

A Porous Humanitarian Shield: The Laws of War, the Red Cross, and the Killing of Civilians

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A growing literature suggests that the international community is potentially crucial in inducing or coercing conflict parties in civil wars to refrain from committing atrocities against the civilian population. However, most of the extant studies focus on the third party interventions by states or international governmental organization. We examine in this article whether the presence of a private actor, the distinctively neutral and independent International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), whose mission includes the protection of the civilian population, has a restraining effect on the conflict parties. We argue based on the growing literature on compliance with international treaties that this actor can deter to some extent government perpetrators from targeting civilians, but largely fails to reach out to rebel troops. The time inconsistency argument that we develop expects successors to governments which ratified the relevant Laws of War conventions and protocols to pay less and less attention to the treaty obligations; this treaty inheritance thesis is in considerable contrast to the optimism that socialization theories attribute to the norms and obligations explicitly or implicitly stated in international treaties. Using the Eck-Hultman data on so-called one-sided violence, we analyze statistically whether the ratification of the respective Geneva conventions and protocols reduces violence against civilians by the state actor. Furthermore, we examine whether or not the physical presence of the ICRC through delegations and seminars reduces the risk of one-sided violence in conflict zones. The statistical analysis shows that neither the ratification of the Geneva Conventions and Protocols nor the presence of the ICRC in conflict zones had the desired effects. The statistical evidence suggests in line with the treaty inheritance argument that the more time has passed since the ratification of the relevant Geneva Conventions and Protocols, the larger is the risk of mass killings. Even if we test for the possible endogeneity of ICRC activities, we cannot find evidence that the ICRC presence in conflict zones makes a crucial difference and that especially rebel leaders are not deterred from pursuing one-sided violence as an integral part of their military campaigns.

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* Previous versions of the paper have been presented at the the Pan-European Meeting of the Standing Group on International Relations, Stockholm, September 9-11, 2010, the 51st annual ISA convention, New Orleans, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, the University of Konstanz, and the University of Greifswald. We appreciate the helpful comments of the seminar and conference participants. We would like to thank the German Foundation for Peace Research, the University of Greifswald and the University of Stuttgart for financial support and Isabel Schneider, Romy Escher, Sebastian Kuhn, Marina Beielstein, Kristof Lintz, Ivo Sieder and Oliver Neumann for research assistance. Comments by Winfried Pohlmeier on the empirical estimation are greatly appreciated.

Introduction

Scholars studying violent conflict analyze the behavior of a variety of actors in war-torn societies. Besides the conflict parties and third party states, an important role is ascribed to international organizations. Whereas governmental organizations, like the United Nations, receive widespread scholarly attention, non-governmental organizations are often not in the limelight of academic research and are mostly attributed a role in post-conflict reconstruction. Indeed, few private international organizations are systematically present in conflict zones. One exception is the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (ICRC). Its main task is to provide assistance for conflict victims, such as health services, survival relief, but also to prevent and contain harmful effects of conflict.

The ICRC has played the leading role in the development of international humanitarian law and thus is widely accepted to be its watchdog. It is still actively involved in disseminating and promoting the Laws of War, for example by teaching members of the armed forces not to attack and mistreat civilians and military personnel hors de combat. The first Geneva Convention, which was drafted by a group of private individuals around the founder of the ICRC, Henry Dunant, was signed by 14 European states in 1864. Although this and the subsequent conventions attributed the main responsibility for the implementation of these rules to the ratifying member states, the ICRC indirectly became the main international guardian of the Law of Wars besides the League of Nations and the United Nations.¹

The ICRC as organization received already three times the Nobel Peace Prize, in addition to the one awarded to Henry Dunant. It is one of the largest private humanitarian organizations with missions and delegates on a world-wide scale. The ICRC sees itself as an “impartial, neutral and independent organization whose exclusively humanitarian mission is

¹ Subsequent landmark developments in the evolution of the Laws of War include the Geneva conventions of 1906, 1929, and 1949 as well as the Hague (1899, 1907) conventions. Three protocols, which date from 1977 and 2005 respectively, have amended the 1949 Geneva Convention and have led to stronger legal protection of civilian victims of war.

to protect the lives and dignity of victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence and to provide them with assistance”².

In this article, we examine whether the ICRC reaches these goals and whether it is sufficiently present in those states around the world in which one of the key goals of the Laws of War, the protection of civilians, are particularly endangered. Most theories of international relations suggest that the influence of private actors on real or potential human rights abusers remains limited at best and might in some cases even be counterproductive. A growing literature at least suggests that the activities of non-governmental international actors are much more positive than the realist thesis that such interventions remain epiphenomenal in a wider context lets us expect. Yet, the evidence assembled so far in support of this international law thesis is restricted to the norms that governments or powerful IGOs supervise (e.g. Simmons 2009. 2010). At the moment, we do not know how effective private actors with similar missions are in protecting civilians. Mainly legal or historical studies of the ICRC have appeared so far. Finnemore (1996, Chapt. 3) and Forsythe (2005) are among the few social scientists who have closely examined the genesis and functioning of the ICRC.

