Extremely violent societies
Patterns and cases 1976 – 2010

Crossing Boundaries
Security and Justice Research Group
Susanne Karstedt
University of Leeds
University of Leeds, 11 – 12 October 2012
Introducing the concept

Constructing the Violent Society Index

Trajectories of violence and peace

Patterns: Exemplary Cases
Extremely violent societies – the concept

- Mass violence/ mass atrocities are part of an entire social process
- Mass atrocities are part of ongoing conflicts with multiple actors and shifting alliances
- Mass violence and atrocities are increasingly ‘multi-polar’ (Gerlach 2010, 149).
Extremely violent societies – multi-polar violence

- Diverse groups of perpetrators participate for a multitude of reasons, ranging from state government forces to militias and citizens.
- Different population groups become victims of massive attacks of physical violence, including mass killings, rape and enforced relocation.
Extremely violent societies – multi-polar violence

- Mass participation in these events spreads across the boundaries of different groups and blurs the lines between different types of involvement and non-involvement as well as between the victimised and the persecuting groups.
- Mass atrocities oscillate between these different forms of violence.
- Different forms of violence alternate across a drawn-out process.
Challenges for Prevention and Intervention

- The rapid motion of mass violence versus the slow motion of peace building
- The dynamics of violence versus long-term causal factors
- Micro-dynamics versus macro-level
- Shifting involvements and boundaries between violent actors and victims
Understand the processes of violence
Combine various forms of violence
Understand the dynamics of different types of violence
Identify “extremely violent societies”
Understand trajectories of violence
Understand the context of mass atrocities
“Violent Societies Index” (VSI): Construction

Four types of violence

- Interpersonal violence – homicide
- Battle Deaths in internal conflicts
- Terrorist attacks
- State Violence

(Political Terror Scale: extra-judicial killings by security forces, disappearances, torture, political prisoners)
“Violent Societies Index” (VSI): Construction

Data Sources 1976 – 2010

- Homicide – WHO data base
- Battle Deaths – PRIO/UCDP data set
- Terrorist attacks – Global Terrorism Database (START)
- State Violence – Political Terror Scale
  US State Department and Amnesty International Country Reports
“Violent Societies Index” (VSI): Construction

- Standardisation – standardised against highest and lowest value for each year
- Each component score standardised
- Range: 0/1 – 10
- VS Index: Sum of standardised component scores
- Range: 1 – 40
- Three periods
  - 1990 – 1999
  - 2000 – 2010
“Violent Societies Index” (VSI): Construction

Two VS Indices:

- VSI 40: Including homicide (73 countries)
- VSI 30: Excludes homicide (132 countries)
VSI (30) and VSI (40)

Violent Societies 1976-2010 – Regional Distributions

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Legend:
- VSIndex 30
- VSIndex 40
Trajectories of violence and peace:

- Country Rankings across time
- Mass atrocities listed by Harff and/or Genocide Watch

Patterns of violence and peace

- Exemplary cases
- Typical trajectories of different types of violence
VSI(40) - Countries with highest ranks
* mass atrocities between 1976 and 2009; italics: included in previous period

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Between 55% and 77% of the most violent countries in each decade have experienced incidents of mass violence and genocide.

Latin American countries dominate among highly violent societies, but include also “success stories” (Chile, Argentina).

A high level of stability and “sustainability” of violence across the periods (even with new actors moving in) among the highest ranked countries, but not in the lower ranks.
High levels of violence do not necessarily coincide with conflict and mass atrocities, but are driven by high levels of state violence.

Extremely violent societies without mass atrocity incidents are characterised by:
- High levels of state violence (Colombia, Mexico)
- Ongoing and low-level political and ethnic conflicts (Thailand, Mexico)
# VSI(30) - Countries with highest ranks

*mass atrocities between 1976 and 2009; italics: included in previous period*

<table>
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All countries with the exception of Colombia experienced mass atrocities and genocidal events.

Countries with sustained conflicts dominate.

Rwanda is not included in contrast to DR Congo, reflecting the intensity and duration of the conflict there.

Represents subsiding conflicts and mass atrocities in Latin America and increasing violence in Africa.
### VSIndex(30) - Country trajectories 1980 - 2009

*mass atrocities between 1976 and 2009*

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* experienced mass violence and genocide in any of the decades according to Harff (2003) and / or Genocide Watch (2010)
VS 30 Trajectories of increasing violence

- All countries in this group experienced mass atrocity and genocide during at least one decade
- Steep increase are not caused by incidents of mass violence but rather by continuous increase of armed conflict, state violence and terrorist attacks
- Algeria, Burundi, Congo DR and Nepal have extreme
### VSIndex(30) - Country trajectories 1980 - 2009

*mass atrocities between 1976 and 2009*

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</table>

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VS30 Trajectories of decreasing violence

- Countries moving out of conflict and mass atrocities
- Reflects subsiding conflict-related violence in Latin America
- ‘Success stories’: Bosnia, Chile, Nicaragua, South Africa
## VSIndex(30) - Country trajectories 1980 - 2009

