The Logic of Vulnerability and Civilian Victimization:

Shifting frontlines in Italy (1943-1945)

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What causes civilian victimization in conflicts where the incumbent is simultaneously engaged in an international war and a counterinsurgency campaign? We argue that a key driver of civilian victimization is an incumbent's vulnerability, specifically when the conflict's frontline is shifting. Vulnerability is a function of informational and logistical challenges: when the frontline is shifting incumbents face increased informational uncertainty and unstable supply chains that augment the vulnerability of the incumbent. Thus, the incumbent will increase its use of civilian victimization in response to a scarcity of high-quality information on the location and identity of insurgents, in order to limit possible information leaks, and to contain supply disruption and logistics support to adversaries. We support our argument using matched difference-in-differences analyses of original subnational data on Nazi-Fascist violence in WWII Italy (1943-1945) and qualitative evidence.

Introduction

In early October 1943, German forces in Southern Italy were rapidly withdrawing towards the Gustav Line, a defense line north of Naples. On the night of October 13, near the town of Caiazzo, a small group of German soldiers noticed flares being set off from a country house close to their tactical command. Shortly after, a young German lieutenant ordered their troops to shoot 22 civilians, including women and children, on the conjecture that the civilians were attempting to provide information about the location of the German command center to advancing English troops. [1] This episode of civilian victimization is far from unique in WWII Italy. According to the most accurate historical research, Nazi-fascist forces killed 9977 civilians throughout Italy[2]. Some of the most brutal massacres, such as Sant'Anna di Stazzema and Marzabotto, were committed by German troops as they withdrew towards Northern Italy , after breaking the Gustav line and before the new Gothic line was established around the Northern Apennines, between Florence and Bologna, late in the Summer of 1944.

In Poland, on the eastern frontline of WWII, "the Germans would kill civilians after taking new territories. They would also kill civilians after losing ground. If they took casualties at all, they would blame whoever was at hand: men in the first instance, but also women, and children" [3]. The Korean War (1950-1953), the second deadliest conflict since 1945[4], also featured high levels of civilian victimization in moments of pressure or movement of the frontline: "As usual in most wars, when the atmosphere at the front was relaxed, communist prisoners were perfectly properly used, and sent to the camps in the rear. But at periods of special stress or fear, especially in the first six months of the war, many UN soldiers shot down enemy prisoners - or even Korean civilians — with barely a moment's scruple" [5]. In the recent war against Daesh in Iraq, dynamics of civilian victimization can

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[1] Klinkhammer 1993

[2] Data are from the website www.straginazifasciste.it as of April 2016.

[3] Snyder 2011, 121

[4] Lacina and Gleditsch 2005, 154

[5] Hastings 2010, 329

also be linked to the retreat of the frontline. During the Battle of Mosul between October 2016 and July 2017, Daesh killed many civilians while they were retreating from the frontline under pressure by Iraqi and US forces. According to some accounts, spikes in civilian victimization were linked to concerns that escaping civilians could leak information to anti-Daesh alliance forces, facilitating their advancement.[6]

What explains spatial and temporal variation of civilian victimization by conventional armies? Violence against civilians in civil wars has been explained by territorial control[7], knowledge of previous political identities[8], internal organization of forces[9], as a function of resource scarcity[10] or desperation[11]. Moreover, the use of indiscriminate violence against civilians has been an important issue in studies on counterinsurgency[12]. Yet, limited attention has been given to the interaction between macro-trends in hostilities—such as conventional armies' frontline movements—and local-level patterns of civilian victimization. Further, most theories of civilian victimization tend to be static. The examples outlined above suggest that shifting frontlines can influence the propensity of conventional armies to use civilian victimization when they are also facing a local insurgency.

This article demonstrates how an incumbent fighting a conventional war varies the use of violence against civilians as a tool of counterinsurgency according to movement or stability of frontlines. We argue that incumbents will respond to increased vulnerability of their forces due to changes in the overall pattern of conventional war by intensifying violence against civilians. When armed forces are on the move, the frontline is under pressure. Moving forces face significant challenges in protecting their communication and supply lines, thus increasing the incentive to deter (and retaliate against) the civilian population that may provide vital information to their enemies. On the contrary, when

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[6] Kesling 2016; Prickett 2018

[7] S. N. Kalyvas 2006

[8] Herreros and Criado 2009; Balcells 2017

[9] Humphreys and Weinstein 2006; Mitchell 2009

[10] Wood 2014; Zhukov 2017

[11] Downes 2008

[12] Kocher, Pepinsky, and Kalyvas 2011; Lyall and Wilson 2009

stable conventional frontlines are (re-)established, the vulnerability of the incumbent troops to irregular warfare decreases. Thus, we expect an incumbent to reduce its civilian victimization. This article introduces a *logic of vulnerability*, based on changes and disruptions of information flows and logistical supply on frontlines, to explain variation of civilian victimization by conventional forces.

We test our hypotheses by studying the violence perpetrated by German and Fascist forces in Italy during WWII (1943-1945). Italy is a particularly appropriate case to evaluate our theory because the conventional warfare between the German and the Allied forces clearly alternated between moments of extreme mobility of the frontline and periods of prolonged stability. Moreover, the Italian case provides exceptionally fine-grained data on timing, geography, perpetrators and victims of violence that we used to construct two original geo-referenced datasets at different levels of analysis. First, we test the link between conventional operations, incumbents' vulnerability, and civilian victimization by performing matched difference-in-differences analyses with data throughout Italy. Then, we replicate the analysis at a more granular level in the Emilia-Romagna region. Here, we are able to complete a more in-depth analysis on the effects of frontline movement and evaluate the possible influence of specific local-level factors. Finally, in the Italian case, we profit from detailed historical studies that allow us to acquire a "thick" knowledge of the case, in line with recent empirical studies on conflicts related to WWII[13]. This allows us to integrate our quantitative findings using historical material to qualitatively identify our mechanisms and evaluate possible alternative logics of civilian victimization.

While popular historical accounts have interpreted Nazi-fascist violence as a result of racism or political indoctrination[14], our findings show that Nazi-Fascist forces significantly change their behavior towards the Italian civilian population in the different phases of the conventional war, depending on their vulnerability. Beginning in late Spring 1944, while withdrawing after the fall of the Gustav line in Southern Italy and before they consolidate their position on the Gothic line in Northern Italy, German troops notably increased their

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[13] Costalli and Ruggeri 2018; Stathis N Kalyvas 2006; Zhukov 2017; Barber and Miller 2019.
[14] Bartov 2001a; Gentile 2015a

use of civilian victimization. German forces also changed their behavior as they strengthened their position on the Gothic line in the Fall of 1944, but in the opposite direction: civilian victimization was reduced. This reduction was greatest in the areas closest to the front and with less reduction as distance from the frontline increases.

This article contributes to the literature on civilian victimization in war in three different ways. First, it explains how a *logic of vulnerability* can drive conventional forces' civilian victimization and specifies its constitutive elements: information and logistical challenges. While most explanations of civilian victimization tend to be static, the logic of vulnerability provides a dynamic theory that does not assume a deterministic linearity where violence is anticipated to increase as incumbents retreat and their defeat approaches. The logic of vulnerability predicts punctuated equilibria of violence, but also increases and decreases of civilian victimization depending on the level of forces' vulnerability produced by movements of the frontline. Second, the article focuses on the underappreciated links between macro-dynamics of international and regular warfare and civilian victimization. Given the increasing number of internationalized civil wars in the global security environment, where these dynamics are especially relevant, it is important to shed light on these links[15]. Third, this article is one of the first studies to use a mixed-methods approach to demonstrate the nexus between vulnerability and civilian victimization using high-quality disaggregated data from a major historical case of conflict.

The article is structured as follows: first, we reorganize previous studies on civilian victimization under several logics. Second, we sketch our theoretical framework and derive testable hypotheses. Third, we introduce the Italian case and the research design. Then, we discuss the results of statistical models and support them with micro-narratives relative to civilian victimization by Nazi occupation forces in WWII Italy. The conclusions provide potential avenues to consolidate and advance this line of research.

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[15] Pettersson, Högbladh, and Öberg 2019

2. Incumbents' Logics of Civilian Victimization

Violence against unarmed civilians, though reprehensible, can follow a logic[16]. There are various explanations of the use of civilian victimization. In this section, we present the different 'logics' of civilian victimization that have been used in extant literature. Drawing on Cederman and Vogt's argument that there is a "usefulness of building bridges between the main logics"[17], we neither argue that we provide an exhaustive list of all possible logics nor that these logics are mutually exclusive.

