

Responding to Sexual Violence: Women's Mobilization in War

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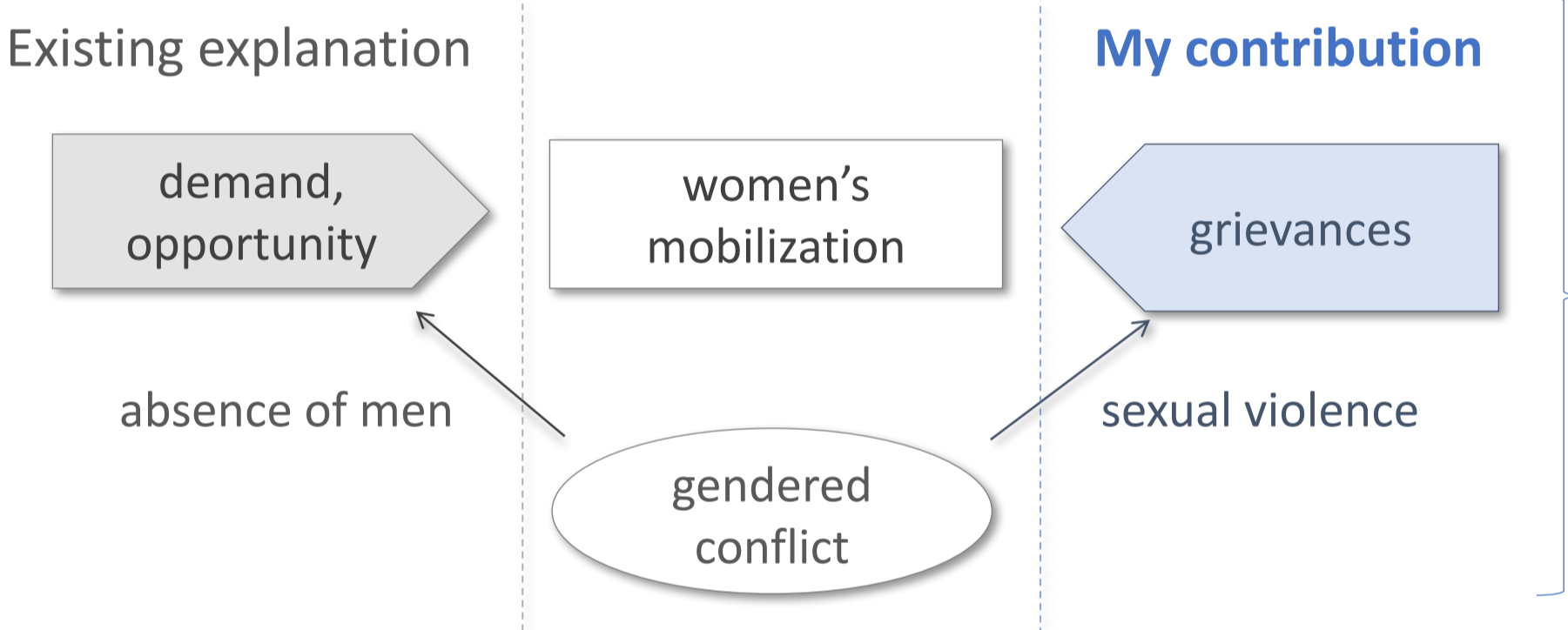
Introduction

Conflict is gendered, inter alia, in that fighting is male-dominated. This leaves women as the dominant group among the civilian population. The existing literature generally discusses two dimensions regarding the situation of civilian women in conflict:

- 1) Their victimization: sexual violence, indirect consequences of conflict, e.g. displacement, poverty, malnutrition...
- 2) Their gains in agency: as local peacemakers, in women's and peace movements, increased political and social participation...

How do these two dimensions come together? What are the drivers of women's mobilization in war?

Existing accounts propose that women fill spaces created by the absence of men. I contend that this does not tell the full story.



