is unclear what kind of group this is and whether it really constitutes a coherent and the same actor over time. Nevertheless, by and large the dataset provided incredible valuable data on specific dynamics of civil conflicts, including its transnational dimensions.

As it is the stated goal of ACLED to "track rebel events" (Hegre & Raleigh 2005: 9), in contrast to the ACD incidents that do not involve a government actor – i.e. battles between rebel parties – are also coded. Moreover, events that do not take place on the territory of the conflict-state are included as well. Thus, ACLED is well-suited to serve as a base for a study on transnational rebel groups. As the aim of this paper is to provide a comprehensive and explorative first look at the local level of the phenomenon of TNRs rather than testing specific theories on a clearly defined dependent variable, I compiled three distinct datasets from the

source material: One measuring *activities* of rebel actors, one focusing on those very *actors*, and one aggregating transnational rebel activities to the level of secondary administrative *regions*.[4]

The Activities Dataset

First, because I am interested in all activities of (potentially transnational) organizations, the unit of analysis had to be changed from the original *event* to *actor-event* data, meaning that every case is an activity of one specific rebel actor. This step was necessary because ACLED includes events in which no government but two insurgent parties participate. For example, in the Liberian civil war the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) of Charles Taylor engaged in heavy fighting with another non-state group, the United Liberation Movement for Liberia (ULIMO). Such fights are coded as just one event in ACLED although they represent activity from two distinct rebel groups, consequently underestimating the total number of rebel activity. To account for this I duplicated such events and assigned the side A actor to the first and the side B actor to the second as the rebel organization performing the activity. There are some problems with this procedure regarding the coding of event types, because in the original data just one type is coded and in cases where it is directed it is unclear to which rebel actor it belongs. Thus, it cannot be discerned which of the two parties gained territory or established a base. Fortunately, such events are relatively infrequent and – more important for this study – never happen in an extraterritorial setting. This problem is possibly going to be solved in future versions of ACLED because newer editions include detailed descriptive comments on the event coded.

Some further modifications were made to the dataset: Because coups (ACLED calls them mutinies) are generally thought to work out different than other civil wars (Salehyan, Gleditsch & Cunningham 2008: 13), I excluded activities where the rebel actor is designated as a faction of the military. As I want to limit the study to civil wars I also excluded cases in which a colonial power (namely Portugal in Angola) or international peacekeepers were involved, as well as a few

[4] Data is available from the author upon request.

instances of battles between state militaries. I also simplified the type variable, merging battles in which territory was gained either by rebels or governments into one category to distinguish whether events were decisive or not. In total, the resulting dataset contains information on 4568 rebel activities. In order to determine which of these events are extraterritorial, indicating the presence of a TNR, I created a variable indicating whether the country for which an event was coded matched the country that was identified as the conflict site according to the ACD. When this was not the case the variable was set to 1, defining an activity as transnational.

The Rebel Actor Dataset

In a second step, I created a dataset containing information on all rebel actors active in the countries under study from 1960-2004. Unfortunately, the coding of rebel actors in ACLED is at times not straightforward or even inconsistent: While some rebel groups that can be seen as a direct successor to an earlier group are merged with that into one and the same actor (for example, ACLED treats the Ugandan Holy Spirit Movement and Lord's Resistant Army as "HSM/LRA"), in other cases predecessors are explicitly kept conceptually distinct, like Tutsi insurgents in Zaire prior to the formal establishment of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo (AFDL). Although it is commonly accepted that the current manifestation of originally Rwandan Hutu militants in the Eastern DRC, the FDLR, absorbed the earlier insurgent forces of the army for the Liberation of Rwanda (ALIR) around 2000 (Omaar 2008), ACLED identifies the group as PALIR (the political wing of ALIR) for the whole period and codes the FDLR separately as "opposition alliance (FDLR)". ACLED also segregates activities of the Ugandan National Liberation Front (UNLA), who fought in the 1970s against then Dictator Idi Amin alongside Tanzanian troops, into such that the group conducted together with their Tanzanian allies and independent operations. In all this cases, I merged the actors into one ID variable (transforming for instance "PALIR" and "opposition alliance (FDLR)" into "ALIR/FDLR"). The resulting dataset contains 48 different rebel groups.

Information on the frequency and types of activities as well as on the time between the first and last events were recorded of these groups was aggregated to this level from the activities dataset. Groups that participated in at least one extraterritorial event according to the activity dataset were marked as transnational rebels and were also categorized in terms of the extent of their transnational activities. In addition to that, more precise information on the characteristics of most of these non-state actors was retrieved from the Expanded Uppsala Armed Conflict Dataset (EACD), coded by Cunningham, Gleditsch & Salehyan (2009).[5] This included variables on the relative strength of the rebels comparative to the government, how or if the conflicts they were involved in ended, whether they controlled territory or received support from external actors.

The Region Dataset

Finally, to give an account on the geographical aspects of transnational rebel activity, I used Geographic Information Software to aggregate information on frequency and type of events to the level of secondary administrative regions in every country. The size of these units naturally vary with the size of the state they are part of, but should nevertheless give a fairly accurate picture of the spatial extent and conditions of TNRs. To give an impression, in the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo such a region would for example be Rutshuru, which is part of the larger first level administrative region of North Kivu. For regions in which TNRs were active, additional information was coded on the distance to the capital (taking the location of conflict events as the reference rather than centroids or boundaries), whether it was contiguous to an international border and whether natural resources in the form of precious metals or diamonds were located in it. In order to assess whether TNRs are active more in populous or emote areas, regions were rated along the Human Influence Index (HII)[6], which combines data on among others population density, road and train networks, nighttime stable light values and

[5] Available from http://privatewww.essex.ac.uk/~ksg/eacd.html.
[6] Available from http://sedac.ciesin.columbia.edu/wildareas/

land coverage into a scale ranging from 0 (no human influence) to a theoretical maximum of 64 (Sanderson et al. 2002). I condensed this into six categories (the highest category, indicating a HII of over 50, is reached in none of the coded regions) and assigned a value to the region representative of the location of events. All in all, 68 regions experienced TNR activity.

