

Sudden Rain

The Effect of Conflict on Women's Mobilization

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Sudden rain brings the sheep and goat under the same roof.

—Liberian proverb

This article examines the effect of conflict on both the origins and efficacy of women's mobilization. Applying Ted Gurr's rebellion framework to women's movements during conflict, we discover several important similarities between drivers of minority rebellion and women's mobilization. In our case studies of Liberia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), we find Gurr's understanding of group cohesion in general—and group identity specifically—as critical in comprehending the conditions under which we might expect women to mobilize. Preconflict levels of human and social capital among women appear significant in Liberia as compared to the DRC and proved important in explaining modern mobilization in Liberia. As conflict intensifies and active grievances increase, we also see that external actors play a significant role in outcomes for women. Furthermore, our research confirms Gurr's emphasis on the importance of the state and democratization as society transitions from conflict to recovery.

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Although Gurr's framework serves as a useful lens through which to view the role of conflict in women's mobilization, our work identifies areas for modification or further research. Primarily, we find that women's persisting grievances offer little explanatory power in predicting effective communal protest or rebellion in either Liberia or the DRC, perhaps due to the repressive culture regarding gender expectations. Rather, active grievances springing from the consequences of conflict appear to play a more significant role. Finally, we note inherent differences between women's organizations and ethnic groups that require further research. Particularly in the transition to postconflict recovery, the role of the state differs in the inclusion of women versus that of ethnic minorities.

The first part of this article offers a review of the literature on women's empowerment. Here we explore the theoretical underpinnings of the importance of women to societal well-being as well as the conditions under which they pursue increased empowerment. The second part addresses the effect of conflict on cultural change as it relates to women. We examine the mechanisms by which individual women suffer as well as gain because of war, and we introduce Gurr's framework to understand communal effects. The third part applies the model to women in both Liberia and the DRC, concentrating on the most recent conflicts in those states. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of our findings, potential policy implications, and areas for further research.

Women's Empowerment

A review of research on women's empowerment reveals a growing consensus on the importance of women's inclusion for societal well-being. One need look no further than the comments of Kofi Annan, former secretary-general of the United Nations (UN), to understand the near universality of this perspective: "It is impossible to realize our goals while discriminating against half the human race. As study after study has taught us, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."¹

Unsurprisingly, gender equality plays a significant role in the UN's Millennium Development Goals. Seeking to alleviate poverty and assist transitioning states in moving from insecurity to stability, these objectives represent the international community's best efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest. The empowerment of women serves as one of the primary mechanisms in those efforts to eradicate extreme poverty, promote universal primary education, and extend gender equality.² Thus, in this respect, women's empowerment is a necessary condition for the eradication of extreme poverty and state stability.

As constructed by the UN, women's empowerment might be considered a goal with intrinsic value, not simply instrumental worth. Similar to Amartya Sen's ideas of development as freedom, affording women the ability to self-determine affirms basic human rights.³ As full citizens and agents of change, empowered women have access to resources and opportunities. They also exercise their political voice and enjoy the same freedom from violence as their male peers. As such, the literature on development and gender

emphasizes the role of empowerment in building more representative institutions for all members of society, not simply women.

At a societal level, a growing body of literature points toward women's empowerment as not only an end in itself but also a means to economic growth. A recent study in the United States concludes that increased participation by women and minorities in the labor force explains 15 to 20 percent of aggregate growth in output per worker between 1960 and 2008.⁴ Similarly, research indicates that the growth differential between East Asia and other slow-growth regions, including sub-Saharan Africa, is partially attributable to gendered differences in education.⁵ Eliminating barriers to entry for women in specific sectors, one study argues, could result in up to a 25 percent increase in labor productivity as market forces more efficiently allocate human capital.⁶ Additionally, as the World Bank notes, with women's labor force participation and educational achievement rates increasing around the world, noninclusive economies are likely to be left further behind.⁷

As important as inclusive policies are for social well-being, historical evidence indicates that such policies rarely materialize naturally. In its 2013 report on the global gender gap, the World Economic Forum assesses that both North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa fall consistently last in several gender-equality categories. These categories include but are not limited to economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, and political empowerment.⁸ Sadly, these conditions are unlikely to change without an exogenous impetus. Esther Duflo concludes, "Equality between men and women is only likely to be achieved by continuing policy action."⁹ A 2001 World Bank report reinforces the idea that economic growth is not enough to ensure gender equality. Instead it is also necessary to reform economic and legal institutions and take measures to correct the gaps in political voice and access to resources.¹⁰ This article examines conflict's potential for catalyzing such political, economic, and legal reforms.

Thus far, we have discussed women's empowerment as if it is a universally understood term. It is not. Both in definition and understanding, empowerment of women takes different forms throughout the literature. Lotsmart Fonjong explains five stages of empowerment—welfare, access, "conscientisation," participation, and control—noting that "empowerment is only real when women have attained control over themselves, resources, factors of production and decision-making, be it at home or in the public arena." She claims that this progression must occur before women reach the control stage. In other words for all levels, men and women must experience equality for basic needs, have access to resources and services, remain aware of inequities, participate in the allocation of resources and services, and, finally, exercise control as defined above.¹¹

This construct of empowerment parallels the idea of practical and strategic interests. According to R. Ray and A. C. Korteweg,

Practical gender interests arise from women's position in the sexual division of labor and tend to involve struggles not for liberation but for the ability to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. These interests, which stem from women's lived experiences, are inductively derived. Strategic gender interests, on the other hand, are derived deductively, seek to

change the rules under which women live, and can be arrived at only after practical interests have been taken into account.¹²

