The Effect of Civilian Casualties on Wartime Informing: Evidence from the Iraq War.*

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Abstract

Scholars of civil war and insurgency have long posited that insurgent organizations and their state enemies incur costs for the collateral damage they cause. We provide the first direct quantitative evidence that wartime informing is affected by civilian casualties. Using newly declassified data on tip flow to Coalition forces in Iraq we find that information flow goes down after government forces inadvertently kill civilians and it goes up when insurgents do so. These results have strong policy implications; confirm a relationship long posited in the theoretical literature on insurgency; and are consistent with a broad range of circumstantial evidence on the topic.

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1 Introduction

Civilians often bear significant costs of fighting between parties to sub-state conflicts. In Afghanistan, an estimated 21,000 civilians have "died violent deaths as a result of the [ongoing] war" (Project, 2014). In Iraq, between 134,789 and 152,104 civilians have been killed since the United States invasion in 2003 (Count, 2008). The toll in Syria has been even greater. Price et al. (2014) calculate that nearly 200,000 individuals have been killed during that country's four-year old civil war.[1] And these numbers do not include the grievous injuries suffered by many of the conflicts' civilian survivors. While some 3,200 civilians are reported to have been killed in fighting between the Taliban and Afghan forces in 2014, more than twice as many Afghans were wounded during the same period (Johnson, 2014).

Scholars have long posited that insurgent organizations and their state enemies incur costs for the collateral damage they cause. Most twentieth-century counterinsurgency theorists writing on the wars of decolonization argued that obtaining information on rebels from non-combatants was critical for government forces and that protecting the population from insurgents was critical to gaining that cooperation (Trinquier 1961; Galula 1964; Taber 1965; Clutterbuck 1966; Thompson 1966; Kitson 1977). More recently, Kalyvas (2006) argued that indiscriminate violence against civilians is counterproductive because it can turn civilians against the party causing them harm.[2] Berman et al. (2011) explicitly model the relationship between harm and informing as part of a 3-sided game in which civilians punish insurgents who create excessive costs by sharing information with government forces.

Indirect empirical support for this relationship has been identified in a number of conflicts. U.S. government officials cited the potential for civilian casualties to harm cooperation from civilians as one reason for imposing more restrictive rules of engagement in Afghanistan

[1] Though this estimate does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights contends that 62,347 of these individuals were civilians (Alfred, 2014).

[2] Though see Lyall (2009) for evidence to the contrary from the Chechen war.

in 2009. Condra and Shapiro (2012) show that in Iraq insurgent violence went up after Coalition-caused civilian casualties and down after insurgent-caused ones, consistent with an informational reaction to abuse. Lyall et al. (2013a) show that self-reported victimization by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) correlates with lower support for ISAF and higher support for the Taliban. Shapiro and Weidmann (2015) provides evidence that the plausibly exogenous variation in cell phone coverages led to lower insurgent violence during the Iraq war, which they attribute to greater information flow to counterinsurgents as the risks of informing went down.

What is missing in these papers is direct evidence on information flow to counterinsurgents. As one recent paper puts it, "despite its central role in civil war dynamics, the act of informing is still poorly understood, due mostly to the classified nature of informant tips" (Lyall et al., 2013b).

Using newly declassified data on weekly province-level tips collected by Iraqi and Coalition force during the Iraq war, we provide the first direct test of the influence of civilian abuse on wartime informing. Our data span all thirteen provinces which experienced substantial violence over a 60-week period from June 2007 to July 2008. We combine the data on tips with administratively-collected geolocated data on combat violence and press-based data on civilian casualties. Exploiting plausibly exogenous variation in civilian casualties occurring during combat incidents we find a robust relationship between indiscriminate violence and informing. In our baseline model, an additional Coalition-caused civilian casualty leads to approximately .8 fewer tips in the next week, while an additional insurgent-caused one leads to approximately .5 more tips. Consistent with prior work we find that government forces pay a higher cost for causing casualties in so far as the drop in tip flows following a single government-caused casualties is roughly 60% larger than the increase following insurgent caused ones.[3] These effects, while modest in magnitude, are substantively significant. In

[3]The difference is modestly significant statistically, t=1.48, p=.16.

the median week in which insurgents caused civilian casualties, they killed four civilians, predicting two additional tips to Coalition forces. That is a substantial number (roughly 10% of the weekly mean) since single tips often resulted in raids that led to the capture of both large numbers of weapons and key insurgents.

From a scientific standpoint, these results provide the first empirical confirmation of a relationship scholars and practitioners have posited for more than 50 years. From a policy perspective, our findings reinforce the importance of minimizing collateral damage. In addition to the ethical imperative that combatants take all reasonable measures to avoid harming civilians, they appear to face strategic incentives to do so as well: at least in Iraq members of the public penalized parties who did not.

This paper proceeds as follows: in the following section, we consider the possible effect(s) of civilian casualties on battlefield outcomes and why incidents of collateral damage should be expected to affect wartime informing. We then introduce our data and empirical strategy. Finally, we present results and conclude with a discussion of policy implications.

2 Theory

A growing body of literature analyzes the effects of civilian victimization on battlefield outcomes during periods of insurgency. The effect of civilian casualties on wartime informing is of particular interest since scholars of sub-state violence have long highlighted the importance of information in insurgency campaigns. Despite its theorized importance, very little is known about the factors that affect wartime informing.

2.1 The Importance of Informing

A broad range of work argues that incidents of civilian casualties should affect citizens' willingness to inform. Condra and Shapiro (2012), for example, argue that: "collateral

damage causes local noncombatants to effectively punish the armed group responsible by sharing more (less) information about insurgents with government forces and their allies when insurgent (government) forces kill civilians." This hypothesis emerges from a tradition of scholarship that focuses on the central role played by civilians in civil war and insurgency in deciding whether or not to share information about combatants (Tse-Tung (1961), Berman et al. (2011), Lyall et al. (2013b), Irish Republican Army (1985), Kalyvas et al. (2006), Nagl (2009)). This line of reasoning emphasizes how the asymmetry of combat power in many non-state wars renders information about insurgent activities "a central resource in civil wars: counter-insurgents seek it, insurgents safeguard it, and civilians often trade it" (Lyall et al., 2013b).

The investment by Iraqi and Coalition forces made in creating anonymous tips channels provides *prima facia* evidence that counterinsurgents find tips useful. Telephone tip hotlines like the one in shown in figure 1 were activate throughout the war.[4] The United States established other platforms as well so that information could be discreetly transmitted to state forces; these included e-mail addresses as well as online internet web forms like that run by the Central Intelligence Agency throughout the Iraq war shown in figure 2.

[Insert figures 1 and 2 about here.]

Beyond the logical inference that these systems must have been useful if they were maintained for so long, there is substantial evidence that tips served an important counterinsurgency function in Iraq. Internal government documents released to the authors describe anonymous tips collection programs during the recent Iraq war as "a critical information resource for both [Coalition Forces] and [the Government of Iraq] in combating terrorism" (U.S. Central Command, 2007). Field reports are prevelent; tips are reported with major cache discoveries including "more than 450 deadly anti-tank mines... in the stronghold of

[4]Indeed, one prominent counterinsurgent predicted in the 1960s governments would find it worthwhile to provide "would-be informers... a safe, anonymous way to convey information" (Galula, 2006).

support for radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's militia" (Garamone, 2007); the discovery of bomb-making facilities (Miles, 2007); and the arrests of "hundreds of key former Ba'athists and Al Qaeda and the eventual bombings that finally killed Zarqawi" (Castro, 2007); to highlight just several.