First, scholars have attempted to explain civilian victimization as a tool to directly diminish insurgents' effectiveness ("*tactical logic*"). There is a lively debate on the tactical effectiveness of indiscriminate violence targeting the population. On the one hand, using widespread civilian victimization against those not engaged with insurgent forces can be counterproductive[18]. On the other hand, some scholars have found that, under specific conditions, indiscriminate violence can work as an effective counterinsurgency tool [19]. Acts of barbarism—defined as the "systematic violations of the laws of war in pursuit of a military or political objective"—including targeting of the civilian population and other mass atrocities[20], when used by the strongest actors in asymmetric wars would actually lead to favorable outcomes. Further, Suleimanov and Siroky argue that indiscriminate attacks against civilians decrease insurgents' activities in the short-term, but in the long-term insurgents can recover and change their areas of activity [21].

Second, scholars have argued that violence will occur in areas where information about political allegiances is available to parties in conflict ("*allegiance logic*"). In conventional ideological civil wars, violence against civilians takes place mainly in the rearguards and targets those who supported the adverse political faction before the onset of the war[22]. This logic requires that incumbents have some form of information on the allegiances of

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[16] Stathis N Kalyvas 2006

[17] Cederman and Vogt 2017, 15

[18] Stathis N Kalyvas 2006

[19] Downes 2008; Lyall 2009

[20] Arreguin-Toft 2001, 101

[21] Souleimanov and Siroky 2016

[22] Balcells 2012

civilians to avoid blatant errors. Incumbents can use the historical knowledge of local politics, such as previous riots, protests or electoral behavior[23]. Balcells explicitly states that, in conventional civil wars, armed groups will resort to violence in their rearguards "if there has been mobilization from the enemy group in this territory"[24]. Similarly, in conflicts where groups are mobilized along ethnic lines, warring actors would engage in civilian victimization in areas populated by the enemy's ethnic group, in order to disrupt networks of civilian support[25].

Third, exasperated armed actors resort to violence against civilians as a final attempt to win a conflict or, conversely, to minimize their losses ("*desperation logic*"). Downes argues that, in long wars, actors are more likely to resort to civilian victimization if they believe this will serve to coerce their adversary to give up or, at least, will minimize their own losses[26]. Long deployments can also have the effect of inducing combatants to increase violence against civilians, due to frustration or erosion of social and moral norms, especially when structures of command are dysfunctional [27].

Fourth, racism, rather than strategic advantage, can be the main driver of civilian victimization ("*racist logic*"). Historical research on Nazi military operations and occupation both in Eastern and Southern Europe have found that racism was deeply embedded in the education and training of Wehrmacht soldiers, as well as the more politicized units of SS (Schutzstaffel)[28]. The apparent complete disrespect among German forces for the lives of civilians demonstrated throughout Russia and the Balkans is often linked to the indoctrination of German soldiers to think of the enemies as "Untermenschen." In Italy, the belief that the local population was inferior was due less to indoctrination (Italians had been allies, though reputed as minor ones) than the perceived "softness" of Italians, as demonstrated during the war and after the Nazi occupation in

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[23] Steele 2017
[24] Balcells 2017, 28
[25] Fjelde and Hultman 2014
[26] Downes 2008
[27] Manekin 2013
[28] Bartov 2001b

1943. According to Wette, a leading German historian of the period: "The Germans now [1943] began to regard Italians as inferior too, and treated them in a manner hardly less degrading and inhumane than their treatment of Jews and Russian prisoners of war"[29].

Fifth, organizational factors can also explain civilian victimization ("*organizational logic*"). Armed groups that rely on short-term gains to recruit personnel[30] and are not endowed with internal enforcement structures[31] appear to be more likely to use civilian victimization. Historians have noted that particular German units were responsible for multiple, and particularly brutal, instances of civilian victimization. The Reichsführer SS 16th division that operated in Italy since 1943 was responsible for several massacres, including Sant'Anna di Stazzema (August 1944) and Marzabotto (September-October 1944) that killed more than 1000 civilians[32]. Browning's seminal studies on genocide similarly find that particular German units, such as the Reserve Police Batallion 101 in Jozefow and Lomazy, were responsible for the large-scale killings of Jews in WWII Poland[33]. Specific organizational cultures, peer pressure and particularly brutal commanders seem to explain why some units engaged in civilian massacres while others did not. As Neil Mitchell suggests: "the bastard theory of political violence has one central proposition: bastards do the violence[34]."

Sixth, civilian victimization can be the outcome of spirals of retaliation between the groups involved ("*logic of retaliation*"). The action of one group leads to a reaction from the opposition, leading to a circular pattern of violence independent from the prime motives of the conflict. Scholarship on state repression has stressed the link between states' action and their perception of the threat. The "law of coercive responsiveness" described by Davenport argues that "authorities generally employ some form of repressive action to

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[29] Wette 2006, 137–38

[30] Weinstein 2006

[31] Humphreys and Weinstein 2008

[32] Gentile 2015a

[33] Browning 1998

[34] Mitchell 2009, 1

counter or eliminate the behavioral threat[35]". Without engaging in the lengthy debate on effectiveness of violence[36], it is worth mentioning that revenge against enemy's action can be a powerful motive for engaging in violence, and, under certain conditions, civilian victimization[37].

Two final logics are more directly connected with our *logic of vulnerability*: the logics of control and resources. As outlined by Kalyvas, civilian victimization—both selective and indiscriminate—is most likely to occur in areas with incomplete but prevalent control by one of the parties of the conflict[38]. Since incumbents need the collaboration of the population for gathering high quality information about the insurgents and use selective violence, incumbents are more likely to use high levels of civilian victimization through indiscriminate violence in areas where the insurgents enjoy hegemonic, but incomplete, control.

Incumbents may also alter their strategic use of civilian victimization when their resources are under threat. Zhukov argues that insurgent attacks on infrastructure compel incumbents to use their forces for defensive duties, limiting their capacity to carry out reprisals against civilians[39]. Wood, Kathman and Gent, instead, find that external interventions in civil wars tend to affect civilian victimization according to who benefits from the intervention. Actors that profit from interventions tend to reduce their levels of civilian victimization while, conversely, those actors that are weakened by interventions increase their use of civilian victimization[40]. As the war continues, conditions on the ground change. Wood argues that battlefield losses exacerbate resource scarcity and lead insurgents to increase civilian victimization[41]. Thus, we know that incumbents respond to changing balances of forces vis-à-vis insurgents, but a key question emerges from this

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[35] Davenport 2007, 7
[36] Lyall 2009
[37] Balcells 2017
[38] S. N. Kalyvas 2006
[39] Zhukov 2017
[40] Wood, Kathman, and Gent 2012
[41] Wood 2014

review: How do the dynamics of conventional warfare influence the strategies of incumbents against insurgency?

3. Logic of Vulnerability and Civilian Victimization

We argue that incumbents' vulnerability affects civilian victimization. Vulnerability, in turn, varies as frontlines shift: when incumbents' forces are on the move, they will resort to higher levels of civilian victimization. Conversely, when the frontline is static, incumbents commit lower levels of civilian victimization. This section outlines our theory of a logic of vulnerability, introducing explicit mechanisms. Conventional forces that simultaneously face a counterinsurgency campaign and a conventional interstate war need to manage difficult and competing strategic choices. Incumbents need to ensure that their forces are protected and adequately supplied to work effectively and, in turn, survive. Two key factors consistently impact the vulnerability of an incumbent's military forces: information availability and logistical constraints. As a battlefront shifts, information availability decreases and logistical constraints intensify, therefore increasing an incumbent's vulnerability and leading to an increase in civilian victimization.

When "on the move", incumbent forces operating in areas marked by insurgency face two key informational problems. First, incumbents have difficulties in acquiring information on the location and identity of their enemies. Second, especially if they are retreating, there is a high risk that the civilian population will defect to the insurgents[42] or, most importantly, to the conventional enemies. Civilians living in conflict areas may be able to provide information to the enemy's troops about the incumbents' forces position and movements. Effective counterinsurgency using 'selective' violence necessitates high-quality intelligence. Such information requires a developed network of reliable informants that can only be formed with time in a stable environment. When incumbents forces move, these networks are not available. Thus, incumbent forces may only have a vague idea of who and where the insurgents are located. Therefore, civilian victimization can be utilized as the best available strategy to *also* kill the insurgents. In the German advance during the

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[42] Stathis N Kalyvas 2006

Russia Campaign in 1941, a German officer in Ukraine noticed that villagers were moving from the territory acquired by Germans to provide intelligence to opposing forces. "On reaching the Soviet positions", the officer recalls, "they had provided detailed information to the Russian troops on the east bank, outlining our positions and strength (…)[43]". At the same time, Sonderkommandos – the special groups of deportees that collaborated with Nazi troops – were conducting extensive "pacification" through "countless atrocities"[44] towards the civilian population.

