

External Support in Civil War Onset: Sri Lankan Context¹

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Abstract

Did external support to Tamil rebels mark the onset of the three-decade civil war in Sri Lanka? Previous studies present burgeoning population, ethnic demographic imbalances, and discrimination against the Tamil community, and the demand for greater autonomy by Tamil politicians in the North-East region (Sons of the Soil) as the determinant factors of the Sri Lankan Civil War. This study, on the contrary, utilizing a dataset comprising 49 instances of civil war events in Sri Lanka from 1960 to 2009, argues that external support was the likely determinant for the outbreak of war. The material, political, moral, training, and geographic support by the Government of India starting in the late 1970s changed the balance of power and bolstered the rebels to escalate the conflict to a war. Despite statistical insignificance, external support and civil war onset are positively correlated, suggesting future potential to refine the study.

Keywords: Sri Lankan Civil War, Civil Wars, External Support.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2025 International Studies Association–Midwest Conference in St. Louis, Missouri. This manuscript remains a working paper.

Introduction

What is the ultimate factor that triggered the Sri Lankan civil war? Contextually, the catalyst of the Sri Lankan civil war is marked by the communal violence that erupted following the killings of 13 Army soldiers in the northern region city of Jaffna by a Tamil rebel group on 23 July 1983 (Moorcraft 2013). One significant question begs examination is why the communal violence in 1983 escalated to a civil war. This paper argues that despite the continued sociopolitical reconciliatory efforts between successive governments of Sri Lanka and the Tamil political parties for nearly 25 years (before 1983), the external support to these rebels, which changed the balance of power, is likely to have triggered the thirty-year protracted conflict.

The Correlate of War (COW) Typology of War defines civil war as military actions involving internal to the metropole (central government) of a state (system member), that involves a total of at least 1,000 battle-deaths during each year of the war ("COW War Data, 1816 – 2007 (v4.0) – Correlates of War" 2023). External support in civil wars encompasses a broad spectrum of assistance provided to warring parties, including direct military intervention, weapons, training, funds, safe havens, intelligence, logistics, and other critical resources by external actors, influencing the dynamics, such as conflict onset, escalation, duration, outcome, and negotiations (Gillespie 1992).

Sri Lanka serves as a widely explored testbed in civil war scholarship, with numerous studies examining the sociopolitical and economic determinants of the country's civil war. Cultural factors encompass a burgeoning population, ethnic demographic imbalances, and discrimination against the Tamil community (Fearon and Laitin 2011; Taras and Ganguly 2015). Political factors involve the demand for greater autonomy by Tamil politicians in the

North-East region (Sons of soil), exclusionary language policies, and external interventions (Fearon and Laitin 2011; Moorcraft 2013; Hashim 2013; De Silva 2012). Economic considerations mainly focus on the strain on the declining welfare economy due to a growing population (De Silva 2012). While existing studies often take a cross-sectional large-N approach, there is a dearth of country-specific studies examining onset of war. In light of this gap, this paper aims to conduct a single-country-focused statistical study by thickening the thin concepts to identify the probable determinant of the Sri Lankan civil war.

Accordingly, this study employs the logistic regression method to elucidate the impact of external support on increasing the probability of civil war onset. Utilizing a dataset comprising 49 instances of civil war events in Sri Lanka from 1960 to 2009 (the year the war ended), the study aims to discern the correlation, particularly in light of changes in the balance of capabilities of Tamil rebels with external support from the Indian Government.

However, following statistical analysis, the coefficient is not statistically significant despite observing a positive correlation between civil war and external support. Additionally, the controlled variables also show no statistical significance. Nevertheless, this suggests that the study could benefit from further refinement in the future.

The paper begins by offering a concise context of the conflict. Subsequently, a literature review synthesizes existing scholarship on civil war and the determinants of the Sri Lankan conflict. The third section of the paper explains the research design. Next the empirical analysis presents the statistical findings of the determinants of the Sri Lankan conflict. The paper concludes by summarizing the findings and recommending the avenues for future research.

Background to the Conflict

The Sri Lankan civil war erupted on 23 July 1983 when Tamil rebels attacked a military convoy, killing 13 Sri Lankan Army troops in the Northern Region city of Jaffna (De Silva 2012; Moorcraft 2013; Hashim 2013). This attack spurred communal violence in most parts of the rest of the country, especially in the suburbs of the capital, Colombo. The civil war lasted nearly three decades, and the roots of the conflict date back to the pre-independence era. Historical events and internal and external factors contributed to the outbreak of the civil war.