This article pursues a different research agenda and examines the extent to which the main actors in civil wars, governments and rebels, comply with the international norms advocated by the ICRC. Recent formal work suggests that institutions like the ICRC which do not possess a powerful enforcement mechanism can deter atrocities to some limited extent. We particularly expect in line with the work of Giligan (2006) that compliance success of the Geneva organization will vary with the perpetrator’s anticipated opportunity costs of ordering the killing and maiming of civilians. These costs will be higher for government than for rebel leaders. Although the Laws of War extend to all conflict parties, governments are the signatories of the international agreement and therefore primarily liable for gross violations of

² Mission statement available on the ICRC website (<http://www.icrc.org/HOME.NSF/060a34982cae624ec12566fe00326312/125ffe2d4c7f68acc1256ae300394f6e?OpenDocument>, last consulted February 7, 2010)

the international norms. If they target civilians in a blatant way, they face the risk of international isolation and of economic or political sanctions. The opportunity cost argument that we advance, however, also suggests in contradiction to the constructivist socialization thesis that the costs of a signature will decline over time and that the longer a country participates in the Laws of War regime, the lower should be the inhibition to target civilians. Once a conflict has escalated, the ICRC could also have some indirect sanctioning power through persuasion and naming and shaming (Checkel 2001, Finnemore 1993, 1996, Hafner-Burton 2008) strategies. In this article, we will examine whether the seminars it conducts help to persuade potential perpetrators to stop the victimization of civilians and whether the shaming of these actors through the rare and therefore highly targeted ICRC statements and condemnations has a similarly positive effect.

Making usage of the cross-sectional Uppsala data set on so-called one-sided violence (Eck and Hultman 2007), we analyze whether the presence of the ICRC limits the killing and harming of civilians in conflicts around the world. Our longitudinal event count regression models show that the ICRC is not able to stop the abuse of civilians. On the contrary, there is rather indication that the more years have passed since a state ratified the Geneva Conventions and Protocols that are particularly important for the protection of civilians, the larger the number of unarmed people who are killed by both government and rebel henchman. This result contradicts the constructivist hypothesis and the hope of the ICRC that domestic actors become socialized over time with the Laws of War and learn to act more humanely in conflict situations. Furthermore, the physical presence of the ICRC in the preceding year is also associated with more, rather than less, extensive civilian abuse in the subsequent year. Our statistical analysis shows that proactive policies like seminars for military personnel and the warning or condemnation of the warring parties is not related to less violence against civilians either.

Theoretical background

There are various approaches that try to explain why we can observe more or less one-sided violence in wars.³ Explanations range from strategic considerations and the balance of power of the conflict parties (e.g. Downes 2008, Kalyvas 2006; Verwimp 2006) to factors that relate to the internal organization and sanctioning mechanisms within the rebel groups or government forces (e.g. Schneider 2010, Weinstein 2007). A third strand of literature blames the international community, or rather its absence in conflict areas, for the atrocities against the civilian population in times of armed conflict. Valentino (2004) for example, advances the view that international actors by means of military intervention can limit or even prevent the occurrence of mass killings during wars.

However, the effectiveness of such interventions is heavily disputed, and the question of whether or not a neutral actor like the ICRC reduces the carnage or not has preoccupied conflict researchers since decades. Most early studies on this topic boiled down to the contention that impartiality is key for successful interventions and effective conflict management. Young (1967:81) is one of many who claim in this vein that "a high score in such areas as impartiality would seem to be at the heart of successful interventions in many situations". However, recent theoretical and empirical advances show that the nexus between the impartiality of an intervention and its effectiveness is much more involved. To start with, Bercovitch and Schneider (2000) argue, based on a political economy model of the demand for conflict management, that the neutrality of a mediator is endogenous to the conflict situation and that impartiality is a means to compensate for a lack of power. Moreover, conflict management by formally neutral mediators is less effective than other state-led mediations as neutral mediators often agree to intervene in relatively hopeless cases. Kydd (2003) demonstrates formally that unbiased conflict management is less informative than

³ For an overview see Schneider et al. (2010)

biased mediation and that biased mediators have a strategic advantage over impartial ones. Savun (2008) offers some empirical support of the thesis that a lack of neutrality is not necessarily bad for convincing the warring parties on a peaceful resolution of their conflict.

The question is of course whether the disputed effectiveness of impartial mediations easily translates to other forms of conflict management and especially the humanitarian interventions that are characteristic of the ICRC. This organization, headquartered in Geneva since its foundation, is unique in its status under international law and in its role as neutral intermediary between warring factions. The ICRC's principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence and rules of confidentiality are frequently portrayed as necessary basis to be able to provide humanitarian assistance during armed conflict and to get access to victims (Ku and Brun 2003).

However, such normative statements should be taken *cum grano salis*. Forsythe (2005) does not only point out various examples where the ICRC did not have a very neutral stand (e.g. Italy in Ethiopia) or the close connection between the ICRC and the Swiss government in the past but also summarizes the criticism that is related to the refusal of the ICRC to publicly speak out against severe violations of humanitarian law and thus to engage into the practice of naming and shaming. He maintains that the NGO's tradition of discretion might have been counter-productive in some cases. Cases in point are the silence of the organization with regard to the Holocaust (Favez 1988) or, in case of its implementation in Hungary, its tardiness in trying to rescue the Jewish population from the Nazi and Arrow Cross henchmen (Ben-Tov 1990). According to the President of the ICRC, speaking out for the civilian population and especially the European Jews would have not been effective as "such an appeal could lead to a loss of access to some two million Allied prisoners of war whom the ICRC was then assisting" (Kellenberger 2004:598).⁴ As acts of one-sided violence, by their gruesome nature, demand partial actions, it is not surprising that the ICRC has