Facing diminished security together with limited information on the ground increases the incentives for incumbents to use violence against both civilians and the insurgents. The incumbent's inability to identify insurgents makes the civilian population the most likely target. In short, when the frontline is moving, incumbents have greater difficulty in gathering information and face a higher risk of information leaks. Hence, incumbents employ civilian victimization as a tactic to both eliminate the insurgents, as well as limit information loss. The same process is evident among the US forces during the Vietnam War. As US troops moved into villages, they found it difficult to distinguish between insurgents and civilians and resorted to civilian victimization to avoid further attacks [45].

The second element of incumbents' vulnerability relates to logistics. Due to mobility, incumbent forces have limited possibility to create functioning war economies and logistical support to guarantee the provision of army resources. Wood's analysis of rebel groups found that civilian victimization occurs more frequently when rebels are facing severe losses that constrain their access to resources[46]. For incumbents and conventional forces, the problem is possibly even more pressing. The establishment of stable communication networks, with fortified positions, guarantees the possibility of a well-functioning military supply chain. As highlighted by T.E. Lawrence in his early theory of insurgency, insurgents can prosper by attacking poorly defended communication

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[43] Bidermann 2000, 42

[44] Bidermann 2000, 43

[45] Greiner 2010

[46] Wood 2014

networks, creating major obstacles to the normal functioning of regular armed forces [47]. During the Korean War, moving frontlines and disruptions of logistical supply was a tactical obsession for militarily officials: "As the supply system cracked, men grew desperate in their hunger. Morton saw two soldiers discover an abandoned, half-empty can of peas coated in days of dust. They simply scraped off the dust with a bayonet and wolfed the remains. The young lieutenant found this spectacle, of thousands of men on the margins of panic, very frightening"[48]. The challenge of logistics is still relevant today. During operation 'Iraqi Freedom', US planners considered guaranteeing the security of the supply chain as "combat operations"[49].

As frontlines move, supply chains and logistics are stretched. This stretching increases an incumbent's vulnerability by making the incumbent's supply chains more vulnerable to attacks, as well as constraining ready access to resources. Without an effective supply chain, the incumbent's troops will be more likely to "live off the land" and engage with the civilian economy including forced seizures of fuel, food, raw materials, shelter. While these processes may also occur under the control of insurgents, mobility intensifies the emergency, exacerbates scarcity, and creates (further) incentives to punish non-complying civilians who "compete" for resources. To borrow from Mancur Olson[50]: when moving, incumbents will act as "roving bandits", maximizing short-term gains. Overall, when logistical safety is disrupted, depredation and violence become the dominant strategy. Incumbents facing high uncertainty will shrink and refocus their time horizon on decision-making, opting for short-term benefits. They will not privilege medium- and long-term time horizons, where incentives for maximizing resource extraction capacity prevail and make incumbents "stationary bandits".

A final logistical problem is that armies on the move create displaced, internal refugees in the areas they move through. Managing the flows of civilians represent a high cost for conventional armies. First, incumbents allocate scarce resources to deal with displaced

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[47] Lawrence 1920

[48] Hastings 2010, 195

[49] Wright and Reese 2008, 506

[50] Olson 1993

civilians, such as building and managing camps. Second, displaced civilians represent potential defectors and insurgents. In both cases, the incentive for conventional forces is to engage in less costly and more rapid solutions, with large-scale civilian victimization acting as a potential effective tool. For example, during Operation Barbarossa, the German advance towards Stalingrad, the Wehrmacht committed widespread atrocities – similar to those undertaken during the retreat – in areas such as Kiev and Kharkov. The Wehrmacht found it difficult to organize camps and wanted to avoid creating a "potential nucleus of future partisans" [51].

H1. When frontlines move, incumbents' armed forces will increase the level of civilian victimization in the areas they are moving to.

When incumbents' forces are not on the move, that is when a static frontline is established, vulnerability is much lower since the factors above – information availability and logistical safety – play in the opposite direction with reference to the use of violent means. The re-establishment of frontlines provides four opportunities for incumbents. First, incumbents can recreate fortified positions that reduce the possibility for insurgents to launch effective attacks against the incumbents[52]. Second, in these less vulnerable periods, incumbents can re-establish defensible supply chains between home bases and forward-deployed units. Third, due to this resource stability, incumbents reduce their need to interact with civilians, diminishing the information available to the population itself and consequently its strategic value for the enemy. As incumbents enjoy less vulnerability, they reduce the need to kill civilians as a way to deter, or retaliate against, insurgents even if they do not possess sufficient information to clearly identify insurgents.

Finally, as new frontlines are established, incumbents can devote the majority of their resources to fighting the conventional enemy that now represents the major threat to their immediate survival. In these phases, counterinsurgency is more efficiently and more

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[51] Shepherd 2009, 107
[52] Collard-Wexler 2013

effectively pursued through the development of a functioning network of informants and thus, the capacity to apply selective violence against insurgents. Moreover, incentives exist to strike informal deals with insurgent forces, that have been recognized as an important, if often overlooked, local outcome in intra-state conflicts[53]. In these phases of conventional war, then, we should expect incumbents to modify their strategies, following incentives to exert less violence against civilians than in the phases preceding the instauration of the new frontlines.

H2. When new frontlines are established, the levels of incumbent civilian victimization should decrease in areas near the new frontline.

We do not claim that the *logic of vulnerability* necessarily excludes all other logics presented above. Our research design allows us to control for alternate logics and gauge if these logics operate in parallel with our proposed logic of vulnerability. The scope of our argument applies to cases of frontline movement where incumbents face both a conventional enemy force and an insurgency. Examination of historical conflicts in different time periods and regions suggest that our argument is relevant for all conventional forces that advance or retreat through areas inhabited by aggrieved populations. Although the logic of vulnerability should apply to different types of incumbents, it is particularly salient for conventional forces that are reliant on long and complex supply lines, such as armies operating abroad.

4.0 The Italian Case

Several specific features make Italy between 1943-1945 an interesting and suitable case to study how the macro dynamics of an international war impact on the micro-level dynamics of counterinsurgency and civilian victimization. The conflict between the Italian resistance movement and the Nazi-Fascist forces was fought among the broader context of

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[53] Staniland 2012

World War II. Within Italy, conventional military operations and asymmetric civil war occurred simultaneously for almost two years. At the macro level, the German forces attempted to prevent the northern advance of Allied forces following their invasion of southern Italy. At the local level, German and Italian Fascist forces also carried out counterinsurgency operations against the Italian resistance movement. The international conflict within Italy alternated between moments of extreme mobility of the frontlines and periods of prolonged stability. This fluctuation between movement and stability allows us to demonstrate how these different phases have diverging effects on the incumbents' use of civilian victimization. Including military personnel and civilians, the international conflict and insurgency within Italy resulted in more than 200,000 Italian casualties[54] .

The civil war in Italy began on 8 September 1943—the day that the Italian King signed an armistice with the Allied Forces withdrawing Italy from World War II—and ended in the late Spring 1945, with the complete liberation of Italy. In the immediate aftermath of the armistice, Mussolini was made the formal leader of the Italian Social Republic (RSI), a Nazi puppet state that embraced the territories of Central and Northern Italy, areas where German forces had a heavy influence.

With the signing of the armistice, German forces invaded Italy from north, to prevent the advancement of Allied forces that had landed in southern Italy. Parts of the Italian army, without formal orders, attempted to resist to the German invasion. In September 1943 alone, the resisting forces endured 18,965 casualties[55]. In southern Italy, a new government was formed, supported by a coalition of political parties that reemerged after twenty years of Fascist dictatorship. Italy was divided into two parts and an armed resistance movement began to form in regions occupied by Nazi forces.

The armed resistance formed to fight both the foreign occupiers and the new Fascist state. In turn, a counterinsurgency was carried out both by German forces and Fascist militias, often operating under the command of the former. In the first months, the resistance movement was composed of very small formations mostly located in Northern and

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[54] ISTAT 1957
[55] Torsiello 1975, 643

Central Italy. The resistance movement was initially fragmented, formed by small bands of fighters that had only limited contact with other bands and the local branches of the reemerging parties. The partisans had scarce resources, with light weapons provided by former soldiers and officers of the Italian army in the days of the disbandment, and arms that were seized from Fascists forces[56]. However, during the first months of 1944 the resistance grew and became a significant force by the spring of 1945.