History and Demographics

Historically known as Ceylon, Sri Lanka has a diverse and multi-religious population of nearly twenty-two million. The island's strategic significance, owing to its geographic location – between the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea - and deep harbors, has been evident since the ancient Silk Road trade route and continues to date (De Silva and de Silva 1981). However, its pivotal location as a major trading hub brought both prosperity and challenges. Throughout its existence, the island faced invasions, including prehistoric encounters with Southern Indian Dravidian invaders and later colonization by European powers. From 1505 to 1805, Ceylon was colonized by the Portuguese and Dutch, with English colonial rule lasting from 1815 to 1948 (De Silva and de Silva 1981).

The early 20th century witnessed a national movement for political independence, leading to Ceylon attaining dominion status in 1948 and subsequently becoming the Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972. Even today, Sri Lanka's destiny remains intricately tied to its geography. Positioned strategically, the country holds a significant role in the current geopolitics of the Indian Ocean.

Like geography, its multiculturalism has brought harmony and tensions to the social fabric. Sri Lanka's population is characterized by a diverse ethnic composition, with the majority being Sinhalese, constituting around 74%. The Tamil community, comprising both Sri Lankan Tamils (approximately 11%) and Indian Tamils (about 4%), adds to the rich cultural tapestry. Moors, predominantly Muslims, make up around 9%, while Burghers and Malays contribute around 0.2% each. Various smaller indigenous communities form the remaining percentage (Hashim 2013). The geography and the demography shaped the political landscape of the country.

Internal Socio-Political Factors of the Civil War

Internally, policies perceived as detrimental to social cohesion were introduced by the government from the 1950s to the 1960s. Most significantly, the complicity of both Tamil and Sinhala political elites in exploiting these simmering tensions for their respective political gains triggered a conflict spiral. This transitioned from aspirations of greater integrity to demands for greater autonomy, then evolved into calls for Federalism, ultimately culminating in separatism by armed rebels, setting the stage for the civil war.

The attainment of independence from British rule represents a pivotal moment in Sri Lankan history. While the sense of independence served to unite society, it also introduced divisions, particularly within the political elite. The first President of the Ceylon National Congress from 1917 to 1922, a Tamil leading the country's independence movement, exemplified harmony during that period (De Silva and de Silva 1981). However, signs of discord began to emerge in the political landscape during the same march to independence.

The first recorded incident occurred when a commission, headed by Lord Saulsbury (the Governor-General), was appointed by the British Government in the mid-1940s to explore

granting independence to Ceylon. The leader of the Tamil Congress Party requested parity of representation in the national legislature, a request rejected by the commission (De Silva and de Silva 1981). Despite this sudden spike in Tamil nationalism, the political elites of the two communities navigated the country to a rare peaceful independence in 1948, unlike many other colonial transitions, including neighboring India, which incurred massive human costs. The second instance unfolded in post-independence, in 1951 when the newly established Tamil United Front (the breakaway party from the conservative Tamil Congress party) publicly declared during a national convention for a 'separate Tamil Homeland' based on their distinct historical past (De Silva and de Silva 1981; Chandraprema 2012).

Similar to the rise of Tamil nationalism, there was a corresponding rising wave of Sinhalese nationalism during the same period. The toxic political landscape was exploited by Mr. SWRD Bandaranayake, who broke away from the existing government and got elected to the Premiership, with one of the election manifestos being making Sinhala the official language (De Silva and de Silva 1981; Hashim 2013; Chandraprema 2012). This led to the third and most detrimental incident of the introduction of the National Language Act, declaring Sinhala as the country's official language. The implementation of the Sinhala official language policy intensified the sense of grievance among the Tamil population, who perceived their language, culture, and economic position to be discriminating and marginalizing (Fearon and Laitin 2011; De Silva 2012; Chandraprema 2012; Hashim 2013; Moorcraft 2013).

