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From grievances to civil war: The impact of geopolitics

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Abstract
I revisit claims that the Cold War had no meaningful effect on civil war after 1990 by probing its empirical veracity. I argue and employ a Bartik-style difference-in-differences identification strategy to show that countries with greater political grievances during the Cold War were more likely to experience civil war after the Cold War. I provide evidence suggesting that changes in the credibility of external support to both governments and rebels affected this uptick in conflict onset in aggrieved countries. These findings suggest the confluence of geopolitics and preexisting grievances played a causal role in civil war after the Cold War.

Keywords Civil war · Grievances · Cold War · Geopolitics · Difference-in-differences · Causal inference

JEL Classification F50 · D74 · N40 · H56 · O57

Following the end of the Cold War, the 1990s marked one of the bloodiest decades in human history, due mainly to an elevated propensity of civil conflict (Lacina, 2006, 276). Yet, in a seminal article, James Fearon and David Laitin (2003) discounted the Cold War's termination as a causal factor, declaring the "prevalence of civil war in the 1990s was not due to the end of the Cold War and associated changes in the

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international system" (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, 77–78). This paper revisits Fearon and Laitin's claim, principally by re-evaluating the empirical evidence.[1]

Whereas Fearon and Laitin elevate the importance of predominantly time-invariant country characteristics, such as rugged terrain and mountains, as drivers of civil war, I combine both international and domestic level characteristics to explain patterns of civil war across countries and time. I present evidence supporting the argument that during periods of changing credibility of external support, countries with more aggrieved populations are more likely to experience civil war (Sect. 1 describes the rationale). As Figs. 1a-c show, evidence in support of this conjecture is visible in the underlying raw data.

For a global sample of countries, Fig. 1a mimics existing studies (e.g., Fig. 1 in Fearon & Laitin, 2003, Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010, and Anderson, 2019) in documenting an elevated incidence of civil conflict around the end of the Cold War.[2] Figure 1b decomposes this trend by a country's average level of political grievances *during* the Cold War (based on the proportion of years during the Cold War a country was "not free" on the Freedom House's political rights index).[3] Countries exhibiting any grievance during the Cold War were more likely to exhibit conflict after the Cold War compared to those without any grievances. Finally, Fig. 1c suggests a plausible channel: civil war was more prevalent in aggrieved countries with a lower prospect of external support from a major power (as proxied with the government *not* being an ally of the United States).[4]

While suggestive, the patterns in these figures do not necessarily establish a causal relationship. To mitigate concerns posed by endogeneity and confounding factors, I exploit the period surrounding the end of the Cold War as a plausibly exogenous change in the structure of the international system, with a number of correlated effects, such as changing credibility of "support" from major foreign powers and diminished state capacity. Crucially to draw causal inferences, the end of the Cold War was (1) largely exogenous to internal political conditions in minor countries (Gaddis, 1997, 286) and (2) *relative* to the Cold War period, the post-Cold War period ushered changing credibility of external support from major powers, particularly from the United States (Monteiro, 2011).

Building on these insights, I exploit this exogenous "treatment" in a difference-in-differences (DD) framework that is akin to a Bartik or "shift-share" identification strategy increasingly used in political economy to estimate causal effects with observational data (e.g., Dreher & Langlotz, 2020; Nunn & Qian, 2014). Intuitively,

[1] The analysis in this paper is distinct from Kalyvas and Balcells (2010). Whereas they study how the international system can affect the *composition* of warfare and strategies in civil war ("technologies of rebellion"), this paper emphasizes how *pre-existing* political conditions (i.e., grievances) can elevate the *onset* of civil war when the structure of the international system changes.

[2] As a point of reference to the cited studies, Figs. 1a, b, c plot the *incidence* (occurrence) of civil conflict, which combines the continuation of existing warfare and the onset of new conflicts. The arguments advanced in this paper pertain most directly to the outbreak (onset) of new conflicts. Accordingly, the statistical analysis in the rest of the paper focuses on conflict *onsets*.

[3] The patterns identified in Fig. 1b hold with alternate measures of grievances from different data sources.

[4] The next section discusses a number of plausible channels for the patterns in Fig. 1a, b, such as external support and state capacity/development.

the research design compares the onset of civil war between the Cold War and post-Cold War period across countries that experienced low and high levels of political grievances during the Cold War. Econometrically, I interact a post-Cold War dummy (the "treatment" or "shift" variable) with a country's average level of grievances *during* the Cold War (the "pre-treatment conditioning" or "share" variable) to estimate a causal effect: the onset of civil war rose in the post-Cold War period in countries whose populations were more politically aggrieved during the Cold War. This finding is *not* driven by (violent) post-Cold War transitions in many former Soviet countries, Yugoslavia, and successor states, as these countries are *excluded* from the statistical analysis. Moreover, the paper's main finding is robust to different samples and specifications, alternate measures of grievances, unobserved heterogeneity (e.g., region and country-specific time trends), and is not driven by other variables that may be correlated with political grievances, such as ethnic fragmentation and low economic development. Reassuringly, the share-shift research design is robust to several challenges to causal inference, including "testing" for parallel trends, controlling for spurious and non-linear time trends, and discounting the impact of potential correlated factors with the share variable (i.e., political grievances) such as ethnic fractionalization. These results are fully discussed and presented in Appendix D.[5]

I then evaluate channels. I present two sets of findings that are consistent with the external support channel (as suggested by Fig. 1c). First, I show that governments with stronger military ties to the United States during the Cold War – and presumably with a greater likelihood of support from the United States thereafter (e.g., Cunningham, 2016; Lake, 2009) – were less prone to conflict onsets after the Cold War. Second, using recently compiled data on "competitive interventions" (Anderson, 2019), I show that countries where the government and/or rebel groups received external support from the United States and/or the Soviet Union *during* the Cold War were more likely to experience civil war after the 1990; presumably due to changing credibility of support from each superpower *after* the Cold War's termination.

Together, the paper's empirical findings are consistent with the narrative that changing credibility of external support after the Cold War empowered poorly equipped rebel groups to fight weakened and repressive governments (Herbst, 2004) and offers a partial explanation for the severity of political violence in the 1990s (Lacina, 2006, 276). Existing scholarship on civil war, which frequently focuses on conditions *within* countries – such as inequality between groups, economic development, and geography, among others (Fearon & Laitin, 2003, Cederman et al., 2011) – are limited in explaining this *temporal* cross-national variation. More broadly, in demonstrating the causal impact of geopolitics on civil conflict, this paper contributes to burgeoning scholarship on the varied ways foreign powers can affect political violence in other countries. For instance, this includes how foreign actors can affect the "technology" of rebellion (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010), secessionist movements (Coggins, 2011), the duration of conflicts through "competitive interventions" (Anderson, 2019), and the prevalence of "quagmires" (Schulhofer-Wohl, 2020).

That said, this paper's theory and empirics diverge from these prior studies by tying pre-existing political grievances and geopolitics to cross-national and time-

[5] The paper's appendices are all available on the *Review of International Organizations'* webpage.

