

How pro-government militia ethnic relationships influence violence against

civilians



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Yehuda Magid

yehudamagid.com

Department of Political Science
Indiana University, Bloomington

Justin Schon

justinschon.com

Department of Anthropology
University of Florida, Gainesville



ABSTRACT

How do ethnic links between governments and pro-government militias (PGMs) affect the abusive behavior of PGMs? PGMs may recruit from the ethnic group in control of the government (Dominant PGMs), from quiescent groups not in control of the government (Peripheral PGMs), and from ethnic groups actively rebelling against the government (Defector PGMs). Existing research has indicated that Defector PGMs are less likely to target civilians than non-defector PGMs, but it does not distinguish between Dominant and Peripheral PGMs. We argue that while both Dominant and Peripheral PGMs target civilians, they do so differently. Peripheral groups tend to carry out more acts of violence, but these acts tend to be of relatively low severity. In contrast, the relatively few acts of violence that Dominant PGMs perpetrate tend to be more severe. We contend that these differing patterns of violence are a product of the level of trust the government has in each type of PGM and the ability of the PGM to help the government avoid accountability for abusive behavior. Regression analysis of a global group-year dataset of PGM abuses (1989-2007) supports our theoretical arguments. Our analysis suggests that a more nuanced examination of PGM ethnic relationships can improve our understanding of PGM behavior.

THEORY

In Sum:

The ethnic ties between governments and PGMs determine 1) the ability of the government to use the PGM to avoid accountability for abusive behavior and 2) the government's ability to trust a PGM in the long-term.

Why Peripheral PGMs carry out a greater number of attacks against civilians:

Peripheral PGMs allow the government to avoid accountability for abusive behavior. The government is therefore more willing to allow these groups to regularly carry out attacks against disloyal ethnic groups. Dominant PGMs, in contrast, are likely to target civilians in times of emergency when avoiding accountability is of secondary concern.

Why Dominant groups carry out more severe attacks against civilians:

PGMs tend to rely on the government for military hardware. The government is likely to better equip those groups that it believes will remain loyal in the long-term. Governments are more likely to believe that dominant groups will remain loyal because of their shared ethnic identity. Consequently, governments are likely to better equip Dominant PGMs. As a consequence Dominant PGMs are able to inflict more damage with each attack that they perpetrate.