The unexpected resistance to the policy compelled Prime Minister Bandaranayake to amend the controversial Act and introduce language reforms. After negotiations between Tamil political parties and successive governments, the controversial act was abolished in 1977, and the Tamil language was acknowledged as the country's official language and granted equal status with the Sinhala language. Consequently, the 1978 Sri Lanka constitution read: (1) The

official language of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala, (2) Tamil shall also be an official language, (4) English shall be the link language, (3) the national languages of Sri Lanka shall be Sinhala and Tamil (“1978ConstitutionWithoutAmendments.Pdf,” n.d.). Accordingly, the constitutional amendment of 1978 brought the language in full circle: from ‘English Only’ under colonial rule to ‘Sinhala and Tamil’ from 1944 to 1956, to ‘Sinhala Only’ from 1956 to 1978, and on to ‘Sinhala and Tamil along with English’ from 1978 onwards. Much of the ambiguity in the language law, and hence in the official language policy, had been settled with the Constitution of 1978 (De Silva 2012).

Despite language reforms, demographic tensions continued to simmer. The primary sociocultural factor exploited by political elites was the demographic dispersion, specifically the concentration of Tamil communities in the Northern region of the country. This demographic reality gave rise to the ideology of greater autonomy for Tamil-majority regions through a Federal State solution (De Silva 2012; Hashim 2013; Chandraprema 2012). Over time, this ideology escalated to the secessionist aspiration of establishing a separate "Tamil Homeland," championed by rebel groups and the Tamil political elites.

Despite reconciliatory efforts for autonomy and power devolution in Tamil regions following the constitutional reforms in 1978, rebel groups with secessionist ideologies emerged among the Tamil population in the early 1970s. However, these ill-equipped rebels were initially incapable of unleashing armed conflict due to their limited capabilities. The shift of balance of power changed with external support from the Indian government in the mid-1970s, which involved arming, training, and providing a safe haven to the rebels.

The External Factors of the Civil War

Externally, the influence of post-colonial revolutionary wars erupting in other parts of the world and Superpower interventions during the Cold War era provided hope and emboldened Tamil rebels to pursue armed rebellion against the Sri Lankan government (De Silva 2012). However, the Indian intervention is likely to be perceived as the decisive factor for the onset of the civil war in 1983.

The overt training and arming of Tamil rebels by Indian intelligence services from the 1970s significantly reduced asymmetry in combat capability between the rebels and the Sri Lankan government military and instilled confidence to launch the armed conflict in 1983, which denotes the onset of the war (Selvadurai and Smith 2013; Hashim 2013; De Silva 2012; Chandraprema 2012; Moorcraft 2013). Furthermore, the intervention of the Indian Government (Dixit 2004) in Sri Lankan military operations in 1987, which prevented the apprehension of the rebel leader, prolonged the civil war for another twenty-two years (De Silva 2012; Hashim 2013; Chandraprema 2012). Conversely, the termination of support to the rebels following the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi by the LTTE in 1991 profoundly affected the war's termination in 2009. Therefore, external support was crucial in determining the onset, escalation, duration, and termination of Sri Lanka's civil war.

This Indian intervention was characterized by Tamil nationalism simmering in the Southern regions of India, sociocultural affiliations between the people of the Southern state of Tamil Nadu and the Northern region of Sri Lanka, and the geopolitical interests of the central Indian government at that time (Selvadurai and Smith 2013; De Silva 2012). The external factors, therefore, played a critical role in shaping the dynamics of the conflict, contributing to its onset, prolongation, and complex resolution.

The civil war terminated in May 2009 with the military defeat of the dominant Tamil rebel group - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Understanding the contributing factors in context provides insight into the determinants of the nearly thirty-year civil war, revealing the intricate interplay of historical, political, and social dynamics that led to such a prolonged and devastating conflict.

Literature Review

There are three approaches utilized in civil war scholarship in explaining the causes of intrastate wars – greed, grievance, and opportunity. However, most statistical studies have modeled civil wars on social, political, and economic approaches rather than greed, grievance, and opportunity models (Kisangani 2013).

First, the social factors consider nature of the country and society (Kisangani 2013). In addition, countries with increasing populations but limited in resources are also prone to conflicts. Ethnic dimension of civil wars is another social factor that attributes to civil war. Horowitz (1983) contends that severe conflicts are most likely to occur in countries where a substantial ethnic minority faces an ethnic majority that, due to ethnic voting patterns, can consistently win in national elections. The nationalist perspective (Connor 1973; Taras and Ganguly 2015) suggests that long-standing cultural differences increase the likelihood of conflicts.