A national tips hotline jointly run by the U.S. and Iraqi governments "was so effective, that units began to setup local regional tip centers... [and the] President (US), Vice-President (US), and SECDEF have all requested historical data for the program" (Iraq, 2008). While it is unclear what proportion of operations carried out were based on tips received, those organizations that reported integrating tips into their intelligence cycle claimed they relied heavily on the channel. The tips program reportedly "provide[d] [Multi National Forces-Iraq's Strategic Counterintelligence Directorate (SCID)] with 80% of its [human intelligence] sourcing and 100% of [its] operations" (U.S. Central Command, 2007), and was considered "very successful" by American special operations forces targeting high priority individuals (U.S. Central Command, 2007).

More recently, following the Islamic State's advances into Iraq, the country's central government reestablished tips lines so that residents of "Fallujah and Ramadi" may "report... suspected terrorist operations" (Shorfa, 2014, 2013; al Qaisi, 2014). In Afghanistan, less has been publicly reported about informing, but a similar pattern emerges. The former director of the Pentagon's Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization (JIEDDO) reported six years into the Afghanistan war that in cases where "[C]oalition forces separate the enemy from the people... [w]e see tips go way up; we see bomb makers turned in; we see IED networks dissolve" (Tata, 2007). Reports from the field indicate that "IED finds were due directly to local national tips" (Cuomo and Gorman, 2010).

Across these conflicts, insurgents are reported to have taken actions to reduce informing through anonymous channels. In an apparent "effort by the insurgency to tie up the lines" in Iraq, prank callers attempted to overwhelm call center operators by "berat[ing] and

threaten[ing them]. Women called to offer the operators sex or, they said, just to chat" (Semple, 2006). Consistent with this story, internal U.S. Government documents reveal that while calls to tips lines exceeded 5,000 per day, "[t]hree out of four phone calls [received were] harrassment or death threats" (U.S. Central Command, 2007). Similarly, billboards, which were used to promote tips lines in Iraq, "'hit a nerve with the insurgents' who regularly vandalize[d] [those] promoting the campaign" (Miles, 2004). In Afghanistan, the Taliban are reported to have "issued decrees ordering all cell phone towers to be turned off during nightly hours, in an attempt to prevent villagers from calling in tips to the military forces (Trofimov, 2010) and have attacked and destroyed cell phone towers for the same purpose (Shachtman, 2008)" (Shapiro and Weidmann, 2015).

2.2 Heterogeneous Response to Civilian Casualties

Intuitively state- and insurgent-caused civilian casualties might be predicted to operate in opposite ways for a number of reasons. State-caused casualties could lead people to think the government is malign and therefore refrain from sharing tips, for example, while insurgent-caused ones would induce the same sentiment towards insurgents and therefore increase tips to government. A revenge dynamic could also be in play for civilians who suffer the loss of family member or friend. As Schumann and Ross (2010) explain, "individuals experience distress when they have been treated unfairly... [and] [r]evenge may enable victims to reduce their distress by restoring equity with the transgressor." Revenge can also provide the victim with a sense of psychological gratification (Crombag et al., 2003) in ways that are highly valued (DiGiuseppe and Tafrate, 2007). One way to exact revenge in the context of civil war is to help the enemy of the party that has hurt you.

In the context of civil wars like the one in Iraq, however, the actions taken to harm those who have hurt you carry asymmetric risk depending on whether that party is the insurgency or the government and its allies. Civilians harmed by the state can simply abstain from

informing, enabling insurgents to conduct more attacks. Civilians who suffer at the hands of insurgents, however, must take a risky action to inform. Although revenge motives in some settings are found to be relatively insensitive to consideration of the potential risks (O'Connor and Adams, 2013; Carlsmith et al., 2002), the risks of informing versus abstaining from doing so were starkly different in Iraq. Not informing in Iraq was the normal thing to do; the vast majority of citizens did not inform, and there was no punishment for abstention.[5] Informing, however, could be quite risky. Although anonymous tips platforms allowed civilians to discreetly and relatively easily submit information about insurgents, such activities still carried with them some expected cost – if insurgents were successful in determining that an individual had informed (by, for instance, checking outgoing call records on his/her phone at checkpoints, which reportedly happened), such individual could be killed. We would, therefore, expect a greater level of harm from insurgents would be required to generate the same reaction.

Existing evidence is consistent with this expectation. Condra and Shapiro (2012) show there were asymmetric effects of civilian casualties in Iraq depending on whether the population in a given area was largely pro-government or pro-insurgency and argue that, in general, "killings by one side [can] have a different impact on subsequent violence than killings by the other." Research by Lyall et al. (2013a) provides evidence of such phenomenon. The authors find that self-reported harm inflicted by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan is correlated with an decreased support for ISAF and an increase in support for the Taliban, but reports of Taliban-inflicted harm do not have the same relationship. As we show, a similar asymmetry existed in Iraq during the study period.

[5]Contrast this with the former East Germany, for example, where informing was pervasive and failure to participate was suspicious.

2.3 Expectations

Given this background we can articulate two simple expectations:

1. Coalition killings of civilians during combat incidents will lead to a decrease in tips while insurgent killings of civilians in such incidents will lead to a greater flow of tips.

2. The reaction to killings will be asymmetric, tip flow will drop more following a given level of Coalition-caused harm than it will increase following the same level of insurgent-caused harm.

3 Data

To test the relationship between civilian casualties and information flow in Iraq we take advantage of several kinds of administrative data collected by Iraqi and U.S. forces as well as data on civilian casualties developed by Iraqi Body Count, a non-governmental organization that has been tracking civilian casualties in Iraq since the start of the war in 2003.

3.1 "Tips" Data

Information supplied by local citizens on insurgents and/or their activities was collected and quantified by various elements of the Coalition and Government of Iraq throughout much of the war.

Tips were collected from Iraqi citizens in a variety of ways. A plurality flowed into the "Iraqi National Tips 1-3-0 Hotline [hereafter, '130 hotline'], an anonymous telephone hotline for reporting terrorist related activity" (U.S. Central Command, 2007). The 130 hotline was established by Coalition forces in January 2005 and tranferred to Iraq's Ministry of Interior in November of 2007" (Iraq, 2008). The hotline was modeled after a similar program established by the British Army during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In fact, a team of

"police officers from Northern Ireland were drafted in to help to set up the service and train an Iraqi team to answer the calls 24 hours a day" (Haynes, 2007). The "[t]ips center," where incoming calls were received, was initially located in Iraq's Al Adnon palace, which was then part of the International (Green) Zone established by Coalition forces following their invasion (Iraq, 2007). A subsidiary 130 tips center was also established in Basrah (Iraq, 2007). While the 130 hotline was established to serve the whole of Iraq, in practice, the large majority ("90%") of legitimate tips reported through the hotline were specific to activities within the Baghdad area (Iraq, 2007).