4

loosened its policy of discretion and neutrality a bit.⁵ In the view of Delorenzi (1999:28-29), the organization has slowly started to strike “a balance between discretion and public condemnation” following the usage of poisonous gas in Yemen in 1967. ICRC president Kellenberger (2004:599-600) lists some cases where the ICRC abandoned its policy of discretion such as an appeal to the warring parties in Bosnia-Herzegovina (August 1992) and in Kosovo (September 1998). To protect its delegates, the organization refrained from calling the killings in Rwanda a “genocide”. The ICRC president nevertheless insists that the ICRC acted decisively and states: “It would be hard to conceive of a more dramatic and urgent public appeal to the international community than that of 28 April 1994...” (ibid. 602).

However, the ICRC is far from relying on public condemnations as frequently as similar organizations like *Médecins Sans Frontières* or *Amnesty International*. Some of these NGOs were partly founded in response to the perceived impossibility that an international actor like the ICRC remains neutral and discrete in a conflict like the war in Biafra with its monstrous mass killings. As Delorenzi (1999:25) writes in a ICRC booklet, “...NGOs who advertised their ‘without borders’ or ‘emergency’ status...had no scruples about reporting, denouncing and using public opinion through the media to exert pressure on governments”.

Some recent contributions on the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions furthermore suggest that impartial interventions of the international community may have adverse effects on the civilian populations. Krain’s (2005) detailed statistical study of the genocides between 1955 and 1997 indicates that only partial interventions are able to reduce the plight suffered by civilians in conflict zones. According to him, only militarily bolstered interventions enable the international community to shelter the civilian population against the malign intentions of the perpetrators and to dampen the one-sided violence. Some researchers go as far as suggesting that some humanitarian efforts are not only inefficient, but that they occasionally

⁵ This development was concomitant with similar changes in the development of Swiss neutrality. Although the example of the Alpine republic initially shaped the neutrality stance of the ICRC, Bugnion (2008) insist that the policies of impartiality of the two organization have developed independently of each other since the mid-1860s.

increase the abuses of civilians. Hultman (2010) shows in an examination of all peace operations in post-Cold War internal conflicts that such humanitarian efforts are linked to increases in one-sided violence by rebel organizations. However, the mandate of an operation is crucial. While the effect of peace operation on government violence remains unclear in her negative binomial regression models, the explicit mandate given to UN interveners to protect civilians makes a difference and reduces the number of civilians killed by rebels. This suggests that “simply sending troops without the mandate to interfere when necessary can be devastating“ (Hultman 2009: 20). However, case study evidence suggests that even explicit mandates can have counter-productive effects. Branch (2009: 479) for instance contends, based on a study of Uganda, that “humanitarianism can be instrumentalised by [...] warring parties for their own ends, leading to a prolongation of the very violence it purports to ameliorate”. Schneider and Bussmann (2009) show for the civil war in Bosnia that the intensification of international sanctions against the Serbs after the massacre in Srebrenica was associated with more Serbian civilians killed by Bosniak troops. In other words, also partial interventions like the one undertaken in the Bosnian civil war raise the danger that the protected engage into last-minute revenge killings.

One serious problem of the study of international interventions by governmental and non-governmental actors is case selection. According to Melander (2009), international interventions predominantly occur in conflict zones where the risk of mass killings looms largest, if the killing and maiming has not already set in by the time the international community starts to act. Differentiating between the factors which influence the chance of an international intervention and those that reduce the mass killings, he concludes that international peacekeeping might have a benign effect after all. The various contributions of Fortna (e.g. 2004) also suggest that most missions are effective and that conflict management by the United Nations is particularly effective. Doyle and Sambanis (2006), however, suggest that the UN has particular difficulties in stopping the killing once a conflict has set in.

There is little research that assesses interventions by non-governmental actors and the role of the international norms that they advocate. A growing number of studies, however, examines the compliance with and effectiveness of the international norms for the protection of life integrity right; these investigations are, however, equally inconclusive as the related studies on peacekeeping. According to Hathaway (2007), domestic political and legal enforcement of treaties as well as collateral consequences of non-compliance influence the decision of whether or not a government lives up to the obligations of such treaties. Simmons (2009) forcefully contends that the international commitments that such treaties entail have improved the human rights records of signatory states. Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui (2005, 1378), by contrast, argue that the international human rights regime serves as a symbol for the “paradox of empty promises”. Hence, although governments sign international human rights treaties, they do not comply with them. Neumayer (2005) maintains that the level of democracy as well as the number of citizens participating in NGOs rather than the ratification of an international treaty improves the human rights record of a state. Yet, while the human rights regime may not be directly effective, it may cause states to respect these norms indirectly through the conclusion of preferential trade agreements that include a human rights clause. Hafner-Burton (2005b, 595) observes that such agreements typically include strong enforcement mechanisms. This should, in her view, increase the chance that a government respects the human rights of its citizens. However, Hafner-Burton (2009) admits that governments which have signed such agreements still often do not implement the human rights clauses.