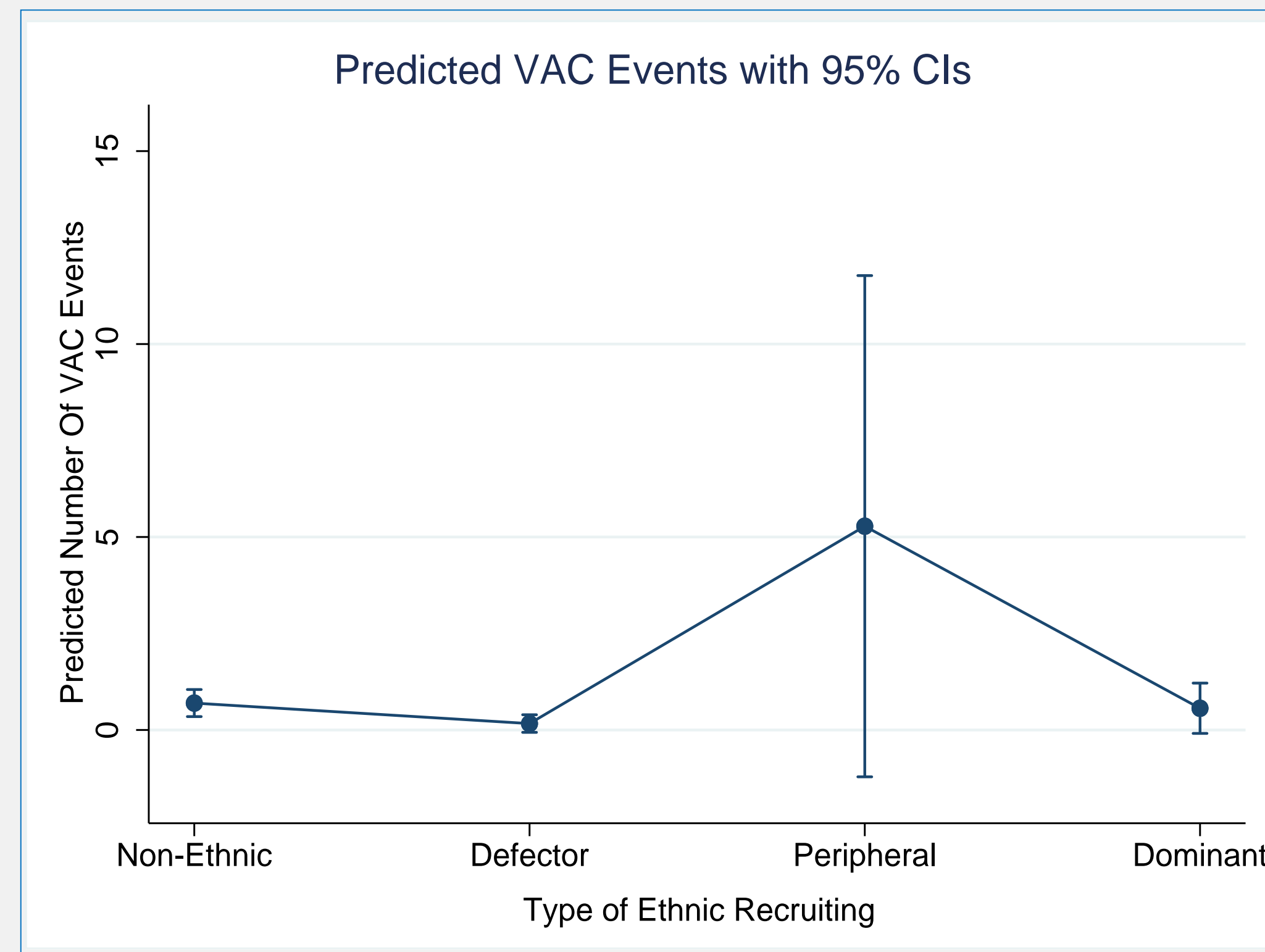
HYPOTHESES

H1: Dominant PGMs carry out fewer acts of violence against civilians than Peripheral PGMs.

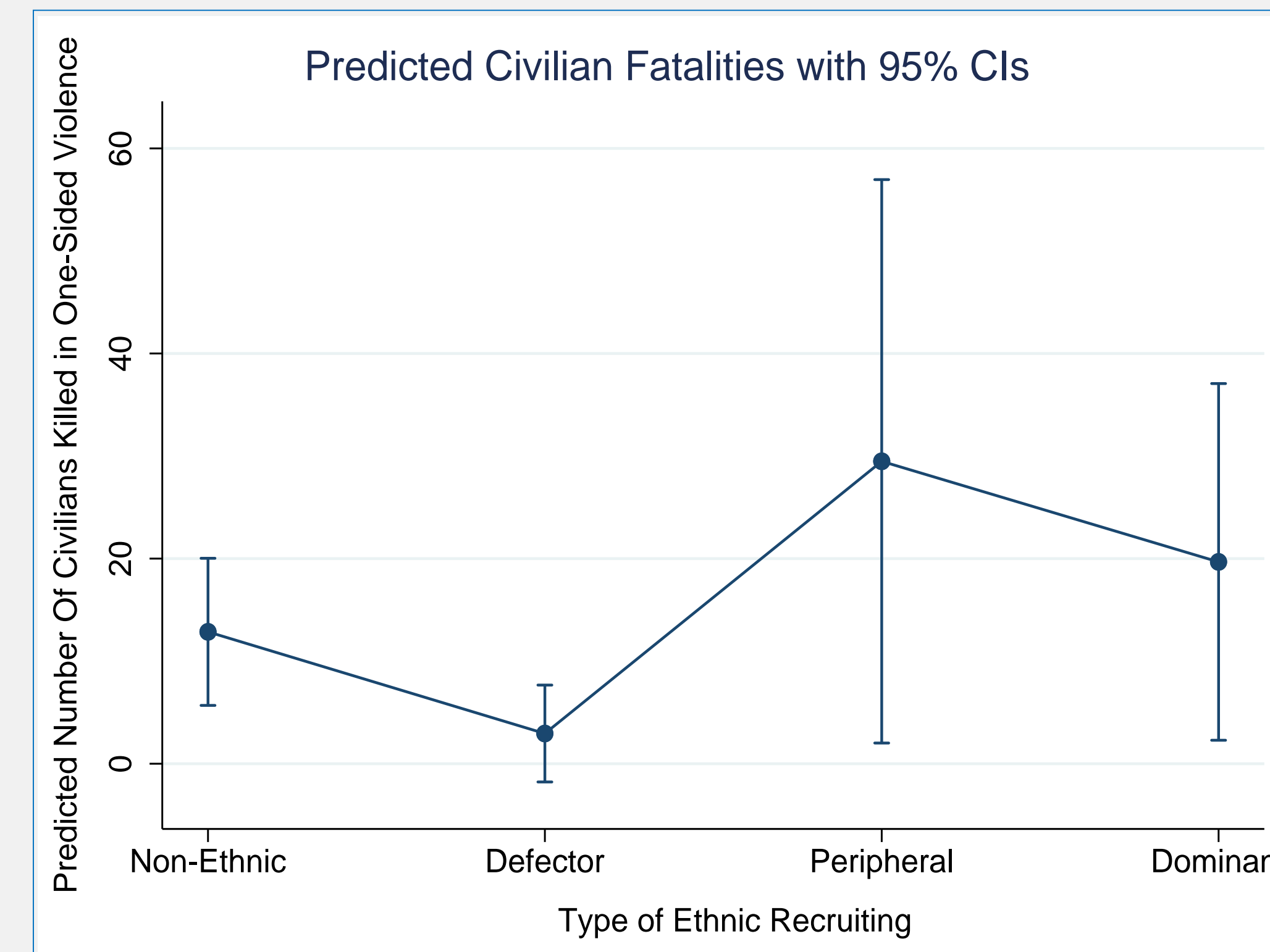
H2: Dominant PGMs kill more civilians per attack than Peripheral PGMs.

