Islamists and Nationalists: Rebel Motivation and Counterinsurgency in Russia’s North Caucasus

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Abstract: How does religion shape the nature of insurgency? Do Islamist insurgents fight differently from those with secular aims, like national self-determination? Do they select different types of targets, use different military strategies, respond to different types of incentives? Scholarly attention to the role of religion in civil and interstate war has increased in recent years, but there remains little empirical assessment of whether and how religious motivations might influence insurgent strategy and tactics. This paper starts to fill this gap by offering a disaggregated analysis of Islamist and nationalist violence in Russia’s North Caucasus. Using a new incident-level dataset, we find that nationalist and Islamist violence share many of the same causes, with several important exceptions: Islamist violence closely tracks the religious calendar, more closely follows international trends, is more geographically dispersed, and is less responsive to coercive pressure than violence by secular groups. Whereas selective Russian counterinsurgency tactics have outperformed indiscriminate force in eliciting compliance from nationalist rebels, this relationship has not held for Islamists. We also find that religiously-motivated violence accounts for only a minority of the unrest in the Caucasus, and conclude that Russia’s reliance on indiscriminate tactics – in part driven by the assumption that most of its enemies are irreconcilable jihadists – is making it more difficult to pacify the region.

1 Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford and Department of Government, Harvard University. Draft. Please do not cite or circulate without permission.
Students of war have long recognized that military conduct can depend as much on the issue over which combatants fight, as on the material balance of power. In the 19th Century, the rise of nationalism in Europe, and Napoleon Bonaparte’s harnessing of its passions, led to concerns that conflicts over national independence and self-determination might overturn the nascent system of states. Since that time, and particularly since World War II (WWII), scholars have credited nationalism with making combatants inspired by it more difficult to coerce than in previous eras. A passionate attachment to land and to, as Benedict Anderson has it, an “imagined community” has helped mobilize combatants to fight even when doing so is very costly and success is highly unlikely. Similar concerns have emerged about the increasing role of religion in modern warfare. Recent fighting by Salafi-Jihadist groups in Northern Mali, Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Pakistani tribal areas, Southern Thailand, and other conflict zones has raised new questions about the nature of non-state opponents that modern governments face, and whether these adversaries are more likely to seek a bargain or fight to the bitter end. Although nationalism and religion seldom stand alone as motivations for insurgency, they potentially shape the nature of violence on the ground and call for different types of government responses.

Do Islamist insurgents fight differently from those with secular aims, like national self-determination? Do they select different types of targets, use different military strategies, or respond to different types of incentives? Answers to these questions have broad implications for theory and policy. Recent years have seen increased scholarly attention to the role of religion in civil and interstate war.

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hough many of the literature's central theoretical claims are either built on assumptions of micro-level behaviors or have clear implications for the conduct of warfare, most empirical work has resided on the macro, cross-national level. Few empirical studies have sought to systematically examine the impact of religion on strategy and tactics. To our knowledge, there have been no attempts to empirically evaluate the proposition that religious extremists behave differently on the battlefield – that they are less “rational” than secular combatants, or less responsive to coercive pressure, all other things equal. We currently lack a commonly accepted operational definition of what “Islamist” violence is, or how one might discern motivations from violent actions. As a result, we are unable to even establish how prevalent this type of violence has been in recent conflicts.

We offer the first disaggregated, quantitative comparison of religious and secular insurgent violence, using new evidence from Russia’s North Caucasus (2000-2012) – where jihadist and nationalist insurgents have operated in the same region, time period, and against the same political opponents. We find that the determinants of the two forms of insurgent violence are largely the same, with several important exceptions. Nationalist attacks are characterized by a stronger attachment to territory and tend to cluster in large population centers. Islamist violence is more geo-

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7 For recent examples of cross-national work, see Hegghammer, “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters;” Svensson, “Fighting with Faith.”

8 For notable exceptions, see Moghadam, “Motives for Martyrdom;” Moghadam, The Globalization of Martyrdom.
graphically dispersed, tends to ebb and flow with key dates on the Islamic calendar, and more closely mirrors international trends in global jihadist violence. A further difference arises in how these two types of groups respond to government coercion. While the conventional wisdom among conflict scholars holds that selective forms of violence should outperform indiscriminate tactics in eliciting compliance from targets, we find that this relationship holds only for nationalist guerrillas. The technology of government violence appears to have little effect on the resolve and capabilities of Islamist insurgents.

That said, Islamist violence is also quite rare. We find that religious violence – even under the most expansive definition – represents an unexpectedly minor share of violence in the region (3 to 19 percent). Even if restraint, precision and accuracy offer few advantages in fighting committed Salafi-Jihadist rebels, it would be exceedingly dangerous to extrapolate the same policy lesson to the Caucasus more broadly. The overwhelming majority of combatants in the Caucasus behave like rational actors, who respond to selective incentives. Indiscriminate government tactics make it far more difficult to convince these actors to lay down their arms.

RELIGION, RATIONALITY AND VIOLENCE

Religion challenges rationalist views of risk-averse, goal-oriented conflict behavior.9 The willingness of religiously-motivated combatants to accept immense personal sacrifices in pursuit of improbable aims is difficult to reconcile with purely instrumental decision-making. Rather, religious violence more closely fits Weber’s model of “value-rational” behavior, in which “ethnical, aesthetic, religious or other” beliefs compel a continued pursuit of goals, heavily discounting the costs of attaining them.10 Such highly committed patterns of fighting are, of course, not unique to religious wars. Wars of national self-determination can also entail the dismissal of dim prospects for success, and the subordination of individual interests to group-


level ones.\textsuperscript{11} Yet recent literature has seen religious warfare as an even greater departure from the rationalist baseline, for at least five reasons.

First, religion tends to be uncompromising. Even given some liberty in translation and interpretation over time, the texts of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Koran limit the conduct of followers in important ways.\textsuperscript{12} Each of these three texts serves as a guide to conduct approved or mandated by a supreme being. Conduct departing from these guidelines puts a follower at risk of losing God’s favor (the risks and penalties vary depending on the nature of the breach of conduct). Followers are less likely to pursue action that they believe to violate the key tenets of their faith as laid down in holy scripture, even when doing so might result what others might consider a better outcome, such as peace.