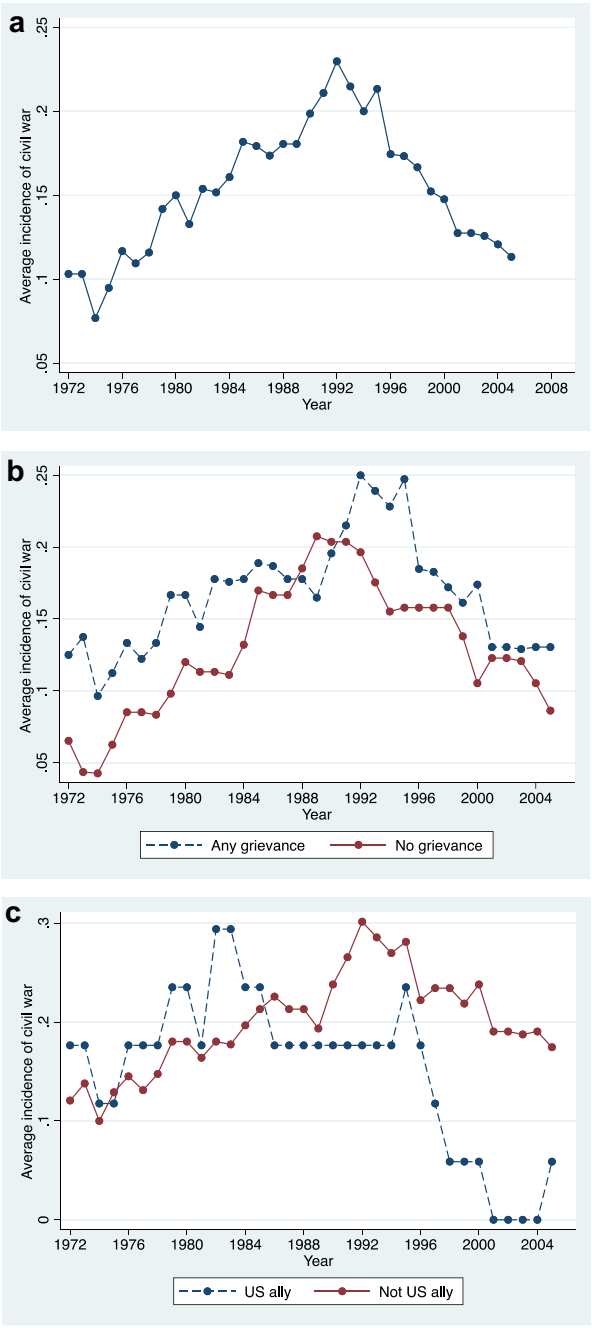


Figure 1 **a** Average incidence of civil conflict. **b** Average incidence of civil conflict, by level of grievance (during the Cold War). **c** Average incidence of civil conflict in countries with any grievances (during the Cold War), by alliance status with the United States

varying patterns of civil war and leverages a Bartik-style research design to tease out causal effects. Consider for example, recent scholarship by Anderson (2019) and Schulhofer-Wohl (2020). They each advance novel theories centered on how foreign

interventions, one on the duration of civil wars, the other on the incidence of "quagmires", while this paper reveals how a change in the structure of the international system can affect the onset of civil war in politically aggrieved societies.

1 Argument

1.1 Preconditions for civil conflict: Political grievances

Civil war entails large-scale fighting between the government of a sovereign state and domestic challengers. As such, these wars entail the "rupture of state sovereignty" which occurs at the level of the polity (Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl, 2019). Inherent in this conceptualization is the notion that a peaceful settlement cannot be reached, presumably due to a breakdown of civil (peaceful) political processes. In many instances, the prevalence of prior *political* grievances underlies this breakdown and lies at the core of "grievance" based explanations for civil conflict (e.g., Gurr, 1970; Regan & Norton, 2005). Regimes that restrict political rights frequently pursue redistributive policies (e.g., taxation, public goods provision) that perpetuate inequalities and perceptions of deprivation (Gurr, 1970). Indeed, economic inequality (often based on ethnic and/or religious divisions within countries) tends to be highly correlated with political exclusion and grievances (Cederman et al., 2011). Typically, economically impoverished groups will also tend to have less political power and pent up political grievances. These factors in turn can mobilize rebellion against a repressive government (Regan & Norton, 2005).

By most accounts, political grievances relate to the actual (or threatened) use of state resources to deter individuals and/or organizations from challenging government personnel, practices, or institutions (Goldstein, 1978, xxvii). In practice, Christian Davenport (2007, 2) observes that political grievances deal with "applications of state power that violate First Amendment-type rights, due process in the enforcement and adjudication of law, and personal integrity or security." While the state can adopt various strategies to repress its population (or sub-groups), a central feature of these measures is restriction of the capacity for individuals to *politically challenge* the state.

Of course, the mere existence of grievances does not imply civil war. As Stathis Kalyvas (2009, 422) observes: "Obviously, the problems with grievances as a determinant of civil war onset is that they seem to be much more prevalent than civil war and that they are very hard to measure directly. Ultimately, it is difficult to escape the conjecture that one has to look for combinations of demand for, and supply of, rebellion (or intention and opportunity)."

A number of plausible factors may provide opportunities for the onset of civil war. These include, but are not limited to, income shocks to governments and/or rebel groups. Motivated by Fig. 1a-c change in the structure of the international system (e.g., end of the Cold War) and associated effects (e.g., changed incentives for major power to provide external support) may also provide an opportunity for civil war onset, especially in countries with politically aggrieved (repressed) populations. In the next sub-section, I provide a brief narrative of how the Cold War's

"exogenous" termination introduced a number of plausible pathways that elevated the onset of civil war.

1.2 Opportunity

1.2.1 The "exogenous" end of the Cold War

From the end of World War II until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the Cold War dominated international politics. The geopolitical rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States influenced both the relations among other states (e.g., membership in rival alliances) and domestic politics within those countries, most frequently helping prop up client governments and their capacity to repress their populations (Gaddis, 1997). Indeed, as Ann Hironaka (2005, 107–111) observes, the fear that client states might switch sides or become neutral incentivized each superpower to be more credible in helping governments and/or rebels.

The end of the Cold War affected the cost–benefit calculations for credibly providing external support. The Cold War's termination, however, ended due to numerous factors inherent to conditions *within* the two superpowers, and particularly so in the case of the Soviet Union. Thus, the ending of the Cold War represents a change in geopolitics that is plausibly exogenous from the economic and political conditions in other countries. For the preeminent Cold War scholar, John Gaddis (1997), this included in the Soviet Union a "collapse of legitimacy" (283) among the domestic population, economic stagnation (starting as early as the 1960s) and decay (290), the economic hardships incurred from keeping up with the 'Reagan arms-race' in the 1980s and Gorbachev's (futile) attempts at economic resuscitation via 'glasnost' and 'perestroika' (292). Soviet "commitments" abroad were not a pivotal factor, as "the 'third world' did not, in the end determine the Cold War's outcome" (Gaddis, 1997, 286).[6]

Thus, the exogenous termination of the Cold War transformed the incentives of the superpowers to meddle in the affairs of other countries. This ushered in a period of geopolitical uncertainty and political upheaval in many countries (Petersen, 2002).[7] The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a new period of unipolarity. Many scholars contemplated its implications, especially the United States' strategic imperatives and incentives to intervene abroad (Mearsheimer, 1990). For the United States, unipolarity has conferred greater flexibility in its strategic options. It can act defensively, offensively, or disengage (Monteiro, 2011).