In addition to the 130 hotline, a number of regional channels were established to collect tips. "Local/Regional" tips were classified by Coalition forces as those "(telephonic or e-mail) not called into the 130 Hotline in Baghdad" (Iraq, 2008) or "initiated by a person via any method other than a Tips Hotline" (Iraq, 2007). Collectively, regional tips outnumbered those received through the 130 hotline of Defense (2007) (Figure 3). There existed at least three non-130 hotline sources of tips received by telephone: those called into Provincial Joint Coordination Centers; Iraqi police stations; and "[p]ersonal [c]ell [p]hones or [c]ommanders (Iraqi Police, Iraqi Army, Coalition Forces)" (Iraq, 2007). Figure 3 shows examples of the reporting that Multi-National Command Iraq and JIEDDO produced using data on these hotlines.

The 130 hotline was advertised to Iraqi citizens in a variety of ways. In addition to billboard advertisements mentioned previously, television commercials, leaflets, business cards, posters, stickers, and even cigarette lighters were all used to advertise tips channels (Iraq). Figure 4 shows advertisements run to promote the 130 hotline.

[Insert figure 4 about here.]

Our data on tips to Coalition forces in Iraq are derived from various plots in recently declassified reports prepared by Multi-National Corps – Iraq and released to the authors

for the purposes of this and related studies (Iraq, 2008). Figure 5 shows one such plot. To generate estimates of the underlying data from which the plots were constructed, each plot was digitized with Plot Digitizer (Huwaldt), which was then used to extract tip counts for each observation of each plot. The weekly data cover the period June 1, 2007 through June 27, 2008. Similar graphs were provided for all but five of Iraq's provinces. Three of the five missing provinces were in the Kurdish region, where there was very little combat and where Coalition forces were likely not engaged in efforts to recruit informants. For unknown reasons the Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces, both of which are relatively peaceful majority Shia provinces, are also missing. These gaps are unlikely to impact our conclusions.

[Insert figure 5 about here.]

Critically, the tips data we use do not count the raw number of calls placed to the tips lines—which would be a biased measure of information flow because of the insurgent efforts to flood the line with fake tips discussed above. Rather, the data record the number of tips classified by Coalition and Iraqi operators as valuable. Specifically, tips were classified into two types: "informational", were defined as consisting of tips for which "[n]o immediate response [is] required; useful in developing intelligence and further research" (Iraq, 2008); and "preemptive", defined as consisting of tips "requir[ing] an immediate on-the-ground response" (Iraq, 2008). The classification into these two categories does not appear to have been consistent across time and between provinces. We, therefore, aggregate up to a measure of total useful tips for our analysis.

Civilian Casualties

Data on civilian casualties (CIVCAS) are the product of a multi-year collaboration with Iraq Body Count (IBC), a non-profit organization that collects data on civilian casualties suffered

in the Iraq War and makes them publicly available.[6] The data are based on media reports of incidents involving civilian casualties between December 2003 and the present. We use the subset of these data covering our period.

Civilian casualties can be divided into four different categories in the data: (1) insurgent killings of civilians that occur in the course of attacking Coalition or Iraqi government targets, which we call insurgent-caused casualties; (2) Coalition forces killings of civilians in the course of combat incidents or attacks on insurgents, which we call coalition-caused casualties; (3) sectarian killings defined as those conducted by an organization representing an ethnic group which did not occur in the context of attacks on Coalition or Iraqi forces; and (4) unknown killings, where a clear perpetrator could not be identified. This last category captures much of the violence associated with ethnic cleansing, reprisal killings, and the like, where claims of responsibility were rarely made and bodies were often simply left abandoned.

Critically, the killings in the first two categories do not represent the intentional targeting of civilians. Rather, they represent accidents of war. The rates with which these killings happened certainly reflected the level of care the two sides took to avoid them, which varied from place-to-place on both sides, but they do not include acts of intimidation killing. Because of the accidental nature of these events they are unlikely to include the violence which was a result of insurgent strategic action to forestall tips to Coalition and Iraqi forces. That kind of violence would be captured in the latter two categories of civilian casualties.

3.2 Covariates

Incidents of insurgent violence carried out against and recorded by Coalition forces are taken from "significant activity" (SIGACT) reports by Coalition forces that capture the location, date, time, and type of attack for attacks targeted against coalition, Iraqi Security Forces,

[6] http://www.iraqbodycount.org

civilians, Iraqi infrastructure and government organizations.[7] Population data are extracted from World Food Programme (2008) surveys and the Landscan 2008 dataset, which takes the form of gridded population estimates for the entire world.

3.3 Descriptive Statistics

Tip flow was substantial throughout the period under study, with Coalition forces receiving 24 useful tips in the median province/week. The numbers were highly variable, however, with some weeks exhibiting exceptionally high numbers of tips and others reporting no tips at all. As we show below, this skewed distribution does not drive our results. The time series were also extremely idiosyncratic across provinces, both in terms of levels and the shape of the time series, as figure 6 shows. We plot the number of tips per combat incident to normalize for the fact that the intensity of insurgent activity varied greatly across provinces. Given the skewed distribution of tips we show that all results are statistically and substantively similar if we trim the tips time series at 3 standard deviations from the mean.

[Insert figures 6 and 7 about here.]

Insurgents were responsible for roughly twice as many civilian casualties in an average week as Coalition forces, 3.3 vs. 1.7 as table 1 shows. As is clear from the skewed distribution, and as can be seen in figure 7, the time series of civilian casualties was highly episodic.[8] There are weeks when both sides cause high numbers of civilian casualties, as well as weeks when only one side did, and these are imperfectly correlated with overall combat intensity. The bivariate weekly correlation between combat incidents and Coalition-caused civilian casualties is roughly .46 and .49 with insurgent-caused casualties, but in differences the

[7] For further details see Berman et al. (2011).

[8] Because we do have no strong reasons to expect substantial non-linearities in the response to civilian casualties and because both civilian-casualties time series exhibit a large number of zeros we do not log them.

correlations drop substantially, to .29 for Coalition-caused incidents and to .07 for insurgent-caused ones.

[Insert table 1 about here.]

4 Empirical Strategy

To test the prediction that information flow increased in insurgent-caused civilian casualties and decreased in those caused by the Coalition, we estimate the relationship between civilian casualties incident to combat operations and subsequent tip flow. Because telephone and e-mail tips channels would allow individuals to respond rapidly to observed civilian casualties, we adopt the province-week as our level of temporal analysis, and we expect to find that the number of tips responds to causalities from the previous week.

As figures 6 and 7 showed there were strong trends in both time series. We therefore estimate the following first-differences model:

$$(y_{j,t} - y_{j,t-1}) = \alpha + \beta_1(c^c_{j,t-1} - c^c_{j,t-2}) + \beta_2(c^i_{j,t-1} - c^i_{j,t-2}) + \beta_3(c^s_{j,t-1} - c^s_{j,t-2}) + \gamma_t + (\epsilon_{j,t} - \epsilon_{j,t-1}),$$

where, $y_{j,t}$ is the number of tips in province j during week t, $c^k_{j,t}$ is the count of civilian causalities in province i during week t attributable to source $k \in \{$Coalition (c), insurgents (i), sectarian (s)$\}$. Week fixed effects, γ_t, control for linear responses to unobserved characteristics of each particular week. Differencing period t and period $t-1$ in this model eliminates permanent unobserved trends in the individual provinces.[9] Controlling for lagged changed in sectarian killings should account for intimidation killings by insurgents designed to prevent the population from cooperating with Iraqi and Coalition forces.