Second, and related, the quality of salvation tends to be lumpy. One cannot be partly sinful or partly holy in one’s conduct and the end state of one’s existence is discrete rather than continuous: one’s conduct is either sanctioned or censured; one goes to heaven or not. Moreover, salvation can be both or either about individuals or groups.\textsuperscript{13} It is this quality of Salafism—the belief by some Islamic clerics that the status and welfare of the body of the faithful (the Umma) correlates with God’s favor—that justifies, for Salafists, the targeting of fellow Muslims. If Muslim sin explains the unlikely defeat of the faithful by Israel in 1948 and 1967 (for example), and by contrast Muslim adherence to strict Sharia law explains the equally unlikely defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, then what might not be possible if all Muslim sinners were either killed or forced to obey “God’s law”? And if everything is possible so long as sin is purged, why compromise? Salafism has analogs in both Christianity and Judaism (and no doubt other religions as well), but whether the individual’s or the group’s salvation is at stake, the lumpy quality of salvation is

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item Varshney, “Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Rationality.”
  \item Logically, we should therefore expect theocracies to be much more authoritarian than non-theocracies, because when church and state are fused, opposition to state policy becomes tantamount to opposition to god. On the other hand, a recent study of the alleged relationship between Islam in particular, and “authoritarianism,” found only one causal link between the anti-democratic character of Islamic states and Islam as a religion: the subordination of women. See M. Steven Fish, “Islam and Authoritarianism,” World Politics, Vol. 55, No. 1 (October 2002), pp. 4–37.
  \item This is why, especially in the Jewish and Muslim contexts, god’s punishments are described as collective as well as individual. That is, the body of the faith community can be harmed by individual or minority deviations from prescribed conduct. For a clear statement of this in Islam, see Sageman on Salafism: “Statement of Marc Sageman to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States.”
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primarily what makes religious motivation less amenable to compromise than even nationalism.

Third, in addition to salvation, physical locations themselves share this lumpy indivisible quality.\(^{14}\) Examples include the Q’aba in Mecca, and the Temple Mount or Hiram al-Sharif in Jerusalem or ancient American Indian sites that contain sacred clays used in religious rituals. A similar dynamic is at work among some Muslims, who view lands formerly controlled by Muslims as ripe for reacquisition from infidels or apostates. This was the one of the first objectives of Al Qaeda, which sought to expel westerners from Saudi lands.\(^ {15}\)

The symbols and rituals that imbue physical locations with heightened strategic value can extend to the timing of violence as well. By synchronizing their attacks with key dates on a religious calendar, combatants are able to demonstrate knowledge and commitment to faith, bask in the reflected glory of historical battles (e.g. Operation Badr during the 1999 Kargil War), generate outrage to escalate a sectarian conflict (e.g. attacks against Mosques during Friday prayers), exploit an opponent’s lowered state of alert during a sacred day (e.g. Yom Kippur War), or simply take advantage of the increase in capacity and spare time during a holiday season.\(^ {16}\) Although non-religious insurgents may also seek to exploit vulnerabilities afforded by the religious calendar – as illustrated most famously by the Tet Offensive – sacred days generally do not offer nationalists the same kind of focal point for combatant mobilization.

Fourth, religious violence tends to be less constrained in its territorial reach.\(^ {17}\) The transnational nature of religions and the fraternity of co-religionists provide an impetus for combatants to empathize with the subjective grievances of their brethren, follow their best practices on the battlefield, and – when possible – cross

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\(^{17}\) Christianity and Hinduism, for example, each acknowledge holy places, yet the control or possession of a specific territory is not necessary to the practice of either faith. By contrast, many in Islam hold that territory does matter: control of the lands surrounding the Q’aba in Mecca and the Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, for example, are material to the practice of Islamic faith and often analogized to the body. This is why for many Muslims, even the non-violent occupation of territories linked to the holy sites can be akin to an act of violence or sacrilege: a blind-spot for members of other religious communities who seek to control or share the same territories.
borders and join in the fight against those deemed infidels and apostates. The global scope of Salafi-Jihadist goals – a rejection of modernity and Western materialism, the reestablishment of an Islamic Caliphate, and the eventual expansion of Islam’s realm throughout the world – has increased demand for transnational cooperation and emulation. As a result, seemingly isolated incidents of violence can aggregate into a discernible and deliberate global pattern, even without a centralized command structure or any tangible links in leadership, personnel, materiel or finances. Such dynamics are relatively rare in wars over national self-determination, which by their very nature tend to be defensive and localized.

Fifth, religion encourages followers to discount their physical survival. The logic is simple. The physical self is mortal, and hence temporary, but the religious self is potentially immortal and eternal. If belief is strong enough it can therefore become rational to sacrifice the temporary and mortal to obtain the eternal and immortal. In the Christian and Muslim traditions, self-sacrifice in religiously-prescribed conduct is held to be rewarded by eternal, super-physical existence in a heaven or paradise. Indeed, religious adherents often appear to discount the present in favor of the future, and may accept tangible individual or group costs in anticipation of future and intangible benefits. For example, a rational individual might seek his own death (a very high cost) under circumstances expected to result in long-term extra-temporal benefits, such as eternal paradise. Note that in neither the “shadow of the future” nor the “martyr” case are the expected benefits guaranteed, yet we may still consider those who calculate in this fashion to be rational actors in that their decision calculus is consistent.

Taken together, these aspects of religion chip away at bargaining and self-preservation, two key pillars in our understanding of deterrence. A rational non-religious person is expected to assess the tangible costs and benefits of action or inaction, and then maximize his or her utility by choosing the course of action that

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20 Our discussion of religion, religious practice, and religious motivations is ideal-type, and not meant to stand as descriptive even of the practice or motivation of a majority of the followers of any particular religion.
21 Nationalism shares this effect. See especially Anderson, Imagined Communities, pp. 9–12.
22 See Author.
results in the highest likelihood of benefit with the lowest risk or cost. But zealots and fanatics (secular labels for dedicated followers of religion, some of whom may be rational and some may not) will often act differently, choosing instead to sacrifice tangible benefits for intangible ones, even to the point of sacrificing their own lives. Thus a non-religious actor can be coerced or deterred by the threat of destruction; whereas a religious true believer may be impossible to coerce or deter in the same way.23

Perceptions of rationality have a direct bearing on government efforts to contain violent uprisings. To deter potential insurgents, a government may extend selective incentives, punishing those who take up arms against the government, while rewarding or protecting those who do not. To this end, indiscriminate violence – where perpetrators select targets on the basis of group-level attributes like ethnicity or geography rather than individual partisan loyalties – does not generate a clear set of incentives for compliance. Such practices may actually solve the insurgents’ collective action problem, since – if the innocent are punished along with the guilty – neutrality can be as dangerous as rebellion.24 The conventional wisdom among civil war scholars and counterinsurgency practitioners holds that indiscriminate violence is “at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive.”25 Selective violence is more efficient, but also costlier to implement, as it requires accurate human intelligence on the identities and whereabouts of one’s opponents. Yet if religiously-motivated rebels do not respond to selective incentives anyway, the rationale to avoid crude-but-cheap indiscriminate tactics becomes much weaker.

In sum, the literature has produced strong theoretical expectations that religiously-motivated actors will be more difficult to coerce than secular actors. They will also be less likely, once inspired, to compromise. Nationalism shares many of these features with religion, but logically (and as we will see, empirically), key differences remain.