Discrimination along cultural lines has given rise to numerous hypotheses in civil war scholarship. One study posits that political democracy and civil liberties are associated with lower risks of civil war onset (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Another hypothesis suggests that policies favoring specific language or religion may raise the risk of civil war onset in states with religious or linguistic minorities. Income inequality is also considered, with the arguments that greater income inequality is linked to a higher risk of civil war onset. However, after testing these hypotheses, Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that ethnicity is not the root cause of conflicts where fighters are mobilized along ethnic lines. Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that the factors that explain which countries have been at risk for civil war are not their ethnic or religious characteristics but rather the conditions that favor insurgency. These include

poverty—which marks financially and bureaucratically weak states and also favors rebel recruitment—political instability, rough terrain, and large populations. Walter (2022) contributes to this discourse by introducing another dimension to the ethnicity debate. Walter (2022) proposes that countries with fractional political parties aligning along ethnic, religious, or racial identities, rather than political ideology, and seeking to rule at the expense of others are more prone to conflicts, a concept known as factionalism (Walter 2022). In such situations, where competing groups are of equal size, the balance of power creates intense rivalry.

In sum, civil wars result from many social factors. Ethnic dimensions play a crucial role, with Horowitz (1983) highlighting the likelihood of severe conflicts in countries where ethnic minorities face electoral challenges due to voting patterns. The nationalist perspective (Connor 1973; Taras and Ganguly 2015) argues that cultural differences contribute to conflicts. Fearon and Laitin (2003) contend that insurgency is not solely rooted in ethnic or religious characteristics but is influenced by broader conditions like poverty, political instability, rough terrain, and large populations. Walter (2022) introduces the concept of factionalism, asserting that countries with fractional political parties aligned along ethnic, religious, or racial lines, rather than political ideology, are more susceptible to conflicts, particularly when competing groups are of equal size, intensifying rivalry and fostering civil wars.

The second approach is the political factors that attribute to civil wars. These consist of political repression (Collier and Hoeffler 2004a; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Lopez and Johnson 2020), exclusionary politics (Collier and Hoeffler 2004a), and economic disparities (Fearon and Laitin 2003) stand out as key dimensions. Political repression (Collier and Hoeffler 2004a; Lopez and Johnson 2020) is identified as a potential cause of conflict, with political exclusion rooted in ethnic allegiance becoming a prominent concern when one ethnic group holds a majority. This phenomenon, termed "ethnic dominance," accentuates the vulnerability of

minorities, especially when the largest group forms a slim majority (Collier and Hoeffler 2004). Conflict stemming from political exclusion becomes more probable when the largest ethnic group constitutes between 45% - 90% of the population.

Economic inequality (Fearon and Laitin 2003) further contributes to political factors, acting as a catalyst for rebellion among the impoverished seeking retribution and potentially leading affluent regions to engage in pre-emptive secessionist rebellions. However, not all identified factors hold equal weight in causing civil wars. Notably, only "ethnic dominance" consistently demonstrates adverse effects, suggesting a nuanced interplay between various grievances. Walter (2022) highlights ethnic entrepreneurs, often those at risk of losing or recently losing power, as potential instigators of war. The trajectory of political status for disgruntled ethnic groups in fractionalized anocracies plays a crucial role, especially when groups known as the "sons of the soil," (Fearon and Laitin 2011) perceive a loss of power. In democracies, demographic changes, such as migration and birth rate differences, can lead to the downgrading of certain groups. Another contributing factor is the loss of faith in the existing system, creating a vacuum that extremists may exploit to offer alternative narratives.