The compliance of governments with the Law of Wars has recently been studied by Morrow (2007, see also Morrow and Jo 2006). His statistical analysis of international conflicts suggests that the rules that protect civilians during warfare have the poorest compliance record, while other rules such as the ones banning the usage of chemical or biological weapons are much more closely observed. Morrow’s (ibid: 570) analysis points out

that compliance and non-compliance with these rules has a strong reciprocal nature: “When one side does not comply, the other responds in kind, and joint ratification strengthens reciprocal enforcements”. The international norms advocated by the ICRC strengthen, in his view, this enforcement and prevent the international treaties to be just toothless tigers. The role of the ICRC with regard to internal wars is, however, weaker as the rebels are not signatories of the agreement or heirs to a ratification like a successor to the government which originally signed the treaty.

We call the fundamental challenge that the ICRC faces in the implementation of the Laws of War the treaty inheritance problem. Several studies have borrowed from the literature on time inconsistency starting with Kydland and Prescott (1977) to argue that compliance with international norms should decrease with the passage of time if the ratifying states cannot credibly commit to observe the treaty obligations in the long-term (Simmons 2010:276-277). As indicated, reciprocity increases the chance that governments adhere to the Laws of War. This deterrent effect of the Geneva Conventions and Protocols might be the consequence of the weak sanctions other regimes like the International Criminal Court provide. According to Gilligan (2006) some leaders will refrain from committing atrocities if there is even a remote chance that they will face a tribunal instead of going into asylum in a third state in case they lose power. In other words, the compliance of a regime like the one guarded by a NGO like the ICRC will grow the higher the opportunity costs of committing crimes against humanity are. In the aftermath of a signature, these costs are relatively high, but they will fade out the more distant the ratification of an international regime is. Compliance with the Laws of War becomes problematic when a government pledged its adherence to the treaty in a relatively peaceful period, but is unexpectedly challenged some times later by rebel troops. Government and regime changes exacerbates this problem as succeeding generations of politicians feel less bound by the international obligations than succeeding governments. Given this treaty inheritance problem, we conjecture states and

rebels to observe the ICRC on the protection of civilians less and less with the passage of time.

Note that treaty inheritance argument stands in considerable opposition to the socialization and related literatures which expect positive effects of the passage of time on treaty compliance. Especially the constructivist school of thought maintains that international norms become effective through learning and socialization. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) argue, norms evolve in a “life cycle”, passing through stages of evolution, acceptance, and internalization. The ICRC played an important role in the development of the norms comprising international humanitarian law but now is especially active in spreading the acceptance of IHL to more countries and the socialization of these norms. As Finnemore and Sikkink (1998: 902) have put it, the ICRC is the “chief socializing agent” of the Geneva Conventions.⁶ According to Goodman and Jinks (2004, 702), increasing compliance can also result from a sequential growth in the severity of the treaty obligations: “...human rights regimes can potentially employ coercive techniques most effectively once robust levels of internalization have occurred”.

The empirical record for the thesis that compliance grows with the passage of time is, however, rather ambiguous. Examining regional ratification patterns for various human rights regimes, Simmons (2009: 96) rejects the passage of time hypothesis according to which states are gradually converted to higher human rights standards. We therefore maintain that the power of the international norms will fade out over time due to the treaty inheritance problem.

H1: The longer a state has already ratified the relevant Geneva Conventions and Protocols that oblige it to protect civilians in war, the more one-sided violence will be observed.

⁶ Finnemore (1996:87) argues in addition that governments and citizens “embraced” the Geneva conventions “on the basis of religious and moral duty borne by civilized nations” rather than of self-interest.

The role of the ICRC is not reduced to the development of the Laws of War. On the contrary, the Geneva organization is one of the most resourceful NGOs that are active in world politics.⁷ It tries to convince with various means conflict parties around the globe that the respect for the Geneva Conventions and its Protocols is in their very best interest. The ICRC's income is to a large extent used for the financing of the world-wide delegations that we will be examining in the following statistically. To our knowledge, no comparative study has ever analysed whether the Geneva organization becomes active at the right places and devotes sufficient attention to those emerging conflicts where the Geneva Conventions and Protocols are endangered.

The literature on the compliance of international norms suggests in the footsteps of Axelrod (1984) that the threat of sanctions is key for the successful implementation of norms. This creates obviously a problem for the analysis of the ICRC as this non-governmental organization has no direct punishments at its disposition. However, the presence of a militarily powerless organization could nevertheless deter certain atrocities as its presence in conflict zones increases for potential perpetrators the risk to be named and shamed after an atrocity. Case study evidence suggests that the presence of the delegates of the ICRC can make a difference. This seems to have been the case for instance during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 at the Kamarampaka Stadium and Nayarushishi camp in Cyangugu where the International Red Cross was present, while the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) were deployed at the Kabgayi Archbishopric in Gitarama prefecture and in the Amahoro stadium in Kigali city. As Kuperman (2001, 17) notices, Hutus killers did not attack Tutsis and other opponents as openly at these locations as they did elsewhere: "Thus interestingly, it appears the modest deterrent impact of UNAMIR troops may have been more

⁷ *Médecins Sans Frontières* for instance had a world-wide income in 2008 of 957 million US dollars, while the ICRC had a similar income in contributions of 1,147 million Swiss Francs in the same year. See <http://doctorswithoutborders.org/press/MSF-Fact-Sheet-2009.pdf> and [http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/annual-report-2008-finance/\\$File/icrc_ar_08_finance.pdf](http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/annual-report-2008-finance/$File/icrc_ar_08_finance.pdf) (last consulted, 7. February, 2010)

a function of their being foreign than their being armed, considering that the unarmed ICRC had a similar deterrent impact”.⁸