 The Italian resistance movement benefited from the advancement of the Allied forces from South. Allied forces first landed in Sicily in July 1943 before a second series of landings on mainland Italy in September. The Allied forces needed to break through two major German defensive lines to reach northern Italy. First, the Gustav Line, below Rome, blocked Allied forces between the end of 1943 and spring 1944. Second, the Gothic Line, running along the Apennines north of Florence, held Allied advancement from the winter of 1944 until the following spring. The Allied forces played a fundamental role in the liberation of the country and the development of the civil war between the partisan bands and the Nazi-Fascist forces.

5.0 Research Design

In order to test our hypothesis of the logic of vulnerability, we triangulate three different empirical analyses. First, we perform a statistical analysis using spatially and temporally disaggregated data relative to all the Italian territory involved in frontlines movement. Second, we increase the spatial and temporal disaggregation of the data for a second statistical analysis of the Emilia-Romagna region. Third, we present qualitative historical evidence to provide a richer understanding of the local dynamics of violence.

In our research design, the movement and holding of frontlines divide the temporal dimension in three distinct phases (Figure 1) and the geographical space in three geographic areas (Figure 2). Two crucial events divide the temporal dimension: the collapse of the Gustav Line in June 1944 and the establishment of the Gothic Line in the

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[56] Pavone 2013

Emilia-Romagna region in September 1944. The collapse of the Gustav Line divides time in two phases: phase 1 (before the collapse, when the frontline is stable) and phase 2 (after the collapse, when the frontline is shifting). The establishment of the Gothic Line marks the end of phase 2 and the beginning of phase 3, a period when the frontline is again stable.

Figure 1: Frontline Phases
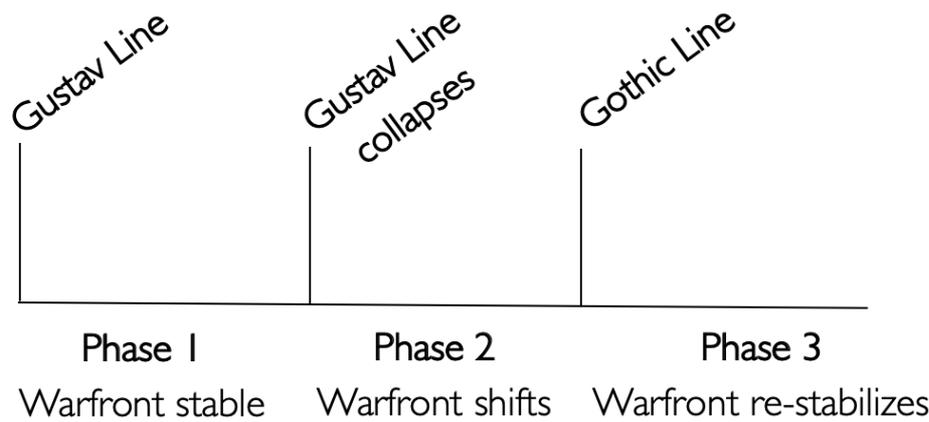
The geographic space is composed of three areas: A, B, C (see Figure 2). Area A is delimited by the Gustav Line (in the south) and the Gothic Line (in the north). Area B is a 75 kilometers-deep strip of territory that runs above the whole Gothic Line, from the Tyrrhenian Sea (east) to the Adriatic Sea (west). Finally, Area C is the territory between the northern border of Italy and Area B. Hence, Area A is controlled by the incumbents in phase 1, but it becomes an area of moving frontline in phase 2, disappearing from our research in phase 3 because under the control of the Allied Forces. In the empirical analysis of all three areas across time periods, our units of analysis are monthly grid-cells. Considering the nature of our analysis, we decided not to rely on the administrative units, as they had no role during the combat operations. Utilizing monthly grid-cells allows us to compare units with consistent size.

Figure 2: Italy and Research Design Areas

Area C
Area B
Area A
No in Sample
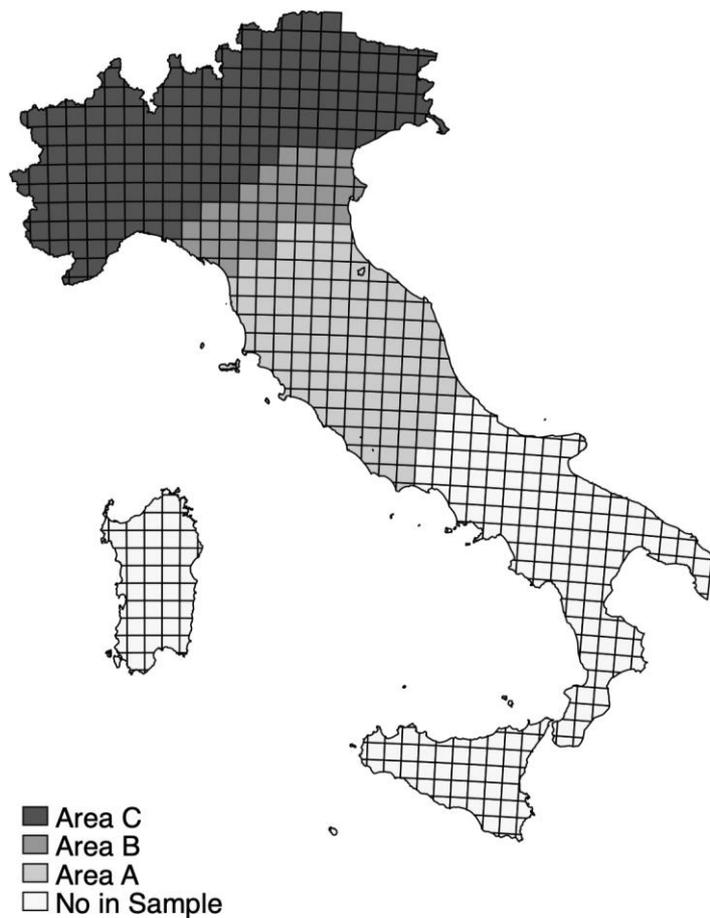
We opted for a grid of squared cells with sides of 25 km. Costalli and Ruggeri[57] found that cells with 30 km sides over-aggregate relevant geographic variation of the Italian resistance movement, whereas cells with 20 km tend to inflate the observations without providing further information. Hence, cells of 25 km are the apt balance between over-aggregation and sample inflation. We have a time-series cross-section with 26 months and a maximum of 650 cells. The data include more than 5000 violent events. However, as we opted for the month-grid cell as our analytical unit, the temporal and spatial merging lead to a total of 1419 month-cells with violent events and 961 events involving civilian victimization. The sample shrinks because several events happened in different days but within the same month and same location. Month-grid cells with events amount to 10% of the overall sample (N=15600). The mean of civilians killed per month-cell is 0.63, with a standard deviation of 8.2.

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[57] Costalli and Ruggeri 2015

Testing the two hypotheses on the whole territory of the conflict

In the first part of our national analysis, we test whether civilian victimization in area A changed due to the movement of the frontline. We analyze the difference in the level of civilian victimization in area A before and after the collapse of the Gustav Line (phase 1 and phase 2, respectively). We compare this difference with the levels of civilian victimization during same time span in Area C, which was not affected by the movement of the frontline. In other words, and more precisely, we use a difference-in-differences research design where grid-cells in Area A represent the treated sample, while grid-cells in Area C are the control group. We exclude Area B from the non-treated sample because keeping B would likely undermine SUTVA and violate the assumption of spatial independence, due to possible spillovers of violence as an inertial byproduct of the moving forces.[58] In our appendix we provide evidence that our data does not violate the parallel trend assumption.

In the second part of our national analysis, we investigate whether the stopping of the frontline and establishment of the Gothic Line had any effect on the dynamics of violence against civilians in Area B, which is still under the control of the incumbent and close to the frontline. In this second difference-in-differences analysis the grid-cells in Area B are the treated sample, while the cells in Area C are again the control group. We compare the two areas at phase 2 (when frontline is moving) and at phase 3 (when the frontline is again stable).

Figure 3 depicts our expectations for the evolution of violence against civilians in the three areas over time. According to our theory, we should see low levels of violence in all three areas in t_1, but we should see a sudden increase of violence during t_2 in Area A, when the frontline moves. During t_2 violence should also increase in Area B, but with a certain delay, because of the frontline moving north and the re-grouping of Nazi-fascist forces in the area. During t_3, though, violence in Area B should decrease due to the stability of the

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[58]However, we also run models with Area B in the control group and our results hold (see Appendix).

frontline. In area C (upper part of the figure) we expect to see no change in the level of violence against civilians, and this is why we use it as our control group.