If we measure these strategic interests in terms of women's roles across society, the economy, and politics, including important policy outcomes for all citizens, then we could better explore the conditions that lead to this outcome. Mi Yung Yoon concludes that while opportunities for education and employment for women affect women's representation in legislatures in the developed world, these factors do not similarly affect women in the developing world. For these women, proportional-representation voting systems and culture have the greatest effect on their empowerment at the highest level. Furthermore, "egalitarian culture fosters women's involvement in electoral politics, but hierarchical culture impedes it. How favorably or unfavorably the society views women's involvement in politics depends on where its culture lies in the egalitarian-hierarchical cultural spectrum."¹³ Yoon agrees that although it is critical to understand the political, economic, and social context, "culture, which shapes people's views toward women's roles, appears to play a significant role, irrespective of levels of economic and political development."¹⁴

Importantly, cultures are mutable and not fixed. The question becomes one of how culture changes (the latter defined as "the set of learned behaviors, belief, attitudes, values, and ideals that are characteristic of a particular society or population").¹⁵ Certainly, there are contexts in which worldviews or frames of mind are more easily challenged. When identities change, they then inform interests—and interests move people to mobilize. These changing identities do not occur in a vacuum; rather, they are a response to alterations in the political, societal, and economic contexts that holistically can affect cultural change. The latter, then, is not disconnected to the political, economic, and other changes, especially crises. Case studies will further our understanding of international, regional, state, and local interactions and illuminate their influence on women's identities, interests, and mobilization.¹⁶ We direct our attention to how conflict and war, the most disruptive change to a society, can affect identity and interests—and thus mobilization. Our discussion also focuses on the nature of that mobilization to the extent that it affects women's empowerment at the highest level when a lasting peace is established.

Women and Conflict

Historical understandings of gender roles in conflict might be categorized as men doing and women being.¹⁷ According to this conventional understanding, men prosecute wars as soldiers, politicians, and leaders. Women, on the other hand, are passive victims, attempting to survive or at least support their men until peace is restored. Such a perspective confines women's outcomes in the aftermath to a small set of unappealing permutations, all centered on the losses they suffer. Likely, this understanding of women as passive victims never passed close scrutiny. Whether they served as spies, the backbone of insurgent logistics, or even active fighters, women's place in the history of warfare is much more than that of victims. Moreover, as warfare trends away from conventional interstate

conflict, reality demands a new comprehension of the way women both participate in and are affected by violent conflict. Somewhat paradoxically, we see that as women become more involved in war fighting, whether intentionally or not, their opportunity for short-term emancipation increases after the struggle ends.¹⁸

Violent conflict both intentionally and unintentionally changes the dynamics of power in a society. In some sense, conflict is entirely about power—some fighting to gain it, and others doing everything necessary to maintain it. If gender relations are a form of power structure, as many feminist authors suggest, one should similarly expect that relationship to change during violent conflict.¹⁹ We examine the ways in which women are affected by war, specifically through changes in the power relationship between men and women, emphasizing the potential gains that women may acquire through conflict. With these possibilities set forth, we apply Ted Gurr’s framework for understanding why ethnic groups mobilize to further our understanding about why women mobilize. This application will shed light on gaps of the framework when applied to women; further, it will help identify the mechanism by which some seeds of social transformation take root after the shooting stops while others wither in the immediate aftermath.

Gurr’s framework offers a holistic approach toward understanding group rebellion through uncovering the interaction of phenomena defined by the group, the state, and the international system. He further explains that “in conflict analysis the competing theoretical perspectives are *relative deprivation* and *group mobilization*: the former contends that people’s discontent about unjust deprivation is the primary motivation for political action, whereas the latter emphasizes leaders’ calculated mobilization of group resources in response to changing opportunities” (italics in original).²⁰

Gurr’s framework brings these two factors together, explaining their interaction with a micro and macro perspective—namely, examining group, state, and global contexts (see the figure below). He addresses how collective disadvantage, group identity, and repressive control affect persisting grievances and the extent of group cohesion “as a function of a group’s social, political, and economic organization, past and present” and characterizes mobilization as “the extent to which group members are prepared to commit their energies and resources to collective action on behalf of their common interests.”²¹

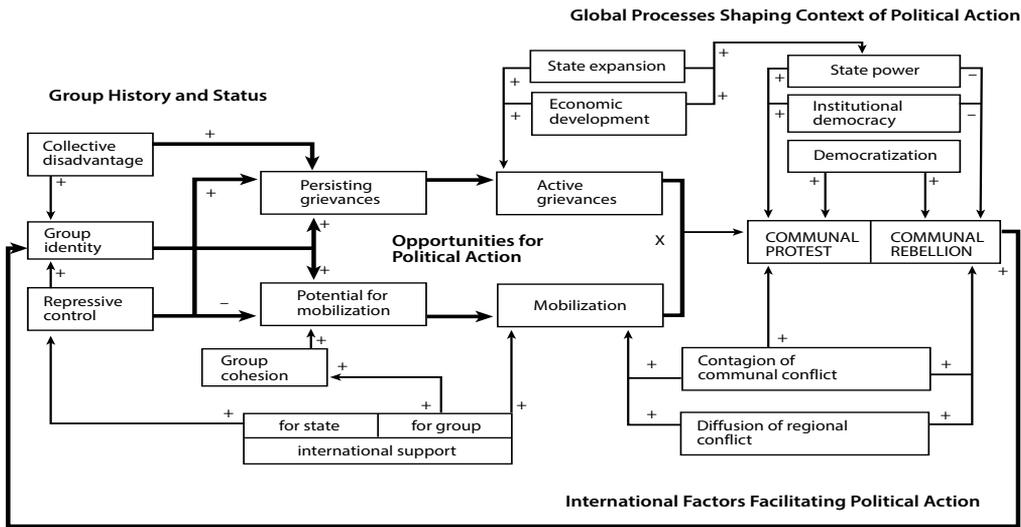


Figure. Processes of communal mobilization for political action. (Ted Gurr, "Why Minorities Rebel: Explaining Ethnopolitical Protest and Rebellion," in *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, ed. Ted Gurr [Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993], 125. Reprinted with permission from the Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace.)