Our study will go in the light of this finding beyond the mere analysis of possible effects of the Laws of War by investigating whether the presence of the guardian of this body of international norms, the ICRC, makes any difference in preventing civilian casualties. In particular, the longer the ICRC is already present in a country, the more time it would have had to spread the norms of IHL. On the other hand, similar as the time inconsistency argument laid out above, the deterring effect of ICRC presence might wear off as time goes by. If the conflict parties could observe in the past that the ICRC has no enforcement mechanisms at its disposal, the willingness to obey IHL might decline. This is presumably even stronger for the rebel side. The ICRC is more in contact with government officials than with rebel groups despite its neutrality. Public authorities are its main partner in negotiating access to a country, access to detainees, etc. In turn, government officials are still to some extent interested in good relations with the large Geneva organization. Rebel groups are frequently more remote and thus less restrained.

H2: The presence of the ICRC in a country is related to fewer civilians killed during civil war.

H3: The longer the ICRC maintains already a delegation in a state prior to the conflict-year, the more one-sided violence is committed by the conflict parties, especially the rebel side.

The ICRC is active in conflict zone, thus the link between ICRC presence and the atrocities against civilians could be biased by reverse causality. We would expect that the ICRC’s staff is deployed to the most severe conflicts. The direction of causality is problematic in particular

⁸ Interestingly, the ICRC qualified this fortunate episode in its 1994 report similarly, but also wrote: “...with probably a million Rwandans dead, it is clear that the ICRC’s protection work was effective only on a very limited scale” (quoted in Delorenzi 1999: 55)

with regard to the indicator variable. By examining the prior length of ICRC presence we can tackle the endogeneity problem to some extent. In the sample there are cases where the ICRC establishes a delegation with the outbreak of the present conflict, such as in Liberia. In other cases the ICRC is present in a country already a long time (e.g. like in Algeria where it maintains a delegation since the war of independence). We will thus distinguish between a short and long prior presence.

Actors which try to make international treaties more effective can typically rely on various positive and negative inducements. A private actor like the ICRC, however, has only a limited number of strategies at its disposition. We distinguish in this article between persuasion and naming and shaming strategies. The aforementioned seminars in which soldiers and commanders are exposed to the obligations that the ratification of international humanitarian law creates belong to the former category of instruments, while condemnations and warnings that the ICRC uses as a weapon of the last resort belong to the latter type of strategies.

A broad literature expects that such strategies can be highly effective, especially if they come from private actors like the ICRC. Particularly constructivist scholars attribute to non-governmental actors considerable power in convincing governments to respect life integrity rights (Risse, Ropp Sikkink 1999). According to Moravcsik (1995: 161), shaming “seeks to enforce individual human rights ... by creating an international and domestic climate of opinion critical of national practice”. Hafner-Burton’s (2008) extensive study on naming and shaming, however, suggest that perpetrating governments often switch from one form of human rights abuse to another one once the global media has put them under the spotlight.

H4: IHL dissemination activities of the ICRC and the naming and shaming of the conflict parties reduce one-sided violence during armed conflict.

Method and data

We analyze in this article the ratification of international humanitarian law and the role of the ICRC in relation to atrocities committed against civilians during armed conflict. For the dependent variables we used Eck and Hultman's (2007) data on one-sided violence. Their variable counts the number of civilians killed intentionally and directly by the government forces or by an organized rebel group during armed conflict. Thus our sample is limited to one-sided violence in civil wars which is available for the years from 1989 to 2004 and for 72 countries. We estimate negative binomial regression models because the dependent variable, the number of civilian victims in a year, is count data. A negative binomial model is more appropriate than a Poisson regression model in case of over-dispersion, as indicated by the goodness of fits test, because it relies on less restrictive assumptions.⁹ We use a random-effects panel design which is, as indicated by the likelihood ratio test, preferable to a pooled model. We refrain from the use of fixed-effects estimation because we would lose too many observations as all cases without variance (i.e. all countries where the ICRC was present or not present during the whole time period) would be dropped from the sample. This would reduce our sample by half.

International humanitarian law: We will investigate whether the ratification of the Geneva Conventions restrains the conflict parties. The Geneva Conventions and Protocols are as indicated a key part of the Laws of War with which the signatory states try to regulate warfare. The Geneva conventions provide safeguards for military persons hors de combat, namely detainees, sick, and injured, as well as for civilians. We concentrate specifically on

⁹ Ideally we would like to use a zero-inflated negative binomial regression model because in many of our observations we have no civilians killed. However, on theoretical grounds, it is difficult to choose which variables would explain whether civilian killings occur or not and which variables are then to be used to explain the number of killings. Research on one-sided violence is rather at its beginning and also thus not provide us with a sound body of theoretical propositions and well-established empirical findings yet. We will simply use this method of estimation for robustness tests.