Without the Soviet threat, the United States re-evaluated its strategic imperatives, often losing interest in propping up client states and sometimes its willingness to

[6] As Gaddis (1997, 284) concludes: "The end of the Cold War made it blindingly clear that military strength does not always determine the course of great events: the Soviet Union collapsed, after all, with its arms and armed forces fully intact. Deficiencies in other kinds of power – economic, ideological, cultural, moral – caused the USSR to lose its superpower status.".

[7] Petersen (2002) traces how anarchic and uncertain conditions in the international system has played a role in twentieth century ethnic conflicts in Baltic states.

restrain the rebel groups it once supported (e.g., UNITA in Angola). Thus, as the United States divested itself from many weak states, it weakened them further (Hale & Kleine, 1997, 5). For Soviet client states the situation was dire. The collapse of the USSR erased their external financial support and their legitimizing principles (Kanet, 2006, 343). For many states that relied on superpower support (e.g., countries in sub-Saharan Africa), the end of the Cold War drastically reduced their government's revenues and overall state capacity to thwart armed rebellion (Herbst, 2004). As Kalyvas and Balcells (2010, 422) note, "these low-capacity states faced daunting prospects as they became vulnerable to equally low-capacity rebels who were able to challenge them." Furthermore, some foreign-backed rebel groups interpreted a less credible signal of external support as a green light to intensify violence (e.g., Angola's "second" civil war).

1.2.2 Plausible channels

The narrative from above identifies several plausible channels through which an exogenous change in the structure of the international system may have elevated the onset of civil war. The most apparent channel suggests that two sources of external support may have affected patterns of civil war *after* the Cold War: less credibility of support from the United States (e.g., Montiero, 2011) and an outright loss of support provided by the Soviet Union (e.g., Kanet, 2006).[8] The supposition that greater credibility of external support can engender civil peace follows from several prominent theoretical works.

Rationalist explanations for conflict attribute their occurrence to a bargaining failure stemming primarily from incomplete information and/or commitment problems (Fearon, 1995).[9] In such a framework, credibility of support (or reduced prospect thereof) from a foreign actor can shape the bargaining dynamics between a government and opposition group(s) by shifting the relative capabilities of warring parties towards peace and/or helping actors to credibly commit to a negotiated settlement.[10] These central insights underlie subsequent game theoretic models of third-party involvement in civil wars. Rupen Centiyan (2002), for example, emphasizes the role of incomplete information in whether an external actor "intervenes" (or not) and how it can affect bargaining between a government and rebel group. In contrast, Clayton Thyne (2009) advances a model in which "cheap" signals from a foreign power introduces uncertainty in the bargaining process and makes conflict more likely. These accounts suggest that changing credibility of external support can influence conflict dynamics. And in settings where political grievances serve as an important motivator for violence for at least one of the warring parties, changing credibility of foreign

[8] For instance, "support" from foreign actors can include the "exporting" of ideology (e.g., revolutionary Marxism), economic and military assistance, diplomatic "cover" in international organizations, and/or outright interventions (e.g., military deployments).

[9] A third, and less likely cause, is "issue indivisibility.".

[10] External support can fall into two categories: (1) future, direct intervention (e.g., "boots on the ground") and (2) current and future efforts to prop up the current government or rebel group (e.g., through financial assistance, arms shipments, etc.).

support can lead to a bargaining failure and subsequent outbreak of civil war. Indeed, in a setting with preexisting political grievances, this violence can manifest in at least three ways.

First, *opposition groups* from aggrieved populations may make extremist demands and escalate violence when there is less credibility that a third party will help *deter* conflict. In these instances, without external support, the government is perceived to be vulnerable and easier to defeat. For example, this dynamic characterizes Angola's "second" civil war in the 1990s in which less certainty of foreign support – particularly indifference by the United States in upholding the Bicesse Accords of 1991 – emboldened the rebel group UNITA to reject the country's first election outcome and re-initiate violence against the government (Ciment, 1997).[11]

Second, and conversely, changing credibility of external support may strengthen a *government's* resolve to hold firm in the face of demands from aggrieved groups. A government may do so because it fears that any accommodation will inspire violence if it shows any weakness. For example, this logic may offer a partial explanation for the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. As the Cold War waned, a sharp drop in financial transfers from the Soviet Union and the overall collapse of communism undermined the country's ideological basis; providing an opportunity for anti-communist and nationalist forces (particularly in more Western-oriented republics of Croatia and Slovenia) to increase their demands (Jovic, 2009, 51; Ahmed et al., forthcoming).[12] In an effort to preserve the country's unity, the Yugoslav People's Army (PNA) sought to crush these secessionist groups. Tragically, however, the PNA increasingly came under the influence of Slobadan Milosevic's government and its pursuit of a Serbian state that accelerated the splintering of the multi-ethnic Yugoslav republic (Armatta, 2010, 121).

Third, in the absence of external support, *ongoing* conflicts are often less likely to see a resolution. For instance, the inability of warring factions – particularly the ruling government – to credibly commit to a post-conflict settlement with aggrieved groups often exacerbates conflict (Fearon, 1995). Here, the involvement of a foreign actor can help the opposing sides credibly commit to a post-war political settlement, such as by monitoring a cease fire. Relatedly, external support can shift the balance of forces towards a negotiated settlement.

The view that greater certainty of external support is a source of civilian peace is not universally held. Some scholars argue that financial and military assistance from external powers to incumbent governments and/or rebel groups can prolong the duration of civil wars (e.g., Anderson, 2019), increase the number of conflict fatalities (e.g., Heger & Salehyan, 2007), and complicate peace negotiations (e.g., Cunningham, 2010). In some instances, the prospect of foreign support – particularly in the form of humanitarian interventions – may foster moral hazard

[11] I elaborate on this case in Sect. 4.

[12] While Yugoslavia was a not formally part of the Soviet bloc, it still adhered to socialism and benefited from Soviet foreign economic policies. For example, Ahmed et al. argue that Soviet trade subsidies helped communist/socialist countries orchestrate trade among themselves and enabled their governments to maintain political stability. In the 1980s, as these transfers waned governments in these countries became more vulnerable to violent change.

by lowering the cost of armed rebellion by aggrieved groups (Kuperman, 2008). Moreover, the provision of external support is not random: characteristics of the group receiving assistance and/or underlying conflict dynamics can influence the decision and nature of support offered by foreign actors (Cunningham et al., 2011). Given these counterarguments and potential concerns with endogeneity (discussed in Sect. 2.1), one must turn to the data and appropriate research design to reconcile the net effect of external support on civil war. Sections 2–4 strive to do that.

It is plausible, however, that a change in the credibility of external support is correlated with other drivers of civil war. Most notably is the relationship between state capacity (e.g., economic development, government finances) and civil war. On the one hand, a reduction in state capacity makes the incumbent regime more vulnerable to attack, especially in the form of "symmetric non-conventional" warfare from politically aggrieved groups (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010, 1). Yet on the other hand, stronger state capacity – often through the control of natural resources – can make the state a more attractive "prize" for capture via warfare (e.g., Besley & Persson, 2011). State capacity can change through a variety of means, including shocks to government revenue and economic production more generally, variation in commodity prices and costs of sovereign borrowing (e.g., via global interest rates), and foreign influence.[13] As described in Sect. 2.1, the Cold War's termination comprised a significant "shock" in foreign influence, through for example adjustments in the provision of financial and war materiel and ideological legitimization (e.g., Marxist revolutionary sentiment "exported" by the Soviet Union).

