Violence against civilians and public support for the state: The moderating role of governance and ideology

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Abstract

When state armed forces engage in violence against civilians during civil wars, why do some citizens continue to support the government? I argue that individuals’ support for the state in such contexts is shaped by the interplay between their perceptions of violence, governance, and ideology. Drawing on research concerning motivated reasoning, I suggest that ideological similarity with and effective governance from the state can alleviate the negative effect of military violence against civilians on support for the state and, conversely, augment the positive effect of insurgent abuse on attitudes toward the government. Analysis of seven years of surveys fielded by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) in Colombia between 2005 and 2011 suggests that individuals’ responses to victimization by the state’s armed forces depend on whether the individuals are ideologically aligned with the state. More specifically, among people who have an ideology similar to that of the president, military victimization has a less negative effect on support for the armed forces and for the national government. There is also mixed evidence that the quality of state governance, particularly the provision of security from crime, shapes the ways people respond to victimization. While existing studies primarily focus on the effects of either violence or governance on attitudes toward the state, these findings indicate that a more complete theory of why people support governments which engage in violence against civilians requires an understanding of not only violence but also of governance and ideology.

Keywords: violence against civilians, civil war, Colombia, public opinion

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Introduction

When state forces engage in violence against civilians during civil wars, why do some citizens continue to support the government? There are ample examples. From 1982 to 1983, General Efraín Ríos Montt led a period of the Guatemalan civil war in which the state killed 75,000 of its citizens, many of whom were indigenous. Yet, in 1999, in a newly democratic Guatemala, 45% of victims of state violence and 59% of indigenous Guatemalans had favorable views of Montt (Bateson, 2021). Similarly, although the government of Colombia’s former President, Álvaro Uribe, engaged in egregious abuses of civilians, almost 70% of Colombians had confidence in him close to the end of his presidency (Rodríguez Raga & Seligson, 2011). In fact, 33% of victims of state violence had confidence in him, as did 72% of victims of pro-state paramilitary violence.

This is puzzling because civilians threatened by violence against civilians turn against armed actors which employ it (e.g. Wood, 2003; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007). Even among populations which are not targeted, violence against civilians can depress support for the use of force (e.g. Johns & Davies, 2019; Dill & Schubiger, 2021; Dill, Sagan & Valentino, 2022). Indeed, people evaluate civilian targeting as unethical (Levy, 2022). In other words, there is a strong norm against violence against civilians.

Prior literature offers several reasons why people may not oppose the government even when it engages in violence against civilians. The state could provide development, aid, or goods and services (e.g. Berman et al., 2013; Mikulaschek, Pant & Tesfaye, 2020). Alternatively, individuals could identify with the state; people respond less negatively to civilian targeting when they are religiously, ethnically, or nationally aligned with the perpetrator (Condra & Shapiro, 2012; Lyall, Blair & Imai, 2013; Silverman, 2019). These studies primarily focus on the relationship between public attitudes and either violence or governance. In contrast, I consider how governance, identity, and violence interact to shape public opinion toward

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1 Violence against civilians can be indiscriminate, collective, or selective, but in this project I do not differentiate between forms of targeting.
the state in conflict. I examine how people reconcile military abuse with receiving effective governance from the state or identifying with it ideologically, and I study how paramilitary and rebel violence against civilians affect support for the state.

I conceive of support for the state as attitudinal and continuous, meaning that someone can moderately support the state but not have a positive attitude toward it. I argue that support for the state is shaped by the interplay between individuals’ perceptions of violence, governance, and ideology. It is not only characteristics and actions of the government which shape public attitudes, as existing literature demonstrates, but also violence committed by other armed groups: insurgent violence against civilians increases support for the state whereas pro-government paramilitary civilian targeting depresses support for the state. I further theorize that ideological similarity with or effective governance from the state can alleviate the negative effect of military victimization on support for the government and augment the positive impact of insurgent violence on support for the state.

I examine seven years of nationally representative public opinion surveys in Colombia fielded by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). I consider how public support for the armed forces and national government is shaped by perceptions of victimization, the quality of state governance, and ideological similarity with the government. The results indicate that attitudes toward the state depend on exposure to violence committed by the military and guerrillas, the quality of municipal services and security from crime, and ideological similarity with the president. Furthermore, individuals who are not ideologically aligned with the president react more negatively to victimization by the armed forces. Exploratory analyses focusing on rural rather than urban residents and support for guerrillas rather than for the state provide mixed evidence that the quality of state governance may also shape how people react to victimization.

This study makes several contributions. First, by considering how civilians integrate information about governance, ideology, and violence, it clarifies how and how much the governance provided and the ideology promoted by the government condition regular people’s
responses to violence against civilians. Second, this project demonstrates that studying violence, governance, or ideology in isolation paints an incomplete picture of civilian support for armed actors. Integrating all three into one theory helps us understand the complex, nuanced attitudes of people who are deeply affected by civil conflict and who shape both conflict processes (e.g. Kalyvas, 2006; Kilcullen, 2010) and post-conflict stability (e.g. Samii, 2013; Tellez, 2020). Last, this research suggests that the citizens of countries at war do not blame the state for pro-state paramilitary violence, affirming previous research which suggests that states employ pro-state paramilitaries in order to evade accountability for war crimes (e.g. Carey & Mitchell, 2017).