*mass atrocities between 1976 and 2009*

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</table>

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VS30 Mixed Trajectories

- ‘Sudden’ periods of violence - Turkey
- Steep increase of violence and slow decrease – Rwanda
- Waves of violence – Uganda
Pattern I: Sustained High Level of Violence with Multiple Actors

Colombia 1976-2010

- Peace accord (1984-87)
- Negotiations (1990-98)
- End of peace talks (2002)
- Peace offer (2008)
**Pattern I: Sustained High Level of Violence with Multiple Actors**

Colombia 1976-2010

- **Peace accord** (1984-87)
- **Negotiations** (1990-98)
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- **Peace offer** (2008)

**Graph**

- Homicide and battle deaths / 100,000
- Number of terrorist attacks

**Legend**

- **Homicide**
- **Battle death**
- **Terrorist attacks**
Colombia:
- Interpersonal violence driven by organised crime activities and groups
- Terrorist attacks reacting to peace agreements, cease fire, intermittent
- Paramilitary groups
- Armed conflict, army involvement
- Continuously high level of state violence, but decreasing before final peace offer
- Violence subsiding before final peace offer
Pattern II: Sets of intra-state conflict, multiple actors and mass atrocities

Sri Lanka 1976-2010

Component Score

Defeat of the LTTE
Peace accord

Homicide
Battle death
Terrorist attacks
Political Terror
VS-Index
Pattern II: Sets of intra-state conflict, multiple actors and mass atrocities

Sri Lanka 1976-2010

- Homicide
- Battle death
- Terrorist attacks

Defeat of the LTTE
Peace accord
Pattern II: Sets of intra-state conflict, multiple actors and mass atrocities

Sri Lanka

- Between 1989 and 1990 (13,000 – 30,000) and in 2008/2009 est. 30,000 killed in mass atrocities
- Different types of actors and conflicts: left-wing political insurgency and ethnic conflict (including inter-ethnic conflict)
- Different motives, different targets of violence, different types of violence dominating
- Concomitant terrorist attacks and armed conflict
- High and sustained level of state violence

Dynamics of peace

- All types of violence subside before cease fire/peace accord
Pattern III: Violence build-up, mass atrocities

Rwanda 1976-2010

- Battle death
- Terrorist attacks
- Political Terror
- VS-Index

Component Score

VSIndex(30)
Pattern III: Violence build-up, mass atrocities

Rwanda 1976-2010

Battle deaths / 100,000

Number of terrorist attacks

- Battle death
- Number of terrorist attacks
Violence build-up, mass atrocities

Rwanda

- All types of violence increase before genocide
- Ongoing armed conflict after genocide
Pattern IV: Shifting alliances, multiple targets, blurred boundaries

Burundi 1980-2010

- Battle death
- Terrorist attacks
- Political Terror
- VS-Index
Pattern IV: Shifting alliances, multiple targets, blurred boundaries

Burundi 1980-2010

- Battle deaths / 100,000
- Number of terrorist attacks


Battle death
Number of terrorist attacks
Pattern IV: Shifting alliances, multiple targets, blurred boundaries

**Burundi**
- Victim and perpetrator groups alternate
- Each groups becomes target of mass atrocities
- Involvement of militias and paramilitary groups
- Mass atrocities driven by state violence in the 1980s
- Mass atrocities driven by armed conflict in the 1990s and 2000s
- After several attempts towards peace building violence starts to subside from 2005, including state violence
Pattern V: Multiple perpetrators, multiple target groups, extreme levels of violence

DR Congo 1976-2010

- End of Mobutu's regime
- Peace accord

- Battle death
- Terrorist attacks
- Political Terror
- VS-Index
Pattern V: Multiple perpetrators, multiple target groups, extreme levels of violence

DR Congo 1976-2010

- End of Mobutu's regime
- Peace accord

Battle deaths / 100,000
Number of terrorist attacks

- Battle death
- Number of terrorist attacks
Between 1994 and 2010 four million death toll
Militias and armies from neighbouring countries
Different target groups – ethnic and political
Concomitant state violence and internal armed conflict
State violence at extreme levels throughout period
Macro-Pattern: Sustained State Violence

- Brazil, Colombia, Russia,
- Algeria after amnesty (1999), minority rights (2001) and end of civil war (2002)
- Mexico (paramilitary units)
- Rwanda after genocide
- Sri Lanka: build-up preceding conflict
Macro Pattern: Peace, regime change and decreasing state violence

- Chile: continuously decreasing before regime change
- Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina: fast decrease
- Nepal: Resuming state violence
- Colombia: concomitant decrease of state violence and other types
Conclusions

Patterns

• Violence decreasing before final peace accord
• Subsiding violence might indicate ongoing efforts at peace building
• State violence mostly continues after peace accords and regime changes (exceptions e.g. Chile, Yugoslavia)
• Interventions decrease violence
I am grateful to Michael Koch, University of Bielefeld for data collection, construction of the VSI, graphics design and great ideas.