[9]In levels, both time series exhibit non-stationarity. In differences, this is not the case whether we look province-by-province using a Box-Pierce test or whether we use the common panel data unit root tests.

Substantively, this approach follows Condra et al. (2010) and Condra and Shapiro (2012) who leverage the randomness inherent in weapons effects to identify the impact of civilian casualties. Simply put, the consequences of any given combat engagement have a large random component. Diifferencing out the unit specific trends should remove any omitted variables that impact both the propensity for civilians to suffer in $t-1$ and the rate of information flow in t. Essentially, we are trying to isolate the causal impact of the idiosyncratic week-to-week changes in civilian casualties due to bad luck and chance. Because our analysis in this paper is at the province level, the first level administrative unit, as opposed to the district level, the lower level unit used in much of the prior work on the Iraq war, much of that randomness may be averaged out. We therefore employ a rich set of controls to show that the coefficients change little as we address various potential sources of bias.

Our first-difference estimator will be consistent as long as $\Delta\epsilon_{j,t} = \epsilon_{j,t} - \epsilon_{j,t-1}$ is uncorrelated with changes in casualties from the prior week, $\Delta c^c_{j,t-1}, \Delta c^i_{j,t-1}$, and $\Delta c^s_{j,t-1}$. This assumption will not hold if changes in causalities respond to external events that might be correlated with changes in tips in the next period. For example, if casualties are a function of past tips, then tips from the past will be correlated with tips at t and causalities at $t-1$. Mean reversion could also cause a mechanical correlation between tips and causalities: casualties would decrease after a bad event even if tips remain the same, leading to a generally negative estimate of the correlation. A final concern of bias might arise if informants choose to provide tips based on future expectations formulated on past events. For example, if informants believed past tips to Coalition forces induced accidental civilian deaths by the Coalition for intentional killings by insurgents, then fear of retribution from insurgents might lead civilians to decrease tips after clashes.

To address concerns for these types of bias in the first-difference estimator, we implement a series of controls for feedback from lagged values of y_j and c^k_j. We show that the estimated coefficients (β_1 and β_2) changes little in magnitude and significance when controlling for

potentially confounding factors from the past. This gives us confidence that casualties are uncorrelated with the potential sources of feedback. Controlling for past trends in killings of various kinds, both intentional by insurgents and accidental by both sides, for example, does little to change the core results which suggests that expectations about future deaths resulting from informing are unlikely to be driving the results. To address additional concerns for mean reversion bias, we control for sources of noise in the relationship between civilian casualties and tips. *A priori*, mean reversion is more likely to be substantial when causalities are prone to deviation from their mean. Thus, controlling for factors that plausibly add noise to the variation in casualties, such as the level of combat in a province at a given time, the population, and flexible polynomial interactions of these factors, should reduce any spurious results due to mean reversion. As we will see, none of these controls significantly alter the results.

5 Results

This section discusses our core results and their robustness.

5.1 Main Results

We find direct evidence for the information hypothesis. As table 2 shows, civilian casualties perpetrated by Coalition forces in a given week are associated with significant decreases in the number of tips supplied the week following, and the opposite is true for insurgent-caused casualties.

[Insert table 2 about here.]

To make it clear where the results are coming from we introduce our key treatment variables and then controls one column at a time: Column 1 includes only Coalition-caused

killings and Column 2 insurgent-caused ones. Because the two time-series surely covary due to unobserved factors Column 3 includes both which increases the magnitude and significance of the anti-insurgent reaction. Column 4 introduces controls for changes in the intensity of sectarian violence in the previous week, and Column 5 adds in controls for changes in the intensity of combat in the prior week. To ensure the results are not driven by some unobserved common shock across weeks, Column 6 introduces contemporaneous changes in civilian casualties of all three types and combat incidents. The coefficients move around little in terms of substantive or statistical significance in columns 4-6, though the significance of the anti-insurgent reaction falls below the 90% level when we include controls for contemporaneous violence.

Our preferred parsimonious specification is presented in column 5 and includes both Coalition- and insurgent-caused civilian casualties as well as controls for the intensity of combat and intimidation by insurgents (measure as the previous week's changes in sectarian violence and combat incidents). In that model, an additional Coalition-caused death predicts roughly .8 fewer tips the week following.[10] Conversely, an additional civilian death attributable to insurgent action leads to an increase of approximately .5 tips in the following week. The difference between these effects is in the expected direction. The reaction to Coalition-caused deaths is larger but modest in statistical significance (t=1.48, p=.16).

Interpreting magnitude of this effect directly from changes in the count of useful tips is not straightforward as tips themselves vary considerably in quality. Consider, for example, the various outcomes of tips received and reported by the Defense Department. In some instances, tips led to important though relatively minor successes, as when, for instance, "[a]n early morning tip from local residents led members of the 101st Airborne Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team to an area near Kirkuk, where they found two IEDs" (AFPS,

[10]Approximately 1.3 fewer tips can be expected in the week which has an increase of the average number of Coalition-caused civilian casualties in a province week (.77×1.7).

2006a). In other cases, tips led to very significant discoveries. One such tip, for instance, led Coalition forces to a "bomb-making factory in western Iraq... [complete with] 'quite a sizable selection of chemicals,' including canisters of chlorine, several 55-gallon barrels of nitric acid and several bags of fertilizer" (Miles, 2007). Other tips are more difficult to compare. In one instance, for example, a "tip from an Iraqi motorist led to the capture of a kidnapper and the freeing of a woman and her four children April..." (AFPS, 2006b).

5.2 Robustness

The results are robust to a series of alternative specifications.

As discussed in the previous section, one concern with our approach is that unobserved factors influencing both trends in past civilian casualties and current tip flow could lead us to misattribute changes in tips to lagged changes in civilian casualties. Columns 1-3 of table 3 show this concern is unlikely to be valid. Our core results on insurgent-caused casualties are unchanged when including four lags of differences in civilian casualties (Column 1), combat incidents (Column 2), and tips (Column 3), while those on coalition-caused casualties become substantively and statistically stronger.

[Insert table 3 about here.]

A second concern is that our results are simply an artifact of mean reversion of some other kind of cyclicality in the data. The fact that controlling for lagged changes in tip flow does not attenuate the results should ease any such concern. Since mean reversion is more likely to be substantial when causalities are prone to deviation from their mean, we can determine whether controlling for factors that plausibly add noise to the variation in civilian casualties attenuates the results. Column (4) does just that, adding what we call size controls which include the level of combat in a province over the previous eight weeks, the population of that province, and flexible polynomial interactions of these factors. Adding these controls

again makes the results cleaner. Combining multiple lags of changes plus size controls makes the result stronger still, as can be seen in Column 5. We, therefore, believe that the effect(s) of any unobserved feedback processes or mean reversion would be to attenuate the results. Table 2 represents a conservative presentation of the relationship between civilian casualties and tip flow.

The results are also robust to various alternative specifications which address various additional potential confounding factors, as is shown in table 4. The first such concern is that common shocks affecting provinces at certain times might induce a correlation between changes in civilian casualties and changes in tips that is not due to civilians' response to idiosyncratic civilian casualty events. To address this concern, Columns 1-3 control for a province or province/period fixed-effects. Accounting for additional time-invariant differences between locations or time-varying common shocks in this manner makes little difference in terms of statistical significance, though the coefficient magnitudes do shift somewhat.