1.3 Testable implications

To summarize, the paper's central argument is predicated on two notions. First, political grievances are an important pre-condition for civil war. Second, the end of the Cold War introduced a number of plausible channels that created an opportunity for civil war. The confluence of these ideas underlies the paper's central "conditional" relationship: *countries with more aggrieved populations (during the Cold War) were more conflict prone after the Cold War*. This finding may arise from several plausible channels, most notably from a change in the credibility of external support and variation in state capacity.

2 Identification strategy

2.1 Challenges to causal inference

Empirically, untangling the causal relationship between pre-existing grievances and civil war in a large-N study is problematic due to the presence of endogeneity and confounders. Moreover, this concern may be more pronounced when also considering the effects associated with external support. For example, a foreign power may

[13] In the empirics, I control for these factors with year fixed effects (e.g., to account for annual variation in world commodity prices and interest rates), per capita GDP, and fuel exports.

provide support abroad due to some degree of shared ethnicity with the government and/or opposition, and ethnicity is often an important source of political grievances *and* conflict (Carment & James, 1996, 179). Similarly, various rebel group characteristics (e.g., shared ethnicity, religion, or ideology) can shape both a foreign country's decision to provide support as well as the subsequent conflict dynamics (Cunningham et al., 2011). Failure to mitigate these concerns will, therefore, generate biased inferences.

A solution to these challenges is to identify a plausibly exogenous event that affects a foreign actor's (country A) decision to provide support to country B, *conditional* on B's level of pre-existing grievances. This event should be plausibly exogenous to economic and political conditions that might affect conflict in country B, such as its pre-existing grievances, the level of economic development, the degree of ethnic fragmentation, etc. Under certain circumstances (e.g., non-violation of the parallel trends assumption), this exogenous event in turn can be utilized in a difference-in-differences (DD) research design to identify causal effects (see Appendix A for a more technical discussion).

This paper's research design mimics a Bartik or "shift-share" estimation strategy that is increasingly employed in political economy (e.g., the impact of foreign aid on governance, the effect of the "China trade shock" on employment and electoral politics) and other fields in economics (see Goldsmith-Pinkham et al., 2019 for a discussion). The empirical strategy has two components: the interaction of a "shift" variable (e.g., industry growth rates, weather conditions) and a "share" variable (e.g., employment shares in an industry, propensity for a country to receive foreign aid). The interaction of these two components trace how the shift variable is differentially propagated (or "exposed") to the treated units (e.g., firms, aid recipients) in either the reduced form or as an instrumental variable.

The Bartik approach underlies this paper's reduced form empirical strategy. Specifically, I exploit the period surrounding the end of the Cold War as a plausibly exogenous shock to the *structure* of the *international system* (as discussed in Sect. 1.2). I then interact this exogenous shock (the shift variable) with a country's average level of political grievances during the Cold War (the share variable) to contrast the trajectory of civil war after the Cold War in countries with high grievances to those with low grievances (Sect. 2.2 presents the regression specification). This approach corresponds to a DD identification strategy with a continuous treatment where countries with higher levels of "Cold War grievances" comprise the treatment group and those with lower levels of Cold War grievances constitute the control group.[14] Figure 1b depicts this comparison with a binary cutoff: grievances versus no grievances. Suggestive of the paper's central argument, the plot shows that countries exhibiting any Cold War grievances were more likely to exhibit civil war compared to countries with no Cold War grievances. Section 3 provides more systematic econometric evidence of this relationship.

[14] The use of a continuous treatment has been employed in a number of studies, such as those related to the effect of foreign aid on growth and political violence. See, Nunn and Qian (2014), Ahmed (2016), and Dreher and Langlotz (2020).

While the Bartik approach can be a powerful empirical strategy, recent works raise some caution in drawing valid causal inferences from shift-share estimation procedures. The first is properly accounting for a potentially endogenous component (if any) in the shift-share variable. Nathan Nunn and Nancy Qian (2014) provide a detailed discussion for the case where the share variable is potentially endogenous and convincingly argue that directly controlling for this component (and other covariates) in the regression specification still achieves valid causal identification (Bun & Harrison, 2019 formalize this econometric approach). Furthermore, as Nunn and Qian argue, in instances where the potentially endogenous share variable is unit-specific but time-invariant (e.g., proportion of years a country receives foreign aid), a researcher can include unit-specific fixed effects in-lieu of the time-invariant share variable. Per their suggestion, the paper's baseline specification includes country fixed effects to account for the potential endogeneity of political grievances on civil war onset.

In probing Nunn and Qian's (2014) findings, Paul Christian and Christopher Barrett (2017) raise a second concern stemming from spurious trends that may violate the parallel trends assumption. The final concern evaluates the "exogeneity" of the relevant component of the shift-share instrument (Borusyak et al., 2018; Goldsmith-Pinkham et al., 2019): the shift component (i.e., the shock, such as the end of the Cold War) versus the share (i.e., the exposure of the shock to relevant units, such as intensity of political grievances during the Cold War). I allay these concerns in Appendix D where I fully discuss these two issues in the context of this paper's research design and provide econometric tests to mitigate these worries. For example, to address concerns related to parallel and spurious trends, I follow suggestions from Earle and Gehlbach (2015) and Christian and Barrett (2017). Here, I demonstrate the robustness of the paper's findings to the inclusion of country-specific linear and non-linear time trends. Following insights from Goldsmith-Pinkham et al. (2019), I show that exogeneity stems from the share variable by discounting the impact of potential correlates of political grievances (e.g., ethnic fragmentation, geographic terrain, economic development) on civil war onset.

2.2 Baseline specification

With this Bartik-style research design in mind, I estimate variants of the following baseline DD regression:

$$ONSET_{it} = \alpha + \beta(P_t x G_i) + \boldsymbol{X_{it}}\theta + Y_t + C_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where $ONSET_{it}$ is an indicator variable equal to one if country i experiences an outbreak of a new civil war in year t and zero otherwise. To directly interpret marginal effects, I estimate (**1**) via OLS, although the results are robust with estimation via logit or probit. To account for potential serial correlation, the standard errors are conservatively clustered at the country level.

In Eq. (1), P_t and G_i are the treatment (shift) and pre-treatment conditioning (share) variables, respectively. P_t is an indicator variable equal to one for the post-Cold War period (1990–2006) and zero for the Cold War period (1972–1989). Crucially to generate valid causal estimates, the conditioning variable (G_i) has to be pre-treatment; that, is measured

prior to the beginning of the post-Cold War period. Thus, I define G_i as the proportion of years *during* the Cold War in which country *i* was deemed "not free" on Freedom House's political rights index (see the following sub-section for further description and justification). Thus, G_i quantifies the average intensity of political grievances during the Cold War that is (1) pre-treatment, (2) specific to each country and (3) time-invariant. (The results are robust using alternate measures of grievances – see Table C5.)

The baseline specification controls for a parsimonious set of time-varying country characteristics ($\boldsymbol{X_{it}}$) that existing studies link to civil war, such as per capita GDP, economic growth, and resource rents. The specification also includes country (C_i) and year (Y_t) fixed effects. Country fixed effects account for all time-invariant country characteristics (e.g., geographic terrain, colonial history) that may affect civil war, while year fixed effects capture all common temporal shocks (e.g., annual variation in commodity prices). The inclusion of country fixed effects implies the coefficient estimates in Eq. (1) explain the within-country variation in $ONSET_{it}$.