The third is the economic factors attributed to civil wars. The economic model investigates factors that either encourage or discourage rebellion, shedding light on what strengthens rebels and fortifies states. Two prominent schools of thought emerge within the economic model. Collier et al. (2003) concentrates on rebel organizations, examining both economic and institutional standpoints. In contrast, Fearon and Laitin (2003) emphasize the relative weakness of the state compared to the strength of rebel groups. Collier et al. (2003) argue that not all states face an equal likelihood of experiencing civil wars. Underdeveloped states characterized by high inequality, low economic growth, and dependence on raw material exports stand out as particularly susceptible to prolonged conflict. The study assumes that

rebels, driven by self-interest, are more likely to pursue narrow group interests than the broader benefit of the population. From an institutional perspective, conditions essential for conflict escalation involve recruitment, maintaining cohesion, acquiring equipment, survival, and financing (Collier and Hoeffler 2004a; Collier and Sambanis 2005; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Gillespie 1992). Recruitment is facilitated by a pool of young, uneducated, and susceptible individuals, including those seeking revenge, psychopaths, or individuals coerced into fighting. Cohesion is achieved through charismatic leadership and ethnic/clan ties. The end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's collapse are identified as pivotal moments that opened avenues for rebels to acquire potent military equipment. Financing mechanisms include resource extortion, state sponsorship, and diaspora contributions. The Fearon and Laitin (2003) model delves into opportunities arising from weak states. Factors such as recent independence, political instability, anocracy, large populations, naturally protected bases, foreign government and diaspora support, and valuable yet lightweight natural resources for financing contribute to the potency of rebels. Consequently, the more feasible rebel operations and the weaker the state, the higher the probability of insurgency or civil war.

Consequently, civil wars are more likely to escalate and prolong in weak states with poor economies, pronounced inequalities, and social structures revolving around two or three large ethnic groups.

In addition to social, political, and military factors, external support emerges as another significant factor determining civil wars. Scholars like Salehyan (2009) and Hironaka (2005) argue that many internal wars are not purely internal but involve external elements. Rebels utilize bases in adjacent countries and may receive support from interstate rivals exploiting domestic distance as a proxy for interstate conflict. Insurgents leverage refugee camps and diaspora networks to mobilize support and recruit manpower. A permissive regional

opportunity structure provides rebels with greater incentives to challenge regimes they aim to change or overthrow. Sambanis et.al. (2020) contend that foreign patrons empower local actors representing various groups to pursue their goals through violent means. Consequently, this dynamic heightens the significance of ethnic identity and fosters polarization. In the absence of the perceived threat of intervention, polarization alone is often inadequate to spark conflict. Conversely, without polarization, intervention lacks the capacity to incite war.

In the Sri Lankan context, the outbreak of the civil war may have been influenced more significantly by external support than by other socioeconomic and political factors. Although socioeconomic and political tensions had persisted since pre-independence in 1948, it was during the early 1980s, following the intervention of the Indian Government, that militants took a decisive stance by confronting the Sri Lankan military. Consequently, it is plausible to consider Indian support to Tamil rebels, which changed the balance of power, as a pivotal factor contributing to the onset of the civil war in Sri Lanka.

The socio-economic and political reasons for the Sri Lankan civil war consist of factors such as ethnic tensions, historical grievances, and political considerations. The conflict was influenced by factors such as ethnic demographics, economic disparities, and competing nationalist ideologies. The Tamil people's historical grievances, from perceived discrimination and exclusion to the demand for regional autonomy, also played a significant role. Socioeconomic factors such as relative deprivation, political instability, and poverty, as well as the impact of Sinhalese colonization of Tamil-populated regions, contributed to the conflict. The language laws and quotas for government jobs that affected Tamils further exacerbated the tension.

Additionally, external interventions, including support for opposition groups and the availability of bases for Tamil insurgents in neighboring countries, influenced the duration and

intensity of the conflict. The proximity of India, particularly southern India, also impacted the political, social, economic, religious, and cultural development of Sri Lanka. In addition to cultural affinity and providing sanctuary in the Southern Indian State of Tamil Nadu, the external intervention led to ethnic polarization.

The hypothesis thus is:

Hypothesis 1: The external support to Tamil rebels by the Indian Government is likely to have increased the possibility of the outbreak of the Sri Lankan civil war.

Research Design

This study intends to evaluate the impact of external support to Sri Lankan militants on increasing the probability of the outbreak of civil war. To assess these factors on the likelihood of civil war, this study employs a small-N (N=50) aggregated a single country (Sri Lanka) year dataset of the presence and absence of Sri Lankan civil war on a yearly basis from 1960 to 2009. It consists of data from the COW dataset, Polity V, the World Bank dataset, Harvard's Historical Index of Ethnic Fractionalization Dataset (HIEF), and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). The COW project will provide conflict start date/s and external support. The Polity V dataset will provide democratic and autocratic features of Sri Lanka, the demographic data is from the World Bank while UCDP determines the external support and HIFE provides fractionalization data. The aggregated dataset began in 1960, as the earliest demographic data of Sri Lanka from the World Bank commenced in 1960. The data ends in 2009 as the conflict ended in 2009. The study utilizes Logistic regression methodology for the analysis.