the Geneva Convention IV that relates to the protection of civilian persons in time of war and was adopted 1949 and on an additional protocol to the Geneva Conventions from the year 1977 that extended the protection of victims to non-international armed conflicts. Instead of relying on an indicator of whether a state ratified the treaties, we take the number of years since the state ratified the GC-IV-1949 and the AP-II-1977 assuming that the longer the state adheres to the body of IHL, the more the norms are internalized in a society and thus both the government and the rebel groups should have a better record in upholding the law of war.¹⁰ Information about the state parties to the treaties related to international humanitarian law is available from the ICRC's website.¹¹

Presence and activities of the ICRC: In a second set of tests, we investigate the role of the guardian of international humanitarian law more closely. First, we looked at whether the presence of an ICRC delegation in a country at civil war has any impact. The ICRC is present in many countries with permanent delegations, regional delegations, or missions. We only coded as presence if the ICRC had a delegation in a given country in a given year, or if there was headquarter of a regional delegation in the country. The regional delegations typically attend to several countries in the region but are not necessarily heavily involved. Besides, the yearly reports do not always distinguish very clearly the various activities of the regional delegation according to country. Therefore, we only consider the ICRC as active in a country if the regional delegation had its main office there. Missions are of a temporary nature and sometimes can be only a trip of a Geneva official to a country to establish first contacts. We do not include these missions. We extracted information from the annual reports of the ICRC

¹⁰ Certainly it would also be plausible to assume that with increasing time the adherence to IHL declines. After an initially high motivation to respect and implement newly ratified treaties, the commitment of governments might decline with time passing as the topic is no longer at the forefront of the political agenda (see for example Abouharb & Cingranelli's study to human rights records before and after negotiations with the World Bank). Considering the short time period for which data is available we are unable to test lagged effects.

¹¹ <http://icrc.org/ihl> (last consulted: September 30, 2009).

(various years).¹² In addition to the dummy variable of whether the ICRC is present in a given year, we estimated the effect of the length of stay counting the years since the delegation was opened or the year that is given in the annual report for being permanently present. From this variable of years of presence we deducted two dummy variables accounting for whether the ICRC is present for a long time (more than 10 years) before the armed conflict in our sample started, and one dummy variable for a short presence (1-2 years) before conflict restarted. This way we deal with the potential endogeneity bias.

The ICRC exercises an enormous variety of activities, such as visiting detention centres, establishing contact among families, medical support etc. Our focus was on activities directly related to the promotion and dissemination of IHL. As part of dissemination, the ICRC is active in offering presentations and seminars for members of the military and police forces to acquaint them with international humanitarian law. It teaches soldiers not to attack and mistreat an enemy fighter hors de combat, medical personnel, and civilians. We coded whether such seminars were offered by the ICRC, and whenever precise numbers were provided in the reports, we counted the number of military and police officers that attended such sessions. As these numbers might not always be overly precise, we alternatively collapsed them in an ordinal scale of 1 to 5 if 1-9, 10-99, 100-999, 1000-9999, or 10000 and more police and/or military personnel attended the IHL seminars.¹³

We also analyze the rare public condemnations by the ICRC. Whereas the ICRC follows rather a rather strict policy of discretion and only rarely applies the strategy of publicly naming and shaming IHL violators, there are a few instances where it makes public statements. We coded actions of condemnations through the ICRC based on ICRC press

¹² All variables extracted from the ICRC annual reports were coded by two independent coders. The correlation for the presence variable was .88, seminars .66, participants .73. Divergent cases were individually verified and corrected.

¹³ We also coded if the annual reports of the ICRC specifically mentioned whether the ICRC performed dissemination activities spreading the message of international humanitarian law among the government and its officials, opposition groups, and the civil society. However, the correlation between the two coders was not very high and thus we refrain from reporting these results.

releases (only available in 2004) and various news reports¹⁴. The events were weighted according to the Goldstein scala (1992).¹⁵

As control variables we included the logarithm of population and logarithm of real GDP per capita from the Penn World Tables 6.3 (Heston et al. 2009). In populous countries the number of civilians killed presumably is higher, whereas in developed countries we can expect fewer civilian casualties (Eck and Hultman 2007). We also control for the stability of the political regime with the duration variable from the Polity IV data (Marshall and Jaggers 2002). This variable, rather than the polity variable itself, holds constant in the context of whether ratification of IHL will be adhered to by subsequent political leaders, especially in the face of a political system change. Duration counts the number of years since the most recent regime change of more than three points on the Polity scale. Furthermore, we control for the conflict intensity by including a variable that accounts for the presence of a full-fledged civil war, i.e. with more than 1,000 battle-related casualties, as differentiated by the UCDP/PRIODATA data set on armed conflict (Gleditsch et al. 2002). Alternatively, in some tests, we hold constant if the country experienced a civil war in the previous 15 years (Eck and Hultman 2007), a variable that could be closely related to the presence of the ICRC.

Findings

The first set of tests, reported in Table 1, refers to the effect of the ratification of the Geneva Convention IV and the Additional Protocol II on one-sided violence. The ratification of IHL does not have the expected restraining effect. On the opposite, the longer ago a state has ratified GC-IV-1949, the more the government uses violence against civilians during an

¹⁴ We relied on ICRC press releases (only available for 2004) and news reports of Le Monde (who has a permanent correspondent in Geneva) and Le Figaro (from 1990-2003), New York Times, and BBC Monitoring (1989).