The inclusion of country and year fixed effects in the baseline specification is advantageous in two ways. First, they subsume the constituent terms of the interaction term in Eq. (1): C_i for G_i and Y_t for P_t. (The results remain robust in specifications without fixed effects; see Table 1, columns 1 and 2.) Second, based on Nunn and Qian (2014) – and subsequent scholarship, e.g., Ahmed (2020), Dreher and Langlotz (2020) – the inclusion of C_i accounts for the potentially endogenous effects associated with G_i, which is country-specific and time-invariant.

In Eq. (1), the coefficient of interest is β. Conditional on covariates, β measures the differential effect of the Cold War's termination on the onset of civil war in the post-Cold War period between countries with low and high grievances (from the Cold War). An attractive feature of this research design is the continuous measure of the pre-treatment conditioning variable (G_i), which generates a causal estimate that varies at different levels of pre-existing grievances (i.e., ranging from 0 to 1). Consequently, a positive (and statistically significant) value of β implies the transition from Cold War to post-Cold War period caused a greater onset of civil war in the post-Cold War period in countries with more politically aggrieved populations (from the Cold War period).

2.3 Data

Sample. The research design exploits panel data to compare the onset of civil war across sovereign countries in the Cold War and post-Cold War period.[15] The country sample, therefore, does not include any territories that were not independent during the Cold War nor those that dissolved after the Cold War (e.g., Yugoslavia) and were successor states (e.g., Croatia). For example, the estimating sample does not include any post-Soviet countries (e.g., Estonia, Ukraine). While skeptics may worry that their omission drops important cases of political violence after the Cold War (e.g., Georgia), their inclusion would unduly bias (likely, *upward*) the results.

[15] This follows from the inclusion of country fixed effects in the baseline specification (Eq. 1), which implies conflict dynamics are evaluated within the *same* country over time.

For instance, a post-Soviet country (e.g., Azerbaijan) is likely to show high levels of grievances, have weak state capacity, and be vulnerable to insurgency after the collapse of the USSR (i.e., due to the loss of its external patron in Moscow). Thus, by excluding these countries from the sample, I will *not* be biasing the results in my favor. Another source of potential bias relates to small population size; thus, following Sambanis (2004), I also exclude countries with populations less than 500,000. The resulting sample includes 124 countries, spanning Asia, Africa, Europe, Oceania, and North and South America (Table B1 lists the sample of countries). Finally, for "temporal balance" across the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, the sample period ranges from 1972 through 2006.

Measuring civil war. The main dependent variable is the onset of civil war compiled by Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl (2019). This data set conceptualizes civil war as an instance of "sovereignty rupture" which is inherently a polity-level phenomenon and allows for a flexible battle death threshold for each civil war onset.[16] As Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl (2019, 1547) note, "understood in these terms, the rupture of sovereignty that results from the violent contest between the governing authority and its opponents constitutes the core feature of civil war. The concept provides a logically consistent framework within which we can limit the macrolevel process of civil war, that is onset, duration, termination, and resolve the aggregation and continuity questions." In any given year, about 2.1 percent of countries experienced a conflict onset, with a slightly lower rate during the Cold War (=2 percent) relative to the post-Cold War period (=2.2 percent).

Measuring grievances. The core measure of political grievances (G_i) is derived from Freedom House's (2010) *POLITICAL RIGHTS* index (although, the results are robust with grievances from alternate data sources/definitions – see Table C5). Consistent with existing conceptualizations of political grievances based on the curtailment of political rights (e.g., Davenport, 2007; Goldstein, 1978), this index measures the ability for "people to participate freely in the political process, which is the system by which the polity chooses authoritative policy makers and attempts to make binding decisions affect the national, regional, or local community" (e.g., the right to vote, the capacity of elected officials to have decisive votes on public policies).

The *POLITICAL RIGHTS* index lies on a 7-point (1–7) scale, where higher values correspond to less freedom. For instance, an index value of 6 or 7 implies a country is "not free." This designation serves as the basis for measuring pre-existing grievances (G_i), which is equal to the proportion of years a country is "not free" *during* the Cold War period (1972–1989). Therefore, G_i ranges from 0 (e.g., Botswana, Costa Rica, United States) to 1 (e.g., Albania, China, Tanzania), with an average value and standard deviation around 0.40 in the estimating sample (see Table B2). Reassuringly, G_i is correlated with other measures of state repression. For example, leaders in countries with higher levels of G_i face fewer constraints on their political authority (see Table B3) where the most repressive countries during the Cold War (with $G_i > 0.70$),

[16] As Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl (2019) note, in the appropriate cases, data on battle death thresholds (e.g., in the Armed Conflict Database) can be useful in studying conflict *escalation*.

such as Angola (1.00), Ghana (0.83), Hungary (0.72) and Vietnam (1.00), tended to be nondemocratic.

Control variables. The regressions control for a parsimonious set of factors that existing studies have linked to civil war, including one year lags of log GDP per capita, GDP per capita growth, log fuel exports, and population. Following existing studies, GDP per capita proxies for a state's capacity to maintain peace (Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010) while per capita income growth captures whether episodes of poor economic performance heighten the likelihood of conflict (Collier & Hoeffler, 1998). I also control for fuel exports to account for the higher propensity for rebellion in resource rich countries (Ross, 2006). These variables are drawn from the World Development Indicators (World Bank, 2010). Table B2 provides summary statistics for all the variables.

3 Results

3.1 Civil war after the Cold War

Main results. Table 1 presents the paper's core results. Column 1 reports a sparse specification that does not control for any time-varying country characteristics (e.g., per capita income) nor any fixed effects, but does appropriately control for the constituent terms of the interaction term. The coefficient on the interaction term, P_t x G_i – which captures the DD effect – is statistically significant (p-value = 0.001) and implies that countries with the highest levels of grievances during the Cold War were 3 percentage points more likely to experience an outbreak of civil war after the Cold War. Substantively, for the typical country (with G_i = 0.39, such as Nepal), the transition from the Cold War to post-Cold War increased the onset of conflict by 1.2 percentage points.[17] This is equivalent to a 60 percent increase in the baseline rate of *ONSET* from the Cold War period (of around 2 percent). Turning to the constitutive elements of the interactive term, the coefficients imply that more aggrieved countries were not more predisposed to conflict onsets during the Cold War, while the post-Cold War period in general has tended to be more peaceful.

Controlling separately for time-varying country countries (column 2) or fixed effects (column 3) does not attenuate the main DD effect. The coefficient remains similar in magnitude (= 0.03) and statistically significant (p-value < 0.01). Interestingly, column 2 shows that when accounting for time-varying country characteristics (e.g., economic growth, resource rents), more aggrieved countries tended to be more peaceful during the Cold War. The estimated DD effect increases around 50 percent in magnitude in a specification that accounts for both time-varying country characteristics and fixed effects (column 4).[18] Here, a one standard deviation increase in G_i (e.g., comparing Nepal to Cote d'Ivoire) corresponds to a 2 percentage point increase in *ONSET*. This is equivalent to around a 66 percent increase in the baseline rate of civil war onset.