Existing explanations

Civilians threatened by state violence are more likely to oppose the government. They may do so out of rational self-interest; violence against civilians makes it more dangerous to remain neutral (e.g. Krane & Mason, 1989; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007). Or, they may do so because of a strong norm against civilian targeting. Judgements of civilian targeting follow a logic which suggests that people see such violence as unethical (Levy, 2022). Indeed, more than three quarters of people living in countries affected by armed conflict believe that it is wrong to attack combatants in populated areas, “knowing that many civilians would be killed” (ICRC, 2016: p. 7). Civilian victimization causes anger and grievance among victims (Goodwin, 2001; Wood, 2003; Cederman et al., 2020), but even people who are not affected by such violence oppose it, seek to avoid it, and internalize related norms of international law (Johns & Davies, 2019; Wallace, 2019; Dill & Schubiger, 2021; Han et al., 2021). International civil society also mobilizes in opposition such abuse (e.g. Sikkink, 2011; Stanton, 2016).

Despite this norm against civilian targeting, individuals do not respond uniformly negatively to all such abuse. Citizens consider the norms which the abuse violates, the perpetrator’s agency in committing the violence, the clarity of causation between the perpetrator and victims, and the identity of the victims (de la Calle & Sánchez-Cuenca, 2013; Pechenkina, Bausch & Skinner, 2019; Levy, 2022). People also weigh civilian casualties against military
costs and benefits (e.g. Sagan & Valentino, 2017; Dill, Sagan & Valentino, 2022; Dill & Schubiger, 2021). The same wartime abuse can also have heterogeneous effects on different segments of the public. Individuals’ values and attitudes toward the victims shape their support for violence involving civilian casualties (Sagan & Valentino, 2017; Rathbun & Stein, 2020; Bloom et al., 2020), as does their exposure to international law (Wallace, 2019) and their gender (Hadzic & Tavits, 2019). Additionally, individuals respond less negatively to civilian targeting when they share a nationality, ethnicity, or religion with the perpetrators (Condra & Shapiro, 2012; Lyall, Blair & Imai, 2013; Silverman, 2019).

While this research has made strides in accounting for variation in responses to civilian targeting, it does not consider the ways in which governance and ideology may shape how the public reacts to military abuse. Yet, a wide range of literature suggests that governance and ideology shape public support for the state. People are more likely to support armed actors with whom they share an ideology (e.g. Petersen, 2009; Costalli & Ruggeri, 2015; Parkinson, 2021). They are also more likely to support armed groups from which they receive goods and services; aid, governance, and development projects provided by the state or its allies during wartime can win “hearts and minds” (e.g. Kilcullen, 2010; Berman et al., 2013; Arjona, 2016; Mikulaschek, Pant & Tesfaye, 2020; Child, 2023).

Given this brief review of existing work, I assume rather than hypothesize that exposure to military violence against civilians has a negative impact on support for the state whereas the receipt of effective governance from the state and ideological similarity with the state both have a positive impact on support for the government. Yet, as this brief review also makes clear, there are distinct literatures on how governance, ideology, and violence impact public attitudes. I contribute to this research by providing a micro-level analysis of how perceptions of governance, ideology, and violence interact and jointly shape public attitudes toward the state. In doing so, I consider not only violence committed by the state, but also abuse committed by rebels and pro-government paramilitaries.

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2Daly (2022) and Bateson (2021) examine the post-conflict electoral success of parties or candidates tied to armed groups which committed civilian targeting.
Theory

I argue that attitudes toward the state are not only affected by actions and characteristics of the state but also by violence committed by other armed actors: insurgent civilian targeting increases support for the state, and violence committed by groups associated with the government decreases support for the state. Further, I argue that ideological similarity with and effective governance from the state temper the negative impact of military violence on support for the state and, conversely, augment the positive impact of insurgent violence on it. Importantly, given that public support for any armed group is a product of the way that individuals perceive it, what is relevant for this theory is perceptions about the quality of state governance, exposure to violence, and ideological similarity with the state.

This theory is most likely to generalize to conflicts which do not exhibit high levels of inter-group animosity present in cases of genocide, ethnic cleansing, or mass killings based on categorical victim profiles. For the theory to be coherent, victims of violence must be able to plausibly receive governance from a perpetrator or support its ideology. This is unlikely in conflicts with extreme inter-group animosity. For example, a genocidal group would not provide even minimal governance to the group it seeks to expel or eliminate.

“Support for the state” is a form of legitimacy, the right or license to rule or govern (Weber, 1922 2013). Legitimacy entails a willingness or obligation to accept a ruler’s authority (Risse & Stollenwerk, 2018). Given that authorities can coerce compliance, civilians may publicly align themselves with a perpetrator but privately oppose that actor (Rozenas & Zhukov, 2019; Schubiger, 2021). As such, legitimacy is attitudinal. Support for the state is a continuous variable. Thus, on a hypothetical 1-10 scale, an individual who responds 4 would be more supportive of the state than someone who responds with a 2. But neither would wholeheartedly endorse the government or have a positive attitude toward it.