[Insert table 4 about here.]

A second additional source of inaccuracy in the results is that the model is misspecified because we are treating provinces as equal units when in fact some are much larger. Under this logic, in larger provinces the relationship between civilian casualties and tips is drawing on a larger sample of interactions and thus is more precise. If the relationship we are studying is heterogeneous across differently sized units, the weighted estimates will differ from the un-weighted estimates.[11] Columns 4 and 5 show that results using weighted least squares based on either population source are consistent with those of the primary specification. This should further alleviate any concern over possible model misspecification that might otherwise result from failure to model heterogeneous population effects (Solon et al., 2013).

[11] Common practice when a quantity is measured with more precision in larger units is to weight by population (see e.g. Greenstone and Hann, 2014).

A third concern is that the results may be driven by Shia provinces where there was a very different dynamic than the insurgency in mixed and Sunni provinces. Column (6) shows this was not the case. Restricting attention to mixed and Sunni provinces does not considerably impact the results. The coefficients increase, as might be expected given the higher rates of insurgent activity in mixed and Sunni areas, and the statistical significance of the results drops, as it should when the sample size is halved. The core pattern, however, remains the same.

Finally, one might be worried about outliers driving the results given the highly variable nature of how many civilian casualties each sides caused in any given week. Columns 7 shows that trimming the civilian casualties time series at $+/-$ 3 standard deviations from the mean strengthens the results, as does combining trimming with weighting in Column 8. As there are reasons to prefer the weighted and trimmed specification we believe our core results are a conservative presentation of the relationship of interest.

Outlier provinces are also a potential concern. Table 5 shows the results are not driven by any particular province. Dropping each province from the sample and rerunning the model returns results consistent with table 2. Overall the results are remarkably stable and robust.

[Insert table 5 about here.]

6 Conclusion

We have shown that in one very important civil conflict, there is a clear relationship between harm to civilians and wartime informing. Using newly declassified data on the flow of useful tips to Iraqi and Coalition forces, we found a robust relationship between civilian casualties and information flow. Tip flow decreased the week after Iraqi and Coalition forces mistakenly killed civilians during combat operations and it increase the week after insurgents did so. In standardized terms the results were meaningful but modest. A one standard deviation

change in Coalition-caused casualties predicted 4.4 fewer tips in the next week (5.7×-.77), while a one standard deviation change in insurgent-caused casualties led to 3.3 additional tips in the next week (7.0×.47). These changes represent standardized treatment effects from .055 for insurgent-caused civilian casualties to .074 for Coalition-caused ones.

While the magnitude of these effects is are meaningful using common metrics for treatment effects, their substantive import is not obvious. Anecdotally, there was huge variability in the consequences of any one tip, and our data are insufficiently precise geographically for us to pin down the subsequent consequences of these changes in tips. More precisely identified work suggests the impacts could have been large, but there is no direct evidence.

A natural question arising from this analysis is: to what set of civil wars are these results relevant? The Iraq war during the study period was unusual in some respects. The most obvious difference is in the combat power available to both sides. It is a common trope that most civil wars involve a dramatic discrepancy in military power, at least in their early stages, but the scale of the discrepancies in Iraq during this time was unusually large. Because U.S. and international forces fought with Iraqi government forces, the counterinsurgents forces writ large were highly mobile (they had ready access to helicopters and heavily armored road vehicles) and benefited from levels of intelligence support, logistical capacity, and precision indirect fire power (artillery and air power) that far exceeded what is available to most states fighting insurgencies. Those capacities enabled them to effectively target any position in space at nearly any time if they had actionable intelligence. This case may therefore be an an outlier in terms of the potential for non-combatants to influence the trajectory of the conflict by sharing information.

Our main contribution is thus to conclusively demonstrate the existence of an informational channel by which combatant behavior can impact conflict outcomes and to do so using data that until now has remained classified and thus unavailable for research. The relationship we observe is not surprising. Many scholars have found indirect evidence of this

phenomenon previously. What is unique in this study is that we directly observe information flow and are able to benchmark the magnitude of the difference in non-combatant response to the two sides. Consistent with prior work, we find that government forces pay a higher price for inflicting the same level of harm, though the difference is statistically modest.

From a policy perspective these results clearly indicate that the U.S. military's focus in training and doctrine on avoiding harm to civilians is well placed. As Condra et al. (2010) observe, "in addition to moral and legal concerns, there may be military strategic value in reducing civilian casualties." Our results offer quantitative evidence that this is indeed the case. In contemporary counterinsurgency campaigns marked by the deployment of anonymous tips platforms, both the insurgency and its state challenger pay a price for harming civilians.

Figures

Figure 1: Iraqi police officer at tips call center. Source: New York Times.

Figure 2: CIA online tip submission form. The page linking to the weform thanks, in Arabic, those "brave individuals willing to provide information leading to the arrest of terrorists and the leaders of the extremist organizations..." (Author's translation) Source: Central Intelligence Agency.