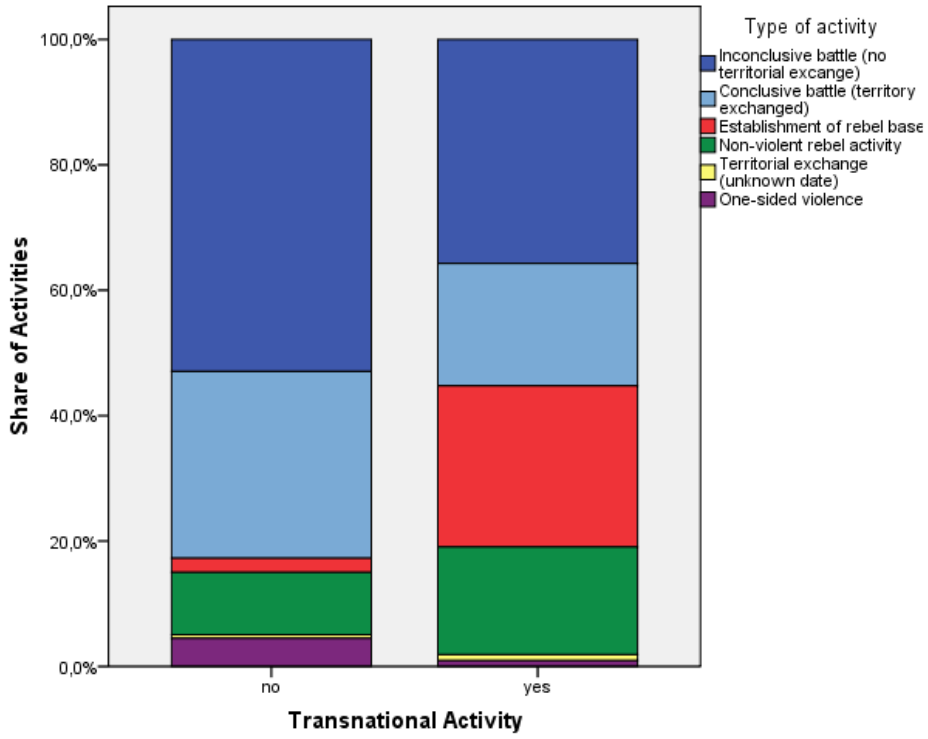
Who, Where, What? Some exploratory Results

In this section I will present some preliminary insights into the data I compiled. These are strictly descriptive and cannot be taken to be representative of transnational civil wars as a whole. Consequently, there will be no integrated testing of one dependent variable.

Activities of transnational rebels

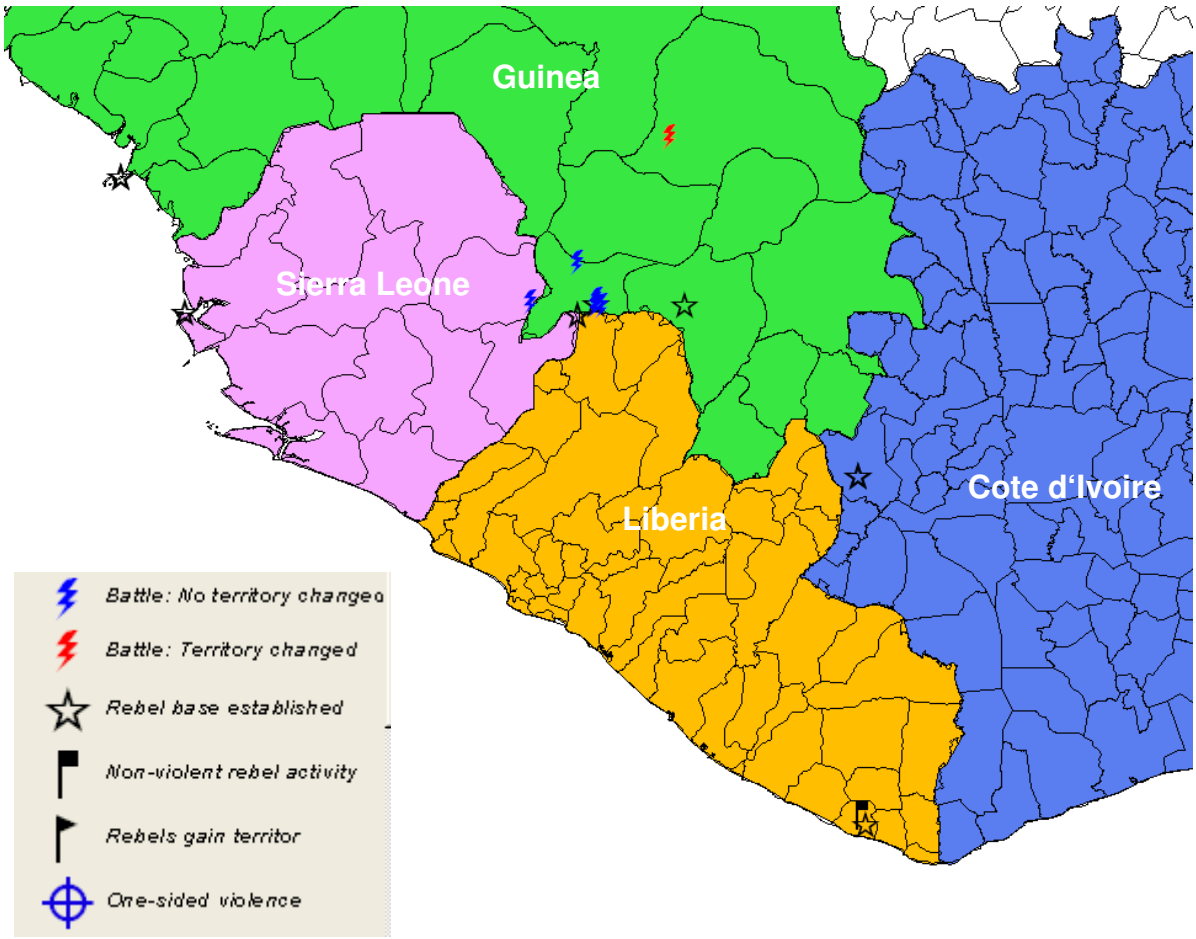
From the 4676 recorded activities total, 210 (or 4.5%) occurred on the territory of a state other than the home state of the rebel group. The bulk of rebel actions obviously still occur within the confinements of domestic boundaries. However, it is nevertheless likely that the data underestimates the transnational dimension, because extraterritorial activities tend to be covert and less high profile than major battles, attracting less media attention and therefore resulting in fewer reports. The following graph shows the distribution of these events over the period under study.

The highest incidence of transnational activities occurred in the years between 1994 and 1999, reaching its peak in 1998. This is probably due to the wars in Zaire/DRC at that time, which involved several transnational actors and was even described as "Africa's First World War". Towards the end of the period in 2004 however there is again a sharp increase – whether this indicates a trend or is just an exceptional outlier could potentially be analyzed by newer revisions of ACLED. Regarding the types of activities that are conducted, the following chart compares transnational activities with domestic ones:

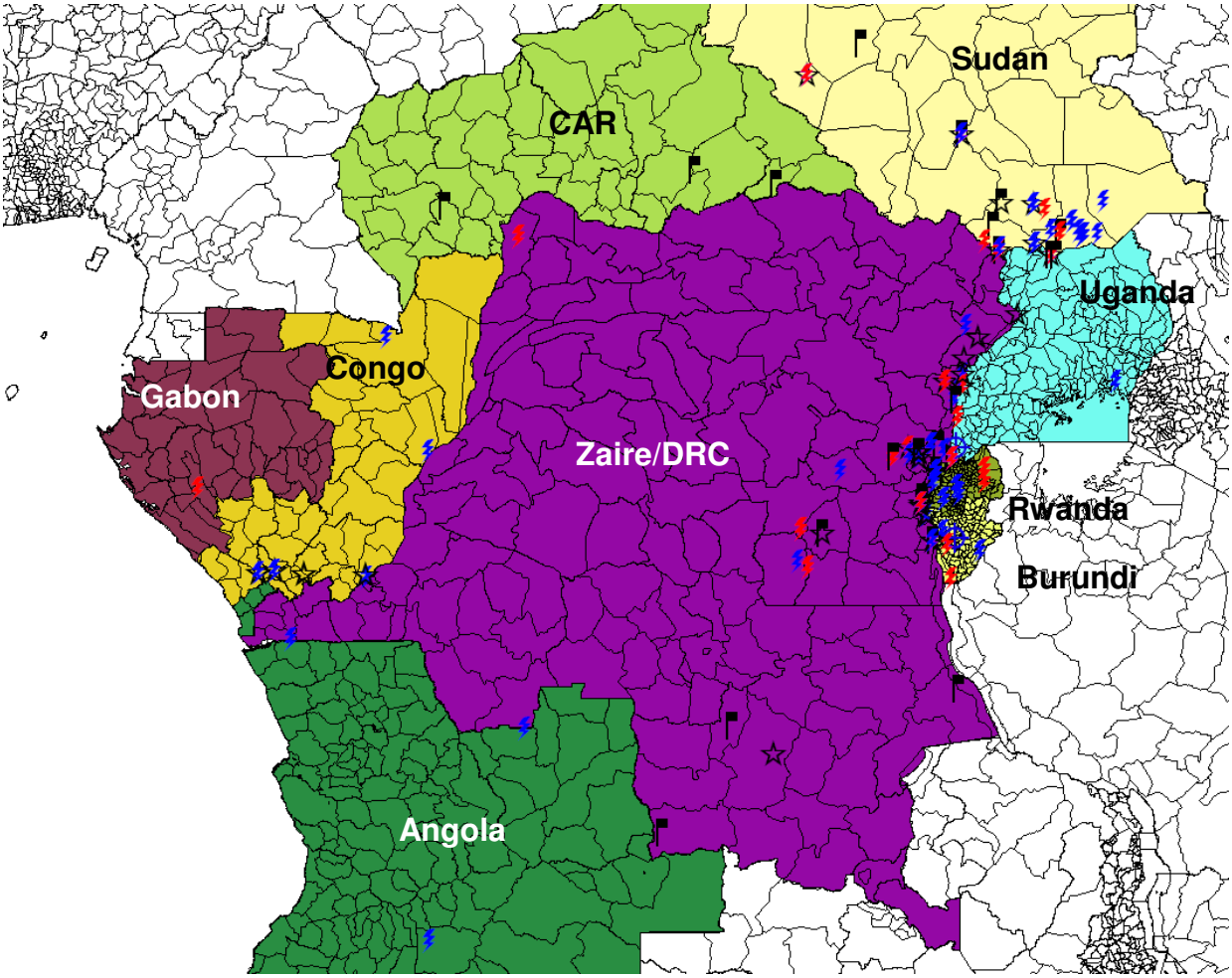


Overall, events coded by ACLED are predominantly battles. This is likely to convey a slightly biased picture of civil wars, especially considering the very low percentage of one-sided violence against civilians, which is in fact a major part of domestic warfare. It can be seen that there is a clear relationship between the location and type of an event (a crosstabulation yields a Chi^2-based Cramer's V correlation coefficient of .281 which is highly significant [$p < 0.001$]). Just about half of all extraterritorial events consist of battles, compared with over 80% of non-transnational observations. The chart corroborates the important part that external sanctuaries play in civil wars – while setting up bases account for just about 2.5% of all domestic activities, more than 25% of extraterritorial actions are about that. In fact, about one third of all headquarters that were founded by rebels in the civil wars analyzed were located across state borders. Not as impressive but still notable is the larger share of reports on non-violent behavior of 17.1% compared with 9.9%. The result that about half of all transnational activities are not battle-related confirms the expectation that TNRs use external territory especially to hide, recover and prepare.

The following maps give an indication of the spatial distribution of transnational rebel activity 1960-2004 in West and Central Africa respectively:



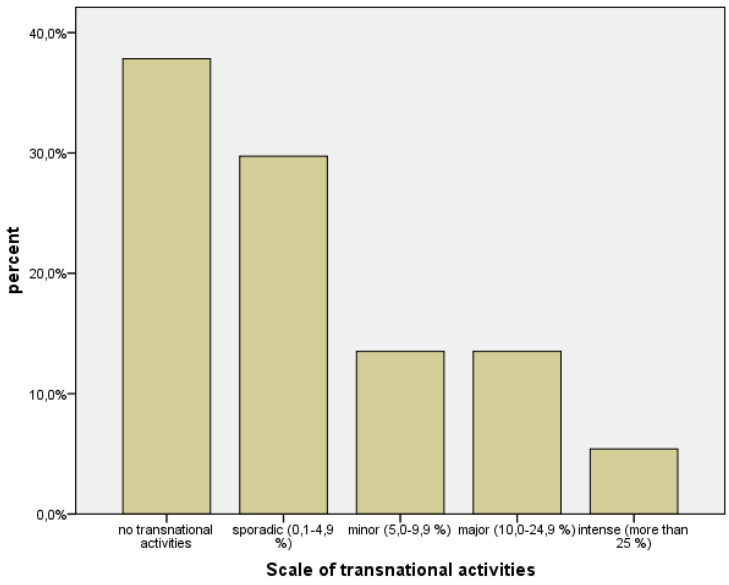
There are not too many transnational events in this region (remember that just the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia are coded here), which seems surprising considering that the Liberian NPFL and the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had extensive transnational linkages and both conflicts were intertwined. The majority of activity took place in the area where Guinea borders both Liberia and Sierra Leone. Extraterritorial bases were set up not only in border regions but also directly in the capitals of Freetown in Sierra Leone and Conakry in Guinea, indicating the heavy involvement of outside governments in the West African wars.



Not surprisingly, the bulk of events are concentrated in the Eastern DRC along the border to Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi reflecting the transnational wars following the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Transnational events are also common in Southern Sudan, where the LRA is known to have been active and supported by the regime in Khartoum in retaliation for Ugandan assistance to the South-Sudanese SPLA. While the map shows that at times heavy extraterritorial fighting took place, most of these battles resulted in no change of territorial control. Bases are again an important element: Some follow the DRC/Uganda border like pearls on a string. What is also revealed is that TNR activity is not confined to near-border areas: While this is not too surprising for small countries like Burundi and Rwanda, events are recorded in the DRC several hundred kilometers away from state boundaries.