“Insurgents” are non-state armed groups opposing the state. “Governance” refers to the provision of goods and services. It also entails taxation and the imposition of rules, but the quality of benefits determines whether these are seen as acceptable impositions. Following
Mampilly (2011), “effective” governance is the provision of both security and other public goods. “Exposure to violence against civilians” is the victimization of an individual or their family. “Ideological similarity” is the distance between an individual’s placement of their ideology on a left-right scale and the ideology of the head of government on the same scale. Ideology is a form of identity-based affiliation because it can create in-group/out-group cleavages. Ideology, however, is more likely to change throughout people’s lives than ethnicity, race, religion, etc.. Violence, governance, and ideology are not the only determinants of public attitudes toward the state, but they are salient ones.³

**Violence committed by other armed groups**

Because conflicts have multiple armed actors, support for the state is not merely a product of state characteristics and actions but also violence committed by other armed actors. I argue that violence against civilians committed by a group opposing the government will increase support for the state whereas violence committed by a group associated with the state will decrease support for it.

In response to security threats, people become more supportive of opponents of the perpetrators. For example, the rally-around-the-flag effect occurs when people support the president during security crises (e.g. Mueller, 1970; Morales, 2021). Conversely, indiscriminate state violence increases rebel recruitment (e.g. Goodwin, 2001; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007). In joining the other side, people punish the perpetrators; wartime victims often support violence as a way to seek revenge (Sonis et al., 2009). Thus, I hypothesize:

- **Opponent Violence Hypothesis**: Exposure to violence against civilians committed by insurgents is correlated with increased support for the state.

However, not all conflicts are bilateral. For example, they may involve pro-government militias or paramilitaries (for a summary, see Carey & Mitchell (2017)).⁴ Several scholars

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³I do not consider the impact of these factors on conflict outcomes because it is difficult to assess whether tactics contribute to victory.

⁴There were over 500 such organizations from 1981-2014 (Carey, Mitchell & Paula, 2022).
have argued that governments delegate at least some objectionable violence to such groups for plausible deniability (e.g. Carey, Colaresi & Mitchell, 2015; Stanton, 2015; Mattiacci & Jones, 2020). However, there is little research on whether the public believes that the government is not responsible for pro-state militia violence.

I suggest that the public blames the state for paramilitary violence because pro-state militias are on the same side of the conflict’s master cleavage (Kalyvas, 2006). People may see all groups on a given side of this cleavage as parts of the same broader organization, or they may blame the state for failing to stop paramilitary violence against civilians. Existing literature suggests that people distribute blame broadly in politics. For example, during American midterm elections, people blame the president’s allies in Congress for his poor performance (e.g. Jacobson & Carson, 2019). Relatedly, Deglow & Sundberg (2021) find that police are blamed for conflict-induced insecurity.

- **Associated Group Violence Hypothesis**: Exposure to violence against civilians committed by pro-state paramilitaries is correlated with decreased support for the state.

### Governance and ideology shape the impact of violence on support

What happens when the state provides its victims with effective governance or promotes an ideology they share? There are three possibilities. First, individuals exposed to violence may always dislike perpetrators. Second, people may evaluate violence, governance, and ideology independently. The third possibility is that violence, governance, and ideology interact to shape public attitudes toward the state. Drawing on literature on motivated reasoning, I suggest that this is the case. I argue that state-perpetrated violence against civilians has a less negative impact on support for the state when an individual is ideologically proximate to the state or receives effective governance from the state.

Motivated reasoning suggests that, when people have directional rather than accuracy goals, they are “motivated to arrive at a particular conclusion.” They process information

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5Kalyvas argues that many civilians do not act on the basis of their beliefs about master cleavages.
in a biased manner to reach those conclusions (Kunda, 1990: p. 482). A long line of research suggests that motivated reasoning affects political attitudes (e.g. Taber & Lodge, 2006; Slothuus & de Vreese, 2010). Motivated reasoning implies that people will interpret new evidence about violence against civilians in such a way as to reaffirm their prior beliefs. Thus, if individuals have positive perceptions of the state because it provides them effective governance or they identify with its ideology, they will evaluate state violence in a more favorable light. Given that victimization is difficult to deny, I do not argue that motivated reasoning will cause people who were victimized to say that they were not victimized. Rather, I suggest that they will try to justify the violence. As a result, the negative effect of state violence on support for the government will be tempered.6

Why, in the wake of state civilian targeting, do such people not reevaluate state governance as less effective or their ideological distance from the state as greater? I suggest that the answer lies in strong moral norms against civilian targeting, as discussed in Existing Explanations. If people were to adjust their understandings of the quality of governance or their ideological distance with the state, they would have to accept that they previously harbored positive perceptions of a group which subsequently engaged immoral behavior. Indeed, engaging in or supporting unethical behavior, including wartime violence, produces distress; people attempt to eliminate this discomfort by justifying the wrongful behavior in a process called moral disengagement (e.g. McAlister, Bandura & Owen, 2006; Aquino et al., 2007; Moore, 2015). I empirically evaluate the possibility that victimization is correlated with perceptions of governance and ideological distance in the section on Endogeneity.