Key to this examination is the idea of political opportunity that leaders might seize based on group factors, state and societal dynamics, and international developments. The factors that might affect any of these elements are numerous although Gurr observes some important considerations. For example, the state-making process in many areas of the developing world produces stressors that can exacerbate grievances as power and resources are highly contested; developments across the globe can influence groups, whether they are, as he describes, a *diffusion* or *contagion* of conflict. Diffusion is a tangible spillover of conflict while a contagion may inspire others toward action.²² Finally, mobilization resulting in either protest or outright rebellion relies on the efficacy of the political institutions. Effective democratic institutions will encourage protest and resolution, but weak or failing organizations may encourage rebellion.²³

Within Gurr's framework, group identity is largely influenced by collective disadvantage, repressive control, and, importantly, existing communal protest or rebellion. It is, therefore, worth recognizing the significant losses unique to women in conflict zones and the impact of those losses on group identity. Particularly in a society in which the individual is defined by his or her connection to family, clan, or ethnic group, loss of identity may be the most significant cost of war for women.²⁴ Since the majority of refugees are women and children, conflicts that displace the population, such as those in Sudan or the DRC, threaten women's sense of belonging. This loss of identity often lingers upon resettlement as many social bonds are permanently severed.²⁵ Perhaps most vividly, women also suffer loss of bodily integrity during times of war. For example, a 1999 survey of 1,125 Rwandan women indicated that almost 75 percent of the respondents had experienced sexual violence during the genocide.²⁶ More than just a by-product of the fighting,

rape and other forms of sexual assault have increasingly become tools intentionally used in the attempt to dominate the enemy. Relatedly, women's health is particularly at risk during times of violent conflict. Whether by direct force or necessity, outbreaks of conflict are closely correlated with increases in prostitution and the health risks associated with such dangerous activity.²⁷

The literature emphasizes the losses of women in war, but this consequence does not appear to hold true for all women in all respects.²⁸ Important for the purposes of this article, war may offer opportunities for women to actively reorder the power structure of gender relations in their lives. Gurr's framework captures these potential gains as opportunities for political action. Much of this change appears to come through the dynamic nature of family roles during the period of conflict. Such hostilities, particularly intense intrastate varieties, may significantly increase the number of households headed by women. In postconflict Cambodia, up to 30 percent of families operated without an adult male.²⁹ Similarly, in Rwanda, pregenocide data indicates approximately 20–25 percent of families were headed by a woman. Postgenocide, that ratio climbed to approximately 35 percent.³⁰

In such situations, women must assume the additional burden of feeding and supporting their families. In their comparative analysis of five conflict regions in Africa, Judy El-Bushra and Ibrahim Sahl find that in each case the economic role of men in society decreases as a result of conflict.³¹ Consequently, women took on significantly greater responsibility for the economic well-being of the family, increasing their authority within the family if not in the community as a whole. Similarly, Krishna Kumar found elevated rates of female participation in the labor force in conflict areas. In Cambodia, Kumar noted that the absence of men during the conflict created increased opportunities in not only agricultural production but also textiles and construction.³² In another piece by El-Bushra, after confirming the head-of-household transformation in conflict areas, she went further, describing several additional factors that increase the economic role of women, even in the presence of men. The author observed that women in Uganda enjoyed greater freedom of movement during the war, which allowed them to cultivate fields that men could no longer access. Further, she reported that in Sudan and Angola, violence displaced the rural population into urban areas where women's income-generating abilities were greater than those in rural areas. Displacement of women during the war also exposed them to new skills and ways of life.³³

Just as conflict can serve as a catalyst for women's economic activity, so have many women in war-torn regions seen an expansion of their roles in social and political structures. According to Codou Bop, wars of independence, in particular, offer a theoretical promise of change in the power relationships between men and women.³⁴ In many African struggles for social and economic liberation, political leaders drew upon a Marxist-Leninist ideology that emphasized the injustice of class- and sex-based inequalities.

Similarly, describing the new roles of men and women in Uganda, Joan Kakwenzire claimed that "the multiple roles that women have taken on have engendered a new race

of women. They have realized the potential of their own strength and this awareness has led some of them toward a more favorable socio-economic position."³⁵

This thread of literature highlights the increased social consciousness of women as a by-product of forced entry into the public realm. Specifically, some women acquire new confidence, organizational skills, and, importantly, a vision for the future. This transformation often may manifest itself in an increased ability to take the lead in forming organizations to champion their causes. For example, El-Bushra and Cecile Mukarubuga found postgenocide Rwandan women gathering to develop agricultural co-ops, build houses, and start savings and credit schemes.³⁶ Similarly, Kumar observed increased collective action by women leading to elevated political participation in a six-country study. Specifically, he cited the experience of women as leaders in refugee camps translating into at least temporary increases in influence upon return to their original communities.³⁷ Notably, Patti Petesch explains the rise of women in postconflict politics and collective groups through the lens of social capital. As conflict destroys the fabric of traditional society, women form new formal and informal networks to adapt and survive. According to Petesch, relative to the old power structure, women realize an increase in social capital, enabling their entrance into significant political and social groups.³⁸