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Observations
Lag Civil War	.41	.49	0	1	50
External Support	.3	.46	0	1	50
PolityV	6.06	1.15	5	8	50
GDP Growth - Annual	4.63	1.89	-1.55	7.72	50
Population Density	249.06	50.89	159.83	326.62	50
Diaspora Migration	-.24	.15	-.51	.02	50
Fractionalization	.39	.04	.33	.45	50
Population Growth-Annual	1.52	.59	.57	2.41	50
Fractionalization*Population Growth	.61	.29	.2	1.09	50

Dependent Variable: Lag Civil War

The dependent variable is the *Lag Civil War*, a dichotomous variable represented by *lag_civil_war* in the aggregated dataset where “1” denotes presence and “0” denotes all other outcomes. This study utilizes an explanation of COW defining civil war as any armed conflict that involves; (1) military action internal to the metropole of the state system members (2) the active participation of national government; (3) effective resistance by both sides; (4) a total of at least 1,000 battle deaths during each year of the war (“COW War Data, 1816 – 2007 (v4.0) – Correlates of War” 2023). It counts an approximate average possibility of .41, with a maximum of 1, a minimum of 0, and a standard deviation of .50. The distribution is limited to the score of 1 or 0.

Independent Variable: External Support

The independent variable, *External Support*, is a dichotomous variable operationalized using UCDP dataset. External support is defined as ‘support to a non-state warring party that is given to assist it in an ongoing conflict’ (“UCDP - Uppsala Conflict Data Program” 2023). The data are restricted to non-warring support, meaning that the externally supporting actor is not involved with own troops, but provides other forms of support to the warring party. The non-warring support can take a variety of forms, including the provision of sanctuary, financial assistance, logistics and military support short of troops. Actors providing external support to a warring party can be governments, either the national government or foreign governments, as well as groups residing in or outside the country in which the non-state conflict is taking place. The party providing the support should be a state or an organization (in the widest sense of the term) and not an individual. Variable external support has a standard deviation of approximately .46 with a maximum of 1 to a minimum of 0 and a mean of approximately .3.

Controlled Variables

Besides external support, there are other socioeconomic and political determinants of civil war. A country's status of governance (autocracy to democracy), economic prosperity, demographics such as population and social factors such as fractionalization have had positive correlations to civil war (Cunningham 2013; Kisangani 2013; Collier and Hoeffler 2004b; Fearon and Laitin 2011).

Furthermore, previous studies have found that state capacity is positively correlated to civil war (Cunningham 2013). The state capacity is measured using gross domestic product growth (GDP growth) through World Bank Dataset ("DataBank | The World Bank," n.d.). Stronger states are more effective at repressing violent opposition.

The variations in *the governance status* are autocracy, anocracy, and democracy, which are measured utilizing the polity score of the Polity V dataset. Anocracy is given as one of the best predictors of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Walter 2022). When countries move towards or away from democracies, they are prone to civil wars (Gurr 1993; Walter 2022). This study utilizes the polity score in the Polity V dataset to measure the *status of the governance* (Gurr 1993; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Walter 2022). Polity V is interested in the durability of different types of governments and their political institutions, focusing heavily on the democratic and autocratic features of a country. It is a 21-point interval variable where the scale ranges from -10 (most autocratic) to +10 (most democratic). Countries are called fully democratic if they fall under the score between +6 and +10. A country within the range of +6 and +10 is considered to have its national elections certified as "free and fair," no important social groups are systematically left out of the political process, and major political parties are stable and based on the mass national constituency. Therefore, *the status of governance*

operationalized through the polity score of the Polity V dataset should capture the variation in this independent variable.

Another factor that impacts civil war onset is state capacity (GDP growth) (Cunningham 2013). Greater state capacity is associated with a lower chance of civil war over self-determination. Annual percentage of growth rate of GDP at market prices based on constant local currency. An economy's growth is measured by the change in the volume of its output or the real incomes of its residents ("DataBank | The World Bank," n.d.). The different effect on civil war might suggest that stronger states are more effective at repressing violent opposition.