[17] This is estimated effect is similar to a one standard deviation movement in G_i (= 0.40).

[18] The time-vary country characteristics are largely consistent with prior studies: countries with higher economic growth, per capita wealth, fuel exports, and smaller populations, are less likely to experience conflict.

Table 1 Grievances and the onset of civil war

Dependent variable:	Onset of civil war						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Grievance (G_i) x Post-Cold War (P_t)	0.031	0.030	0.031	0.049	0.048	0.048	0.048
	(0.009)***	(0.010)***	(0.009)***	(0.013)***	(0.014)***	(0.014)***	(0.014)***
Grievance (G_i)	0	-0.027					
	(0.008)	(0.009)***					
Post-Cold War (P_t)	-0.012	-0.009					
	(0.004)***	(0.004)**					
Incidence of any civil war					-0.035		
in past 2 years					(0.010)***		
Incidence of any civil war						0.041	
in past 5 years						(0.010)***	
Grievance (current)							-0.002
							(0.011)
Country characteristics	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
No. observations	4137	3672	4137	3672	3672	3672	3657
No countries	124	120	124	120	120	120	119
R-squared	0.00	0.02	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.07

Estimation via OLS. Robust standard errors, clustered by country reported in parentheses. *, **, ***=significant at 10%, 5%, and 1% respectively. Country controls include: 1 year lag of log GDP per capita (2000 U$), 1 year lag of GDP per capita growth (% annual), log fuel exports (2000 US$), and log population. These controls, a constant, and country and year fixed effects (depending on the specification) are not reported. $Grievance_i$ is the proportion of years a country was "not free" during the Cold War period. It is country-specific and time-invariant (and thus subsumed in specifications with country fixed effects). *Post Cold War*$_t$ is a dummy equal to the year 1990 and thereafter and 0 in any year prior to 1990

Pre-trend in conflict. Skeptics may worry that these findings are spurious, potentially due to an upward trend in the underlying propensity of civil war in the final years of the Cold War and/or due to a country's *contemporary* level of grievances (rather than average grievances during the Cold War). These potential concerns with "pre-trends" in conflict, do not affect the main results. First, the results are robust to controlling for the occurrence (incidence) of civil war in the past year and five years (columns 5 and 6). Unsurprisingly, these specifications show that a recent episode of fighting dampens the onset of a new civil war. Second, the main result holds when controlling for a country's contemporaneous level of political grievances (column 7).

Alternate specifications, samples and unobserved heterogeneity. The results are also robust to estimation via probit and logistic regression and alternate specifications that vary the composition of fixed effects (see Tables C1, C2). The main finding is also robust to standard errors clustered at the regional level (rather than the country level) and more stringently to the inclusion of region-specific time trends (see Table C3). Controlling for these trends is a means to account for unobservable and time-varying effects at the regional level, such as the higher propensity of conflict in Africa (relative to other regions) in the 1990s and the "regional" diffusion of democracy since the 1970s. Finally, the main findings hold in an expanded sample that includes Soviet successor states and those that exclude former Soviet satellite countries (see Table C4).[19]

Alternate measures of grievances. The main results do not hinge on using Freedom House's measure of political rights as the basis of G_i. The results hold with alternate measures of pre-existing grievances (see Table C5), such as those based on: civil liberties (Freedom House, 2010), physical integrity human rights (Cingranelli & Richards, 2008), the percentage of the population excluded from power (Wimmer et al., 2009), and the POLITY index (Marshall & Jaggers, 2010).[20] Analogous to the derivation of G_i, these alternate measures of grievances are constructed to be pre-treatment, i.e., they are country averages from the Cold War period.

Relatedly, skeptics may worry that grievances actually proxies for a country's underlying quality of political institutions. To allay this concern, I re-estimate the specifications from Table 1 with N_i and P_t x N_i as additional controls, where N_i is a country's average POLITY score during the Cold War, normalized on a [0,1] scale (a higher value implies more democratic politics). The inclusion of N_i, thus accounts for a country's institutional features (e.g., formal constraints on the executive, nature of political competition, etc.) that may be correlated with grievances (pertaining directly to political freedoms). In these specifications (see Table C6), the main DD effect remains robust from Table 1. In contrast, N_i and P_t x N_i do not affect conflict onset.

[19] The results that include Soviet successor states should be interpreted more cautiously since data on conflict onset is not observed during the Cold War for these additional countries (since they were not sovereign prior to 1990).

[20] These measures are not necessarily synonymous. For example, the pairwise correlation between the political rights measure of grievances (from Freedom House) and with the "exclusion from power" measure from Wimmer et al. (2009) is 0.35.

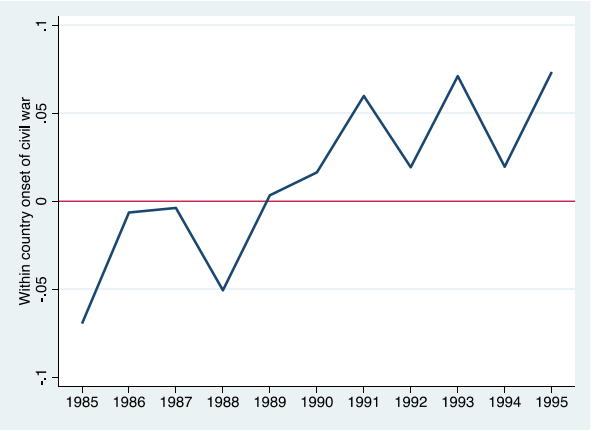
3.2 Event-study specifications

The results thus far estimate the DD effect averaged over the entire post-Cold War period. This DD effect, however, is likely to vary over time. Accordingly, in this section, I decompose the main DD effect over time using several event-study style specifications. I first evaluate whether the failure to account for the uptick in conflict starting in the mid-1980s (see Fig. 1a) might bias the findings. In particular, without modeling potential pre-trends, estimation of Eq. (1) may upward bias the effect of P_t x G_i on civil war onset. To account for this possibility, I amend Eq. (1) and include the interaction of a dummy variable equal to 1 for the period 1986–1990 ("Pre 1986–1990") with G_i as an additional control (Table 2, column 1). Thus, this new interaction term soaks up any pre-trend in conflict onset in countries with varying intensities of Cold War grievances in the five years leading up the end of the Cold War. While column 1 shows that countries with more aggrieved populations (during the Cold War) did experience a slight uptick in civil war onset prior between

Table 2 Event-study specifications of civil war onset

Dependent variable:	Onset of civil war	
	(1)	(2)
Grievance (G_i) x Post-Cold War (P_t)	0.045	
	(0.014)***	
Grievance x Post (1991–1996)		0.043
		(0.015)***
Grievance x Post 1996		0.027
		(0.013)**
Grievance x Pre (1986–1990)	0.013	0.011
	(0.020)	(0.020)
Grievance x Pre 1986		-0.01
		(0.010)
Country characteristics	Yes	Yes
Country and year fixed effects	Yes	Yes
Observations	3672	3672
Countries	120	120
R-squared	0.07	0.07

Estimation via OLS. Robust standard errors, clustered by country reported in parentheses. *, **, ***=significant at 10%, 5%, and 1% respectively. All specifications control for time-varying country characteristics, country and year fixed effects. These coefficients and a constant are not reported. Country controls include: 1 year lag of log GDP per capita (2000 U$), 1 year lag of GDP per capita growth (% annual), log fuel exports (2000 US$), and log population. *Grievance* is the proportion of years a country was "not free" during the Cold War period. *Post-Cold War* is a dummy equal to 1 in 1990 and thereafter, and 0 in any year prior to 1990. *Post (1991–1996)* and *Post 1996* are dummy variables equal to 1 for the period 1991 to 1996 and years after 1996, respectively. *Pre (1986–1990)* and *Pre 1985* are dummy variables equal to 1 for the period 1986 to 1990 and years before 1986, respectively



Notes: This figure plots the year-on-year effect of *Grievancesi* on civil war onset in the 10-year window surrounding the end of the Cold War (1985-1995). Each "point" represents the effect of *Grievances*i interacted with a year dummy (e.g, *Gi* x *1985*, *Gi* x *1986*, etc…) based on estimating Eq. (**2**).