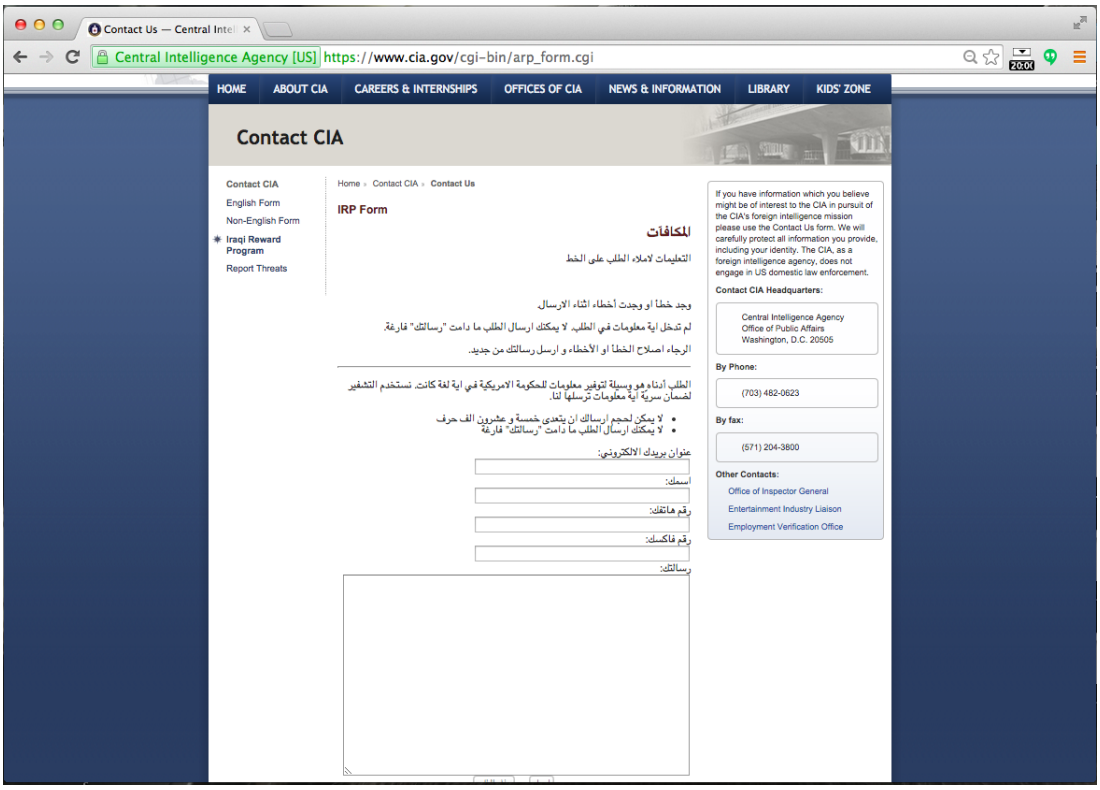
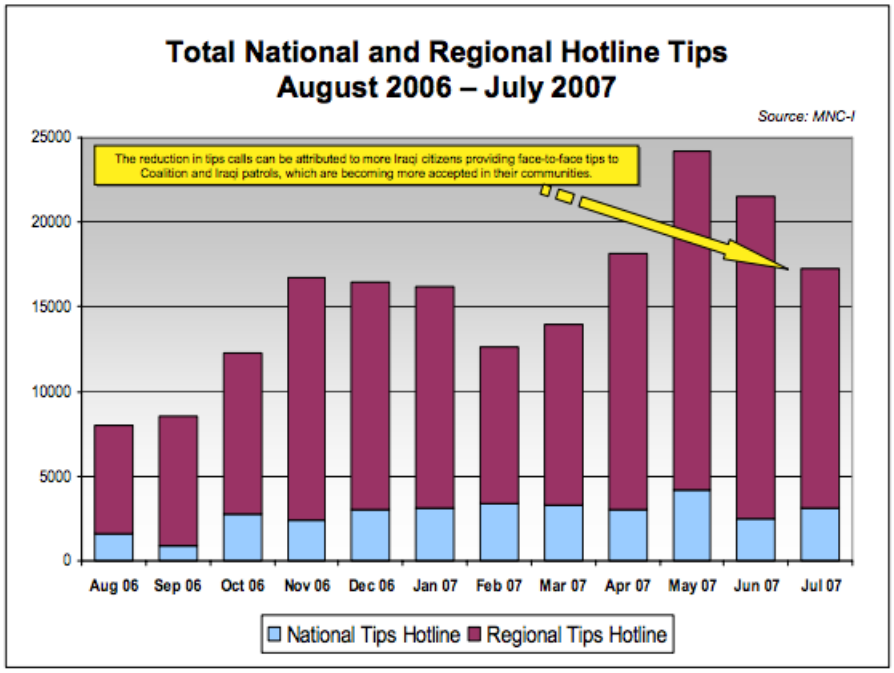


Figure 3: Sample briefing slides.

(a) Iraq-wide National 130 and regional hotline tips numbers compared, August 2006 – July 2007. Source: U.S. Department of Defense.



(b) Comparison September 2006 – July 2007. Source: Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization Fiscal Year 2007 Annual Report.

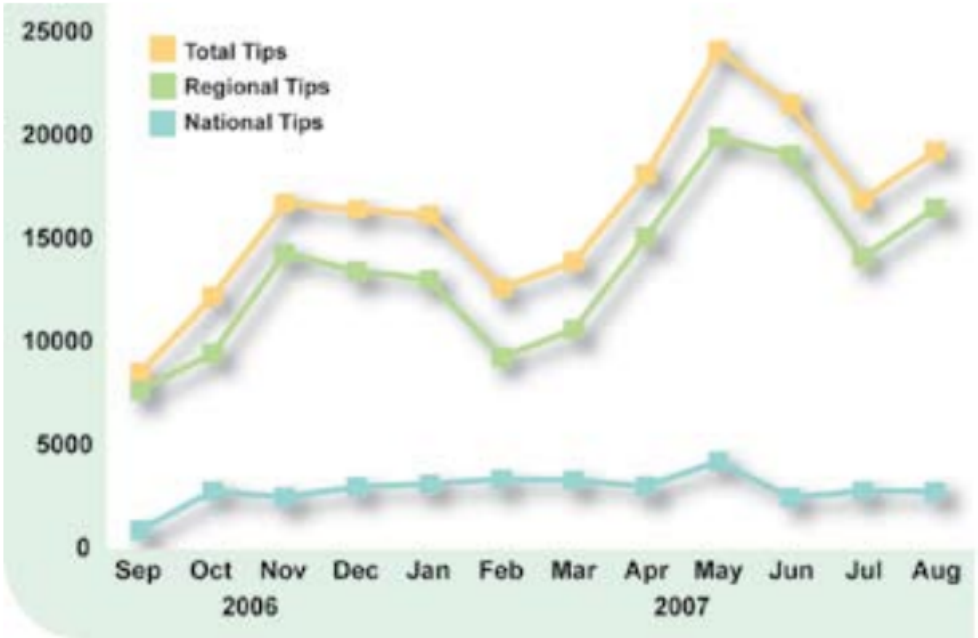


Figure 4: Sample tip line ads.

(a) "Your calls protect Iraq. For the eyes of Iraq... open your eyes. 130" (Author's translation.) Source: U.S. Department of Defense.

(b) "For their sake. For the sake of Iraq, open your eyes." (Author's translation.) Source: U.S. Department of Defense.

(c) "For their sake, keep your eyes on Iraq. Call 130" (Author's translation.) Source: U.S. Department of Defense.

Figure 5: Information and Pre-Emptive Tips Received in the Diyala Province, June 2007 – July 2008. Source: Multi-National Corps – Iraq.