¹⁵ Category 1 (weight: 1): Verbal conflict - defensive (reject, protest, deny)

Category 2 (weight: 2): Verbal conflict - offensive (accuse, demand, warn, threaten)

Category 3 (weight: 3): Conflict action - (demonstrate, reduce relationship, expel, seize, force)

armed conflict. The variable counting the years since ratification has a positive coefficient and is statistically significant at $p < .05$. The ratification of AP-II-1977 is also not significantly related to one-sided violence committed by the government. However, it has the expected negative coefficient. The ratification of IHL does not have a restraining effect on the rebels either. The years of ratification of GC-IV-1949 is not significantly related to violence by the rebels (column 3) and the years since ratification of AP-II-1977 is even positively and statistically significant related to the number of civilians killed by the rebels (column 4).

The results of Table 1 do not support the expectation that the ratification of treaties on international humanitarian law has an inhibiting effect on the use of violence against civilians. The ratification of the GC-IV-1949 is positively and significantly related to one-sided violence committed by the government, and there is some indication that rebels might increase one-sided violence the longer a state has signed the additional protocol extending IHL to non-international armed conflict.

In populous countries we can observe fewer civilians killed by the government (although the variable is statistically not significant) but more killed by the rebels, a relationship that is highly significant. The rebels commit fewer atrocities against civilians in economically developed states. The duration of political regime is also not related to the number of civilian victims killed by the government but there is indication that in states with a more durable political system more civilians are killed by rebels. In full-fledged civil wars, there are more civilians killed by rebels. In Table 2 we replaced this variable with a dummy variable for whether the state experienced a civil war in the previous 15 years, a variable that is not significantly related to one-sided violence through either of the conflict parties.

In Table 2 we concentrated more directly on the presence of the ICRC and its effect on one-sided violence. As endogeneity might be an issue in the sense that it is likely that the ICRC especially becomes active in countries with an outbreak of more severe conflicts with civilian casualties, we lagged all independent variables by one year in these tests. In the first

column of this table we can see that the presence of the ICRC in the previous year has no inhibiting effect on one-sided violence but instead the coefficient carries a positive sign ($p < .12$). In different model specifications (e.g. controlling for an indicator variable whether there was one-sided violence by the government in the previous year, controlling for one-sided violence by the rebel side, or for regime transition and collapse) this finding is robust and even is more statistically significant. In a first evaluation, we tested with an instrumental variable approach, using the lagged value of ICRC presence as weak instrument, whether there is an effect on the incidence of one-sided violence. The variable for ICRC presence remained highly significant and positive and the Wald test of exogeneity was insignificant. The presence of the ICRC is also positively related to one-sided violence committed by rebel groups. As with the regular yearly lag, an IV estimation for the incidence of one-sided violence by the rebels shows that the relationship is not significant (unlike if estimated with a simple panel probit model); in any case the variable retains a positive sign regardless of estimation method applied. Consequently, in our tests there is no indication that the presence of the ICRC reduces the number of civilians killed during a civil war. Endogeneity might bias the results as the ICRC is active in conflict zones and might be especially present in severe conflicts with civilian victims. Little is known about the ICRC's decision on where to establish permanent or regional delegations. We address the issue of endogeneity by investigating closer the time aspect of ICRC presence. Analyzing the effect of the duration of ICRC presence, we see in column 3 that the longer the ICRC is present prior to the conflict year the less OSV is committed by the government, a result that is not significant though. However, the years of ICRC presence are positively related to OSV by the rebels with a significance of $p < .01$. Breaking this variable further down into dummy variables for short (1-2 years) and long (more than 10 years) prior presence showed insignificant results. The tests on the presence of the ICRC in conflict zones do not shed a favorable light. The presence of a

ICRC delegation does not reduce the number of civilians killed in a conflict. On the contrary, a longer presence is related to more one-sided violence on the part of the rebels.

In the analyses in Table 3, we evaluate ICRC activities that relate more directly to the dissemination of IHL and the naming and shaming through the ICRC, two potential mechanisms on how the ICRC could contribute to inhibit conflict parties from committing atrocities against civilians during a conflict. In the first two models of the table we tested specific IHL dissemination activities, namely the effect of IHL sessions and seminars that the ICRC conducted among military and police forces. In the second column we accounted for the number of military/police personnel that attended.¹⁶ None of these variables showed any significant effect on one-sided violence not supporting the hypothesis that spreading knowledge of IHL among military personnel is related to fewer atrocities among civilians. The rare condemnations by the ICRC also are insignificantly related to one-sided violence (columns 3 and 4). Naming and shaming does not have the desired effect.

Conclusion

The article offers, to our knowledge, the first systematic evaluation of the impact that the norms advocated by the International Committee of the Red Cross/Red Crescent have on the risk of civilians being killed in a conflict. Although the protection of civilian only became gradually a part of the Law of Wars, states that have ratified the Geneva Conventions and Protocols are obliged to protect civilians in both interstate and intrastate wars. Our analyses suggest that the norms advocated by the ICRC do not entice military commanders and their combatants to learn that the targeting of civilians is inhumane. On the contrary, the preliminary analysis suggests that these obligations of the Geneva Conventions and Protocols are rather forgotten over the course of time and hence that no learning can be observed. We have established that the longer the period since the ratification of these norms have lasted,

¹⁶ The variable was not significant either if estimated as an ordinal five-valued scale.

the higher the risk of the civilian population is. We also found some evidence that the training seminars which are provided by the ICRC do not have the desired effect and that the presence of the ICRC is associated with more rather than fewer killings. The lacking effect of public condemnations suggests that the naming and shaming that a private actor possesses as an instrument of deterrence is not sufficiently strong and does not prevent troops both on the government and rebel side from committing atrocities.