Motivated reasoning also suggests that individuals who have negative perceptions of the state because they are ideologically distant from it or do not receive effective governance from it will evaluate state-perpetrated abuse of civilians in a particularly negative light. Rather than searching for evidence to justify the violence, they will search for evidence that

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6Though they do not rely on a logic of motivated reasoning, existing research suggests that people react less negatively to civilian targeting when they share a nationality, ethnicity, or religion with the perpetrator (Condra & Shapiro, 2012; Lyall, Blair & Inmai, 2013; Silverman, 2019).
the violence was heinous. For these individuals, the negative effect of civilian targeting on support for the state will be particularly strong.

- **Ideology Interaction Hypothesis 1:** Exposure to violence against civilians committed by the state is less negatively correlated with support for the state among those who are ideologically similar to the state compared to those who are not.

- **Governance Interaction Hypothesis 1:** Exposure to violence against civilians committed by the state is less negatively correlated with support for the state when the state provides effective governance compared to when it provides ineffective governance.

Given that rebel civilian targeting creates a positive perception of the state, motivated reasoning suggests that there should be interactive effects between insurgent violence and both the quality of state governance and ideological similarity with the government. People who are predisposed to like the state because of its ideology or its effective governance will evaluate rebel violence in a particularly negative light; doing so will reaffirm that the state is worth supporting. Among this population, violence committed by insurgents will have a particularly positive effect on support for the state. In contrast, individuals who have negative perceptions of the state because it doesn’t provide effective governance or espouse a desirable ideology will evaluate rebel violence as less unethical, meaning that it will have a less positive effect on support for the state.

- **Ideology Interaction Hypothesis 2:** Exposure to violence against civilians committed by insurgents is more positively correlated with support for the state among those who are ideologically similar to the state compared to those who are not.

- **Governance Interaction Hypothesis 2:** Exposure to violence against civilians committed by insurgents is more positively correlated with support for the state when the state provides effective governance compared to when it provides ineffective governance.
Methodology

Case selection

Colombia has been plagued by conflict involving rebel groups, paramilitary groups, and criminal organizations since the 1960s. It is an excellent case to test the implications of the theory because armed actors with distinct ideologies have engaged in geographically heterogeneous forms of civilian targeting and governance.

Colombian guerrillas like the FARC are leftist, whereas a range of pro-state paramilitaries are on the far-right of Colombian politics. However, opposition to the guerrillas is more important to paramilitaries than a formal ideology (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2008; Ugarriza & Craig, 2013). Many paramilitaries remobilized following a peace agreements in the early 2000s (e.g. Daly, 2016). There is also ideological variation within the government. For example, when President Santos began negotiating a peace agreement with the FARC, his predecessor and mentor, President Uribe, founded a new far-right political party in response (Losada & Liendo, 2016).

There is a strong rural/urban divide in terms of state presence, so not all Colombians receive the same quality or form of state governance (e.g. Holmes, Gutiérrez de Piñeres & Curtin, 2010; Ballvé, 2020). For example, 18% of Colombians lived in poverty in 2020. In rural areas, 37% did; in rural areas affected by conflict, 46% did (DANE, 2021: p. 10). A pillar of the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC was rural development (Kroc Institute, 2020). Similarly, although over 90% of conflict victims were civilians, and all armed actors engaged in civilian targeting (La Comisión de la Verdad, 2022), the violence did not occur evenly across Colombia (Osorio et al., 2019).

While additional analysis is required to establish generalizability, the Colombian context resembles a range of other civil conflicts without extreme inter-group animosity. For example, there are many wars in which both sides engage in civilian targeting; between 1989 and

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7I empirically explore heterogeneity by rurality below.
2021, government and non-state groups engaged in similar total volumes of violence against civilians (Davies, Pettersson & Öberg, 2022). Additionally, neither paramilitaries nor leftist rebels are unique to Colombia. In any given year, pro-government militias operate in 40-60 countries (Carey, Mitchell & Paula, 2022). Out of all non-state armed groups that engaged in or threatened illegal violence 1970-2017, half are leftist (Jasko et al., 2022).

Data and empirical specifications

The data comes from the 2005-2011 Americas Barometer’s Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) Colombian surveys. The survey universe has national coverage of all adults in the country, excluding only institutionalized adults. This dataset has wide geographical coverage (Figure E1). See Appendix E for question text.

I use survey data primarily because individuals’ perceptions of governance, ideology, and violence drive their attitudes toward armed actors. These perceptions are likely correlated with objective measures of governance and violence, but they are more fine grained. For example, the best municipal-level measure of government services, an index of basic needs unmet, is available only for 2005 and 2018. Similarly, measures of violence in municipalities where civilians respond to surveys (e.g. Osorio et al., 2019) are poor proxies for whether they have been victimized because victims often must move. Indeed, between 2002 and 2005, over 5% of the population was displaced (HRW, 2005).