Do these expectations align with the empirical evidence? Existing empirical work supports the proposition that religiously-inspired violence is different from non-religiously inspired violence.26 At the macro level, recent scholarship has shown that civil wars in which religion is a central issue – as in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, where at least one of the fighting sides seeks to impose Sharia Law – are

23 See Author
26 Author.
in fact costlier than wars in which religion is either not a central issue or only a peripheral issue. Moreover, religious civil wars tend to last longer than non-religious civil wars. While non-religious civil wars last on average 92 months, religious civil wars last 114 months, or about two years longer. Furthermore, a religious civil war is nearly twice as likely to recur, after a respite, as non-religious civil war. \(^{27}\)

Although previous research has shed light on the effect of combatant motivations on the general conduct and duration of armed conflict, there has been no systematic comparative assessment at the tactical or micro-level of war. Despite the centrality of micro-level behaviors to theories of religious war, most empirical work has remained on a highly aggregated, cross-national level. An aggregated approach is essential in uncovering broad variation across conflicts and states, but it overlooks a multitude of theoretically-relevant conflict dynamics, like target selection, strategic interaction, interdependence and coordination across and within battle fronts, logistics, and the role of local geographic, demographic, political and economic conditions. Insofar as systematic variation is believed to exist between the military strategies of different types of armed groups, a state-level perspective is insufficient to explain its sources and consequences. \(^{28}\)

HOW “ISLAMIST” IS THE CAUCASUS INSURRENCY?

Insurgent and terrorist violence continues in Russia, well beyond Chechnya. September 2012 witnessed the deaths of at least one police officer and five militants in Dagestan, and an attack that killed seven police officers in Ingushetia. Tatarstan, which had for years been seemingly immune from the violence that has plagued the Caucasus, was the location of two coordinated attacks in July 2012, which wounded the mufti of Tatarstan and killed one of his deputies. The attackers in all three cases are believed to have been Salafi-Jihadists, seeking to institute a fundamentalist form of Islam in parts of the Russian Federation. From the early phases of the Second Chechen War, which broke out in August 1999, Russian authorities have been

\(^{27}\) Ibid.

\(^{28}\) Recent data projects on civil war and terrorism have sought to close this gap, including by distinguishing between various actors. See Clionadh Raleigh, Andrew Linke, Havard Hegre and Joackim Karlsen, “Introducing ACLED: An Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset,” Journal of Peace Research Vol. 47, No. 5 (2010), pp. 1-10; Gary LaFree and Laura Dugan, “Introducing the global terrorism database,” Political Violence and Terrorism, Vol. 19 (2007), pp. 181-204. To date, however, these new data opportunities have yet to generate systematic empirical studies on the relationship between religious motivation and the micro-dynamics of political violence.
keen to frame the North Caucasus conflict as a vital theater in the U.S.-led “global war on terror.” Some observers have disputed this characterization, arguing that most of the Islamist violence is an indigenous outgrowth of the ethno-nationalist struggle in Chechnya and Russia’s efforts to contain it.

The need to systematically differentiate between varying types of insurgent violence is widely recognized, but rarely accomplished. Contemporary accounts of terrorist attacks in Russia almost invariably include a religious extremist frame. For domestic political reasons, labeling the activities of non-state groups as “Islamic terror” facilitates a number of cost-saving and perhaps incompetence-hiding government strategies. In addition to legislative measures designed to quickly suppress any activity deemed “terrorist” and any political rhetoric deemed “extremist,” and the creation of new bodies to oversee and coordinate counterterrorism activities, Russia has dramatically constrained public access to information on operations and casualties. It was also successful in deflecting criticism and gaining support from the United States and Great Britain; two states who have also counted themselves as victims of “Islamic” terror. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the official characterization of violence (or selective reporting) has tended to emphasize Islamic extremism.

This emphasis is consequential for policy choice. If Russia’s enemies in the Caucasus are religious extremists, then avoiding indiscriminate policing tactics, punishing Russian war criminals and rebuilding the region’s devastated physical and

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31 See, for example, “Islamists in Russia: The Boston bombs have put new focus on Russia’s Islamist republics,” *The Economist* (April 27, 2013).
33 For example, the Kremlin insisted at one point on a particular glossary of terms to describe rebel fighters in Chechnya, adamant that “Chechen terrorism” be termed “international terrorism” and that the local Muslim community “dzhamaat” be replaced with “terrorist organization”; Igor Torbakov, “War on Terrorism in the Caucasus: Russia Breeds Jihadists,” *North Caucasus Analysis Volume* Vol. 6, No. 42 (2005). Putin made similar comments following the Boston Marathon bombings of April 15, 2013: “I was always appalled when our Western partners and the Western media called the terrorists, who did bloody crimes in our country, ‘insurgents,’ and almost never ‘terrorists.’” “Putin on Boston bombings: World faces terrorists never referred to as such by West,” *Russia Today*, April 25, 2013.
economic infrastructure can be expected to have little impact on the likelihood or intensity of a future attack. The Russian leadership imagines Islamic extremists — not without some validity — as a force of nature rather than a rational adversary with which it can bargain. By characterizing its adversaries as irrational and insisting that government actions in the Caucasus make it a bulwark against the spread or intensification of Islamic fundamentalism abroad, Moscow can deflect domestic and international criticism of its counterterrorism practices.

It is difficult to deny that understanding Islamic extremism is a vital concern for policymakers in the Russian Federation, the United States, and beyond. Yet most of what we currently know about the effect of Salafi-Jihadist ideology on warfare is based on conjecture and anecdote, rather than quantitative social science. Without more empirical efforts, reducing violence in the Caucasus — or any other region — almost exclusively to Islamist motivations risks misdiagnosing its origins, mispredicting its future course, and prescribing the wrong response.

A MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS

In the following analysis, we address three principal questions. How do religiously-motivated, Islamist rebels fight? Do they present a fundamentally different security challenge to states than insurgents with secular aims like national self-determination? Is Islamist violence driven by a different set of explanatory factors, or can our accumulated knowledge of one form of insurgency help us understand and predict the other?

We answer these questions using a new disaggregated dataset of Islamist and nationalist violence in Russia’s North Caucasus. We track weekly patterns of violence across 7,584 towns and villages in 200 districts (rayons) in nine regions of southern Russia between 2000 and 2012, and examine the extent to which the two types of attacks share the same causes. The North Caucasus region lends itself particularly well to this type of analysis, due to its rich diversity of conflict conditions and armed groups, as well as a variety of ethnic, geographic, demographic and socioeconomic conditions, which enable us to account for a number of potentially confounding structural factors.