Figure 3: Areas, Phases and Expected Violence
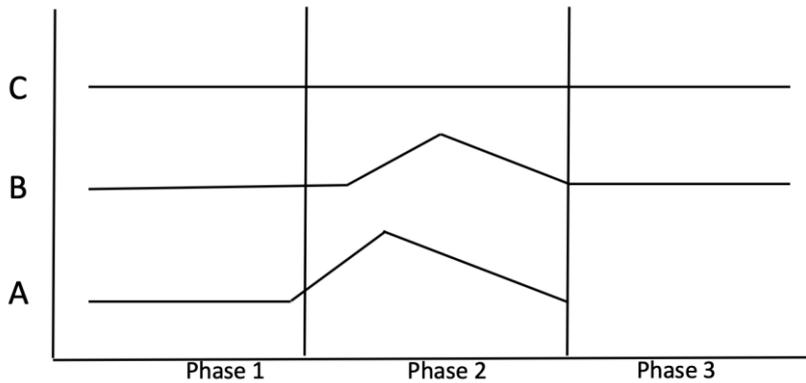
We match our units before performing the difference-in-differences analysis to tackle possible selection bias in the treatment and control groups and to make the parallel assumption more credible[59]. We match cells with a similar political history of voting radical left because variation in radical networks may explain variation of resistance to incumbents[60] and because incumbents may also use this information to target underground networks of resistance[61]. Moreover, we match areas with similar terrain and shares of mountains because counterinsurgency could target those areas as they provide better protection for insurgents [62]. Since we need to handle cross-section time-series data [63], we opt for kernel matching and difference-in-differences for repeated cross sections[64].

Testing the two hypotheses in Emilia-Romagna

We replicate our research design increasing the spatial and temporal disaggregation of our data to conduct a within-region analysis focused on the region of Emilia-Romagna. Emilia-

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[59] Abadie 2005

[60] Costalli and Ruggeri 2015

[61] Balcells 2017

[62] Fearon and Laitin 2003; Pavone 2013

[63] Blundell and Dias 2009

[64] Villa 2016

Romagna is the only Italian region that includes territory in all three areas (A, B, C), as well as being one of the regions with significant confrontation between the Nazi-fascist forces and the resistance movement. The main goal of this within-region analysis is to reduce the threat of omitted variable bias. In order to achieve this, we use squared cells with sides of 10 km and weeks as our temporal units of analysis. Moreover, important historical works claim that Nazi-fascist actions were mainly directed against areas where the incumbent—aware of the extreme mobility of the rebels—presumed the partisans had their operational bases rather than where the rebels carried out their attacks[65]. However, it could be argued that the civilian victimization perpetrated by the incumbent was influenced by the actions of the partisans. To account for this possibility, we leverage the extremely detailed data on partisan activity that is available for Emilia-Romagna region and use them in our analysis in order to explicitly control for partisans' actions. We replicate the research strategy used in the statistical analysis on the whole territory of the conflict performing two matched difference-in-differences for the two phases of the war (moving and stable frontline). Figure 4 shows the three areas in which we divided Emilia-Romagna. In this case Area B is 25 km deep, instead of 75km and phase 1 begins when the frontline enters the region.

Figure 4: Emilia-Romagna, cells and research design areas

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[65] Pezzino 2008; Klinkhammer 1993
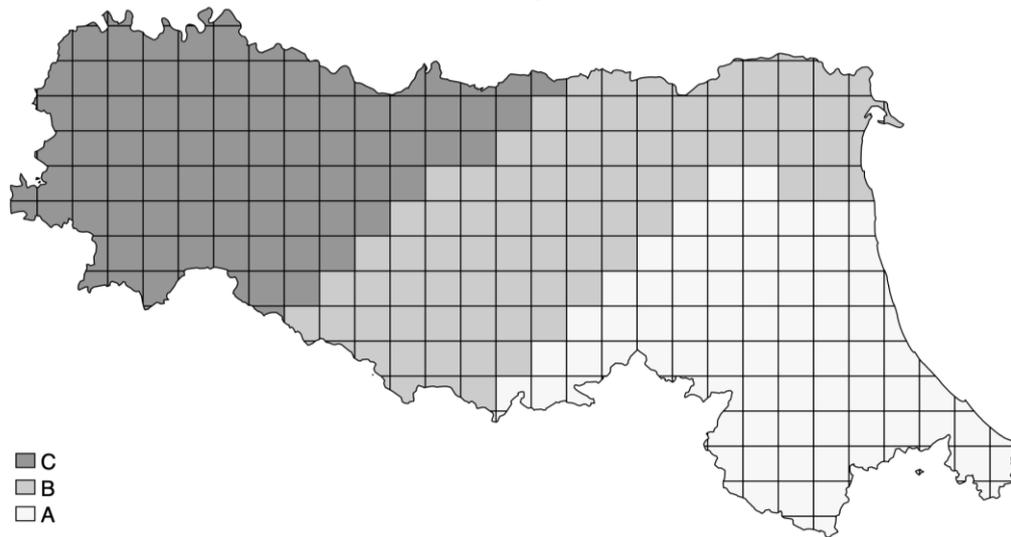
Data

We evaluate our hypotheses using new disaggregated data gathered through extensive archival research. First, a team of Italian historians collected information on every act of violence against civilians or unarmed rebels perpetrated in Italy during the German occupation (July 1943 – May 1945). Following this research, we geocoded more than 5000 events, for which we know the actors of violence (fascist or Nazi forces), the target of violence (partisans or civilians), the number of victims, the date and the location.[66] As a dependent variable, we use the number of civilians killed by Nazi-fascist forces in a cell-month[67]. The data distinguish between victims who were not actively involved in the war (i.e. who were not involved in armed combat) as either "civilians" and "anti-fascists". Civilians are those killed without any clear motivation based on group membership, while anti-fascists were relatives or collaborators of the insurgents. We exclude the latter category from our analysis to focus on civilian victimization and indiscriminate violence.

6.0 Findings

Figure 5 is based on real data and shows the evolution of civilian victimization over time in the three areas of Italy involved in the conflict. If we compare figure 3 and figure 5 we

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[66] See http://www.straginazifasciste.it .

[67] In our online appendix we also provide tables (Tables 1A and 2A) where the dependent variable is operationalized as the number of violent events. Our findings do not change.

can see that our expectations closely reflect this simple description of the data. As expected, the level of violence against civilians in area A was relatively low in phase 1, but it increases significantly at the beginning of phase 2, when the Gustav Line collapses and the frontline moves. Violence in this area drops in October 1944, when most of the Gothic Line is already established and the frontline is only moving on the Adriatic shore of Emilia-Romagna. In December 1944, when the frontline eventually stabilises in that zone and phase 3 begins, the level of violence in Area A stabilizes around zero. Area B shows a similar path, but we a certain delay as expected. Finally, Area C – our control group – shows no relevant change in the level of violence until April 1945, which marks the collapse of the Gothic line, the end of phase 3, the end of the war and therefore also the end of the time span we consider.

Figure 5: Three areas and three phases: Actual levels of civilian victimization
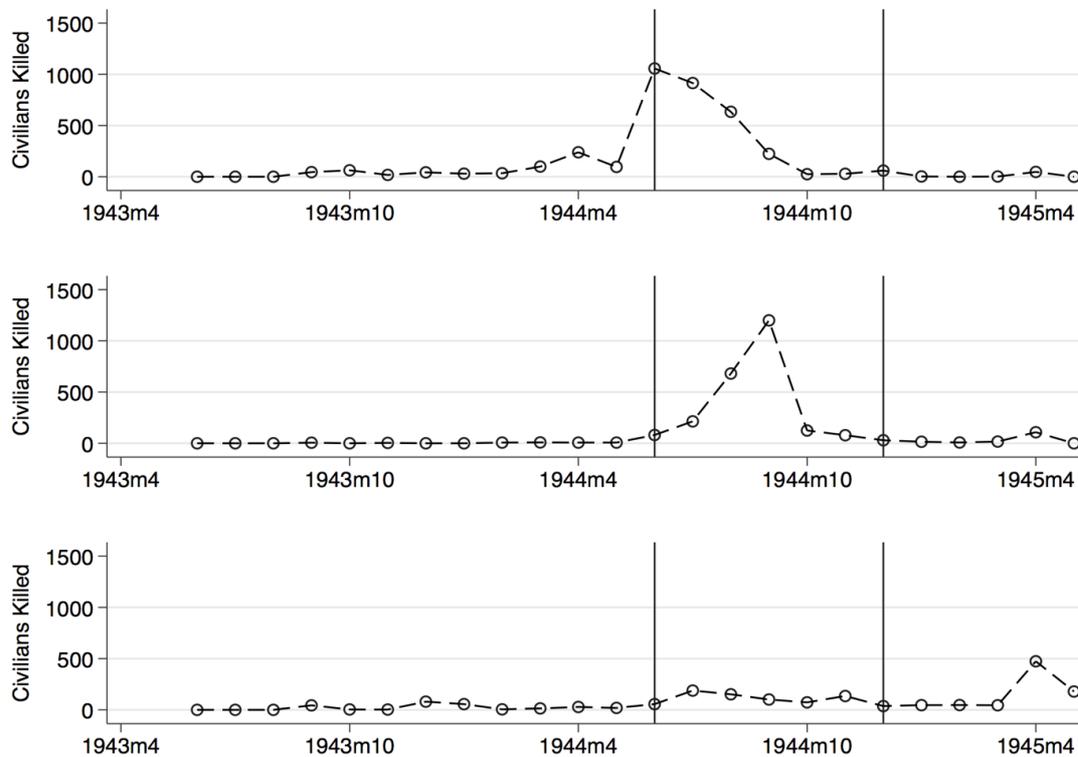
However, we cannot infer any causal relationship from Figure 5. To strengthen our argument, table 1 reports the results of our difference-in-differences analysis of civilian victimization (comparing Area A and Area C) for the first phase, when the frontline is