There are two dependent variables. “Support Armed Forces” is the level of confidence or trust that respondents have in the armed forces, ranging from 1 (none) to 7 (a lot). “Support National Government” has an identical structure. It is appropriate to study attitudes toward both because, while the armed forces are directly responsible for violence against civilians, they make up only one part of the national government. Confidence is an effective proxy for support because it is also a measure of legitimacy; many surveys have

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8The 2004 wave does not include questions about which armed groups are responsible for victimization. Beginning in 2012, LAPOP asks about support for “criminal bands or emerging bands” rather than for “autodefensas or paramilitaries.” Additionally, in 2012, LAPOP begins stratifying by municipal size.

9Security issues at times prevented LAPOP from accessing areas (e.g. Seligson & Rodriguez Raga, 2008).

10The Spanish word is “confianza.”
used questions about trust in the governance to capture attitudes toward the state (e.g. Bell, 2022; OECD, 2022).

Responses to the question about support for the armed forces could be falsified for social desirability reasons (Matanock & García-Sánchez, 2018). Nonetheless, I suggest that it is a reasonable proxy for private preferences. First, the LAPOP scale is a seven-point scale, unlike the binary one used by Matanock & García-Sánchez (2018), so respondents can indicate that they less-than-fully support the military. In the sample, the average level of support for the military is a 4.9 out of 7. Furthermore, Colombian politicians regularly express distinct perspectives on the armed forces (e.g. El Espectador, 2019, 2021).

“Ideological Difference with the President” is the absolute value of the difference between the respondent’s self-identified ideology and the mean ideology of the current president on a 0 to 9 scale. LAPOP asked about politician ideological placement in 2005, 2006, 2010, and 2014. Uribe’s mean of 6.47 is the average of his placement in 2005 and 2006. Santos’ mean of 5.76 is the average of his placement in 2010 and 2014. The 2014 question was included although the data used in this project ends in 2011 because an ideological split occurred between Santos and the Colombian right following the 2010 survey, when Santos began negotiating with the FARC.11

“Ideological Difference with President” is an absolute value because the theory suggests that what matters is ideological distance. Nonetheless, a robustness test interacts ideological distance with placement to the right of the president (Table BIV). “Ideological Difference with President” uses the mean identified ideology of the president rather than the presidential ideology identified by individual respondents, following Adams, Dow & Merrill (2006), because respondents were only asked about politician ideology in a few survey waves: 2005, 2006, and 2010.12 Robustness tests use respondent ideology (Table BII) and ideological difference constructed using individuals’ placement of the president (Table III).

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11 Between 2010 and 2014, the mean identified ideology of Santos drops from 6.39 to 5.13. Using the 2010 average wouldn’t reflect his perceived ideology in the 2011 wave.
12 The party system in Colombia is weak (e.g. Mainwaring, 2018), so I do not examine partisanship.
Governance is operationalized as municipal services and security; both are necessary for effective governance (Mampilly, 2011). “Municipal services” concerns the quality of government services in a respondent’s area, from -1 (very bad) to 1 (very good). Some waves include questions referring to municipal services as health care, trash collection, electricity, clean water, and energy. “Security” refers to whether, thinking about the possibility of being a victim of assault or robbery in one’s neighborhood, the respondent feels secure on a scale from -1 (very insecure) to 1 (very secure). This question concerns security from non-political crime, which is distinct from conflict-related victimization. Indeed, an armed group can victimize civilians while providing security from crime. For example, the federal government arrests murderers even in areas where its military victimizes civilians. Many non-state armed groups, including in Colombia, punish crime in areas they control (e.g. Arjona, 2016; Loyle, 2021; Provost, 2021; Aponte González, Hirschel-Burns & Uribe, Forthcoming).

The regressions include several variables about whether the respondent’s family has been victimized in the conflict by a particular kind of armed group. Victimization encompasses disappearance, death, abandonment of home, or leaving Colombia as a result of the conflict. “Victimized by Guerrilla” takes a value of 1 if guerrillas were responsible for at least some victimization and 0 if either the respondent was not victimized or the guerrillas were not the perpetrators of the victimization. “Victimized by Paras” and “Victimized by Military” have an identical structure. Robustness checks replace military victimization with victimization by the police (Table BV) and classify individuals victimized by both guerrillas and the military as not victimized by either (Table BVII).

I control for confounding variables which could affect both victimization and attitudes toward the state. “Finished primary school” is included because Colombia’s conflict centers around class and rurality, and gender is included because much of the violence was gendered (e.g. La Comisión de la Verdad, 2022). Additionally, binary variables indicating support

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13 This refers to victimization by both paramilitaries and “rearmed paramilitaries.” Respondents were asked about victimization by paramilitaries in all years and about rearmed paramilitaries in 2008-2011.