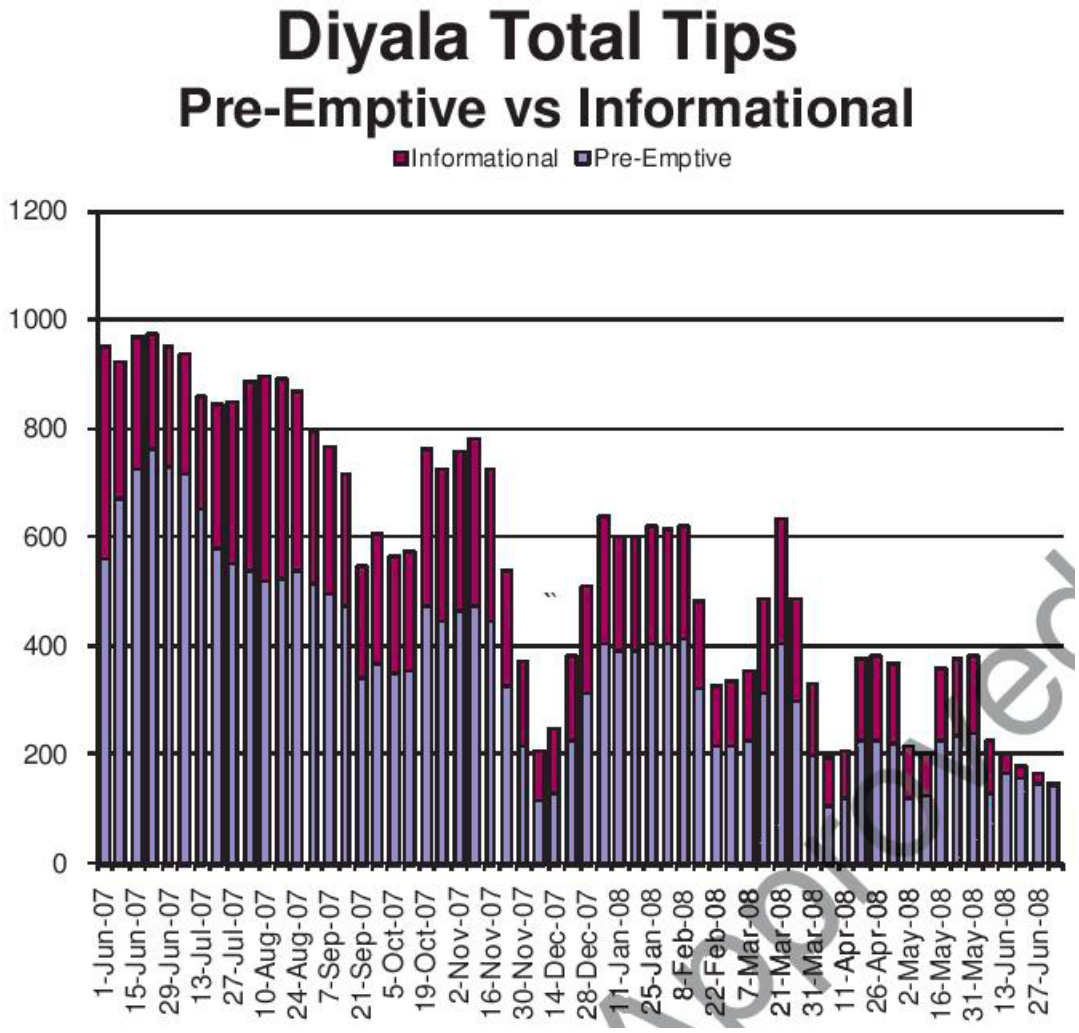


Figure 6: 'Useful' Tip Flow Over Time. Source: Multi-National Corps – Iraq.

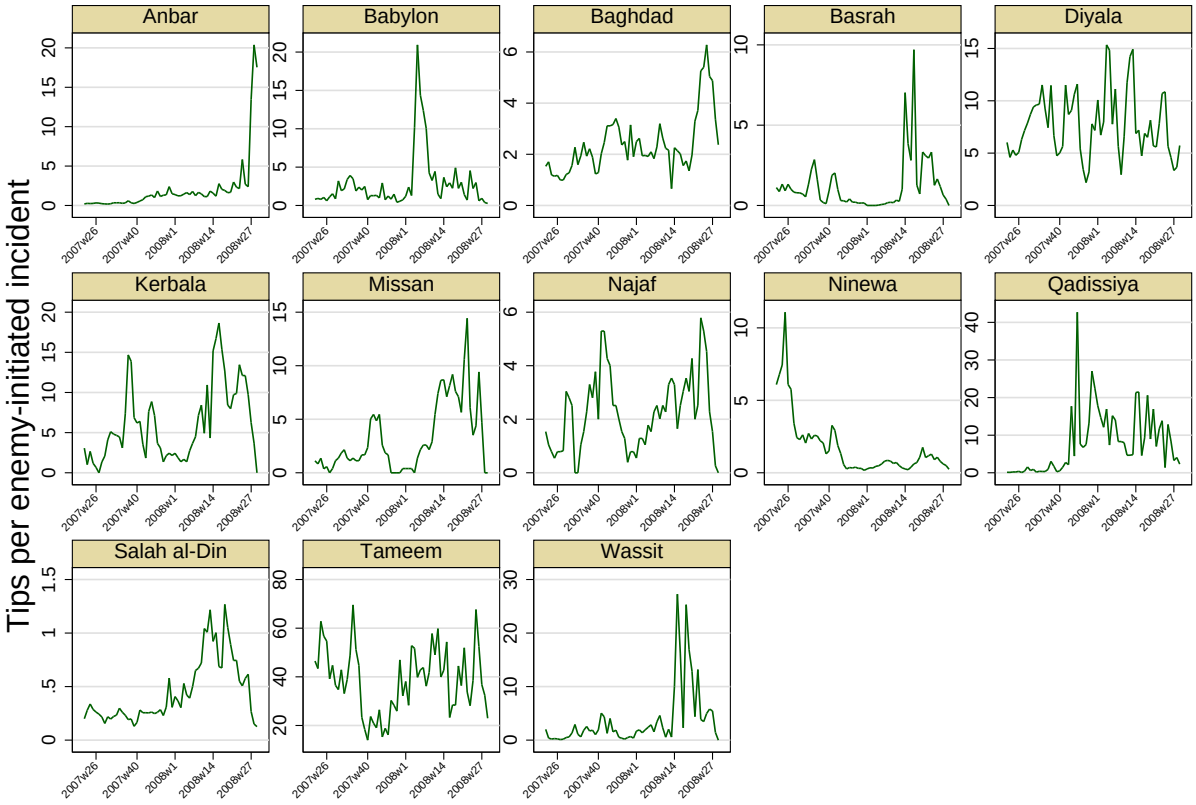
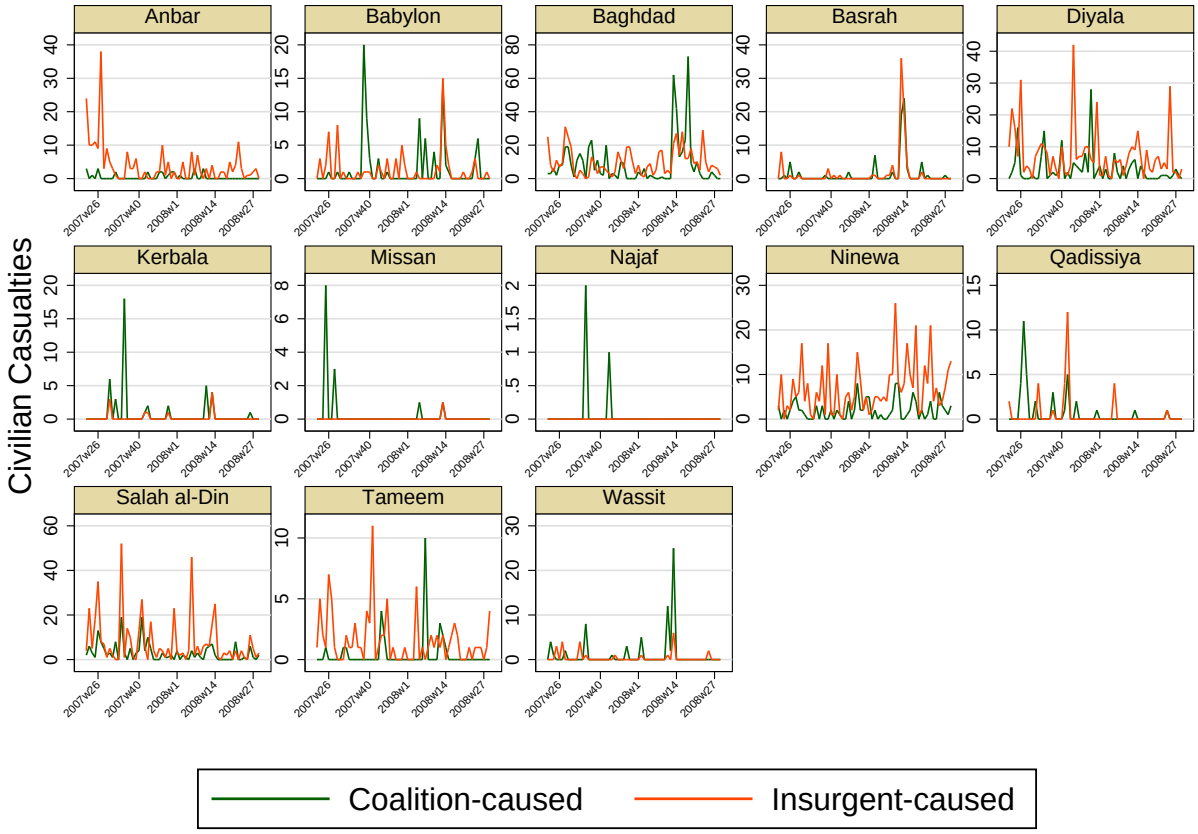


Figure 7: Civilian Casualties Over Time. Source: Iraq Body Count.