moving. We use fixed-effects at grid-cell level and find that when the frontline is moving each cell hosts, on average, almost three more civilian killings per month than when the frontline is stable. This difference is statistically significant (M1). Performing the same analysis on the sample of units with similar share of mountainous terrain and vote share to radical left in 1921 produced by the kernel propensity score matching confirms the previous findings (M2), with only a small mitigation of the average treatment effect. If the *logic of allegiance* was the only logic at work, matching for historical local political preferences should dissolve the effects of the moving front and challenge the *logic of vulnerability*. On the contrary, our findings suggest that the *logic of vulnerability* has a crucial role in explaining the level of civilian victimization. Additionally, we control in a matched difference-in-differences model (M3) for the presence of partisans' bases in a given month-cell. If civilian victimization was only caused by a reaction to the presence of partisan bands, in a *logic of retaliation*, our difference-in-differences analysis should no longer be significant. On the contrary, the effect of the *logic of vulnerability* is unchanged, but a *logic of retaliation* also appears to be present.

Table 1: Effect of the moving frontline on violence against civilians

	M1	M2	M3
			Matched DiD
	Diff.-in- diff.	Matched DiD	& controls
Pre-treat. Diff.	0.304	0.407	0.623**
	(0.212)	(0.297)	(0.309)
Post-treat. Diff.	2.958***	2.781***	3.009***
	(0.300)	(0.394)	(0.404)
Diff.-in- diff.	2.654***	2.374***	2.386***
	(0.367)	(0.493)	(0.493)

Partisan presence			0.690**
			(0.276)
R-squared	0.03	0.03	0.03
Observations	5940	4584	4584

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1. In matched models, we matched units of analysis by share of mountainous terrain and vote share of Left-wing parties before the war.

We now analyze the effect of frontline stabilization on violence against civilians looking at the difference between Area B in t_3 compared to t_2. As we have introduced above, Area B is a 75 kilometers-deep strip of territory that runs above the whole Gothic Line. However, this is just an arbitrary decision and in fact we study the effect of frontline stabilization on different treated areas, using strips of 25, 50, and 75 kilometers of territory above the Gothic Line to gauge whether changes of treated areas affect the results. In other words, we control for different definitions of Area B. We focus on the sample of grid-cells produced by matching, in order to further reduce the chances of nonrandom selection of units into the treatment group. The results in Table 2 confirm our hypothesis and are consistent: the level of civilian victimization in the area under the control of incumbents decreases dramatically when the frontline is re-established and stabilizes. However, it is worth noting that the reduction in civilian victimization is smaller as the distance from the frontline increases. This finding is coherent with the *logic of vulnerability*: the logistical and information needs are most pressing near the frontline. In other words, the incumbent's forces vulnerability increases near the frontline and so do the incentives to kill civilians. As a result, when the frontline stabilizes and conventional forces' security is somehow restored, the difference between the phase of movement and the phase of stability is largest close to the frontline. Given that the presence of resistance bands increased over time in central and northern Italy [68], we also control for whether cells hosted a partisan base[69]. M4 shows that even if the stabilization considerably attenuates violence, in areas

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[68] Bocca 2012
[69] Costalli and Ruggeri 2015

closer to the frontline (25 KMs), civilian victimization is still triggered if there is partisan presence, as expected by the *logic of retaliation*.

Table 2: Effect of frontline stabilization on violence against civilians (matched DiD & controls)

	M4	M5	M6
	Matched DiD & controls	Matched DiD & controls	Matched DiD & controls
	25 Kms	50 Kms	75 Kms
Pre-treat. Diff.	16.665***	14.562***	11.229***
	(2.240)	(2.000)	(1.751)
Post-treat. Diff.	-0.770	-0.450	-0.167
	(2.241)	(1.957)	(1.718)
Diff.-in- diff.	-17.425***	-15.011***	-11.396***
	(3.167)	(2.800)	(2.448)
Partisan presence	5.138*	2.640	1.788
	(2.942)	(2.445)	(2.188)
R-squared	0.05	0.04	0.03
Observations	1848	1824	1812

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Units of analysis matched by share of mountainous terrain and vote share of Left-wing parties before the war.

As an alternative estimation, we performed a time-series cross-section analysis with grid and month-fixed effects and a treatment dummy variable for the cells that experienced the moving frontline. We performed the same analysis for the frontline stabilization and we report these results in table 3A of the appendix. The results are largely identical. Finally, as

reported in table 4A of our appendix, we have controlled for a temporal spatial lag of Nazi civilian victimization based on an inverted distance W-matrix, lagged by one month. We find evidence of diffusion effects, but our findings on moving and stabilization phases hold.

The idea that the movement of the front is strictly connected with the occurrence of massacres features prominently in the work of German historian Lutz Klinkhammer. Klinkhammer finds that:

> "[T]he zones of massacres moved rapidly, leaving the impression of a uniform distribution over the entire territory. In fact, most of the massacres took place in the area of the frontline or in the military zone immediately behind the frontline […] In my view, the speed of German withdrawal considerably influenced the protection of logistical and withdrawal lines. […] It was also the speed of withdrawal that influenced the behaviour of many military units"[70].

Similarly, Carlo Gentile argues that:

> "[S]ince fighting the aggressors directly was very difficult, the soldiers victimized the population […]. In many cases, during the withdrawals, the situation caused a real 'psychosis of partisans' […] At the same time, the violence against civilians was not necessarily connected with the fight against the resistance bands: the regular warfare at the frontline also caused an escalation of violence against civilians. In these cases the violence came in the form of waves, strictly associated with the evolution of the conflict […] The worst phase for the Italian population undoubtedly opened up with Summer 1944 [...] In Autumn 1944 violence and massacres remarkably decreased"[71].

Mazower's comprehensive study of occupied Europe between 1939 and 1945 suggests that there is a relationship between frontline shifts and the level of civilian victimization:

> "After months on the retreat, military necessity dictated securing the Apennines—the last line of defense before the Po valley—and in the summer of 1944 this was

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[70] Klinkhammer 1997, 19–21
[71] Gentile 2015a, 468–69

assured. It was scarcely a coincidence that the Marzabotto[72] massacre occurred at the very moment when the Germans defending the central section of the Gothic Line came under pressure from the advancing Allied forces"[73].

If we combine local accounts of violent episodes, it becomes evident that the geography of civilian victimization closely followed frontline movement. Large-scale civilian victimization along the Tuscan coast occured as the German frontline moved in the very days that preceded the arrival of Allied troops. On 13 June 1944 German forces killed 83 civilians in the small village of Niccioleta in Southern Tuscany. Prior to these killings, Nazi-Fascist forces monitored the area and were aware of the hostility of the local civilians towards the incumbent forces. However, even though the partisans were quite active in the area, there are no documents or testimonies indicating a growing or altered concern for hostility in that particular village[74]. The situation changed suddenly between 10 and 15 June. A band of insurgents stopped to rest in Niccioleta for a day. When the band left, the local antifascist inhabitants organized an armed guard with a few shotguns to protect the village from the Nazi-fascist forces, assuming that the partisans were now strong in that area and that the incumbents would soon withdraw. The German troops were withdrawing northwards after the fall of Rome and Allied forces liberated Grosseto on 15 June 1944. On the morning of 13 June, a German battalion arrived in Niccioleta. This battalion was moving inland to conduct counterinsurgency, designed to protect withdrawing German troops along the coast[75]. When the German soldiers saw the few armed civilians guarding the town, they assumed that Niccioleta was now aligned with the insurgents. As postulated in our argument, the German units assumed the partisans now had a stronghold in Niccioleta and, pressed by the need to secure the back of the

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[72] More on this episode below.