14 An individual can be victimized by more than one actor.

15 The models already adjust for a range of geographic variables.
for the FARC and for paramilitaries take a value of 0 if respondents indicate that they do “not at all” support the armed actor and a 1 otherwise.\textsuperscript{16}

An operationalization summary is in Table AI. Except where noted, regressions are generalized linear models with the ‘survey’ R package (Lumley, 2010) to account for design effects. Models adjust for regional strata by estimating sampling-weighted least squares and adjust for multi-stage clustered sampling at the municipality, sector, section, and block levels by calculating the total variance as the sum of variances from each stage of sampling.\textsuperscript{17} LAPOP randomly selects units at each stage of sampling, and the models assume equal cluster sampling probabilities. Models include year fixed effects.

**Results**

I find that ideological difference with the president, effective governance from the state, and victimization by the military and guerrillas shape public support for the armed forces and the national government. Paramilitary victimization does not. Further, people respond less negatively to military victimization when they are ideologically aligned with the president. There is also mixed evidence that they respond less negatively to such violence when they receive effective governance from the state, particularly security from crime. However, reactions to victimization are not shaped by the quality of municipal services, and guerrilla victimization does not interact with measures of ideology or governance to affect support for the state.

**Non-interactive effects**

Figure 1 visualizes coefficients of the models without interactions (Table AII). As this figure demonstrates, ideological distance from the president and military victimization are negatively correlated with support for the armed forces and the national government, whereas

\textsuperscript{16}About 80 percent of respondents do “not at all” support each actor.

\textsuperscript{17}Strata are mutually exclusive groups of elements; separate samples are drawn from each strata. Cluster sampling occurs when researchers randomly select groups of people (Groves et al., 2009). LAPOP uses clusters at the sector, section, and block levels only in urban areas (municipal capitals), where 77% of Colombians lived in 2018 (Censo nacional de población y vivienda 2018, 2018). The main analyses thus exclude respondents who live in rural areas, where LAPOP clusters only at the municipal level.
security from crime and the quality of municipal services are positively correlated with support for both. These results confirm prior research and validate the assumptions upon which the theory above is based. Table AII also provides support for the Opponent Violence Hypotheses: guerrilla victimization has a positive effect on support for the national government, though its positive effect on support for the armed forces is statistically significant only to the p<.1 level. In contrast, paramilitary victimization does not affect support for either the armed forces or the national government; this finding does not provide evidence for the Associated Group Violence Hypotheses.

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1.** Coefficients, non-interactive models

Figure 1 is based on Table AII; it shows 95% confidence intervals.

**Interactive effects**

Table AIII indicates that the interaction between military victimization and ideological difference with the president is negative and statistically significant in regressions on support for the armed forces and the national government. Figure 2 visualizes these interactions. Among people who are ideologically distant from the president, military victimization has

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18 These results hold when utilizing a bonferroni correction to adjust for two measures of governance.

19 Many variables have similar effects under Presidents Santos and Uribe (Table BVIII). The negative correlation between guerrilla victimization and support for the state is robust to alternative specifications.
a substantively large negative effect on support for the state. In contrast, among people ideologically proximate to the president, military victimization has barely any negative impact on support for the state. Ideological difference with the president ranges from 0 to 6.47. Thus, compared to someone with an ideology identical to that of the president (ideological diff w pres = 0), for someone who is not at all ideologically aligned with the government (ideological diff w pres = 6.47), military victimization is correlated with a 1.94 point larger reduction in support for the armed forces and a 1.62 point larger reduction in support for the national government (on a 7-point scale). These results support the Ideology Interaction Hypothesis 1. However, contradicting Ideology Interaction Hypothesis 2, the interactions between ideological distance from the president and guerrilla victimization are not statistically significant to conventional levels.

![Figure 2. Victimization x ideological diff w pres](image)

Figure 2 is based on Table AIII. Both interactions are negative and statistically significant. Other continuous variables are held at their mean values, and factor variable are held at their reference levels. This figure shows 95% confidence intervals.

Tables AIV and AV, in contrast, provide little support for my argument that effective governance from the state tempers the negative effect of military victimization on support for the state but augments the positive effect of guerrilla victimization on it. Table AIV shows that victimization, whether by the military or guerrillas, does not interact with municipal
services to shape support for the state. Further, the interactions between security and both forms of victimization in Table AV are either not statistically significant or are statistically significant only to the p<.1 level but in the opposite direction as hypothesized.

Interactions between ideological distance and military victimization remains statistically significant to the p<.1 level in models including all of the interactions together (Table BI), using ideology instead of ideological distance (Table BII), interacting ideological distance with placement to the right of the president (Table BIV), not accounting for survey design (Table BVI), classifying respondents who were victimized by the guerrillas and the state as victims of neither (Table BVII), and using a matched version of the government victimization variable (Table BIX). They are not robust to using a version of ideological distance which draws on individual respondents’ perceived ideology of the president (Table BIII) or to replacing military victimization with police victimization (Table BV).