In Gurr's framework, both the likelihood of protest and gains from that action are affected by internal factors such as democratization and by external factors such as contagion of communal protest. Although Gurr's model allows for permanent gains to minorities, many of the social, economic, and political advances won by women during the fighting seem to be fleeting. Although some gender norms may be suspended or refigured in the actual combat period, accumulating evidence now indicates that this shift is not often permanent.³⁹ The reasons for this apparent reversion to the traditional gender roles are as varied as they are uncertain. According to Sheila Meintjes and her colleagues, many women fail to consciously internalize or conceptualize the changes in their roles; without a conscious translation, there can be no organized effort to carry wartime gains into the peace.⁴⁰ Alternatively, women's activity and activism are largely discounted as accidental and of minimal consequence as politics return to the previous hierarchical order.⁴¹ Even women who work for peace at the grassroots level during the peak of conflict, creating a strong sense of community, are dismissed as volunteers or charitable works even though they have a political impact.⁴² As such, they are often excluded from formal peace and postconflict political processes. Finally, changes in gender roles may increase the workload for women because time allocated to economic and political tasks does not often result in decreased work in traditional roles such as child rearing and household chores.⁴³

The remainder of this article sets about examining why some women's movements are able to mobilize and gain traction enough to influence national-level decision makers. Using Liberia as our primary case and the DRC as our secondary case, we examine women's mobilization during conflict through Gurr's three primary nodes: group history and status, international factors facilitating political action, and global processes shaping context for political action.

Case Study: Liberia

Liberia serves as our primary case study for a few important reasons. Primarily, the mobilization of Liberian women in 2002 is one of the most strident in history. The intensity of collective action remains unmatched even in countries such as Rwanda that have seen greater increases in women's postconflict political participation. Furthermore, the Americo-Liberian experience in Liberia provides some variance that may be exploitable for deeper understanding of the role of preconditions for mobilization. Finally, the mobilization was effective. Not only did the movement influence the Liberian Peace Agreement to contain at least some "gender balance" provisions, but also it contained enough momentum to materially influence the election of Africa's first woman president and to place a number of women in critical ministerial positions. If we hope to examine Gurr's framework fully, it is important to have at least one case that agitates to full communal protest. Arguably, the women's movement in Liberia supplies that case.

Liberia's modern history is as unique as it is troubled. In the early 1800s, the American Colonization Society, comprised largely of white slave owners and supported by the United States government, began facilitating the transport of freed slaves to what today is known as Liberia.

Unsurprisingly, the indigenous populations actively resisted the new colonizers, and years of conflict ensued. Possessing both superior weapons and support from the United States, the so-called Americo-Liberians subdued the native population and eventually established the first African republic in 1847.

The first Liberian constitution borrowed heavily from the American version, but the black colonizers fared no better than their former white owners in treatment of "uncivilized" populations. Although Americo-Liberians, often referred to as "Congo people" by the native inhabitants, never exceeded an estimated 6 percent of the population, they dominated all spheres of power in society for almost 140 years. Until 1980, Liberia's political and economic systems remained the exclusive domain of the Americo-Liberian elite. Although that dynamic changed in 1980 with the bloody coup led by Samuel Doe, the new Afro-Liberian government proved no better at sharing power. Doe, an ethnic Krahn, quickly elevated members of his ethnic group at the expense of others, a trend that intensified as Doe himself faced increasing threats to his reign.

As a result of Doe's repressive regime and power-sharing failures, Liberia devolved into a full-fledged civil war by 1989. Under a firebrand Americo-Liberian named Charles Taylor, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia forces gradually gained position as the dominant armed group, eventually resulting in Taylor's election as Liberian president in 1997. However, any expectation of peace under Taylor evaporated in April 1999 when the Guinean-backed Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy invaded northern Liberia. By 2003 that group and the Ivoirian-backed Movement for Democracy in Liberia controlled almost two-thirds of Liberia and held the capital of Monrovia under siege.

Under these conditions in late 2002 and 2003, the women of Liberia mobilized for peace. In what would eventually involve thousands of women in Monrovia but repre-

sented across the nation, the women's movement gained international attention as it pressured Taylor and the rebel leaders to reach a lasting peace. Future Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee led both Muslim and Christian women in daily prayer meetings and protests at the Monrovia fish market, eventually gaining an audience with both President Taylor and the rebel leaders. Within two years, the women not only influenced an eventual peace but also significantly affected the campaign of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman elected head of an African state.⁴⁴

Group History and Status

In his model, Gurr begins with the primacy of grievances and associated group identities as the base from which later mobilization will occur. Strong group identities, combined with and often the result of deep grievances, increase the likelihood of group mobilization. Similarly, weak grievances and group identities deprive leaders of the fuel necessary to energize a movement. Thus, we begin the examination of Liberia by considering the group history, status, and traits of women in Liberia prior to the civil war (persistent grievances) and as changed *through* the war (active grievances).