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34 These regions include the autonomous ethnic republics of Adygea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessiya, as well as two adjacent majority-Russian regions of Krasnodar and Stavropol Krai.
Islamist violence is a difficult concept to define and operationalize. Individual acts of violence may be observable, but the motivations behind them are usually not. Certain incidents have an unambiguously religious, even puritanical character, such as attacks against moderate Sufi clerics, or against institutions that sell alcohol. Other incidents are more ambiguous, like attacks by groups that use religious rhetoric and symbols in the service of a wider movement of national liberation. Further still, we may be hesitant to apply the “Islamist” label to all attacks accompanied by shouts of “Allah akbar (God is great),” yet it is difficult to argue that such incidents are completely devoid of religious content. We sought to overcome these problems by classifying violent events through a triadic framework, specifying the actors involved, the tactics used, and the target of the attack. This approach enables us to construct several alternative conceptualizations of Islamist violence, from very broad to quite narrow. If our results do not significantly change based on definitional choices, then we can have more confidence in the empirical validity – or lack thereof – of various theoretical claims.

The North Caucasus insurgency can be divided into roughly four meta-groups of actors. The first includes the largely secular Armed Forces of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI), which fought a victorious separatist war against the Russian Federation in 1994-1996, and a less successful one after 1999. The second includes a variety of militant groups with an expressed Salafi-Jihadist ideology – like the ChRI’s Sharia Guard, or Arab Mujahideen – that at various points were at least nominally subordinate to the ChRI. The third includes an assortment of Salafi-Jihadist groups – like the Caucasus Front, Caucasus Emirate and associated networks of dzhamaats – that were either initially established outside the ChRI’s command structure, or have since expanded their strategic objective from Chechen independence to a pan-Caucasian Islamic Caliphate governed by Sharia Law. The fourth includes a more amorphous array of independent militant cells, “lone wolves,” tribal militia, quasi-criminal gangs and self-styled Islamic vigilantes, whose motives and ends are largely unknown, apart from the information they reveal through their violent actions. All four meta-groups have relied on guerilla tactics like ambushes, bombings and hit-and-run attacks, against both hardened military targets and soft civilian ones.

Through different combinations of these actors, tactics and targets, we are able to construct a four-tiered typology of Islamist violence: (1) expansive, (2) intermediate, (3) limited, and (4) target-based. We provide a brief description of this typology below, and offer a more detailed discussion, with specific actor-tactic-target
mappings, and numerous illustrative examples, in an online technical supplement. A graphical representation is shown in Figure 1.

The expansive definition of Islamist violence uses the broadest array of actors, including specific armed groups with self-proclaimed Islamist ideologies or political objectives, as well as a more nebulous assortment of Salafists and “Wahhabis” (self-identified, or so identified by officials or reporters), “black widows” (female suicide bombers), Islamic organizations, charities and clerical elites. Any use of force by any of these actors, directed against any government or civilian target classifies as an Islamist attack under the expansive definition.

The intermediate definition trims this list down to include only the set of institutional actors formally seeking the establishment of a regional Emirate through the use of force – dzhamaat groups unified under the Caucasus Front, Arab mercenary units, and various Islamic units of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria’s armed forces.

In the Caucasus as elsewhere, the dividing line between Islamist and nationalist units is not always clear. In both the expansive and intermediate definitions, cases of overlap with nationalist attacks (e.g. actions by Islamic units of the otherwise secular movements, like the ChRI Sharia Guard) were treated as Islamist incidents. The limited definition drops this inclusion rule, and treats overlap cases as nationalist rather than Islamist incidents.

Finally, the target-based definition sets even more restrictive conditions, where the targets of an attack must be institutions deemed forbidden, impure, undesirable or otherwise foreign according to certain interpretations of scripture (e.g. liquor stores, strip clubs). This category might be thought of as religious vigilantism, in which the perpetrators were seeking to rectify some sort of moral turpitude.

By contrast, we defined nationalist attacks generally as ones perpetrated by groups affiliated with the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria’s leadership and armed forces, involving guerilla or terrorist tactics against any government or civilian actor. The nationalist label excludes acts of violence by groups with mixed separatist-religious objectives under the expansive and intermediate definitions, but includes such groups under the limited and target-based definitions.

The challenge of quantifying these different forms of insurgent violence hangs on the availability of micro-level data, capable of faithfully reflecting our conceptual quantities of interest. Despite the increasing availability of reliable disaggregated data on the North Caucasus, there are few preexisting datasets readily available for

35 [WEBLINK TO ONLINE APPENDIX]
36 We provide a full list, along with associated leadership figures, in the online appendix.
this purpose.\textsuperscript{37} We approach this empirical challenge through the automated extraction of geocoded event data from incident reports. Our text corpus was assembled from the Russia-based independent Memorial Group’s “Hronika nasilija [Chronicle of Violence],” a timeline that includes information on the dates, locations, participants, casualty tolls, and other details of violent incidents in the Caucasus region of the Russian Federation, between 2000 and 2012. One of the advantages of Memorial’s event summaries is that they compile daily reports from international news wires, Russian state and local newspapers, news websites, radio and television broadcasts, and independent reporters, permitting a diverse approach to corpus building, reducing the risk of reporting bias often found in single-source event datasets.\textsuperscript{38}

In all, our dataset contains 43,336 unique events in 7,584 cities, towns and villages, distributed across all 200 districts (rayons) of Russia’s nine southern regions between July 2000 and March 2012, representing as close to a universal sample of state and nonstate violence in Russia as open sources currently permit. These include 9,405 incidents of rebel-initiated violence and 22,573 incidents of government-initiated violence. We geo-coded these events with fuzzy string matching against the U.S. National Geospatial Intelligence Agency’s GeoNames database, and aggregated them to the level of the district-week. Rather than relying on off-the-shelf coding dictionaries typically used for events data extraction, we developed a custom dictionary in Russian based on an actor-action-target framework that corresponded directly to the categories listed in Figure 1.\textsuperscript{39}


\textsuperscript{39} The online appendix at [WEBLINK] provides a more detailed description of the automated coding methodology and associated reliability tests.
Key Finding 1: Islamist violence is relatively infrequent

As we show in Table 1, Islamist groups account for between 3 and 19 percent of insurgent violence in the North Caucasus in 2000–2012, depending on how one defines the category. Even under the broadest definition, this type of violence represents only a minority of political unrest in the region, well behind violence perpetrated by nationalist groups (67 to 75 percent), and violence which we were unable to attribute to either of the two types of insurgents, such as local blood feuds and organized criminal violence (15 to 23 percent).

Key Finding 2: But Islamist violence has become more common over time

For every definition of Islamist violence, save “target-based,” the data suggest that Islamist violence has been claiming an increasingly larger share of overall insurgent activity. This time trend is shown in Figure 2, where points represent weekly incident counts for nationalist and Islamist violence and the smoothed lines represent six month moving averages.

Across all definitions, this trend reflects both an absolute decrease in nationalist activity, and an absolute increase in Islamist activity. Based on the limited, intermediate and extensive definitions, Islamist groups engaged in between 3 and 10 percent of all insurgent violence at the early stages of the conflict in 2000, and between 13 and 31 percent in 2011. The ratio of Islamist-to-nationalist attacks was between 4:100 and 13:100 in 2000, but increased fourfold to between 17:100 and 49:100 in 2011. Based on the “target-based” definition, however, these proportions have remained mostly constant over the full period, ranging from 1 to 3 percent of the total, with the exception of a spike to 7 percent in 2006.