We will have to test whether these findings remain stable if we include other samples of states that are at the brink of experiencing major political violence. Moreover, we will have to test in line with Melander (2009) whether the ICRC has “self-selected” itself into those conflicts where the risk of civilian abuse is particularly high. We will also examine which conflicts are particularly influential for the depressing results that our analysis has unearthed.

The results nevertheless suggest that we should evaluate the role that private actors like the ICRC play in the prevention of mass killings much more critically. If the ICRC is not able to socialize military commanders and their troops into the respect for the civilian population, we need to consider how the sanctioning mechanisms related to the international humanitarian law can be strengthened. It is in our view conceivable that the United Nations coordinates its actions more closely with the ICRC and that the Geneva organization moves away from its tradition of discretion. The delegates and headquarter of the ICRC should especially move away from its policy of impartiality and neutrality if it witnesses one-sided violence in conflict zones.

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Table 1. Ratification of Geneva Convention and One-Sided Violence

| COEFFICIENT | (1) OSV by government | (2) OSV by government | (3) OSV by rebels | (4) OSV by rebels |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Log (population) | -0.0920 (0.1123) | -0.0112 (0.0920) | 0.4443*** (0.0838) | 0.5051*** (0.0803) |
| Log (real GDP pc) | 0.2891* (0.1544) | -0.1474 (0.1506) | -0.2705** (0.1091) | -0.3197*** (0.1112) |
| Civil War | 0.3984 (0.2856) | 0.3928 (0.2531) | 0.8333*** (0.1713) | 0.9113*** (0.1691) |
| Polity duration | -0.0115 (0.0080) | 0.0026 (0.0069) | 0.0110*** (0.0042) | 0.0157*** (0.0043) |
| GC-IV-1949 | 0.0370** (0.0179) | | 0.0078 (0.0090) | |
| AP-II-1977 | | -0.0179 (0.0231) | | 0.0545*** (0.0151) |
| Constant | -5.6855*** (1.3245) | -2.6400** (1.3085) | -5.5440*** (0.8999) | -5.8479*** (0.8892) |
| Observations | 421 | 421 | 421 | 421 |
| Number of states | 65 | 65 | 65 | 65 |

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2. ICRC presence and one-sided violence

| COEFFICIENT | (1) OSV by government | (2) OSV by rebels | (3) OSV by government | (4) OSV by rebels |
|--|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Log (population), _{t-1} | -0.0195 (0.1088) | 0.3788*** (0.0807) | 0.0093 (0.1081) | 0.3151*** (0.0839) |
| Log (real GDP pc) , _{t-1} | 0.1026 (0.1999) | -0.3059** (0.1192) | -0.1987 (0.1949) | -0.4105*** (0.1228) |
| Previous war, _{t-1} | -0.4523 (0.4146) | 0.3379 (0.2386) | -0.4037 (0.3276) | 0.4946** (0.2462) |
| Polity duration, _{t-1} | -0.0032 (0.0089) | 0.0117** (0.0046) | 0.0094 (0.0078) | 0.0109** (0.0050) |
| ICRC presence, _{t-1} | 0.8708 (0.5545) | 0.1927 (0.2359) | | |
| Years of ICRC presence, _{t-1} | | | -0.0021 (0.0140) | 0.0509*** (0.0088) |
| Constant | -3.9239** (1.6777) | -4.1343*** (1.0053) | -1.8893 (1.6035) | -3.3101*** (1.0819) |
| Observations | 323 | 323 | 323 | 323 |
| Number of states | 47 | 47 | 47 | 47 |

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 3. ICRC seminars, condemnations and one-sided violence

| COEFFICIENT | (1) OSV by government | (2) OSV by govt | (3) OSV by govt | (4) OSV by rebels |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Log (population), _{t-1} | 0.0028 (0.1158) | -0.0041 (0.1186) | 0.0737 (0.1098) | 0.3147*** (0.0857) |
| Log (real GDP pc), _{t-1} | 0.1841 (0.2089) | 0.1860 (0.2105) | -0.1462 (0.1853) | -0.3111** (0.1295) |
| Previous war, _{t-1} | -0.3941 (0.4467) | -0.3725 (0.4496) | -0.7788** (0.3589) | 0.2162 (0.2771) |
| Polity duration, _{t-1} | -0.0081 (0.0096) | -0.0080 (0.0096) | -0.0007 (0.0086) | 0.0186*** (0.0054) |
| Seminars for armed forces, _{t-1} | 0.1294 (0.0096) | 0.0970 (0.3273) | | |
| Members attended, _{t-1} | | 0.0000 (0.0001) | | |
| ICRC condemnations, _{t-1} | | | 0.1079 (0.0686) | -0.0048 (0.0608) |
| Constant | -3.9397** (1.8009) | -3.9053** (1.8271) | -2.4353 (1.6375) | -3.2775*** (1.1550) |
| Observations | 240 | 237 | 246 | 246 |
| Number of states | 36 | 35 | 36 | 36 |

Standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1