As in most traditional societies, preconflict Liberian women suffered some level of persistent grievance, defined by Gurr as "economic and political discrimination" that restricted group members' access to desirable economic resources and opportunities and to political rights and positions.⁴⁵ Women in the Americo-Liberian segment of society were less constrained, but the average Liberian woman maintained little control of her life's outcomes. Her reproductive capacities and labor-market participation were largely determined by the men in her life. Within marriage, children belonged to the lineage of the father, and the wife had no claim on their property should she leave her husband. In the labor market, women's opportunities were limited to local activities, and women entrepreneurs were uncommon.⁴⁶

Despite their lack of formal societal control, women in Liberian history have not been without agency or a demonstrated ability to organize. On the contrary, Liberian women, both in traditional and Americo-Liberian society, seem to have commanded significant levels of influence. In the traditional portions of Liberia, this influence came through powerful secret societies known as Sande. In these organizations, elder women controlled junior dependents and could exact labor and resources from the families of new inductees. Interestingly, the Sande is a specific manifestation of what some scholars have identified as a "dual-sex hierarchy" common in West Africa in general.⁴⁷ Under such a hierarchy, each sex manages its own affairs, and women are represented at all levels. Although separate from the formal male power structure, women often occupied recognized positions of authority, holding court, issuing summonses, and generally managing the daily affairs of the community's women.⁴⁸ Prevalent in Liberia, the Sande exemplified a parallel structure of government and appears to provide a precedent for women to mobilize in their own interests. In other parts of the country, women in the Grebo, Sapo, Kru, and Krahn tribes regularly organized parallel political institutions as checks on the

men in official political organizations.⁴⁹ Thus, while men and women may not have been considered equal in indigenous Liberian societies, women possessed agency in their lives and had recourse in the face of poor treatment.⁵⁰

Some Liberian women also benefited from a number of unique privileges because of their Americo-Liberian heritage. Although not legal equals to men, women in nineteenth-century Liberia owned land and entered into legal contracts.⁵¹ In 1946 women gained suffrage several years before those in most other African countries. As Liberia experienced macroeconomic expansion after 1950, Americo-Liberian women enjoyed gains in education, labor-force participation, and political involvement. By 1980 women held eight ministerial positions in the Doe government, comprised 30 percent of the university and secondary teachers, and held almost 15 percent of the judicial positions.⁵² Thus, it is clear that women in Liberia possessed significant human and social capital prior to the onset of conflict in 1989.

Using Gurr's model, one would not predict that the women of Liberia were primed for rebellion prior to the initiation of conflict in 1989. They certainly lacked the full status of men in Liberian society, but their *collective disadvantages* and the level of *repressive control* both seem no greater than—and were possibly less than—those of most other women in traditional African societies. Gurr's model relies upon both collective disadvantage and repressive control to determine the level of group cohesion and identity. In preconflict Liberia, however, cohesion between women appears more a function of dominant cultural norms of a dual-sex political structure and the Sande than a product of relative deprivation and persistent grievances.

Although preconflict persistent grievance carries minimal significance, active grievance for women in Liberia became acute during the war. As the conflict in Liberia intensified and spread, more and more Liberians, particularly women and children, moved from the countryside to seek refuge in Monrovia. By 2002 the US Committee for Refugees estimated that more than 30,000 internally displaced persons resided in camps in and around Monrovia. The inhabitants were predominantly unaccompanied women and children.⁵³ As noted in our literature review, such displacement has significant deleterious effects on existing social networks. This loss of network was undoubtedly painful and even deadly for many, but it may also have contributed to the reshaping of identities necessary for a unified mobilization of women. In her autobiography, Gbowee detailed the process by which she and other community leaders attempted to build a women's identity within the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET). In one exercise, she explicitly told the trainees, "We are not lawyers, activists or wives here. We are not Christians or Muslims, we are not Kpelle, Loma, Krahn or Mandigno. We are not indigenous or elite. We are only women."⁵⁴ The most public slogans of WIPNET exemplified the primacy of womanhood over other identities: "Does the bullet know Christian or Muslim? Does the bullet pick and choose?"⁵⁵

The displacement of thousands of women and children to refugee camps in Monrovia also significantly increased the size and concentration of potential protestors. This concentration of a large number of displaced women in the capital area became critical

for the movement for a number of related reasons. First, these women were prime candidates to join an organized rebellion. Several economists have noted the importance of opportunity costs in determining the likelihood of men joining armed rebellion.⁵⁶ According to these theories, as viable economic alternatives decrease, men (and women) are more likely to join rebellions since their next-best alternative is less attractive. Similarly, women in the refugee camps had few, if any, alternative means by which they could improve their current situation. With nothing to lose, they made prime recruits. Their proximity to Monrovia also meant that group communication was possible. In the early days of the mobilization, WIPNET leaders leveraged a contact within a radio station owned by a Catholic church to organize women across Monrovia. Given a general lack of communication infrastructure in Liberia at the time, such organization would have been difficult, if not impossible, if a significant mass of women had not been centrally located in Monrovia. As some scholars have noted, effective mobilizations must also gain access to key political actors. In Liberia this meant Charles Taylor and, later, the rebel leaders in Monrovia. Thus, the high density of women willing and able to mobilize in the capital city was a necessary condition for the success of the movement.⁵⁷

As in Monrovia, the intensity of the conflict disrupted not only social networks but also entire social constructs around the country. Stephen Ellis points out that in the areas of greatest fighting, women assumed significantly more important roles as heads of households. In many regions, men could not travel freely since they were assumed to be potential enemies. In this environment, women increased their participation in the labor market because they could pass through checkpoints more easily. They travelled more widely as traders and, eventually, as entrepreneurs. Women also enhanced their economic roles as the traditional trading ethnic groups of Mandingo and Lebanese left the increasingly ethnically divided conflict zones.⁵⁸ In many cases, economic independence shifted the power structure of gender relations, as evidenced by higher rates of divorce when women were economically independent from men.⁵⁹

International Factors Facilitating Political Action

Given a set of existing group characteristics, Gurr's framework examines the impact of various international factors on minority-group mobilization and political action. According to Gurr, these factors primarily facilitate proactive mobilization of minority groups by increasing a group's access to resources and political opportunities. Specifically, he identifies the importance of contagion of communal conflict, diffusion of conflict, and international support.