Fig. 2 Marginal effect of political grievances (G_i) on civil war onset, by year. Notes: This figure plots the year-on-year effect of $Grievances_i$ on civil war onset in the 10-year window surrounding the end of the Cold War (1985–1995). Each "point" represents the effect of $Grievances_i$ interacted with a year dummy (e.g., $G_i \times 1985$, $G_i \times 1986$, etc.…) based on estimating Eq. (2)

1986–1990, the effect is not statistically distinguishable from zero. Reassuringly, P_t x G_i remains statistically significant and similar in magnitude to the main results in Table 1 (see columns 4–7).

The main DD effect can be decomposed further. Column 2 reports one such specification, breaking down the DD effect over four time periods. The specification shows that countries with more aggrieved populations were no more nor less likely to experience a conflict onset prior to 1986 and between 1986 to 1990. In contrast, more aggrieved countries experienced a significant uptick in civil war onset after 1990, particularly from 1991–1996. Finally, the main DD interaction term in Eq. (1) can be fully decomposed over time by regressing the interaction G_i with a dummy variable for each year fixed effect (Y_t) on civil war onset. In particular, I estimate the following "flexible" DD specification:

$$ONSET_{it} = \alpha + \sum_{t=1972}^{t=2006} \beta_t (G_i Y_t) + \boldsymbol{X}_{it}\theta + C_i + Y_t + \epsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

Honing in on the 10-year window around the end of the Cold War, Fig. 2 shows that the DD effect increases as the Cold War wanes.[21] In the 1980s, the effects were negative implying that countries with higher levels of grievances tended to be more politically stable. But these countries became more conflict prone after the Cold War, as indicated by the positive marginal effects in the 1990s.

[21] The marginal effects corresponding to the period 1972–1984 and 1996–2009 are available upon request.

4 Evaluating channels

As discussed in Sect. 1, the end of Cold War may have heightened the onset of civil war in politically aggrieved societies through two broad channels: changing credibility of external support and/or associated changes in state capacity. In this section, I evaluate these two channels. I begin by probing the veracity of the credibility of external support channel.

Empirically evaluating the "credibility channel" is challenging because measuring this uncertainty is unobservable. However, it may be possible to measure it indirectly by considering the *potential* of support from the most prominent foreign actors during the Cold War: the United States and Soviet Union. In the U.S. case, for example, existing research suggests that countries with stronger security ties to the United States enjoyed a higher probability of its support, typically on the government's side (Lake, 2009).[22] David Cunningham (2016) explains further that governments in a more "hierarchical" relationship with the United States (proxied with its security ties) are more likely to be helped, for example with financial assistance (economic and military aid), diplomatic cover in multilateral organizations, and outright "boots on the ground." Consequently "dissidents in states in more hierarchical relationships with the United States will anticipate US intervention in a potential civil war", leading to the expectation that for "civil war to be less likely in states in more hierarchical relationships with the United States" (Cunningham, 2016, 321).

Based on this reasoning – and applying it in the context of this paper's Bartik-style research design – I leverage whether or not a country was a military ally of either superpower *during* the Cold War as a proxy for *greater* credibility of external support from the United States or Soviet Union (Russia) *after* the Cold War.[23] If this interpretation is correct, it implies a *stepwise* refinement to the paper's core empirical conjecture: countries with greater pre-existing grievances that were allies of either superpower should be less likely to experience a civil war onset after the Cold War compared to countries that were not allies of either superpower.

Empirically, this conjecture implies $\beta_{non\text{-}ally} > \beta_{ally}$. This can be evaluated by augmenting Eq. (1), by estimating variants of:

$$ONSET_{it} = \alpha + \beta(P_t x ALLY_i) + \boldsymbol{X_{it}}\theta + Y_t + C_i + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{3}$$

where $ALLY_i$ is an indicator variable equal to 1 if country i was an ally of the United States or Soviet Union during the Cold War, and zero otherwise. If non-allies are more conflict prone after the Cold War, β should be negative in Eq. (3). $\boldsymbol{X_{it}}$ is the baseline set of time-varying country characteristics and Y_t and C_i are year and country fixed effects, respectively. Since $ALLY_i$ is country-specific and time-invariant its main effect is subsumed by each country fixed effect.

Among countries with any Cold War grievances (i.e., $G_i > 0$), column 1 in Table 3 shows that countries allied with the United States during the Cold War were 4.7 per-

[22] For example, data from UCDP External Support Dataset shows that Between 1975–2011, almost 80 percent of U.S. interventions in civil conflicts supported the government.

[23] Information on alliance status is drawn from the Correlates of War dataset.

Table 3 Evaluating the channel for civil war onset in aggrieved countries

Dependent variable:	Onset of civil war			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Cold War US ally x Post-Cold War (P_t)	-0.048		-0.037	
	(0.015)***		(0.015)**	
Cold War Soviet ally x P_t	-0.010		-0.004	
	(0.038)		(0.037)	
US support for government x P_t		0.019		0.018
		(0.044)		(0.042)
Soviet support for government x P_t		0.124		0.107
		(0.062)**		(0.063)*
Competitive intervention x P_t		-0.146		-0.122
		(0.069)**		(0.070)*
"Other" support for government x P_t		-0.026		-0.021
		(0.025)		(0.023)
US support for rebels x P_t		0.081		0.066
		(0.032)**		(0.030)**
Soviet support for rebels x P_t		-0.050		-0.042
		(0.028)*		(0.030)
"Other" support for rebels x P_t		-0.016		-0.02
		(0.032)		(0.031)
Log GDP per capita in $t\text{-}1 \times P_t$			-0.008	-0.010
			(0.004)*	(0.005)**
Country characteristics	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2238	2222	2238	2222
Countries	77	76	77	76
R-squared	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.08