Key Finding 3: Islamist violence is more geographically dispersed than nationalist violence

Earlier we postulated that religious violence would be more expansive geographically, while nationalist violence would be more localized. Indeed this seems to be borne out by the data here as shown in Tables 2-4. Table 2 reports the proportion of Islamist or nationalist attacks by republic or region. While Chechnya has been the location for the majority of nationalist violence in 2000-2012 (and a plurality of Islamist violence), most Islamist attacks have occurred outside the republic's borders.
The same pattern holds for the ethnic geography of violence (the dominant ethnic group residing in a target village), as shown in Table 3. Villages dominated by Chechens have suffered a majority of the nationalist attacks and a plurality of Islamist ones. While the rank-ordering is the same across both categories of violence, a majority of all Islamist attacks took place beyond predominantly Chechen villages. Villages dominated by ethnic Russians suffered the next-highest proportion (17 percent), followed by Ingush villages (13 percent).

Table 4 reports a third measure of dispersion: the average road distance, in kilometers, from the location of each Islamist and nationalist attack to the nearest village where an attack of the same type occurred during the previous month. The average road distance between attacks in two consecutive months ranges from 133 to 514 km for Islamist rebels, while the same figure is roughly 56 to 57 km for nationalist insurgents.

These data suggest that nationalist insurgents circumscribe their fight within a tight geographical space, supporting the idea that their wars are defensive and local in nature, with a far greater attachment to territory. Islamist attacks, however, tend to unfold over a much broader expanse.

**Key Finding 4: Islamist attacks are more likely to reflect global trends in suicide terrorism**

In a further contrast with the highly localized patterns of nationalist warfare, we find that Islamist violence is highly sensitive to events occurring beyond a country’s borders. Relative to nationalist violence, Islamist attacks tended to occur in months with a greater level of suicide terrorism worldwide (outside Russia). Table 5 reports the mean number of global suicide terrorism attacks on months when at least one incident of each type of violence was observed.

| TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE |

The global number of suicide attacks was between 10 and 24 percent higher in months when Islamist violence was observed, than in months when nationalist violence was observed. The difference in means was insignificant only for the target-based definition.

**Key Finding 5: Islamist violence is more intense on Islamic holidays**

We find strong evidence that the religious calendar drives Islamist activity. As Table 1 shows, the more narrow the definition of Islamist violence, the stronger this
relationship appears to be. Under the expansive definition, Islamist violence is 11 percent higher on Muslim holidays; under the target-based definition, it is a full 73 percent higher. For nationalist violence, this increase hovers around 3-4 percent, and is statistically indistinguishable from zero.

Key Finding 6: Islamist insurgents are less susceptible to coercion than nationalist ones

Finally, an initial glance at the data supports the view that religiously-motivated insurgents are more difficult to coerce. To estimate each type of insurgent group’s susceptibility to coercion, we distinguished between two technologies of government action: (1) selective violence, where targets are selected on the basis on individual attributes, like partisan affiliation with an insurgent group, and (2) indiscriminate violence, where targets are selected on the basis of some collective criterion, like ethnicity or location. Examples of selective violence include arrests, targeted killings and kidnappings. Examples of indiscriminate violence include artillery barrages, cordon-and-search operations, and air strikes in residential areas. We assume coercive leverage to be greater in the selective case because, as Thomas Schelling notes, “to be coercive, violence has to be anticipated. And it has to be avoidable by accommodation.” Indiscriminate detentions and artillery fire clearly do not meet this standard, since compliance (e.g. defecting, surrendering, staying neutral, or seeking a bargain) does not necessarily make one immune from harm.

Table 7 reports the relative effectiveness of selective versus indiscriminate counterinsurgency tactics in suppressing each type of insurgent violence. In the twelve weeks following a counterinsurgency operation, districts where Russian security forces employed only selective tactics witnessed 54 to 55 percent fewer nationalist attacks than in places where indiscriminate tactics were used. The advantage of selective tactics against Islamist insurgents, however, is weaker, with an average decrease of between 37 and 44 percent.

Although this difference is in line with our expectations, some caution is warranted in its interpretation. In particular, Russian security forces do not select their tactics at random. Selective violence is more costly to implement because it relies on human intelligence, which in turn requires the protection of one’s informants from retaliation. Indiscriminate force, meanwhile, does not require fine-grained

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information on the enemy’s identity and whereabouts. As a result, we might expect to see a greater use of selective tactics in cases where some modicum of state control has already been established, and any security improvement associated with selective violence may be at least partly an artifact of this selection process. Indeed a solid majority of Russian counterinsurgency operations since 2000 have relied on indiscriminate tactics. Of 8,762 cases where security forces conducted at least one counterinsurgency operation in a district-week, indiscriminate tactics were used in 63 percent, while just 37 percent involved only selective tactics. To address this and other potential barriers to inference, we provide a series of more rigorous statistical tests.

THE DETERMINANTS OF ISLAMIST VIOLENCE

So far we have presented only descriptive statistics on whether systematic differences exist between Islamist and nationalist forms of violence. We have not tried to discern whether these differences hold while controlling for other potential sources of variation, like geography, demographics, ethnicity, historical grievances, and recent levels of violence in neighboring regions. We now provide several model-based predictions of Islamist and nationalist violence under a variety of counterfactual scenarios. In the following, we adopt the intermediate definition of Islamist violence, which includes only the set of insurgent actors formally seeking the establishment of a regional Emirate through the use of force.

[TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE]

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43 The results shown in Table 8 are based on a spatio-temporal autologistic model of Islamist (or nationalist) violence in a district/week, with the following set of covariates: global suicide terrorist incidents per week, Muslim holidays (binary indicator), distance from nearest military base, population density, elevation, slope, distance from nearest refugee camp, distance to nearest international border crossing, percent fluent Russian speakers, proportion of villages in district that were deported in 1944, and percent forest cover. In addition to the results reported here, we estimated five sets of models: (1) a logit regression model with district-level random effects, predicting the incidence of Islamist (or nationalist) violence in a district/week, (2) the same specification with district-level fixed effects, (3) the same with a rare-events correction, (4) a hurdle model that simultaneously predicts the incidence and severity of the two types of violence, and (5) a bivariate probit model that corrects for simultaneous interdependence between Islamist and nationalist violence. Due to space considerations, we provide these additional results – and a more detailed technical discussion – in the online appendix. Sensitivity analyses confirm the main results discussed below.

44 We provide robustness checks with the four other definitions in the appendix.
The results shown in Table 8 can be interpreted in the following way: “How much more (less) likely would a given type of insurgent attack become in the stated counterfactual scenario, all other things equal?” For example, in the first line of Table 8, we find an Islamist attack to be 200 percent more likely in a week with a high level of global suicide terrorism (12 attacks, or 99th percentile) than in a week with a low level of suicide terrorism outside Russia (0 attacks, or 1st percentile).