[73] Mazower 2009, 501

[74] Pezzino 2001a

[75] Pezzino 2001b

moving front and lacking more precise information, immediately responded by killing 83 civilians[76].

Two weeks later, a similar massacre of 55 civilians occurred in Guardistallo, about 60 kilometres north of Niccioleta. Both cases are significant examples of the many episodes that coincided with the movement of German forces north. American troops were quickly advancing from Rome as Germans forces attempted to regroup along the so-called Frieda Line that moved from Lake Trasimeno to the coast.[77] The Frieda line was located only a few miles from Niccioleta, making the area a logistic bulwark for German forces. On 14 June, American and French troops were only a few miles south of the Frieda Line. Guardistallo was similarly located on the hills surrounding the coastal road, where Allied forces were advancing towards the front. The Guardistallo Massacre occurred only three days before the 34th American Infantry Division took control of the area. The massacre in Civitella della Chiana, central Tuscany, on 29 June 1944 also suggests a strong link between the advancement of Allied forces and civilian victimization. The area had not been hosting insurgents' bases (that were located in the surrounding mountains). Civitella della Chiana was certainly central in the conventional operations of German forces, showing the importance of logistical concerns in the German's most violent counterinsurgency operations. The Civitella della Chiana massacre occurred when the German rearguard was regrouping in the face of the thrust from American, British and French forces. In a detailed account of the massacre in Civitella, German historian Geyer explicitly mentions how Germans acted to minimize problems in their vulnerable rear-guards, with counter-insurgency becoming "a matter of immediate and systematic concern for frontlines units because of their rapid, fighting retreat[78]". On 12 August 1944, approximately 200 German soldiers of the *XVI SS Panzer-Grenadier Division* executed 394 civilians, including women and children in Sant'Anna di Stazzema, northern Tuscany. The massacre occurred just a few weeks before the completion and stabilization of the Gothic

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[76] Pezzino 2001a

[77] Fisher 1989, 242–47

[78] Geyer 1997, 189

Line in the same area. In that period, the resistance was reaching its apex in Tuscany and the Nazi-fascist forces—lacking high-quality information on the location and identity of the rebels—wanted to clear the southern side of the Gothic Line of insurgent threats[79]. As argued by Klinkhammer, "The fact that partisan bands could control the communication routes behind the frontline in some areas of the Apennine Mountains between Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna looked particularly dangerous for the German forces. The partisans could have blocked the supplies and caused problems in case of a German withdrawal[80]". The resistance bands "represented a danger for the [German] fighting troops, for their supplies and for the frequent patrolling missions that were required in view of the establishment of the Gothic Line[81]". "The fight against the bands could succeed only if reliable spies previously infiltrated among the partisans and provided precise information[82]". As a matter of fact, "when fascist militias or German troops managed to completely crush a partisan group, this was almost always due to the action of a spy or to underground investigative work[83]", but these activities take time and require relative stability.

Most of the Gothic Line was already established by October 1944, but the frontline was not completely stabilized until December 1944. During this period of stabilization the incumbents were able to focus their counter-insurgency action towards actual partisans[84]. In those months "the [German] troops managed to arrest many young men who, at the end of 'in-depth interrogatories' and some cross-checking turned out to be partisans[85]". "At the end of the [counter-insurgency] actions of December 1944, a period of considerable quiet finally began[86]". The defensive actions of the Nazi-fascist forces and the counter-insurgency strategies carried out in this period of stability posed significant challenges to

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[79] Pezzino 2008

[80] Klinkhammer 1993, 354

[81] BAMA RH 20-14 AOK 116

[82] Klinkhammer 1993, 354

[83] Klinkhammer 1993, 338

[84] Klinkhammer 1993, 365

[85] Gentile 2015a, 186

[86] Gentile 2015a, 187

the resistance bands. Some resistance bands even entered into explicit or implicit agreements with the incumbents[87]. For instance, the so-called "Banda Beretta", was in control of several areas in the province of Parma, a key area for the communications and supplies for the 14th German Army. The leaders of the band negotiated with the German army and with the Fascist police to not attack the German forces and the communication lines in exchange for a similar restraint from the incumbents[88]. Similarly, on 5 November 1944 in the area of Pavia, a partisan band entered into negotiations with representatives of the fascist militias. However, due to the nature of these negotiations and agreements, it is difficult to trace their outcomes[89]. In any case, "the situation for the population improved: the number of civilians killed remarkably decreased compared to the previous summer[90]".

These qualitative accounts demonstrate the importance of integrating dynamic factors into the logics that aim to explain variation in civilian victimization. Violence in WWII Italy cannot be reduced (not exclusively, at least) to the actions of some units, as civilian victimization was widespread and involved several different divisions.[91] It also cannot be linked exclusively to the retreat of German forces and the associated scorched earth based on a desperation logic, or to racism towards Italians, as the killings are not occurring linearly through time and space but occur in response to specific strategic incentives.[92] In order to gauge more precisely whether the logic of retaliation could have a crucial role and be an inferential threat for the logic of vulnerability, we provide further disaggregated empirical analysis of the region of Emilia-Romagna.

Logic of Vulnerability in Emilia-Romagna

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[87] BAMA 1944a

[88] US NARA 1945

[89] BAMA 1944b

[90] Gentile 2015b, 174

[91] Part of the literature (e.g. Gentile 2015) argues that the "Reichsfuhrer-SS" and the "Hermann Goering" divisions perpetrated most of the violence against civilians in Italy. The new complete dataset that we use shows that these two divisions combined are responsible for about 6% of the violent events. A systematic test is available in the appendix.

[92] Desperation, however, might be a key factor in explaining violence in the last phase of war, in April 1945.

We now move to our disaggregated analysis of Emilia-Romagna. This analysis provides two major empirical gains: First, not only can we identify the presence of partisan bases, but we can also identify their actions against Nazi-Fascist forces. Second, we increase the geographic and temporal disaggregation of the data, moving from 25 km-squared cells to 10 km-squared cells and from months to weeks. Both the data on partisan actions and the smaller units of analysis will allow us to assess the relevance of the logic of retaliation even more carefully. In table 3 we provide the results of the difference-in-differences analysis for the phase of frontline's movement. We find that the level of civilian victimization increases compared to the pre-movement phase and the difference is statistically significant. Our results suggest that each treated week-cell experienced, on average, one civilian death at the hands of incumbent's forces. If we consider all treated cells, the area affected by the moving frontline in that period suffered more than one-thousand civilian casualties. In the next model (M8) we provide a matched analysis where we match the grid-cells by the share of votes to radical left in 1921 before performing the difference-in-differences analysis controlling for partisan activity[93]. The results also hold when controlling for partisan activity, expressed by the number of Nazi-fascist soldiers killed in a given 10 km-squared cell on a given week. In the appendix we also show additional models where we consider different types of partisan activity such as the number of attacks to the incumbents or the number of sabotages conducted by the partisans. The results of interest do not change in these additional models.

Table 3: Effect of the moving frontline on civilian victimization in Emilia-Romagna

	M7	M8
		Matched DiD
	Diff.-in- diff.	& controls

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[93] The territory covered by this analysis – especially the treated area – is much smaller and homogeneous than the one in the previous analysis, thus we do not match for the share of mountainous territory.

Pre-treat. Diff.	0.026	-0.204
	(0.139)	(0.149)
Post-treat. Diff.	1.049***	0.837***
	(0.280)	(0.203)
Diff.-in- diff.	1.022***	1.041***
	(0.312)	(0.336)
Nazi-fascist killed by partisans		4.914***
		(0.122)
R-squared	0.01	0.08
Observations	18084	14522

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. In matched models, we matched units of analysis by vote share of Left-wing parties before the war.

In Table 4, we study the phase of frontline stabilization in Emilia-Romagna and here Area B is 20 kilometers deep. Even at this level of analysis, and accounting for the number of incumbents killed by partisans, we find a statistically significant decline of civilian victimization. Matching grid-cells by the share of votes to radical left in 1921 before testing the effect of frontline stabilization does not change the results.

Table 4: Effect of frontline stabilization on violence against civilians in Emilia-Romagna

	M9	M10
	Diff.-in- diff.	Matched DiD & controls
	20 KMs	20 KMs
Pre-treat. Diff.	2.190***	1.664**
	(0.706)	(0.761)
Post-treat. Diff.	0.266	-0.095

	(0.636)	(0.686)
Diff.-in- diff.	-1.923**	-1.760*
	(0.950)	(1.024)
Nazi-fascist killed by partisans		5.986***
		(0.249)
R-squared	0.01	0.10
Observations	5452	2444

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.1. In matched models, we matched units of analysis by vote share of Left-wing parties before the war.