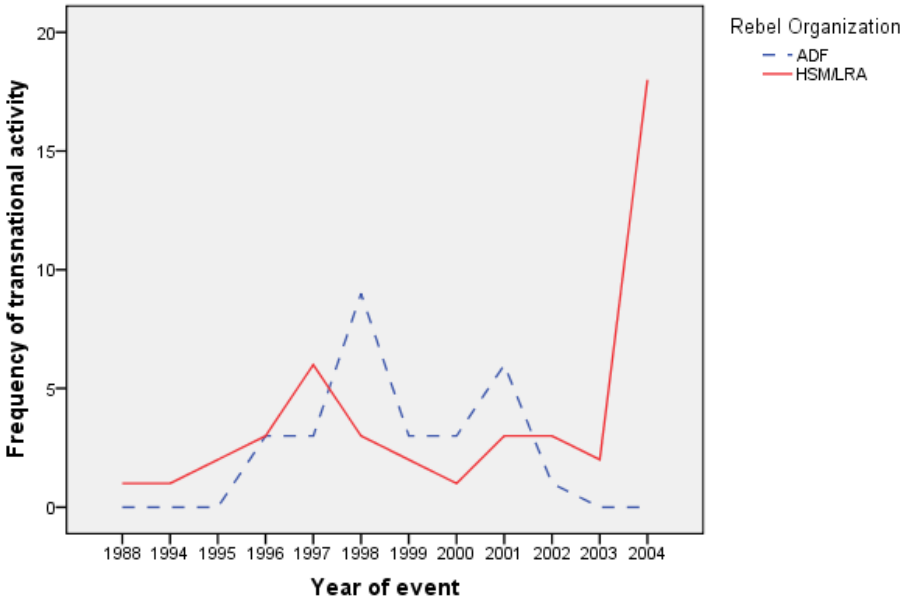
Characteristics of transnational rebels

By aggregating the information on rebel activity to the level of individual rebel organizations we can examine their characteristics and compare groups that act transnationally with those that restrict themselves to their home state. In order to keep this analysis meaningful, rebel actors were only included when they exceeded a threshold value of at least ten total activities. This was necessary to avoid an undue influence of very small and only sporadically active rebels coded by ACLED such as the Peoples Redemption Army (PRA) of Uganda, which is rumored to be mostly an invention of the Ugandan government, or Congolese Mai-Mai militias. However, this excludes also relatively high profile cases like the already mentioned FLEC-FAC or a breakup faction of the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), the RCD-ML, that is known to have been quite active around Kisangani in the Eastern DRC. From the thirty-seven rebel organizations that remain, a 60%-majority of twenty-three can be considered transnational rebels. This confirms the results from Salehyan (2009) about the importance of the phenomenon. TNRs vary, however, considerably in the scale of their cross-border ventures. I calculated the share of transnational activities from the total and categorized the result:

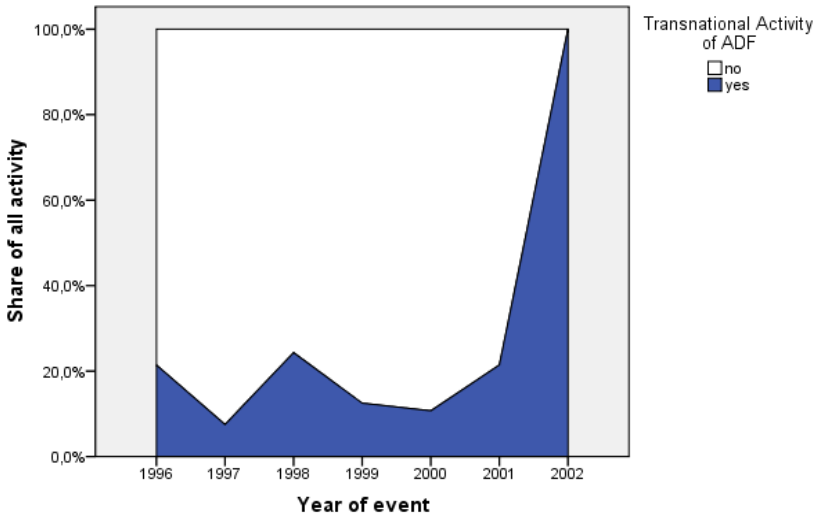


A majority of TNRs according to this data uses the territory of foreign states just sporadically and spend less than five percent of their time outside their home country. About 15% of all rebel

groups (five in absolute terms) have a share of five to ten or ten to twenty-five percent, respectively. Two actors can be considered intense TNRs, with transnational events accounting for more than a quarter of all their activities. Utilizing the temporally disaggregation of the event data, it is possible to track the transnational activity of certain groups over time. The following graph shows the frequency of transnational activities of two Ugandan insurgent groups, the LRA (active since 1988) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF, active between 1996 and 2002):



By dividing the absolute number of transnational events by the total, an indication of the relative frequency of such incidents can be given. This has been done for the ADF in the following diagram:



While the average share of transnational events of the ADF is about 16%, the trend line shows some variation over time, with a peak of over 20% in 1998 and an increase after 2000 until it shifted completely to their rear bases in the DRC in the process of being pushed back by the Ugandan army, which all but destroyed the group with the help of their rebel allies in the DRC eventually.

One of the expectations generated from the literature was, that rebel groups relying on transnational activity are probably be weaker relative to the government than purely domestic groups, because the latter are not in need of cross-border bases to wage an effective insurgency. There is no support in this data for that proposition; if anything, transnational rebels seem to be stronger relative to the state they are fighting, as the following table demonstrates:

Strength of rebels relative to government * Transnational Rebel Group?

			Transnational Rebel Group?		
			no	yes	Total
Strength of rebels relative to government	much weaker	Anzahl	2	1	3
		%	18,2%	5,3%	10,0%
	weaker	Anzahl	7	12	19
		%	63,6%	63,2%	63,3%
	parity	Anzahl	2	4	6
		%	18,2%	21,1%	20,0%
	stronger	Anzahl	0	2	2
		%	,0%	10,5%	6,7%
Total		Anzahl	11	19	30
			100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

The significance of this result is however mitigated by the fact that due to missing data and differences in recorded rebel groups between ACLED and EACD just thirty organizations remain in the sample. Moreover, the EACD data are coded for the group for the whole period of their conflict – hence it might be the case that transnational rebels started as weak on the outset, but became stronger as a direct result of their border-crossing. Another, more substantial, explanation would be that TNR are often founded on the initiative of a foreign sponsor in order to delegate an interstate conflict: Such proxy actors would mobilize on the territory of their

principal, be equipped and trained by it and therefore be a relatively strong force when entering into armed conflict with their home state. The following cross-tabulation compares rebels according to whether they received external military support by foreign governments:

Military support for rebels by foreign government * Transnational Rebel

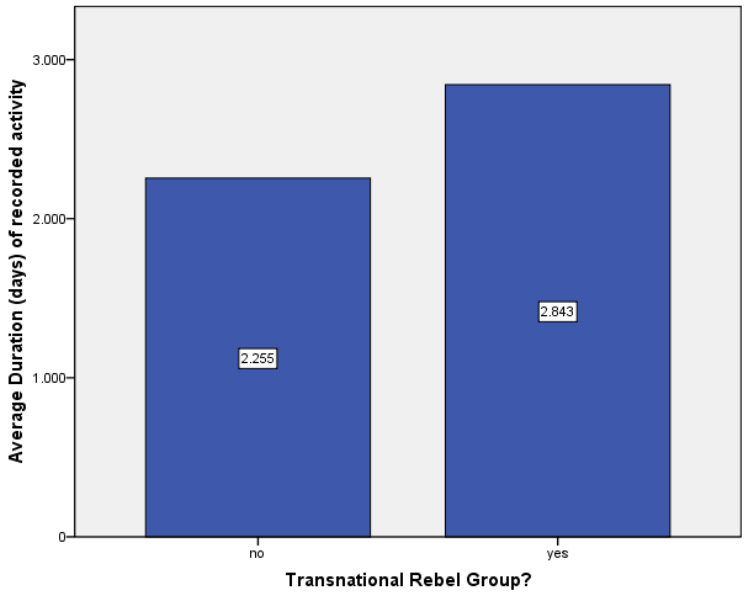
			Transnational Rebel Group?		
			no	yes	total
Military support for rebels by foreign government	no	number	5	7	12
		%?	45,5%	38,9%	41,4%
	yes	number	6	11	17
		%	54,5%	61,1%	58,6%
Total		number	11	18	29
		%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

These data also confirm earlier results that rebel groups very often benefit from external assistance (58.6% in total). Segregating by rebel type just small variations appear: TNRs are slightly more likely to receive foreign support. But as mentioned above, TNRs may also count on kindred transnational non-state, often identity-based groups for help. Although this phenomenon is considerable less common than state support, here the difference is more pronounced: From the five insurgent organizations drawing on non-state military assistance, four were transnational rebels – a share of 22% of all TNR groups.

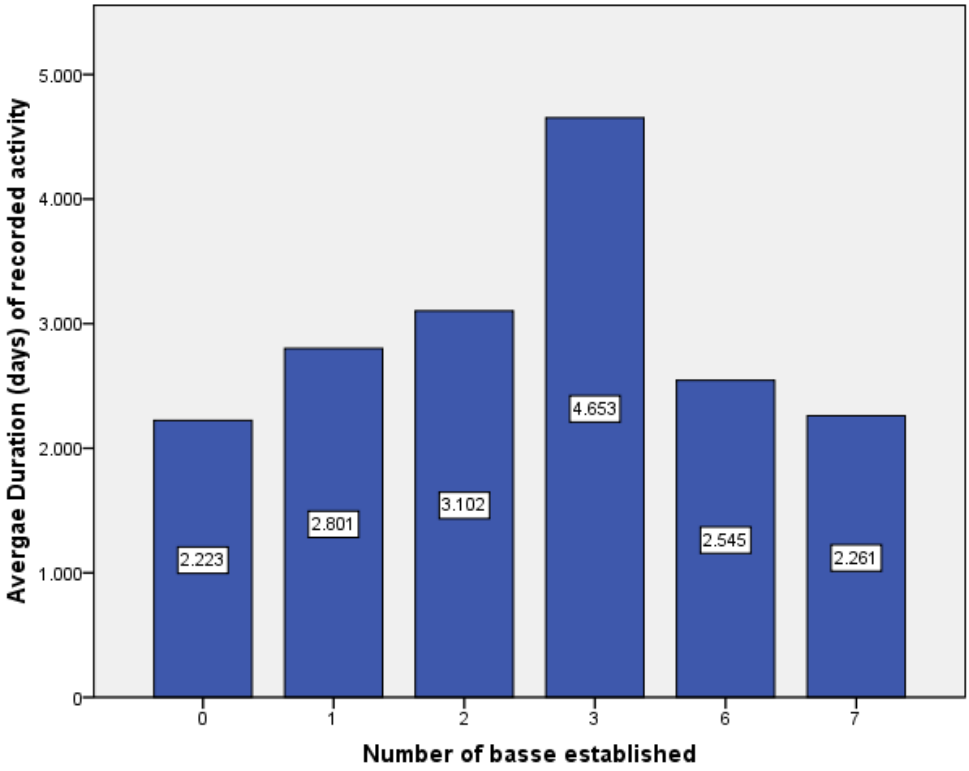
Military support to rebels by non-state group * Transnational Rebel Group?

			Transnational Rebel Group?		
			no	yes	Total
Military support to rebels by transnat. non-state group	yes	number	1	4	5
		%	9,1%	22,2%	17,2%
	no	number	10	14	24
		%	90,9%	77,8%	82,8%
Total		number	11	18	29
		%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

Knowing about the frequency of and characteristics of TNRs, which effect does transnational activity now have on the success of a rebellion – is it a good strategy to go transnational, as earlier research indicated? First, I consider the effect of transnational activity on the endurance of an insurgency. I calculated the duration of rebel groups by calculating the time span between their first and last recorded activity in days. Note that this is probably not identical with duration data coded on grounds other than events – usually, rebel groups are only coded to be active as soon as the conflict they fight reaches a certain level of fatalities. Also, as already mentioned it is unlikely that ACLED really captures all activities of all rebel groups. Nevertheless, the time span in which rebel activity can be observed should be a reasonably approximation of their total time of existence. The following chart shows average duration of TNRs compared with domestic groups:



This confirms the expectation: Rebels with access to foreign territory last longer than rebels confined to their home state, and with about 600 days or more than one and a half year the difference is quite large. The theory suggests that the utilization of cross-border bases where rebels can hide and resupply should account for a big part of that relationship. The following chart tracks duration in relation to the total number of extraterritorial headquarters:



It seems that a curvilinear relationship is at work here, with an increase in the number of external bases resulting in a longer duration initially: TNRs with three safe havens in neighboring states last more than double the time of purely domestic insurgents, a powerful confirmation of the theory. However, relying too much on foreign soil actually decreases duration almost to the level of no bases at all. This could indicate that rebels who lose their foothold in their home country probably also lose touch with their constituency, making it harder for them to survive. Moreover, this decrease of base efficiency could also be due to the fact that host countries are weary of tolerating too much foreign rebel activity in their territory and will engage such TNRs.