As applied to the mobilization of women in Liberia, the role of preexisting peacebuilding networks seems to be of particular significance. Prior to establishment of the WIPNET in Liberia, a number of its founding members received training and motivation through the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Founded by Sam Doe, WANEP was a transnational peace organization focused on building grassroots organizations across borders and on emphasizing nonviolent strategies to address the is-

sues of war and human-rights abuses.⁶⁰ In 2001 Thelma Ekiyor, an active member of WANEP, successfully petitioned it to fund an organization specifically for women to work for peace.⁶¹ The result was the establishment of WIPNET in Liberia, the entity primarily responsible for arranging the famous fish market protests of 2003.

Women organizing throughout the region laid the groundwork for the mobilization that would pressure for peace in Liberia.⁶² As WIPNET established itself, members received training and support from other active regional women's activist groups. Both the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network, working for women throughout Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, and the Liberian Women's Initiative were involved in organizing women to end the war and to become part of earlier peace processes. Gbowee and other future prominent members of WIPNET leveraged the existing networks and best training practices of these organizations to build Liberian Mass Action for Peace, a more inclusive, action-oriented campaign. This movement included not only the Christian Women's Initiative but also several Muslim women's organizations in Monrovia.⁶³

Gbowee's push for action also benefited from increased international attention paid to the role of women in peacemaking and postconflict reconstruction. In 2000 the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security—the organization's first legal, formal document urging all parties to the conflict to elevate the participation of women in peace and security efforts. In part due to growing international emphasis on gender issues in conflict and the strategic messaging abilities of the WIPNET women, regional and international media latched on to the stark images emanating from the Liberian Mass Action for Peace campaign in Monrovia. This reporting likely increased both the legitimacy and influence upon which Gbowee and her supporters would capitalize at the Accra peace negotiations.

As WIPNET's parent organization, WANEP also provided reach into neighboring countries that would prove instrumental in pressuring both the Taylor regime and rebel leaders into peace talks. Upon receiving an audience with Taylor, the women of WIPNET set about locating the rebel leaders in Sierra Leone. Using connections in that country and support from WANEP there, WIPNET sent several representatives to confront the rebel leaders in their Freetown hotels. Simultaneously, WANEP in-country organized local women to line the streets surrounding the rebel lodging until the leaders at last agreed to meet the WIPNET representatives and eventually join in the peace talks in Ghana.⁶⁴ WANEP also facilitated the transport of several key WIPNET leaders, including Gbowee, to Ghana for the peace talks. After a month of glacial progress, the WIPNET leaders, with the assistance of local WANEP leaders, organized over 200 women to physically barricade the delegates in the assembly room. The women agreed to leave only when the chief mediator personally guaranteed immediate progress.⁶⁵

Global Processes Shaping the Context of Political Action

Gurr's framework describes state power in terms of furthering democratization through institutions. Effective democratic institutions set conditions that incentivize protest over

rebellion. Gurr observes that “the resolution of ethno-political conflicts in institutionalized democracies depends most fundamentally on the implementation of universalistic norms of equal rights and opportunities for all citizens.”⁶⁶ In short, democracy induces protest rather than rebellion since political leaders are attuned to the interests and grievances of their citizens.⁶⁷ Michael Lund also provides a comprehensive overview concerning conflict prevention. His model highlights the complexities involved with transitional democracies in a postconflict phase, addressing issues such as instability, social dislocations, and economic crisis. Furthermore, he cites numerous outside actors that can help or hinder such progress.⁶⁸ As many scholars indicate, the process of state making is inherently unstable. This is particularly true as a state tries to consolidate its power, often at the cost of human rights.⁶⁹

In many ways, it is too soon to fully evaluate the postconflict period and transition to democracy in Liberia as it relates to women's empowerment. The process affects not only women's empowerment gains as expressed through the women's movement but also their roles across society, including the political arena. The International Crisis Group observes the uneven nature of Liberia's transition: “Despite marked improvements, numerous grievances that lunged Liberia into bloody wars from 1989 until President Charles Taylor left . . . remain evident: a polarised society and political system: corruption, nepotism and impunity; a dishevelled security sector; youth unemployment; and gaps and inconsistencies in the electoral law.”⁷⁰

Gbowee affirms this point, relating that “Liberia still has a long way to go.” She describes the social fragmentation, corruption, and rampant unemployment as just some of the challenges Liberia continues to face. However Gbowee explains, “And yet—my country has enjoyed eight years of peace.”⁷¹ From this point, she recounts positive indicators. From the perspective of women's empowerment, she lists numerous women who continue to work throughout society and politics, as well as the continued gathering of WIPNET.⁷² The grassroots efforts that helped bring the war to an end are now involved in the peace-building process; women did go to the polls in 2005 and continue to play a participatory political role.⁷³

Interestingly, none of the rebel groups took part in the electoral arena and seemed to be placated with Taylor's ousting and pursuing either business or participating in other ways in the transitional government.⁷⁴ Moreover, the 2005 elections occurred without an incumbent.⁷⁵ Sirleaf won the presidency, but it is important to note that outcomes for other women were less inspiring. Although women comprised 50 percent of the electorate, only 5 of 30 women were elected as senators (17 percent) and only 8 of 64 as representatives (12.5 percent). That said, it is still remarkable to have a woman president and large turnout of women at the polls.⁷⁶ Whether these different factors merged to help President Sirleaf's successful election is hard to know, but long-term success for all Liberians will depend on the continued institutionalization of policies, good governance, and reconciliation

Case Study: Democratic Republic of Congo

War ends nothing.
—Congoese proverb

The DRC serves as our secondary case study. On the surface, the conflicts in Liberia and Congo share many characteristics. Similar to Liberia, the DRC has experienced almost two decades of conflict. Both nations have seen periods of widespread war followed by a tenuous peace and simmering hostilities that eventually reignited into more devastating strife. As in Liberia, the Congo has been the playground of foreign actors, largely stemming from an interest in valuable natural resources. Further, although the conflict in the Congo has been greater in terms of sheer numbers, the intensity of fighting and the resulting impact on the civilian population, including that on women, are reasonably comparable. Despite these apparent similarities, the ability of women to mobilize effectively for political action in the DRC does not match that of the women in Liberia. Understanding that peace is only just taking hold in the DRC, we apply Gurr's framework in hopes of identifying potential causes for this differential.