In almost all counterfactual scenarios, the relative risks of Islamist and nationalist violence tend to change in the same direction, suggesting that the core drivers of insurgency are largely the same for both groups. Apart from Muslim holidays – which are associated with a 20 percent increase in probability of an Islamist attack, but no change for nationalist violence – the differences appear to be ones of scale rather than substance. For instance, we find Islamist attacks to exhibit a far stronger covariance with global levels of suicide terrorism, while the impact of events outside Russia on nationalist violence are less than twice as strong.

We also find significant differences in the geographic distributions of the two forms of violence. Nationalist violence is more strongly influenced by violent events in neighboring districts, and tends to occur in more densely populated areas. Islamist violence, by contrast, tends to occur higher in the mountains and deeper in the forests, but also closer to refugee camps and federal Russian military bases – areas where the civilian population is more likely to have borne the costs of war.

All other counterfactuals in Table 8 – historical grievances due to deportation, distance to international border crossings, and Russian language proficiency – produce variation within each category of insurgent violence, but not between them.

A final result from our regression analysis is that of a small difference between the “predictability” of the two forms of insurgent violence, as measured by the area under the receiver-operator characteristic curve (AUC). AUC can be interpreted as the probability that – given a randomly-selected pair of observations, including one where an attack occurred and one where it did not – a statistical model will assign a higher predicted probability of attack to the observation where an attack did occur. We estimated this quantity using in-sample prediction with our autologistic models of Islamist and nationalist violence. The Islamist model had an AUC of 0.81, compared to 0.85 for nationalist violence. While both statistics suggest very

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45 Formally, the quantities in Table 8 are percent increase in risk, or (relative risk – 1) * 100%, where relative risk is \(\frac{y(x_1)}{y(x_0)}\) and \(x_1, x_0\) are counterfactual values of variable \(x\) (i.e. change from \(x=x_0\) to \(x=x_1\)), and all other covariates are held constant at their median values.

46 All regressions and supporting analyses are included in the online appendix [LINK].
good overall accuracy, they also indicate that the location and timing of nationalist violence is slightly easier to predict, given a previous history of violence.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTERINSURGENCY**

The disparities between Islamist and nationalist insurgents raise a number of questions about the more localized fight in the Caucasus, the motivations of the combatants, and the long-term effectiveness of Russian counterinsurgency there. Our first look at the data offered tentative support for the view that Islamist guerrillas are more difficult to coerce, and hence less amenable to bargaining, than nationalist ones. The use of selective violence by Russian government forces was followed by a greater decline in nationalist than Islamist violence. Yet a simple cross-tabulation cannot account for the various confounding factors that might also explain this result. In particular, Russia’s overwhelming reliance on indiscriminate tactics – which were employed in 63 percent of all counterinsurgency operations since 2000 – indicates that selective forms of violence may be more difficult to implement. It is possible, then, that selective tactics are associated with less insurgent violence partly due to the fact that they are used where violence is already low.

To facilitate a more rigorous evaluation of Russian government counterinsurgency practices, we used matching to take a closer look at the 8,762 cases where Russian security forces (or their local proxies) conducted at least one counterinsurgency operation in a given district-week.\(^47\) We divided these cases into ones where the government employed only selective tactics like arrests, assassinations, kidnappings (3,259 cases), and ones where it employed indiscriminate methods like artillery shelling, aerial bombardment and cordon-and-search operations (5,503).\(^48\) For each case where the government used selective violence, we looked for the closest case where indiscriminate violence was used, but all other conditions – pre-existing levels of insurgent violence, terrain, demographics, the other variables shown in Table 8, and geographic coordinates – were nearly identical.\(^49\)

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\(^47\) Cases of multiple counterinsurgency operations in a single district-week were treated as a single observation.

\(^48\) Cases where Russian forces used both types of tactics were classified as indiscriminate.

\(^49\) Formally, we sought to match treatment (selective) and comparison (indiscriminate) cases on all observable pre-treatment covariates, to ensure that treatment assignment (use of selective rather than indiscriminate tactics) is ignorable, or independent of the outcome (subsequent level of insurgent violence) conditional on the observable pre-treatment covariates. Matching estimators offer a simple way to avoid excessive extrapolation in making causal inferences, thus reducing model dependence. Matching does have its disadvantages, particularly the assumption of no
To account for the secular trends and seasonal fluctuations in fighting, we picked only comparison cases from the same year and month – and during the same types of dates on the religious calendar – as each case of selective violence. We then used several classes of matching algorithms to restrict our sample to only the most directly comparable cases of selective and indiscriminate violence, and proceeded to estimate the effect of each technology of government violence on insurgent activity. Due to space constraints, we analyze only the most conservative matched sample in these pages – where selective and indiscriminate violence were applied under the most similar of circumstances – although other matching estimators confirm our results.\(^5\)

As noted before, we assume that selective violence is the more efficient form of coercion because the probability of punishment is – at least in theory – conditional on the target’s behavior. Indiscriminate violence, on the other hand, is less efficient because a target may be punished regardless of his or her behavior, and incentives for compliance are less clear. If Islamist insurgents are indeed more difficult to coerce than nationalists, then we should expect a smaller decline in Islamist violence following selective counterinsurgency efforts than in the nationalist case.

Table 9 reports simulated changes in Islamist and nationalist insurgent violence, following a switch from indiscriminate to selective counterinsurgency tactics.\(^5\)

These quantities have the following interpretation: “How much more (less) prevalent would a given type of insurgent violence become if the government switched from indiscriminate to selective tactics, all other things equal?”

\[\text{TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE}\]

omitted variable bias. In the current application, however, we found this assumption to be less heroic than many of those associated with competing identification strategies (e.g. exclusion restrictions in Heckman models and instrumental variable regression).\(^5\)

Matching algorithms included (1) Mahalanobis distance, (2) propensity scores, and (3) coarsened exact matching (CEM). Pre-treatment covariates on which we sought to optimize balance included all those shown in Table 8, along with the number of insurgent attacks in the previous 12 weeks, the latitude and longitude of the district center (weighted by population density), and the year, month and week of each observation (the first two we matched exactly). Coarsened exact matching produced the greatest improvement in balance (83-88 percent), but also the smallest sample size (829 treatment cases and 953 comparison). Mahalanobis distance produced the worst improvement in balance (59-61 percent). Due to space constraints, we only discuss the CEM results here, but provide full results for all matching solutions in the online appendix [LINK].\(^5\)

Formally, the quantities in Table 9 are percent increase in incidence, or (incidence risk ratio – 1)\(^*\)

\[^5\] 100\%, where the incidence risk ratio is \(\exp(\beta_1)\) and \(\beta_1\) is the negative binomial regression coefficient on the treatment variable (switch from indiscriminate to selective tactics).
For example, the first line of Table 9 shows that the expected number of Islamist attacks in a district in the 12 weeks following the use of selective violence is about the same as what an average district would experience after indiscriminate violence (about 2 percent lower, actually, but with confidence intervals covering zero). The same statistic for nationalist attacks, however, is substantively much larger, at -5 percent, and is statistically significant.