Finally, in addition to the endurance of a rebellion their success can be measured in terms of how the conflict they fought in ended, if at all. These types of conflict termination are compared in the next table:

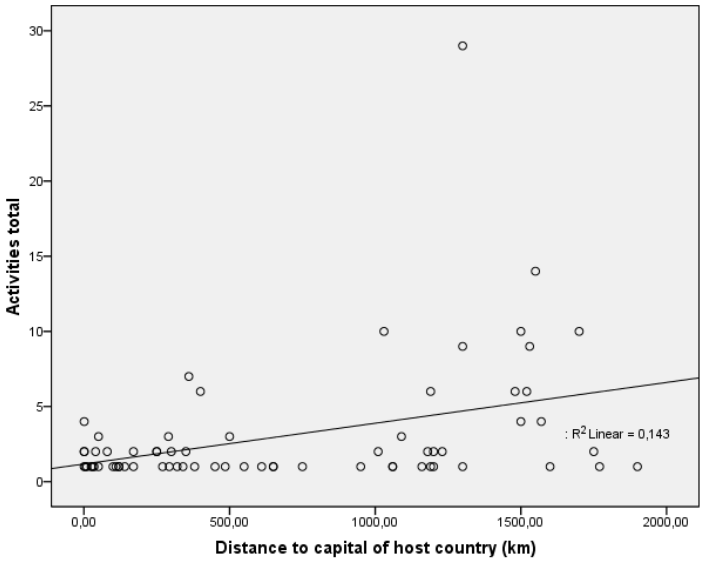
Type of conflict termination * Transnational Rebel Group? Kreuztabelle

			Transnational Rebel Group?		
			no	yes	Total
Type of conflict termination	ongoing	number	0	6	6
		%	,0%	31,6%	20,0%
	Peace agreement	number	3	0	3
		%	27,3%	,0%	10,0%
	Ceasefire with conflict regulation	number	1	0	1
		%	9,1%	,0%	3,3%
	Victory	number	1	9	10
		%	9,1%	47,4%	33,3%
	No or low activity	number	6	4	10
		%	54,5%	21,1%	33,3%
Total		number	11	19	30
		%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%

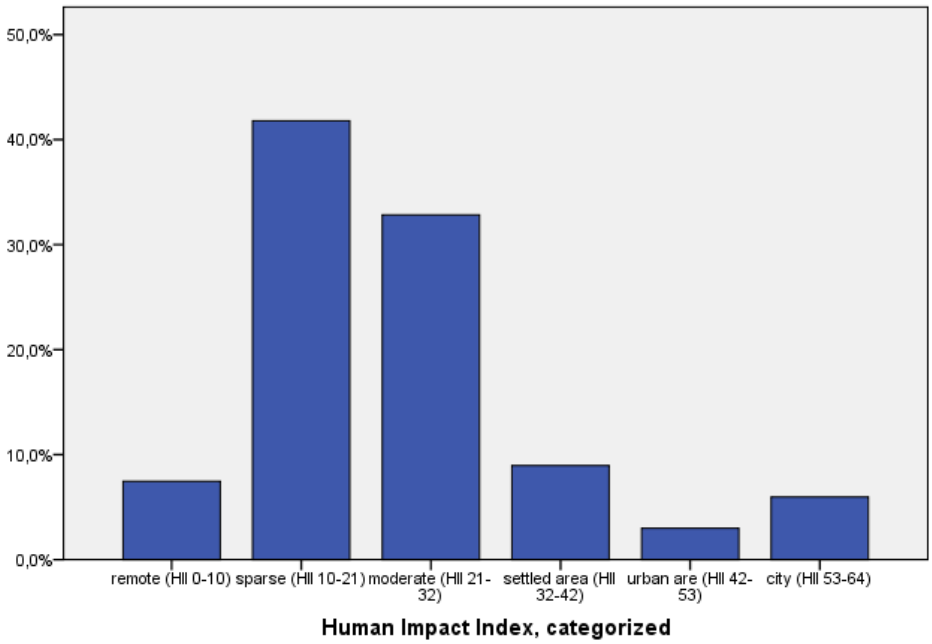
The results are an impressive confirmation of expectations: Transnational activity and the ending of a civil war are highly correlated (yielding a Cramer's V of .72, significant at a p-value < 0.05). Furthermore, they are a logical consequence of the results of the duration analysis: All rebel groups that were still active at the time of the coding were TNRs – about a third of them engaged in ongoing conflict at the time. Corroborating the theory that TNRs are unlikely to enter in a negotiated settlement, none of them terminated the conflict with a peace agreement or a regulating ceasefire. In contrast, almost 50% fought the conflict out to a conclusion on the battlefield. From the ten civil wars that ended in a military victory, six were won by the insurgents – all of them were transnational rebels. All in all, although based on a somewhat limited sample, the results generally confirm the expectation. To cross international borders is definitely a promising strategy for any type of rebel organization.

Regions of transnational rebel activity

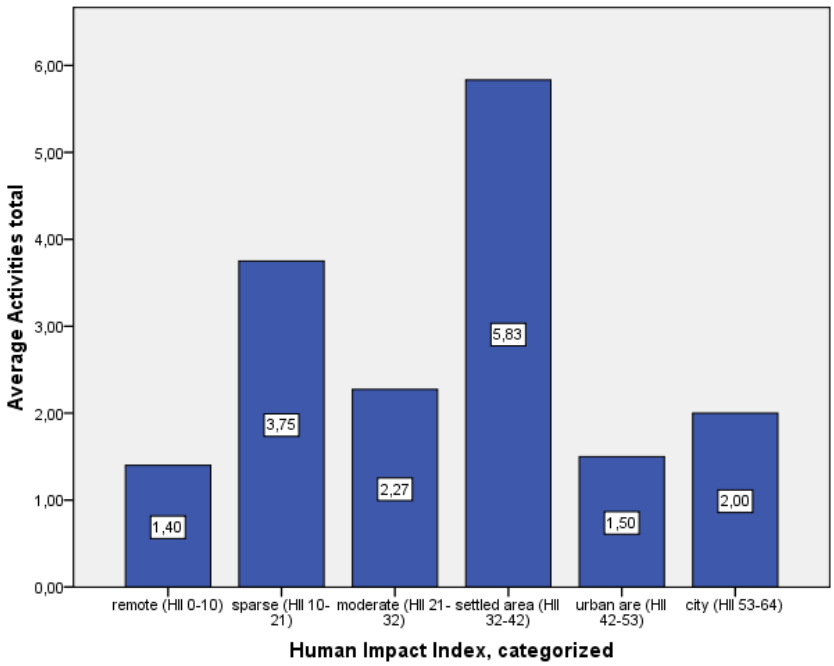
As a last step, I present some analyses on the characteristics of areas in which transnational rebels operate. In total, the 210 transnational activities are divided between 68 second-level administrative regions. Exactly half of those are contiguous to an international border. On average, these border regions showed twice as much activity than regions deep inside the country. Areas of transnational rebel activity have a mean distance to the capital of the host state of about 700 km. As the following scatterplot demonstrates, there is a noticeable, albeit relatively weak (R^2 = .143) linear relationship between distance and frequency of events:



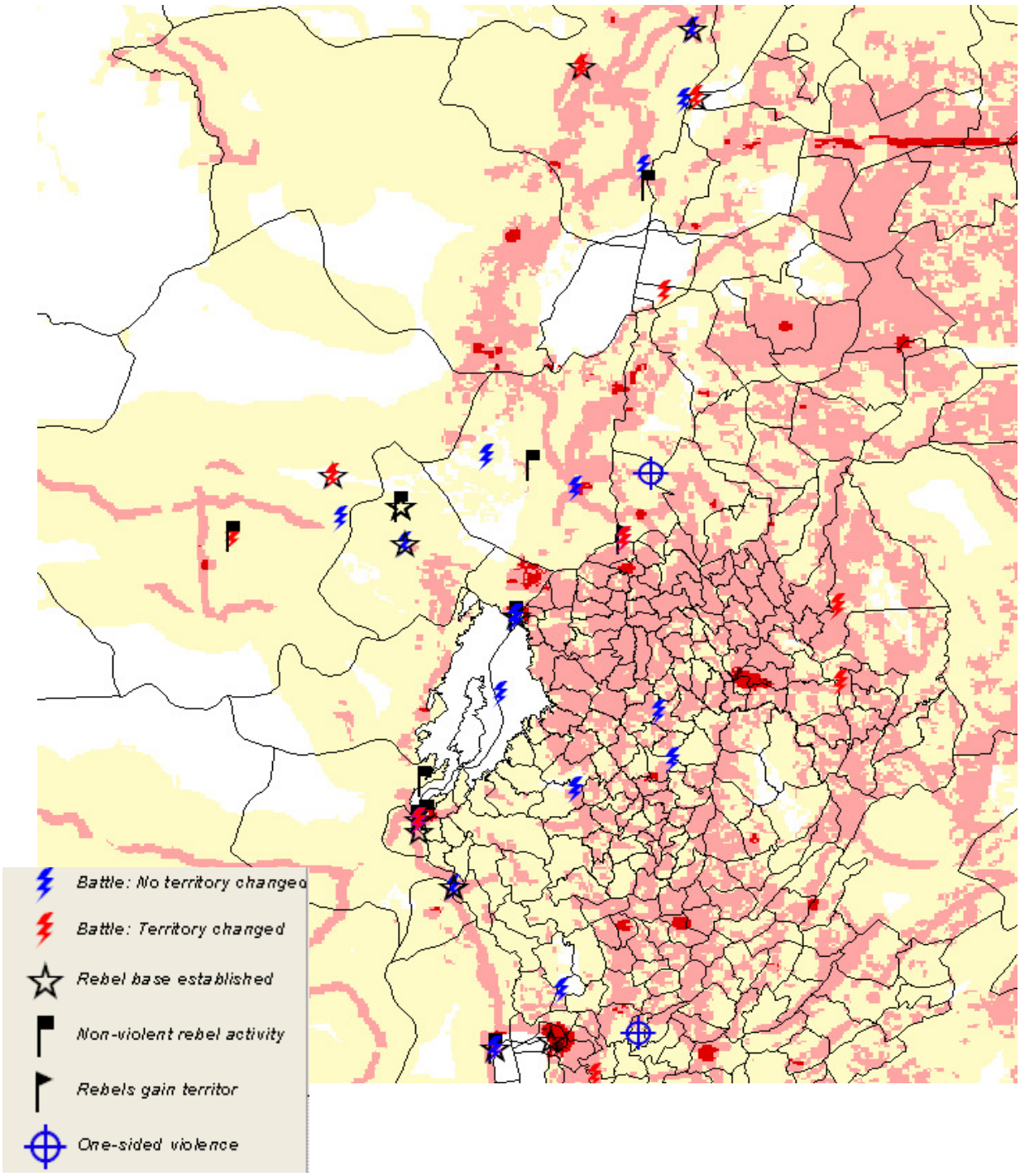
Contrary to expectations, natural resources in the form of diamonds or minerals played no particular important role in extraterritorial activities: Just about ten percent of the studied regions contained such deposits. This result may be due to the limited sample of the dataset, and does not indicate that resources may not have a significant impact in certain cases, but overall, at least for transnational activity the "greed"-hypothesis does not hold. As a last measure of the characteristics of affected regions they were rated according to the Human Influence Index, which codes the impact that human beings have on their immediate environment, thus giving an impression of the conditions under which TNRs operate. Low index values occur in sparsely populated areas with bad infrastructure, high values indicate urban environments.



As expected, most areas with transnational insurgent activity are relatively backward regions, although a minimum of infrastructure seems to be necessary. It is likely however, that there is a considerable reporting bias here, as activities occurring in populated areas are much more likely to be observed. It is also interesting how the picture changes when not TNR presence in general but the frequency of events is taken into account: Although they form just a small percentage of all affected regions, much of TNR activity is concentrated in settled or even urban areas:

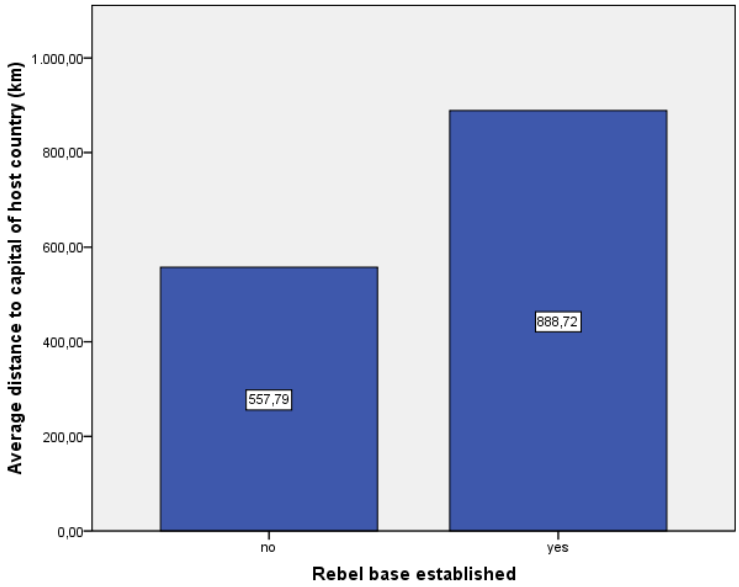


Regions with a middle ground HII of about 30 to 40 (from a maximum of 64) have a mean frequency of activities of 5.83, compared with just 3.75 for sparsely populated and accessed rural areas. Towns and cities are strategically important and therefore embattled locations also in a transnational setting of civil war – a case in point being the Eastern DRC provincial cities of Goma, Kisangani or Rutshuru that saw heavy fighting during the Congo War. The following map shows part of the DRC – Burundi/Rwanda/Uganda border region. Darker colors indicate higher human influence values, generally following settlement patterns and road networks.