It is difficult to provide a simple definition of the violence of the Congo. To summarize Jason Stearns in his seminal work on the conflict in the Congo, *Dancing in the Glory of Monsters*, the conflict cannot be explained through stereotypes or stories; rather, it is a product of "deep history" and all the entangled interactions that come with it.⁷⁷ The violence in the Congo is sometimes called "Africa's world war." The conflict takes place mainly in the eastern portion of the country. However, at times the violence has reached across the nation, directly involving dozens of militias and at least seven countries.⁷⁸

The history of the DRC is rich in conflict and turmoil. It began as a Belgium corporate state under King Leopold II, who exploited the DRC for its rich rubber and mineral deposits. Under his reign, the DRC was known as the Congo Free State from 1885 until 1908. In 1908 King Leopold II relinquished his hold on the Congo, and until 1960 it was controlled by the Belgium parliament and referred to as the Belgian Congo. In 1960 the Belgians ceded authority over the country to its citizens. Following five years of political infighting, Mobutu Sese Seko rose to power and renamed the country Zaire in 1965. Mobutu remained in power until the First Congo War in 1996.⁷⁹

That war resulted from the spillover of the fighting in Rwanda. The Tutsi Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) pursued the fleeing Hutu genocidal Interahamwe militia into what was then still Zaire. The RPF believed that Mobutu was protecting the Interahamwe militia and ultimately marched on the capital Kinshasa to depose him in 1997.⁸⁰ With the eventual outcome clear, Mobutu fled the country, and the RPF-backed Laurent Kabila assumed control of the state, renaming it the Democratic Republic of Congo. With a tenuous peace in place, the RPF retreated to the border, setting up operations to continue its pursuit of Interahamwe. The relative peace did not last long. In 1997 the Second Congo War began between the DRC and RPF. Quickly escalating, this violence included the neighboring countries of Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Uganda. It con-

tinued until peace talks in 2002; however, various militia groups have continued to fight within the DRC's borders.

In response to the violence plaguing the eastern portion of the DRC, the UN has maintained a constant presence there since 1998. On 1 July 2010, through Resolution 1925, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to use all necessary means to protect civilians, humanitarian personnel, and human-rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and to support the government of the DRC in its stabilization and peace-consolidation efforts.⁸¹ MONUSCO played a vital role in helping to defeat the latest rebel group, M23, and negotiate peace between it and the Congolese government in December 2013.

Unlike their counterparts in Liberia, women in the DRC have yet to mobilize effectively for political action. Although some pockets of collective action have formed, the movements are limited to certain areas and have had little to no effect on national-level outcomes. The application of Gurr's framework can help to account for this failure to occur. As with Liberia, we begin with the group history and status of the women in the DRC prior to the ongoing violence (persistent grievances) and then consider how war has influenced them (active grievances).

Preconflict Congolese women suffered from what Gurr referred to as "economic and political discrimination" identified as patterned social behaviors by other groups (and the state) that systematically restrict group members' access to desirable economic resources, opportunities, political rights, and positions.⁸² There is no evidence of a powerful secret society like the Liberian organization *Sande*. It appears that the dual-sex hierarchy does not exist to the extent it does in West African countries. As in many other sub-Saharan African countries, it is possible that the nonexistence of such a dual-sex hierarchy can be attributed to development of the Congo during its decolonization period. Indigenous men also lost significant status during this time, and some scholars believe that this loss contributes to the current subjugation and violence toward women in the Congo. During the colonial era, men throughout sub-Saharan Africa suffered humiliation and relinquished various rights. As an outlet to these frustrations, many of them chose to demonstrate power and control through violence and domination over local women.⁸³ Whereas both indigenous and Americo-Liberian influences offered Liberian women some status in society, those in the DRC did not experience the same preconflict social standing.

Over the years, the conflict in the Congo has escalated many of these persisting grievances into active ones. The Congo is quite possibly the most dangerous place in the world to be a woman. In fact, Eastern Congo has been called the "rape capital of the world" by UN Special Representative Margot Wallström. One report claims that 48 women are raped every *hour*.⁸⁴ Furthermore, numerous studies demonstrate how surges of rebel activity in the country are closely correlated with sharp increases in sexual assaults on women and girls.⁸⁵ The Gender Parity Index also attests to the increasing vulnerability and disadvantage that women confront in the DRC. Not only do fewer girls

attend primary and secondary school, but also the gap is even larger in the conflicted Eastern Congo. Additionally, 23 percent of females face extreme educational poverty (fewer than two years of school) as opposed to 7 percent of males.⁸⁶ Restricted access to education, coupled with the constant threat of sexual violence, contributes to the lack of mobilization of Congolese women.

Despite intense, active grievances, we find no evidence of the widespread mobilization of women in the DRC as we do in Liberia. Although the exact reason is unclear, Gurr's framework offers some possible explanations. First, persisting grievances and active grievances increase the likelihood of mobilization, but they are not deterministic. Rather, one must consider the relative cohesion and identity of the group as it relates to the potential for mobilization. In the Congo, the fractured nature of the conflict is inhibiting group cohesion. A majority of the fighting occurs in the Eastern Congo while the Congolese government institutions are primarily in Kinshasa, over 1,000 miles to the west. Given the lack of both transportation and communication infrastructure in the Congo, this geographic fact has effectively isolated the women most affected by the conflict.