The matched analysis confirms that more selective counterinsurgency tactics are less effective against Islamist insurgents than against nationalists. A switch from indiscriminate to selective tactics against Islamists yielded a small and highly uncertain improvement in security. By contrast, nationalist insurgents were consistently and significantly more responsive to selective than indiscriminate tactics, even under the most onerous of tests. In the twelve weeks following a counterinsurgency operation involving only selective tactics, an average district was likely to see between 1 and 9 percent fewer nationalist attacks than in a similar district where indiscriminate tactics were used.

If, as these findings suggest, Islamist insurgents are more difficult to coerce than nationalists and are driven as much by trends in global jihadist violence as by local dynamics, what lessons should Russia and other counterinsurgents draw? The natural temptation for any combatant with limited resources is to choose the most effective approach given its cost. Selective violence is more costly to implement than indiscriminate violence, because it relies on a greater volume and accuracy of human intelligence. Yet if efforts to avoid indiscriminate tactics offer little if any advantage against one’s opponents, incentives to invest in selective technologies of violence – build a network of informants, establish sufficient territorial control to protect them from retaliation, avoid civilian casualties, build confidence by punishing war criminals in one’s own ranks – quickly vanish.

The danger of reaching such a conclusion is that the overwhelming majority of Russia’s opponents in the North Caucasus are coercible, and – as Table 9 shows – a reliance on indiscriminate tactics makes it more difficult for government troops to defeat them. If, as Kremlin rhetoric insists, Salafi-Jihadists were responsible for the dominant share of violence in the region, the use of cheap-but-crude indiscriminate tactics could conceivably be justified on practical grounds, though certainly not moral ones. Yet we found that – even under the most expansive definition of religious violence – such events account for a distant minority of all unrest. By relying on indiscriminate tactics across the board, against all opponents, Russia may risk prolonging the conflict and inflaming existing, largely nationalist, grievances.
These results only beg the question of whether or by how much the observed level of violence is a consequence of recent Russian counterterrorism efforts. Much of what has been written about the Islamic extremists who undertake terrorist attacks in Russia appears to be true. They seek the formation of a regional Islamic Caliphate and see themselves as part of a larger transnational struggle. They do not respond to selective incentives in the same way as nationalist guerrillas do, and seem to be less susceptible to bargaining. However, they are a minority actor, responsible for only a small share of violent activity in the Caucasus. As long as they remain a minority, a government strategy built on the assumption that collateral damage is irrelevant when fighting a global jihadist insurgency is as likely to provoke violence as to contain it. The relative frequency with which Islamist attacks occur near refugee camps is but one example of how war-related civilian victimization and displacement can create the atmosphere for radicalization. While insurgent violence may not be all local, much of it is, and – some obvious limitations notwithstanding – governments are in a position to contain it. Russia’s own military history speaks to this point, as evidenced by its long nineteenth century struggle to pacify the same region as today.

ONE PAST SUCCESS

After its victory in the Napoleonic Wars, Russia turned its attention to the conquest of the Caucasus. In 1816, Russia sent one of its most talented and beloved generals, Alexei Yermolov, to conquer and “pacify” the region. Reasoning that his adversaries were godless savages, Yermolov instituted a brutal policy against the tribes of the East Caucasus (primarily in contemporary Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia), characterized by a reliance on indiscriminate artillery shelling of civilian areas and “punitive expeditions” designed to “destroy auls [villages], hang hostages, and slaughter women and children.”52 The brutality had two effects. First, it tilted the balance of power away from the older, more conservative religious leaders, who counseled peace and inner purification, to the younger clerics who counseled war and purification by the sword. Political Islam came late to the Caucasian tribes, but after seven years of Yermolov, its influence became widespread. Second, it expanded a pool of grievances into a turbulent sea. By the time Yermolov reported to the Tsar in 1822 that he had “succeeded” in pacifying the Caucasus, he had done little

more than set the stage for perhaps the greatest asymmetric conflict in history, the Murid War of 1830 to 1859.

That war, which pitted Imam Shamil—Third Imam of Dagestan—against three successive Tsars, has been well recounted elsewhere. For our purposes, it should suffice to note three important features. First, the conflict was made possible by Russia’s excessive cruelty in the preceding years. Second, it set Orthodox Christian Russia in opposition to a newly unified and manifestly Islamic resistance. Third, it was brought to an end as much through kindness and reconciliation as through attrition.

Though Yermolov started the war, Prince Aleksandr Bariatinsky finished it. The young Bariantinsky, authorized by the reformist Tsar Alexander II to attempt negotiation with Shamil and his vassals, instituted a program of amnesty. He permitted adult males—nominally peasant subjects of His Majesty—to continue to bear the kindjal, a dagger marking a young boy’s accession to manhood. He paid large sums of his own fortune as bribes and reparations for damage caused by his soldiers, and he respected the security of any who surrendered to him or to his lieutenants. He punished looters and rapists among his troops, and above all, he insisted his men treat the Tsar’s adversaries as human beings. In an unambiguous break with the indiscriminate practices of his predecessors, Bariatinsky saw greater coercive and persuasive leverage in a restrained, selective approach.

It was an entirely novel strategy. We will never know whether the subsequent rapid collapse of Shamíl’s resistance (he was eventually captured and given a lifelong pension by the Tsar) was due to Bariatinsky’s novel “hearts and minds” strategy or to simple exhaustion: the war had gone on for twenty-nine years. But it is worth noting that the Murids were unprepared for their adversaries’ kindness and humanity. It profoundly dislocated them.

The point here is not to advocate a policy of “kindness” per se, only to remind readers that a sound counterinsurgency strategy skillfully combines discriminate violence with an attention to the grievances that motivate public support for (or apathy toward) insurgents.

53 The classic in English is Baddeley, Russian Conquest of the Caucasus. More recent historical accounts can be found in Moshe Gammer, Muslim Resistance to the Tsar: Shamíl and the Conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan (London: Frank Cass, 1994). Ivan Arreguin-Toft’s analysis comprehensively reviews the history in terms of insurgency and counterinsurgency, Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars.

54 Arreguin-Toft, How the Weak Win Wars, p. 63.
CONCLUSION

Understanding how insurgency and counterinsurgency interact is only one part of the problem. The chief difficulty in the North Caucasus is that Russia has convinced large swaths of its public that (1) the source of most terror (and the most extreme terror) is Islamic groups; (2) those who seek to harm the state are not rational actors; and (3) it therefore makes little sense to devote resources to convince them to lay down their arms.