Tables

Table 1: Descriptives

	count	mean	p50	min	max	sd
Useful Tips	780	212	24	0	2930	428
Δ(Tips)	767	-5.6	-.24	-472	441	59
Combat Incidents	780	54.6	18	0	728	91
Δ(Combat Incidents)	780	-1.2	0	-409	462	32
Coalition-Caused Civilian Casualties	780	1.7	0	0	73	5.2
Δ(Coalition)	780	-.03	0	-64	62	5.7
Insurgent-Caused Civilian Casualties	780	3.3	0	0	52	6.2
Δ(Insurgent)	780	-.01	0	-51	52	7.0
Sectarian Violence Casualties	780	15.7	3	0	521	38
Δ(Insurgent)	780	-.46	0	-504	476	33.6

Notes: Unit of analysis is the province-week, 1 June 2007-18 July 2008. Useful tips calculated from MNC-I briefing slides. Combat incidents based are MNF-I SIGACT-III database. Civilian casualties from Iraq Body Count as coded by the Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC).

Table 2: Impact of Civilian Casualties on Information Flow

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Lagged FD of Coalition-Caused	-0.604***		-0.723***	-0.724***	-0.773***	-0.748**
Civilian Casualties	(0.178)		(0.176)	(0.175)	(0.194)	(0.256)
Lagged FD of Insurgent-Caused		0.349	0.468*	0.469*	0.469*	0.429
Civilian Casualties		(0.228)	(0.223)	(0.223)	(0.220)	(0.299)
R-Squared	0.075	0.074	0.078	0.078	0.078	0.082
Observations	767	767	767	767	767	767
Clusters	13	13	13	13	13	13
Sectarian casualties	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of combat incidents	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Period t controls	No	No	No	No	No	Yes

Notes: Unit of analysis is the province-week, 1 June 2007-18 July 2008. Useful tips calculated from MNC-I briefing slides. Combat incidents based are MNF-I SIGACT-III database. Civilian casualties from Iraq Body Count as coded by the Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC). Robust standard errors, clustered at the province level in parentheses. Significance shown as $***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10$.

Table 3: Robustness to Controlling for Past Trends

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Lagged FD of Coalition-Caused	-0.718***	-0.742***	-0.863***	-0.766***	-1.016***
Civilian Casualties	(0.138)	(0.191)	(0.192)	(0.198)	(0.313)
Lagged FD of Insurgent-Caused	0.885**	0.459*	0.449**	0.468*	0.677*
Civilian Casualties	(0.396)	(0.221)	(0.186)	(0.219)	(0.361)
R-Squared	0.085	0.080	0.325	0.081	0.333
Observations	767	767	715	767	715
Clusters	13	13	13	13	13
Lags of civilian casualties	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Lags of combat incidents	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Lags of tips	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Size controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

Notes: Unit of analysis is the province-week, 1 June 200718 July 2008. Useful tips calculated from MNC-I briefing slides. Combat incidents based are MNF-I SIGACT-III database. Civilian casualties from Iraq Body Count as coded by the Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC). Regressions with lags add three lags of changes. Size controls include total violence over previous 8 weeks, sum of squared violence over last 8 weeks, Landscan population, Landscan population squared, and population interacted with total violence. Robust standard errors, clustered at the province level in parentheses. Significance shown as $***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10$.

Table 4: Robustness to Fixed Effects, Weighting, and Trimming

	(1) Province FE	(2) Prov/Quarter FE	(3) Prov/Month FE	(4) WFP weights	(5) Landscan weights	(6) Sunni and Mixed	(7) Trimmed	(8) Trimmed and LS weights
Lagged FD of Coalition-Caused	-0.767***	-0.689***	-0.819***	-0.753***	-0.773***	-1.116**	-1.108**	-1.408***
Civilian Casualties	(0.195)	(0.163)	(0.212)	(0.125)	(0.138)	(0.391)	(0.408)	(0.320
Lagged FD of Insurgent-Caused	0.469*	0.312*	0.299*	0.680***	0.712***	0.679	0.604**	0.851***
Civilian Casualties	(0.220)	(0.150)	(0.165)	(0.206)	(0.215)	(0.408)	(0.255)	(0.215)
R-Squared	0.115	0.110	0.347	0.140	0.138	0.167	0.079	0.142
Observations	767	766	766	767	767	354	767	767
Clusters	13	13	13	13	13	6	13	13

Notes: Unit of analysis is the province-week, 1 June 200718 July 2008. Useful tips calculated from MNC-I briefing slides. Combat incidents based are MNF-I SIGACT-III database. Civilian casualties from Iraq Body Count as coded by the Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC). Trimmed regressions truncate civilian casualty variables at 3 s.d. from the mean. Results are almost identical in substantive and statistical significance if we also trim the tips time-series at $+/-$ 3 s.d. from the mean. Robust standard errors, clustered at the province level in parentheses. Significance shown as $***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10$.

Table 5: Robustness to Dropping Provinces

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)
Province Dropped	Anbar	Babil	Baghdad	Basrah	Diyala	Kerbala	Missan	Najaf	Ninewa	Qadissiya	S-a-D	Tameem	Wassit
Lagged FD of Coalition-Caused	-0.790***	-0.825***	-0.640*	-0.813***	-0.681**	-0.802***	-0.796***	-0.784***	-0.822***	-0.806***	-0.760***	-0.629***	-0.798***
Civilian Casualties	(0.190)	(0.203)	(0.350)	(0.194)	(0.275)	(0.203)	(0.206)	(0.203)	(0.194)	(0.205)	(0.182)	(0.148)	(0.199)
Lagged FD of Insurgent-Caused	0.488*	0.482*	0.311	0.493*	0.399	0.484*	0.483*	0.481*	0.439*	0.480*	0.711***	0.402**	0.483*
Civilian Casualties	(0.238)	(0.228)	(0.195)	(0.241)	(0.256)	(0.230)	(0.229)	(0.230)	(0.228)	(0.228)	(0.217)	(0.176)	(0.230)
R-Squared	0.085	0.085	0.082	0.085	0.085	0.085	0.084	0.085	0.083	0.084	0.085	0.097	0.085
Observations	708	708	708	708	708	708	708	708	708	708	708	708	708
Clusters	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12

Notes: Unit of analysis is the province-week, 1 June 200718 July 2008. Useful tips calculated from MNC-I briefing slides. Combat incidents based are MNF-I SIGACT-III database. Civilian casualties from Iraq Body Count as coded by the Empirical Studies of Conflict Project (ESOC). Robust standard errors, clustered at the province level in parentheses. Significance shown as $***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10$.

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