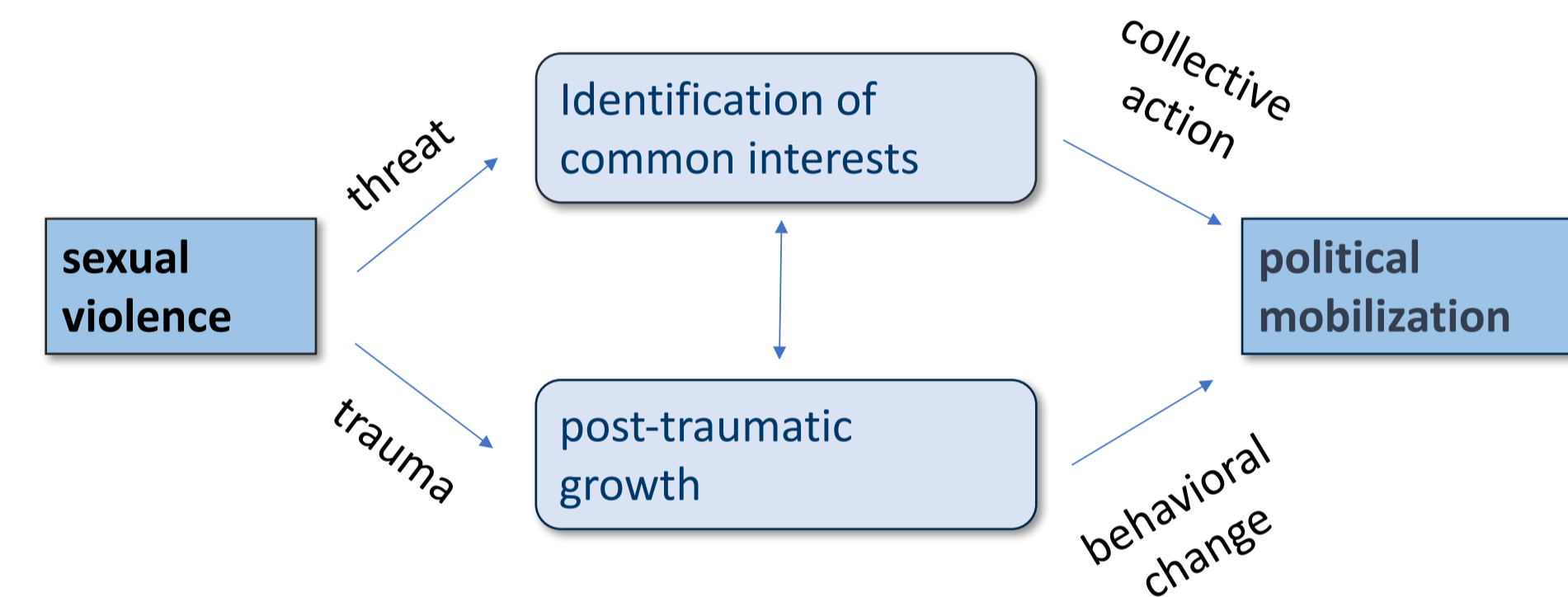
Theory

Expectation: Women mobilize politically in response to wartime sexual violence, via two interacting mechanisms.

Collective threat: Women mobilize collectively in response to the threat to their security, rights and autonomy that wartime sexual violence constitutes. Feeling that their interests and identity are under attack, they mobilize around women's issues with the goal of changing their social and political conditions.

Post-traumatic growth: Some victims experience psychological growth in a process of a cognitive re-evaluation of their traumatic experience. This often goes along with social or political activism.

The mobilizing path via sexual violence is complementary to the demand/opportunity path, which serves as a facilitating background condition.