Even in this area, qualitative historical evidence supports our theory and quantitative findings. On 29 September 1944, immediately prior to the stabilization of the central-western section of the frontline, German troops started a campaign against civilians in the surroundings of Marzabotto, about 15 to 30 kilometers north of the frontline in the Apennines between Florence and Bologna, that lasted several days. By 5 October, 770 people, the vast majority of which were civilians, had been killed[94]. In the days preceding the campaign, the II Corps of the US Army was pushing northwards, having previously reached and conquered the mountain passes. In the days following the massacre, the 65th, 34th, and 91st divisions of the US Army had reached these areas, where the front remained then stable until the Spring[95]. The SS division was in charge of clearing an area from partisan formation that was deemed decisive for their conventional campaign. Unrestricted civilian victimization unleashed in the area was linked to its strategic importance: for the Nazis losing territory would have meant opening the door to Allies' penetration into a large plain where. the latter would have easily prevailed thanks to their superior resources[96]. A battalion of the SS division, led by Major Reder, was tasked with preventing partisans from disrupting this vulnerable and important line of

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[94] Baldissara and Pezzino 2009a
[95] Fisher 1989, 378–80
[96] Baldissara and Pezzino 2009b, 68

communication. The core concern was the potential of attack to German troops behind the frontlines. In the words of Reder, the possibility of an "arranged, simultaneous attack with the Americans[97]" was perceived as a major danger that, given the strategic value of the area, had to be avoided at all costs. The decision to attack the civilian population, rather than insurgents, was both due to informational problems and the fact that units found civilian victimization convenient at a time when attrition from conventional campaign was severely draining their human and material resources. In an *ex post* justification of what had happened in and around Marzabotto, a German officer claimed that the behavior of German units has been "deplorable" and yet "understandable". German soldiers faced a superior opposition and, at the same time, had to defend themselves from attacks behind frontlines, when "supplies and ammunitions started to be scarce and there was an increasing worry for the military situation on other fronts[98]".

As the central-western section of the frontline stabilized between mid-October and November 1944, civilian victimization in area decreased. However, the eastern section of the frontline, along the Adriatic Coast, continued moving until December 1944. The absence of major geographical obstacles had allowed Allied forces to proceed further north through the Fall of 1944. This had created a heightened sense of vulnerability for German forces. In response to this vulnerability, German forces resorted to sustained civilian victimization. The province of Ravenna was center of this violence. The largest massacre of the period occurred on 27 November 1944 in the village of Madonna dell'Albero. The front was fragmented in the area, with partisans being able to join forces with Canadian troops. The 721 Regiment of the 114 Jager (Alpine) division of the Wehrmacht was defending the outposts that guaranteed access to Ravenna, the provincial capital. After a firefight in the area of Via Nuova, the German troops resorted to a scorched earth strategy, killing 56 civilians that had taken refuge in nearby houses. The killing of civilians was not retaliatory, but directly linked to the need for German forces in the outpost to maintain the link with their rearguards. There was also the risk that the

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[97] Baldissara and Pezzino 2009b, 104
[98] Baldissara and Pezzino 2009b, 324

civilian population could provide support to Allied troops and partisans in further house-to-house firefights. According to historian Enrica Cavina, "the massacre of the people of Via Nuova would have made the presence of other people more immediately visible and made the control of the outpost, and the possible retreat, safer[99]".

Fighting between German and Allied forces continued into the early days of December 1944, with soldiers of the Canadian 5th Armoured Division and 1st Infantry Division forcing German troops to retreat, liberating a number of villages. In order to slow the Canadians' advance, German forces began destroying all the lines of communication, including bridges. Withdrawing forces also killed 32 civilians in their homes along the river. According to a former local partisan, civilians in the area were convinced that the Canadians would protect them[100]. However, when retreating German forces arrived first, they mined houses, conscious that they were inhabited. The mining of civilian houses, according to the abovementioned account, was not retaliatory, as there had been no partisan violence against the German's in the area. Violence rather aimed to guarantee the safety of German forces operating in an area where their conventional enemies were already present. German forces sought to avoid civilians providing information to Allied forces.

However, during the winter of 1944 the frontline remained stable with almost no direct clash between the opposing conventional armies. On their side of the frontline, the Nazi-fascist forces organized counterinsurgency initiatives focused on the partisan bands[101], but the civilian victimization decreased dramatically. In this period, the partisans liberated areas of the territory under the official control of the incumbents near the frontline and some interesting forms of governance emerged. The so-called "Repubblica di Montefiorino", on the Apennines of Emilia-Romagna, during the period of stable frontline throughout the winter 1944 and the spring 1945 had a population of more than 25,000

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[99] Cavina 2016, 4
[100] Golinelli 1985
[101] Gorrieri 1966, 599

inhabitants, distributed among approximately 30 hamlets[102]. Often, local representatives of pre-fascist political parties reached agreements with the fascist militias so that these hamlets were formally ruled by local fascist authorities, but in reality were under civilian administration[103]. The civilian population profited from this form of de facto democratic self-government, while the incumbents profited from the   fact that the inhabitants of these areas were not actively supporting or joining the armed bands

Conclusion

Scholars have attempted to explain the use of civilian victimization through several logics. This article challenges and contributes to these logics by introducing the *logic of vulnerability*. We argue that the use of civilian victimization in counterinsurgency operations and conventional warfare are strictly related. In conflicts where incumbents have to fight both an insurgency and a conventional campaign, the *logic of vulnerability* explains temporal and geographic variation of civilian victimization as a function of frontline movements. We have demonstrated the *logic of vulnerability* through an analysis of two key moments in WWII Italy during the campaign of Allied forces against Nazi-Fascist forces, as well as fighting local armed resistance. In the phase of frontline movement between June and August 1944, Nazi-fascist incumbents significantly increased their use of civilian victimization in the rearguards of the frontline. This supports the *logic of vulnerability* as incumbents attempt to deal with pressing needs of securing unstable supply lines against insurgents' attacks and struggling with scarce information on the location and identity of insurgents. The need of acquiring resources from the population and increased exposure to defection of the civilian population to opposition forces can be a critical trigger of civilian victimization. After the stabilization of a new frontline in Fall 1944, German forces notably reduced their civilian victimization. In line with the *logic of vulnerability*, civilian victimization was not a particularly useful tool once incumbents' vulnerability to insurgents' actions diminished. Incumbents' need for resources could be

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[102] Gorrieri 1966, 553
[103] Gorrieri 1966, 548–49

dealt with a re-structured supply chain, and the need to avoid defection from the civilian population decreased. In particular, a decline of civilian victimization can be observed in the territories close to the frontline. The effect of the stabilization of the frontline decreases as the distance from the front increases.

We do not dismiss extant logics of civilian victimization, but aimed to demonstrate how some logics are more pervasive than others. For example, even though racism and extreme ideological indoctrination were notoriously pervasive amid Nazi-fascist forces, our research shows that the *logic of vulnerability* stands as a major explanation for civilian victimization in Italy and it poses the conditions under which other logics may drive violence. The fact that our findings hold under multiple robustness checks, suggests that the logic of vulnerability should be even more relevant for incumbents with lower levels of racism and extreme ideological indoctrination. Desperation might have also played a role in the decision to victimize civilians. Records show that there were frequent instances of isolated acts of violence against civilians by German soldiers. However, the bulk of violence perpetrated by Nazi-fascist forces was in response to precise strategic incentives. As well as the logic of vulnerability, our study suggests that retaliation was a powerful mechanism to explain massacres by incumbents.

Given the recent increase of internationalized domestic conflict, we suggest future advancements should include three specific analytical dimensions. First, further attention should be devoted to the different incentives that exist for domestic and foreign incumbents. The need—or aspiration—to govern the territory in the long-term can change the structure of incentives of domestic vis-à-vis foreign incumbents, leading to different strategies. Second, although civilian victimization has been carried out in history by both democratic and non-democratic armies, further research could engage with how democratic countries' armed forces respond to the logic of vulnerability. Evidence from accounts of USA's war in Vietnam or more recently Afghanistan and Iraq could lead to more rigorous analysis of the conditions under which large-scale human rights violations and massacres of civilians have occurred. Third, in this research we focused on violence exercised by the incumbents. Advancements in this research should include theoretical

insights on the different incentives of using civilian victimization for incumbents vis-à-vis the insurgents.

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