**Exploratory analyses of victimization x governance**

The interactions between victimization and the two measures of governance, municipal services and security from crime, are not statistically significant in the main analyses above. However, two other exploratory approaches, focused on rural respondents and attitudes toward the FARC, provide preliminary evidence that security from crime may shape people’s responses to victimization in ways more complex than predicted by the theory above.

Because of different sampling approaches used by LAPOP in rural and urban areas, the main models focus on urban residents, who make up 77% of Colombians (Censo nacional de población y vivienda 2018, 2018). Yet, there are well-established differences between rural and urban governance. For example, in urban areas, the services provided by the state are at least minimally effective. In contrast, in many rural areas, the Colombian state does not have sufficient territorial control to provide basic forms of governance such as education and healthcare. Indeed, in the LAPOP data, the average rating of municipal services in urban areas is .14; in rural areas, that average drops to .06.

In models focused on rural respondents, the interactions between military victimization
and security become positive and statistically significant (Models 7 and 8 of Table CI). These interactions are visualized in Figure 3, which shows that, when the government does not effectively provide security from crime, military victimization has a more negative effect on support for the armed forces as well as support for the national government. This finding aligns with the theory of motivated reasoning elucidated above.

Figure 3. Victimization x security [Rural]
Figure 3 is based on Model 5 and 8 in Table CI. The interactions are positive and statistically significant. Other continuous variables are held at their mean values, and factor variables are held at their reference levels. This figure shows 95% confidence intervals.

As in the main analysis, guerrilla victimization does not interact with security, municipal services, or ideological difference with the president. Similarly, as in the main models, municipal services does not interact with either form of victimization. Yet, in contrast to the main models, among rural respondents, ideological distance does not interact with military victimization. Thus, ideology may be more important in shaping how people react to violence in urban areas whereas security may have a larger impact on reactions to abuse in rural areas.

The second analysis focuses on attitudes toward the FARC rather than toward the

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20In the model on support for the armed forces, the interaction is robust to not accounting for the survey design (Table CII).
state. Given that there is no data which measures where security and municipal services are provided by non-state groups,\textsuperscript{21} I instead examine how state-provided governance shapes attitudes toward the FARC. I assume, as in the main analysis, that security is provided by the state.\textsuperscript{22} The binary variable “Prefer FARC or Neutral” indicates whether an individual has more confidence in the FARC than in the armed forces or has an equal level of confidence in the two. 12% of respondents prefer the FARC or are neutral.\textsuperscript{23}

The results from Model 1 in Table DI suggest that ideological distance from the president and military victimization are positively correlated with a preference for the FARC whereas guerrilla victimization, the quality of municipal services, and security from crime are all negatively correlated with a preference for the FARC. Further, as visualized in Figure 4, the interactions between guerrilla victimization and both measures of governance are positive and statistically significant. In other words, where the government does not provide security or municipal services, guerrilla victimization has a more negative effect on the likelihood of preferring the FARC. This seems to contradict the broad logic of the motivated reasoning argument, which suggests that people will be more likely to overlook guerrilla violence if the state is ineffective at providing governance. Yet, these unexpected positive interactions could result from victims blaming the guerrillas for the government’s failure to provide services; where insurgents have a violent presence, the government may lack sufficient control to provide effective governance.

\textsuperscript{21} Anders (2020) builds a measure of rebel territorial control, but her data is based on violence. Other indicators concern only whether a municipality has been exposed to conflict (Tellez, 2019; Matanock & García-Sánchez, 2018) or cover only a portion of Colombia (Aponte González, Hirschel-Burns & Uribe, Forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{22} During this time period, the FARC had territorial control over little territory (McDermott, 2010; Castilla & Gómez, 2006).

\textsuperscript{23} I don’t use the 1-7 variable “Support FARC” because approximately 80% of respondents answer 1. One of the interactions is robust to using the binary variable measuring support for the FARC (Table DII) which is a control variable in other analyses.
This analysis of attitudes toward the FARC provides additional evidence that individuals’ reactions to victimization may be conditional upon the quality of state governance. However, it remains unclear whether both security and municipal services moderate people’s reactions to victimization, or whether security matters more. Most importantly, given the null results in the main analysis, the results consistent with motivated reasoning in the analysis of rural residents, and the results inconsistent with motivated reasoning in the analysis of attitudes toward insurgents, further research is necessary to unpack the ways that people incorporate information about security from crime with experiences of victimization.

**Endogeneity**

There are two forms of endogeneity which could affect the empirical analysis: armed groups could target civilians based on whether they support the state, or perceptions of governance, violence, and ideology could all shape each other. I conclude that neither poses a serious threat to the interpretation of the results.