Changing this public perception will be a challenge, and in this effort two avenues must be explored. First, social and political elites should begin a concerted effort to downplay the intensity of the threat posed by contemporary Islamist attacks. If, for example, Islamic insurgents are responsible for 3 to 19 percent of total non-state violence in the region, at least eighty percent of the violence is largely unrelated to Islam in any form. Though upsetting, Salafi-Jihadism does not threaten national survival to the same degree as violent nationalist separatism, much less a major conventional or nuclear war. Annual traffic fatalities drastically exceed the number of deaths caused by terror attacks in the majority of advanced-industrial states. Yet most people have become reconciled to the risks of automobile transport. If the perceived danger of terrorism were likewise successfully mitigated by means of leadership and education, an excessively militarized response might be prevented.

Second, governments should recognize that most of their opponents are rational, cost-minimizing actors who respond to incentives. To deter civilians from taking up arms and convince existing insurgents to lay down theirs, the standard coercive bargaining tools still apply – raise the costs of rebellion through punishment, increase the benefits of non-rebellion through protection and rewards. A reliance on indiscriminate counterinsurgency tactics complicates such efforts by decoupling punishment from a target’s behavior. When government violence ensnares civilians along with insurgents, staying neutral can become as costly as fighting, and incentives to cooperate with the government rapidly disappear.

Finally, indiscriminate violence can potentially multiply the grievances that cause many to rebel. Much of the insurgent activity and terrorism that takes place in the world is based simply on retribution for perceived wrongs. Sometimes, as in the case of the Zapatistas in Chiapas in the 1990s, these grievances are tangible, material and open to accommodation. In other instances, such as Oum Shinrikyo’s desire to end all life on earth, no amount of reward or punishment is likely to deter terrorist violence.
The bulk of the violence directed against the Russian state from within its borders is driven not by religious issues. It does not need to be. Much of it is driven by things within the power of the Russian government to change: by a strong desire for retribution for Russian abuses, or by a sense of hopelessness and boredom (“better to die in battle against Russians than to suffer”). Only if Russia confronts these realities head on will it be able to undermine the grievances that produce and more importantly, reproduce insurgent violence.
Table 1: Breakdown of North Caucasus Violence by Type, 2000-2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Islamist</th>
<th>Nationalist</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expansive</td>
<td>1772 (18.8%)</td>
<td>6260 (66.7%)</td>
<td>1373 (14.6%)</td>
<td>9405 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>1570 (16.7%)</td>
<td>6292 (66.9%)</td>
<td>1543 (16.4%)</td>
<td>9405 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>334 (8.6%)</td>
<td>6135 (75%)</td>
<td>1543 (16.4%)</td>
<td>9405 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target-based</td>
<td>241 (2.6%)</td>
<td>7004 (74.5%)</td>
<td>2160 (23%)</td>
<td>9405 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Distribution of insurgent attacks by type of motivation and by region (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oblast</th>
<th>Nationalist</th>
<th>Islamist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chechnya</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagestan</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingushetia</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stavropol</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabardino-Balkaria</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krasnodar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Ossetia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karachaevo-Cherkessia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adygea</td>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Distribution of insurgent attacks by type of motivation and by dominant ethnic group in targeted village (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Nationalist</th>
<th>Islamist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chechen</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingush</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avar</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kabardin</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lak</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dargin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nogay</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Mean distance from nearest previous attack (km)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Islamist</th>
<th>Nationalist</th>
<th>KS Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expansive</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target-based</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>0.48***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: Mean number of global suicide terrorist attacks on months with insurgent activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Islamist</th>
<th>Nationalist</th>
<th>KS Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanded</td>
<td>15.69</td>
<td>14.26</td>
<td>0.07**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>15.88</td>
<td>14.26</td>
<td>0.08**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>17.67</td>
<td>14.23</td>
<td>0.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target-based</td>
<td>14.42</td>
<td>14.43</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Mean increase in insurgent violence on Muslim holidays (percent change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Islamist</th>
<th>Nationalist</th>
<th>KS Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanded</td>
<td>10.59</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>0.02***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>0.02***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>25.67</td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>0.03***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target-based</td>
<td>73.16</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.03***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Relative advantage of selective tactics over indiscriminate tactics in suppressing insurgent attacks (percent change in subsequent insurgent violence, lower numbers indicate greater advantage)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Islamist</th>
<th>Nationalist</th>
<th>KS Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expanded</td>
<td>-43.69</td>
<td>-55.30</td>
<td>.99***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>-44.35</td>
<td>-55.26</td>
<td>.99***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>-42.28</td>
<td>-54.41</td>
<td>.99***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target-based</td>
<td>-37.39</td>
<td>-54.58</td>
<td>.99***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers represent percent change in number of insurgent attacks (in the twelve weeks after a counterinsurgency operation) associated with switching from indiscriminate to selective tactics. KS test statistics calculated through bootstrapping.
Table 8: Empirical determinants of insurgent violence (I: Islamist, N: nationalist). Horizontal bars are 95% confidence intervals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Counterfactual</th>
<th>Percent change in probability of insurgent attack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global suicide terrorism</td>
<td>An increase from 0 (1st percentile) to 12 (99th percentile) global suicide terrorist attacks in previous week</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious calendar</td>
<td>A change in calendar date from non-holiday to a Muslim holiday.</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of neighboring insurgent attacks</td>
<td>An increase from 0 (1st percentile) to 8 (99th percentile) attacks in neighboring districts in previous week</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rough terrain (elevation)</td>
<td>An increase from -15 (1st percentile) to 1951 (99th percentile) meters</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>An increase from 10 (1st percentile) to 9446 (99th percentile) residents per square km</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military presence</td>
<td>An increase from 0 (1st percentile) to 145 (99th percentile) km to nearest military base</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>An increase from 3 (1st percentile) to 201 (99th percentile) km to nearest refugee camp</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance to intl. border crossing</td>
<td>An increase from 28 (1st percentile) to 500 (99th percentile) km to nearest international border crossing</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent fluent Russian speakers</td>
<td>An increase from 31 (1st percentile) to 95 (99th percentile) percent Russian-speaking</td>
<td><img src="N" alt="Cell" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Deportation in 1944

An increase from 0 (1st percentile) to 100 (99th percentile) percent deported

Forest

An increase from 0 (1st percentile) to 91 (99th percentile) percent forest cover

Table 9: Counterinsurgency tactics and insurgent violence (I: Islamist, N: nationalist). Horizontal bars are 95% confidence intervals.⁵⁶

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Counterfactual</th>
<th>Percent change in incidence of insurgent attack</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counterinsurgency tactics</td>
<td>Russian security services switch from indiscriminate to selective tactics</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph showing percent change in incidence of insurgent attack" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵⁶ Coarsened exact matching results reported, due to the conservative nature of these results (greatest improvement in balance). All other matching results and diagnostic results are provided in the online appendix [LINK].
Figure 1: Four-tiered typology of Islamist Violence
Figure 2: Islamist violence as percentage of overall insurgent violence, 2001–2012