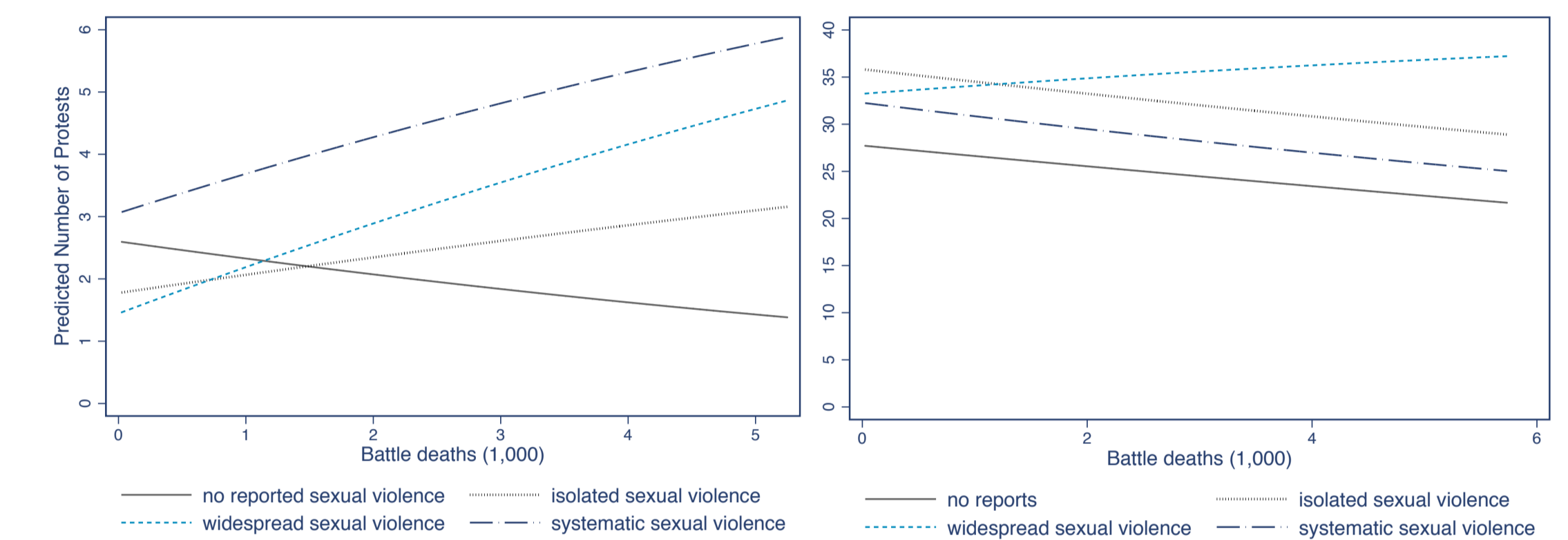
Results

Cross-National Patterns

A conflict country with systematic or massive sexual violence has on average 2.48 women's **protests** for every protest in a country experiencing a conflict with no reported sexual violence ($p < .05$).

A conflict country with widespread sexual violence has on average 1.15 ($p < .01$), and a conflict country with systematic or massive sexual violence 1.14 ($p < .01$) **linkages to international women's NGOs** for every such linkage in a country experiencing a conflict with no reported sexual violence.

The graphs visualize the predicted number of protests and WINGO linkages, plotted against battle deaths.



Case Study

Women in Colombia mobilize at very high levels: they have played an important role in including gender concerns in the 2016 peace agreement and have been actively involved in drafting legislation. The major women's organizations work explicitly on making the gendered nature of the armed conflict visible, and all mobilize (to varying extent) around wartime sexual violence. Some, like *la Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres* and *Mujeres en la Lucha*, even emerged in response to sexual violence against women in the conflict and subsequently broadened their focus.

The interviews yield support for the **collective threat** mechanism, with the following themes emerging:

- 1) women are subjected to violence *as women*
- 2) sexual violence is perceived as a (particularly strong) manifestation of patriarchal culture
- 3) sexual violence threatens women as a group.

In support of **post-traumatic growth**, all interviewees have observed the transformation from victims into political actors or (local) leaders, within their own organizations and beyond.

Questions for future research

- What kinds of gender-based violence in conflict are – under what conditions – perceived to pose the greatest collective threat to women?
- How do the two causal mechanisms interact with other factors known to affect mobilization, such as socio-economic status or existing networks?
- What political and social conditions enable mobilization around sexual violence?

Sexual violence is devastating in the lives of women, just as other crimes are devastating, but with one special characteristic and that is that it is a violence that affects directly the identity of women and the existence of women.

Methodology

Mixed-methods research design to capture **macro-level patterns** across conflicts and examine **causal mechanisms**.

Statistical Analysis

Hypothesis: Higher prevalence of sexual violence in civil conflict is associated with higher women's political mobilization.

Dependent variable: women's mobilization (two indicators)

- 1) women's non-violent protest (1991-2006)¹
- 2) linkages to women's international NGOs (1990-2006)²

Independent variable: wartime sexual violence³

Models: negative binomial regression models for overdispersed count data, with country fixed-effects

Control variables for battle deaths, regime type, development, women's civil liberties, international factors

Case Study: Colombia

Investigation of an **extreme case**⁴, i.e. with prevalent wartime sexual violence and high women's Mobilization, to elucidate causal mechanisms.



Analysis of wartime sexual violence, macro-level patterns of women's mobilization, exploration of the reasons for mobilization in response to wartime sexual violence.

Evidence: primarily interview data (representatives of women's organizations, international actors), complemented with existing research.

Aim: identify both patterns and divergences/ variation across interviewees

Our [organization's] hypothesis is that in the lives of women there exists a continuity of violence. Not because a single woman experiences violence in a all stages of her life, but because women as a social collective experience different kinds of violence since before we are born.

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 4: Gerring, John (2006) *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.