Armed actors make decisions about where to engage in violence and provide effective
governance on the basis of local levels of support (e.g. Steele, 2017; Hirose, Imai & Lyall, 2017; Cunningham, Huang & Sawyer, 2021). However, there are three reasons why this form of endogeneity is unlikely to be problematic. First, armed groups make tactical decisions based on considerations other than public attitudes. For example, the FARC chose territories based on whether a town was near or on a route to forested mountains, international borders, areas suitable for coca growing or transit, or government infrastructure (e.g. Idler, 2020; Otero-Bahamon, Uribe & Peñaranda Currie, 2022; Peñaranda Currie, Otero-Bahamon & Uribe, 2021). Second, the key counterfactual the regressions are testing does not compare those who experienced violence to those who did not. Rather, it compares 1) those who experienced violence and were ideologically aligned with the state or received effective governance from the state to 2) those who also experienced violence but were ideologically distant from the state or did not receive effective state governance. In order for this to pose an issue, armed actors would have to choose their targets on the basis of the marginal effects of governance and ideology on support; armed groups likely do not have such nuanced information. Third, while armed groups engage in collective targeting on the basis of local attitudes (e.g. Steele, 2017), it is probably difficult for them to target people individually based on their attitudes. Indeed, in many contexts, armed actors lack sufficient information to target individuals even on the basis of their observable actions (Kalyvas, 2006).

Nonetheless, I control for a range of confounding variables which could affect both targeting and public attitudes toward the state: education, gender, and attitudes toward the FARC as well as toward paramilitaries. I also conduct a nearest-neigbor propensity score matching analysis, matching individuals who were victimized by the state to those who were not on the basis of age, education, support for the FARC, and support for paramilitaries. In the regression on support for the armed forces, the interaction between military victimization and ideological difference remains negative and statistically significant, though only to the $p<.1$ level. Other losses of statistical significance are likely the result of a greatly reduced sample size (Table BIX).
A second form of endogeneity would occur if perceptions of governance, violence, and ideology were themselves shaped by motivated reasoning. This could mean, for example, that victims of military violence shift their ideology away from the state or characterize state governance as less effective. It could also mean that individuals who receive effective governance or align with the state ideologically are less likely to consider themselves victimized. Alternatively, ideological similarity with the state could shape perceptions of the quality of state governance and vice versa.

There are two reasons to doubt that these possibilities have greatly affected the data. First, if motivated reasoning were shaping respondents’ answers to questions about governance, ideology, and victimization, these variables would be highly correlated. They are not (Table EII); while the correlations between different forms of victimization are relatively high, likely because armed actors cluster in conflict zones, no other correlations have an absolute value of more than 0.092. Relatedly, F-tests suggest that models integrating violence, governance, and ideology variables fit the data better than models with only some of these variables. Additionally, none of the substantive variables in Table AII have a variance inflation factor of over ten; this indicates that there are minimal collinearity issues (Hadi & Chatterjee, 2012).\footnote{I do not examine VIFs in models with interactions because interaction terms are by design correlated with independent variables.}

Second, a brief analysis suggests that reported victimization rates bear a resemblance to the conflict’s geography rather than reflecting the quality of state governance of ideological similarity with the government. T-tests suggest that rates of victimization by all groups are all higher in PDET municipalities designated in the 2016 peace accord as highly affected by conflict. Importantly, internal displacement biases against finding differences; there are likely many individuals victimized in PDET areas prior to displacement who answer the survey in non-PDET municipalities.
Conclusion

I have argued that the determinants of support for the state include not only state violence, governance, and ideology but also the violence committed by insurgent and pro-state armed groups. Further, ideological similarity with and effective governance from the state temper the negative impact that government civilian targeting has on support for the state and augment the positive impact that insurgent violence has on it. Seven years of survey data from Colombia suggests that the quality of state governance, ideological similarity with the state, and victimization by the military and guerrillas shape support for the government. Paramilitary victimization, in contrast, does not. Furthermore, ideological similarity with the government reduces the negative effect of military victimization on support for the state. There is mixed evidence that the quality of state governance, particularly security from crime, also affects how individuals react to victimization. These findings indicate that we cannot fully understand public responses to state-perpetrated civilian targeting without considering the other reasons why people may support the state in civil conflicts.

Future research could help clarify some of the results. First, additional research should consider why municipal services do not seem to moderate the impact of victimization. One possibility is that municipal services are not politicized like security or ideology. Second, further research should investigate why rural residents respond less negatively to military victimization when they are secure from crime but urban residents do so when they are ideologically aligned with the president. Third, additional work is necessary to unpack whether people blame guerrillas for the failures of state governance. Fourth, further research should consider the cognitive limitations of motivated reasoning. Guerrilla victimization interacts with neither governance nor ideology to shape attitudes toward the state, whereas military victimization does not interact with these measures to shape attitudes toward the FARC. Perhaps the task of evaluating one group’s violence in light of another armed actor’s ideology or governance is too cognitively difficult.

Expansions of this research should also consider whether effective governance from or
ideological similarity with a perpetrator are still strong enough determinants of public attitudes to counteract victimization in contexts where violence against civilians is more asymmetric or indiscriminate than in Colombia. Future work should also take advantage of improved data on the locations of rebel group governance to consider more rigorously whether the theory applies to attitudes toward non-state groups. Relatedly, this theory could be extended by a consideration of heterogeneity in forms of violence against civilians in terms of, for example, targeting.

Replication data

The dataset, codebook, and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article, along with the online appendix, can be found at http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets. All analyses were conducted using R.

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