Large and populous countries with young and urbanized populations have an increased probability of experiencing internal wars and even potential separatism (Kisangani 2013). Accordingly, density of population becomes another determinant of civil war. Population density is midyear population divided by land area in square kilometers ("DataBank | The World Bank," n.d.). This ratio can be calculated for any territorial unit for any point in time, depending on the source of the population data. Population pressure on natural renewable resources makes societies prone to conflict.

Rebel financing from the diaspora also decides the probability of the outbreak of civil war. Diaspora is proxied through the emigrant population (Collier and Hoeffler 2004b). Net migration is the net total of migrants during the period, that is, the number of immigrants minus the number of emigrants, including both citizens and noncitizens ("DataBank | The World Bank," n.d.). The diaspora population increases the rebel funding, which in turn increases the opportunity probability for civil war.

Another deciding factor of civil war is social cohesion. Ethnic, religious, and linguistic hatred are widely perceived as a cause of civil conflicts. They can occur in multi-ethnic or multi-religious communities (Collier and Hoeffler 2004b). Accordingly, Ethno-linguistic fractionalization is used to measure ethnic diversity. This measures the probability that two randomly drawn people will be from different ethnic groups. The ethnic fractionalization index ranges from 0, when there is no ethnic fractionalization and all individuals are members of the same ethnic group to 1, when each individual belongs to his or her own ethnic group (Drazanova 2020).

Methods

Several methodological issues should be addressed before discussing the results because this paper uses logistics regression to analyze data. For unbiased, efficient, and consistent estimates, several assumptions should be satisfied (Gujarati and Porter 2009a; Kennedy 1998; Lewis-Beck and Lewis-Beck 2015).

At the very onset, since the regressand is a dichotomous variable, this paper utilizes Logistic Regression. The logit models give non-linear probability estimates. Thus, this study cannot use the OLS procedure for estimates. Dichotomous variables present several problems, which limit the use of OLS.

The assumption of normality for residual is not tenable for the dichotomous variables as the residual disturbances also take only two values; they also follow the Bernoulli distribution (Gujarati and Porter 2009b). Another concern is the Heteroscedastic variance of disturbance. Given the Bernoulli distribution, the variance of error term in logit model is heteroscedastic. Nonfulfillment of estimates between 0 and 1 is another limitation. Since the regressand in the Linear Probability Model (LPM) measures conditional probability of the event Y occurring

given X, the estimators might not necessarily fulfill this restriction. This is a problem with the OLS estimation of the LPM. Furthermore, R^2 becomes questionable as a measurement of goodness of fit. The conventionally computed R^2 is of limited value in the dichotomous response model.

As expected, the model did not produce meaningful results during the robustness checks for the abovementioned assumptions. However, the model was checked for the fourth assumption - endogeneity, and the fifth assumption - multicollinearity. During the endogeneity check, the P value of residual was statistically not significant, thus accepting the null hypothesis of no endogeneity.

The final assumptions are that the number of observations exceeds the number of X variables and that no exact linear relationships exist between or among the Xs (Kennedy 1998; Lewis-Beck and Lewis-Beck 2015). The violation of the assumption is multicollinearity. Multicollinearity was observed between the variables Fractionalization_PopulationGrowth and PopulationDensity through correlation check. Therefore, PopulationDensity variable was dropped from the model to prevent multicollinearity.

So far, the model has been checked for violating endogeneity and multicollinearity. The identified violations were fixed.

Empirical Analysis and Discussion

Table 2 presents our findings on the *probability of civil war onset* from the external support to civil war in Sri Lanka. Model 1 consists of the dependent variable (*lag_civil_war*) and the independent variable (*External Support*). However, the model Likelihood Ratio Chi² is not statistically significant at a 10% level. It thus does not support hypothesis 1, which asserts that the external support for LTTE increased the possibility of civil war onset.

TABLE 2. Regression Model of the Probability of Civil War onset in Sri Lanka.