Estimation via OLS for a sample of countries with any political grievances during the Cold War, i.e., $G_i >$ obust standard errors, clustered by country reported in parentheses. *, **, *** = significant at 10%, 5%, and 1% respectively. All specifications control for country characteristics, country and year fixed effects. These coefficients and a constant are not reported. Country controls include: 1 year lag of log GDP per capita (2000 U$), 1 year lag of GDP per capita growth (% annual), log fuel exports (2000 US$), and log population. In columns 1 and 3, "Cold War US ally" ("Cold War Soviet ally") is equal to 1 if the US (Soviet Union) was a military ally of country *i* at any point during the Cold War and zero otherwise. In columns 2 and 4, each measure of external support is equal to 1 if the named foreign power (US, Soviet Union, or other) provided any military assistance to the government or rebel groups at any point during the Cold War, and zero otherwise. "Competitive intervention" is equal to 1 if both the United States and Soviet Union concurrently provided military assistance to government and rebels in country *i* at any point during the Cold War, and zero otherwise. In columns 1–4, *all* the measures of external support vary across each country *i* and are time-invariant

cent less likely to experience a conflict onset after the Cold War.[24] This effect is highly statistically significant. In contrast, countries that formally allied with Soviet Union during the Cold War were no more (nor less) likely to suffer an outbreak of civil war after the Cold War. While the coefficient estimate is negative (=-0.01), it is statistically indistinguishable from zero. This null finding may be due to the dearth of countries with formal alliances with the USSR during the Cold War.[25]

Indeed, rather than focusing exclusively on potential superpower security guarantees to incumbent regimes (through formal alliances), an alternate approach is to probe the effect of a wider range of military assistance provided by foreign states to *both* governments and rebel groups during the Cold War, and its subsequent impact on conflict onsets after the Cold War. Using novel data on "competitive interventions" compiled by Anderson (2019), column 2 shows that military assistance provided by the superpowers to government and rebels *during* the Cold War generated *differential* effects on conflict onsets after the Cold War.[26] Civil war was more likely to emerge in countries where the Soviet Union exclusively supported the government or less likely if Moscow backed rebels. In contrast, regimes that benefited from military assistance from the United States during the Cold War were not more likely to experience conflict after 1990. However, in case where the United States funded rebel groups, conflict was more likely to erupt after the Cold War. And in instances where each superpower militarily aided competing sides – comprising episodes of competitive interventions according to Anderson (2019) – conflict onsets were significantly (about 15 percent) less likely after the Cold War. Finally, support from other foreign powers (e.g., the United Kingdom, France) to governments and rebels during the Cold War did not seem to affect conflict onsets after 1990.

Skeptics may worry that the effects associated with external support in columns 1 and 2 are spurious; potentially due to the omission of an important confounder: state capacity. To allay this concern, I introduce the interaction of per capita income (a widely used measure of state capacity in empirical work) with the post-Cold War dummy, as a control variable. Columns 3 and 4 show *log GDP per capita* x P_t to be negative and statistically significant, implying that poorer countries were more conflict prone after the Cold War.[27] This inference is consistent with existing scholarship that weaker state capacity is conducive for civil war (e.g., Collier & Hoeffler, 1998). The coefficients on the interactive terms associated with external support tend to be slightly

[24] In this section, I limit the analysis to countries that experienced any political grievance during the Cold War ($G_i > 0$). This is apropos since Cold War grievances are a pre-condition for conflict onset (as shown in Tables 1 and 2). In contrast, estimating a triple interaction term, P_t x G_i x $ALLY_i$ for the full sample (i.e., that includes non-aggrieved countries, G_i=0) can be difficult to interpret and needlessly complicates the analysis.

[25] In contrast, more countries allied with the United States during the Cold War.

[26] In columns 2 and 4, each measure of external support is equal to 1 if the foreign power provide any military assistance to the government or rebel group (depending on the specific variable) during the Cold War and zero otherwise. Thus, each measure of external support varies by country but not over time; and its main effect is subsumed by its corresponding country fixed effect.

[27] The differential effect of another measure of state capacity (foreign aid x P_t) with more a international dimension has no effect on civil war onset.

smaller in magnitude relative to those in columns 1 and 2, but reassuringly remain statistically significant.

Together, the results in Table 3 are consistent with the following inferences (in countries with aggrieved populations). First, *only* support from the superpowers during the Cold War seems to have affected conflict dynamics after 1990. Moreover, the prospect of new conflict was significantly lower in countries that experienced two-sided military assistance from both superpowers (i.e., competitive interventions). Second, countries whose governments or rebel groups that were backed exclusively by the Soviet Union were more conflict prone after the Cold War. Third, countries with rebel groups aided by the United States during the Cold War were more conflict prone after 1990, but this was not the case if the United States helped the government instead.

While the specifications in column 2 and 4 separate the effects of various types of external support (from different countries to either rebel groups or governments during the Cold War), it is worth noting that in some instances, these patterns of support overlapped. Consider the case of Angola, a country with high political grievances during the Cold War (i.e., with $G_i = 1$) that experienced nearly three decades of civil war (1972–1991, 1992–1994, and 1998–2002). The outbreak of the second civil war (1992–1994) is salient for the conflict dynamics this paper seeks to explain.

During the Cold War, the U.S.-backed rebel group (UNITA) fought the Soviet-backed government (MPLA). As the Cold War waned, the fighting reached a stalemate and with U.S. and Soviet support, the MPLA and UNITA negotiated a peace settlement. The resulting Bicesse Accords of 1991 set forth a cease-fire, a demobilization of each side's armed forces, and a transition to a multi-party democracy with elections to be held the following year. Indifference and mixed signals from the United States encouraged the UNITA (led by Jonas Savimbi) to break the accords and re-launch warfare in 1992. As James Ciment (1997, 167) observes: "Bush's continuing support of Savimbi, as well as his administration's unwillingness to afford recognition to Luanda, even after the MPLA agreed to democratic elections and negotiated peace settlement with UNITA, contributed to Savimbi's decision to return to violence after this electoral defeat in 1992." This new conflict onset fits the pattern of estimated effects in column 2: a reduction in violence after 1990 due to the end of backing from both superpowers (i.e., the negative coefficient on "competitive interventions x P_t"), but a heightened risk of conflict associated with US support of the rebel group during the Cold War (i.e., a positive coefficient on "US support for rebels x P_t").

5 Conclusion

Political grievances have long been recognized as an important pre-condition for political violence. But whether or not groups within aggrieved populations resort to overthrowing the government through civil war hinges on viable opportunities. Using a Bartik-style research design, this paper provides causal evidence that the Cold War's termination provided such an opportunity: countries with more

politically aggrieved populations (during the Cold War) were more likely to experience civil war onsets after the Cold War. Moreover, I provide evidence that changes in the credibility of external support to both governments and rebels may have contributed to this uptick in conflict onset in aggrieved countries.

These findings challenge prominent studies that relegate the importance of the Cold War's termination as a causal factor for spike in civil war after the Cold War (e.g., Fearon & Laitin, 2003). In doing so, this paper adds to recent scholarship recognizing the importance of external support as an important factor in civil wars (e.g., Kalyvas & Balcells, 2010; Anderson, 2019; Schulwofer-Wohl, 2020). Methodologically, future research could build on the paper's inferences, possibly by tracing the effect of grievances and geopolitics on civil conflict at a more disaggregated level (e.g., spatial distribution of conflict, characteristics of rebel groups), with detailed process tracing of a single or multiple civil wars in the same country (e.g., Angola) and/or its implications for the (in)stability of post-conflict settlements. Finally, from a policy perspective, this paper's empirical findings may help explain the rise in civil violence in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War (see Fig. 1a-c) and may offer insights into better understanding contemporary civil wars with an internationalized dimension, such as Syria.[28]

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[28] In the Syrian case, Russia has aided the incumbent Assad regime, while the United States (and its allies) has provided assistance to the rebels.

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