Geography has also inhibited Congolese women from forming a collective identity as women. Unlike the situation in Liberia, internally displaced persons have not fled to the nation's capital, instead living in the bush or insecure refugee camps of Eastern Congo. Since 2012 an estimated one million people have been displaced in the DRC eastern provinces of South and North Kivu, major ethnic and political flash points in the country.⁸⁷ A 2013 report by the Norwegian Relief Council found that this constant need of internally displaced persons to flee places "further strains on social cohesion" and that "there is a chronic absence of state institutions and services" present in these camps.⁸⁸ As Gurr's model would predict, this constant destruction of social ties and low group density have largely inhibited a united mobilization.

Perhaps the most striking difference between Liberia and the DRC is the absence of a preexisting women's network to assist mobilization. Apparently the DRC has no traditional women's political infrastructure like the Liberian Sande or more modern regional organizations like WIPNET. Without the human and social capital afforded their Liberian counterparts, Congolese women have struggled to overcome cohesion and identity challenges. Unlike Leymah Gbowee, who could rely on women from Sierra Leone to Ghana in her quest to end the violence, leaders in Congo's limited women's movements have little influence on decision makers at the national level.

However, the existence of a few dynamic grassroots organizations offers some hope for the future. One of these—the Women's Media Association of South Kivu (AFEM), founded by journalist Chouchou Namegabe in 2003—includes women active in South Kivu's media and news organizations. It specializes in the production of rural and urban radio shows promoting women's issues. Its mission is to work for women's and Congolese women's advancement through available media outlets.⁸⁹ The impact produced by this organization is still regional and centered in South Kivu. However, it is possible that with the support of international actors, its influence could allow women to mobilize in a

similar fashion to WIPNET in Liberia. Perhaps over time, the influence of other women's groups outside the Congo will influence the human and social capital necessary to ignite an effective women's movement in the DRC that will benefit the country's future.

Conclusion

Although definitive statements of causation derived from a two-country case study would be ill advised, this article highlights several important issues for further research as well as some potential policy implications. Both Liberia and the DRC experienced a brutal conflict, but only the women in Liberia seemed to mobilize, based on their identity as women. Not surprisingly, we have found that each case must be studied holistically in terms of its preexisting conflict conditions, the conflict, and postconflict contexts. Particularly, Gurr's discussion on group cohesion and identity seem most important for understanding the potential for mobilization among women faced with conflict. In Liberia the historical and modern social networks for women helped foster an identity based in gender when they confronted the severe brutality of the conflict that led to mobilization. Leaders were able to tap into this network to drive action. Although many microlevel networks were destroyed by the war and its resulting displacement, the *precedent* for collective action seems to have supplied the social capital necessary for women to mobilize effectively.

In terms of Fonjong's stages of empowerment, conflict may obviate a linear progression for societies in which women possess agency resulting from preexisting social structures. One might reasonably assert that although welfare, the first of Fonjong's stages, declined during conflict in both Liberia and the DRC, the Liberian women's experience with dual-sex hierarchies and women's organizations facilitated rapid transition to the highest stage: control. Similarly, an examination of Ray and Korteweg's practical versus strategic interests indicates that conflict in Liberia seems to have provided a catalyst toward strategic interests even as practical interests remained largely unmet.

Although imperfect, Ted Gurr's minority-rebellion framework proved a useful construct for understanding the importance of identity in women's movements during conflict. In Liberia a number of factors drove women in Monrovia to subordinate ethnic and socioeconomic identities in favor of identity as a woman. As the war disrupted previous social ties to existing identities, both resident and displaced women in Monrovia found commonality in their acute suffering and active grievances. Congruent with Gurr's model, this combination of strong identities and intense grievance provided the fuel necessary for women like Gbowee to ignite mobilization in the form of communal protest. In contrast, while Congolese women share the active grievances of Liberian women, they appear to lack the group identity necessary to mobilize effectively for political action. This deficiency is likely due to a number of factors such as geographic isolation, lack of access to national-level leaders, and little precedent for women's mobilization upon which to draw.

Despite these findings, several questions remain unanswered and require further research. The mobilization of women in Liberia produced internationally noted outcomes such as gender balance in the peace accords and the election of a woman president, but current outcomes for the average Liberian woman remain disheartening. As noted by Sharon Abramowitz and Mary Moran, a 2010 report by the United Nations Development Programme found that gender equality for the average Liberian woman was lower than in much of the rest of Africa.⁹⁰ Understanding this paradox would represent a significant extension of our research. More broadly, a comparison of traditional societies and outcomes for women in postconflict transitions continues to be an area for additional research, raising a number of policy implications. First, women need to be included in the peace-building process, not only to advocate for women but also to include important societal policies for everyone. Second, the transitional postconflict process is dangerous and fraught with complex challenges. A country must heal among warring parties and, in many cases, must rebuild its economy while incorporating a power-sharing arrangement. Third, regional and international actors should empower, not impose. In other words, external actors must work with local stakeholders to help craft sustainable solutions to the myriad challenges faced by postconflict societies. Finally, as noted earlier in this article, each case must be considered in the unique context of not only the current conflict but also the historical precedents of the culture in which it occurs. A country's woes have no one answer, especially as they relate to women. Future research can only help provide better awareness, better questions, and, hopefully, more adaptable and applicable solutions.

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