Variables	Model 1 or base model (standard error)	Model 2 or full model (standard error)
Intercept	-.3567 (.3485)	9.0048 (4.7212)
External Support	-.0488 (.6318)	.8606 (1.7243)
Polity2		.3626 (1.2042)
Diaspora		-6.5817 (5.4338)
GDP Growth		-.7633 (.4301)
Fractionalization*Populat ion growth		-19.4062 (10.9709)
LR chi2	0.01	37.59
Pseudo R ²	0.0001	0.5763
Prob > chi ²	0.9384	0.0000
N	49	49

*p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01, one-tailed test

According to Model 1, the odds of civil war onset are 0.6 times higher for each one-unit increase in external support, holding other variables constant. The *external support* variable is not statistically significant at a 10% level.

Model 2 integrates the dependent, independent, and control variables and reflects the correlation between external support and other variables. The model's Likelihood Ratio Chi2 is not statistically significant at the 10% level. However, it explains a 57% variance in the dependent variable.

According to the full model, the odds of civil war onset are two times higher for each unit of increase in external support, holding other variables constant. However, the variable is not statically significant at a 10% level. Therefore, while there is a positive relationship between external support between external support and civil war onset, it is not statistically significant. Therefore, the impact of external support for Sri Lanka's civil war onset is not statically established in this study.

Out of the control variables, Polity2 is positively related to civil war onset. However, the variable is not statistically insignificant at a 10% level. Accordingly, the odds of civil war onset are 1.5 times higher for each one unit of increase in Polity2, holding other variables constant. Therefore, the democracy level is positively related but statistically insignificant in Sri Lankan civil war onset for this study.

The other control variable, diaspora migration, is negatively correlated to the onset of civil war. The odds of civil war onset are 0.0013 less for a one percent population increase in diaspora migration, holding other variables constant. The diaspora migration variable is also statistically insignificant at a 10% level. The probable explanation could be that there was not a

significant diaspora population at the onset of civil war in Sri Lanka in 1983. The diaspora population started to grow after the outbreak of civil war.

The odds ratio of 0.466 suggests that higher GDP growth is associated with lower odds of civil war, with an annual 1% decrease in GDP growth increasing the odds of civil war onset by a factor of approximately 0.466, holding other variables constant. The GDP Growth variable is also not statistically significant at a 10% level in this study. Therefore, the study reflects a reduction in GDP Growth in Sri Lanka at the onset of the war. However, it is not statistically significant.

The *Factionalization*PopulationGrowth* variable reflects a negative correlation with civil war onset, however, the coefficient appears unrealistic. The odds of civil war onset are $3.73e^{-9}$ less for a one unit increase in *Factionalization*PopulationGrowth*, holding other variables constant. Fractionalization is statistically significant in other studies. Therefore, refined study could indicate a different outcome for the Fractionalization variable in the Sri Lankan context.

In summary, despite the positive relationship between external support and civil onset in Sri Lanka, the statistical insignificance of the correlation does not establish the hypothesis of the study. Furthermore, there inconsistencies visible in data. Therefore, this study needs to be further refined theoretically and empirically to obtain meaningful correlations between the variables.

Conclusion

The Sri Lankan Civil War is an extensively studied intrastate conflict in Political Science and International Relations scholarship. Accordingly, there are many debates about its onset and causes. However, country-specific empirical studies about Sri Lanka are rare. Thus, this paper attempted to find out what led to the onset of civil war in 1983. As hypothesized, external support was positively correlated; however, it was not statistically significant.

These findings do not suggest foreign sponsorship has no, or merely benign, consequences for civil wars. The results are consistent with the possibility that sponsorship hastens escalation to civil war, and existing research examining variation among armed groups engaged in civil war suggests sponsorship may increase the duration and intensity of civil wars. Political or policy actions aimed at deterring or denying foreign support to armed groups is unlikely to prevent civil war, even if it does delay or reduce the carnage. To prevent civil war requires orienting international security politics and policy towards the core factors that generate political conflict in society and facilitate the organization of armed resistance.

Future research could focus on critical junctures and antecedents in addition to correlating factors adding context to the phenomenon of the relationship between external support and civil war escalation. This study encountered methodological issues resulting in unrealistic estimates for some variables. Therefore, there is all the potential to refine this study further and analyze the determinants of civil war onset.

In sum, external support to rebels is a significant factor in civil wars threat determines onset, escalation, and duration. It also remains a determinant factor of the termination of civil war. The current international security landscape suggests that scholars should continue to study and refine the research on the relationship between external support and civil war.

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