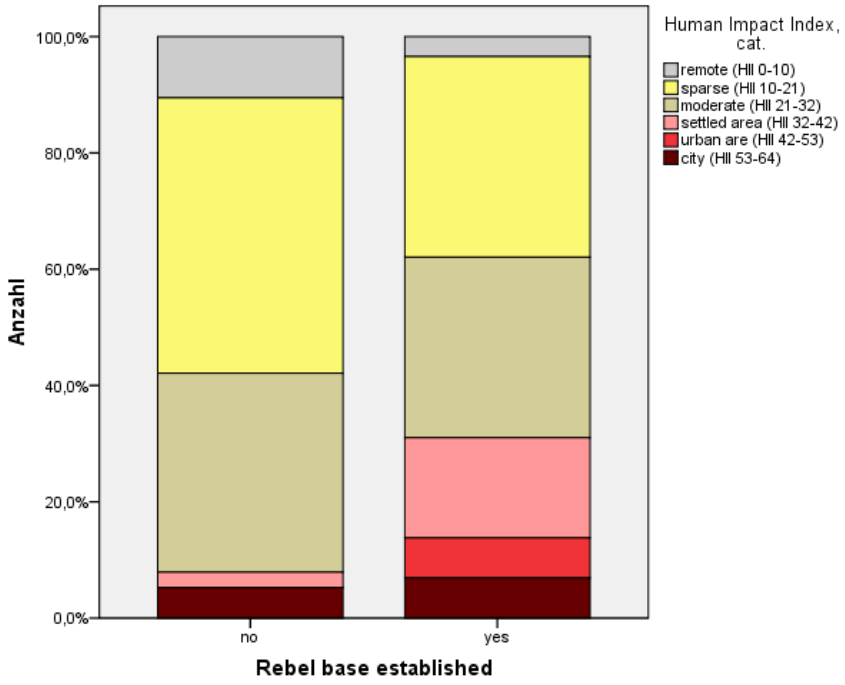


In the previous sections it was established that extraterritorial strongholds are a particular important element of transnational rebel activity. Regions were therefore in a final step analyzed specifically whether they were the site of rebel headquarters. Somewhat surprisingly, the distance to the border seems not to be very influential on the decision to found a base of operation: There is just a slight variation here between regions bordering neighboring states and such that are in

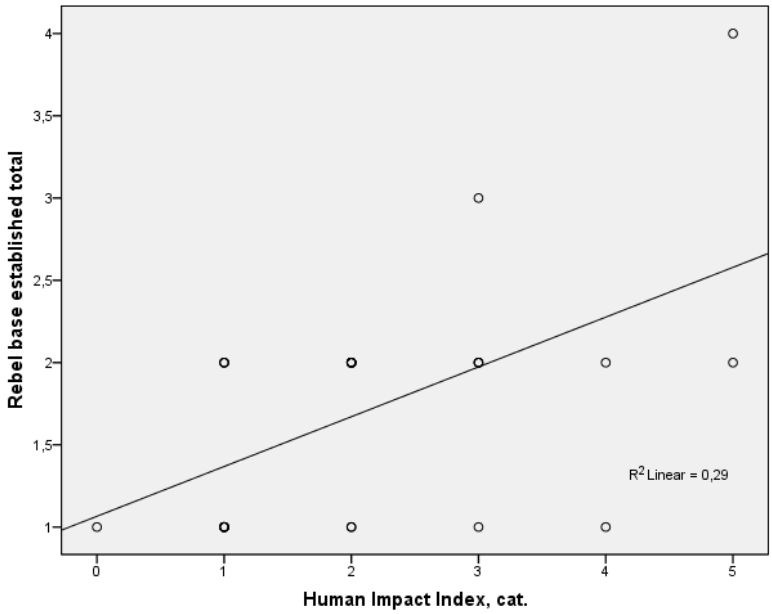
the interior of the country (55.2% vs. 46.2% of all regions containing rebel headquarters). Distance to the capital however seems to have an impact:



On average, districts with established bases are about 900 kilometers away from the capital, contrasting with just about 550 km for regions affected just by fighting or other activities. At last, giving an explanation for the described bimodal distribution of HII-values among the frequency of rebel activities, there are noticable differences in terms of the rural-urban-continuum between regions chosen as sites for extraterritorial insurgent base camps and such that are just passes by:



More than 90% of regions without permanent bases are moderately populated at best – in contrast, about a third of areas containing bases are settled or even urban. Those two categories actually account for almost all of the difference, while bigger cities distribute evenly here. This pattern also holds up and gets even a bit stronger when the actual number of bases is taken into account rather than a dichotomous condition[7]:



The higher the impact of human influence, the more bases were established in a region (the HII can in fact account for about a third of the variation). This confirms that rebels chose predominantly strategically important and infrastructural well developed areas as their strongholds. The results in this section accords well with the observation of Hegre & Raleigh (2009) that civil wars take place foremost in populated regions that lie in the periphery of a state.

Conclusion

The exploration of disaggregated data on transnational rebels by and large confirmed the expectations that were gained from previous studies on the subject that used national or conflict-data level. In the ACLED sample of eight African countries 1960-2004, about the same amount of insurgents – slightly more than half – can be classified as transnational rebels like in the

[7] Note that for this plot one outlier value (six bases in one region) was excluded.

worldwide analysis conducted by Salehyan and others. Those actors use foreign soil predominantly as sanctuaries, although this analysis revealed that they also conduct a considerable amount of military operations there, probably foremost in defense against government forces pursuing them over the border. When setting up bases of operations, which they frequently do, TNRs chose regions that are far from the capital but strategically placed and relatively well supplied with infrastructure on a local level, while fights take place more in remote areas and deposits of natural resources do not play an important part. Using the EACD-data to supplement the data with information on the characteristics and success of rebel organizations, the thesis that rebels going transnational predominantly chose this strategy out of weakness vis-à-vis the government could not be confirmed. The data produced striking evidence however, that a strategy which deliberately includes the use of the territory of neighboring states is clearly superior to a restriction to the home state: Transnational rebels last longer than domestic ones, are less likely to be defeated or pressured into a negotiated settlement and even have good chances to win the conflict militarily. This is not only the case because of the advantages of organizing transnationally, but also a result of the access to direct support in their host countries, be it from governments or kindred non-state groups.

For conflict resolution efforts this is an important result, as it shows that the best peace plan is not likely to work when rebel parties can simply keep their war-fighting potential hidden behind the border and return to wage conflict another day when they deem the agreement not sufficient anymore. The implications for security policies of states are clear: Poorly monitored and porous borders significantly hamper their effectiveness in fighting insurgencies and entail the risk of long-lasting low-level guerilla warfare or even outright defeat. It also shows that regional cooperation is probably the only way to effectively combat transnational rebels and that governments should put aside their differences and stop using rebels in neighboring countries as proxy forces, because such a strategy is likely to come back to haunt them when their rival resorts to the same tactic.

Cross-border activities of armed opposition organizations are clearly an important element of civil wars and deserve further study. This paper has shown that it is certainly promising to combine the two strands of anti-methodological nationalism in civil war research in order to do this. Using disaggregated event data on other phenomena associated with civil and transnational war, like refugee camps or settlement areas of ethnic groups, can surely enhance our understanding of the transnational dynamics of civil conflict. Fortunately, with the ever ongoing gathering and coding of new disaggregated datasets like the improved version of ACLED or EDACS in Berlin (Chojnacki & Metternich 2008), the future of this kind of research looks rather bright.

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