H3: Defector PGMs carry out fewer act of violence against civilians and kill fewer civilians overall than both Dominant and Peripheral PGMs.

RESULTS: NUMBER OF EVENTS



RESULTS: NUMBER OF CIVILIANS KILLED IN ONE-SIDED VIOLENCE



DISCUSSION

1. H1 is supported: Peripheral PGMs tend to carry out a greater number of attacks than both Dominant and Defector PGMs.
2. H2 is supported: Dominant PGMs carry out fewer attacks than Peripheral PGMs, but tend to kill a similar number of civilians overall.
3. H3 is supported: Consistent with existing research (Magid and Schon 2018; Stanton 2015), Defector PGMs tend to carry out fewer attacks against civilians and are likely to kill fewer civilians overall than both Peripheral and Dominant PGMs.

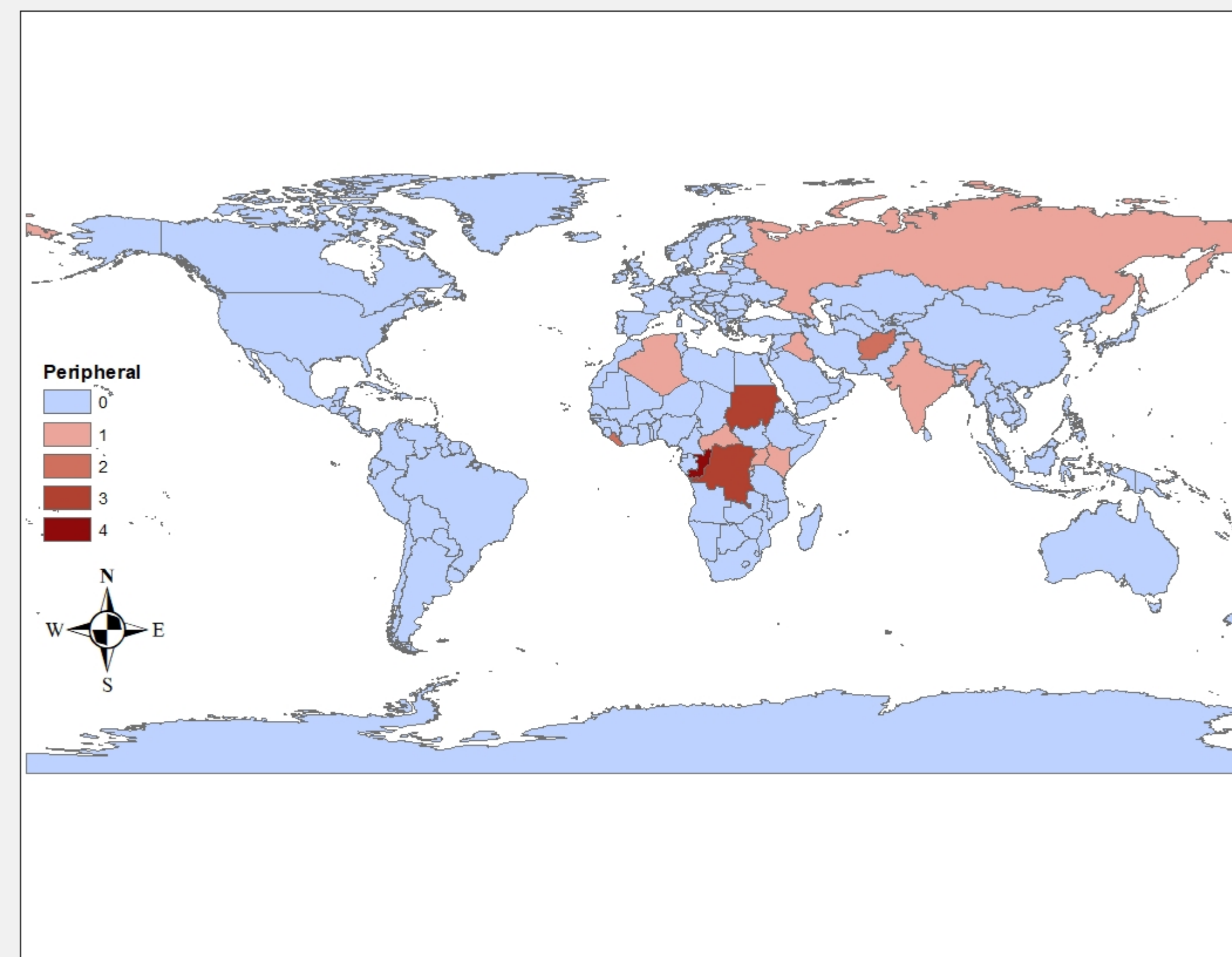
NEXT STEPS

The number of PGM-years with at least one atrocity is actually quite small. Zero-inflated negative binomial models did converge, but more than 90% of our observations have a zero in the dependent variable. We would like to consider alternative modelling strategies.

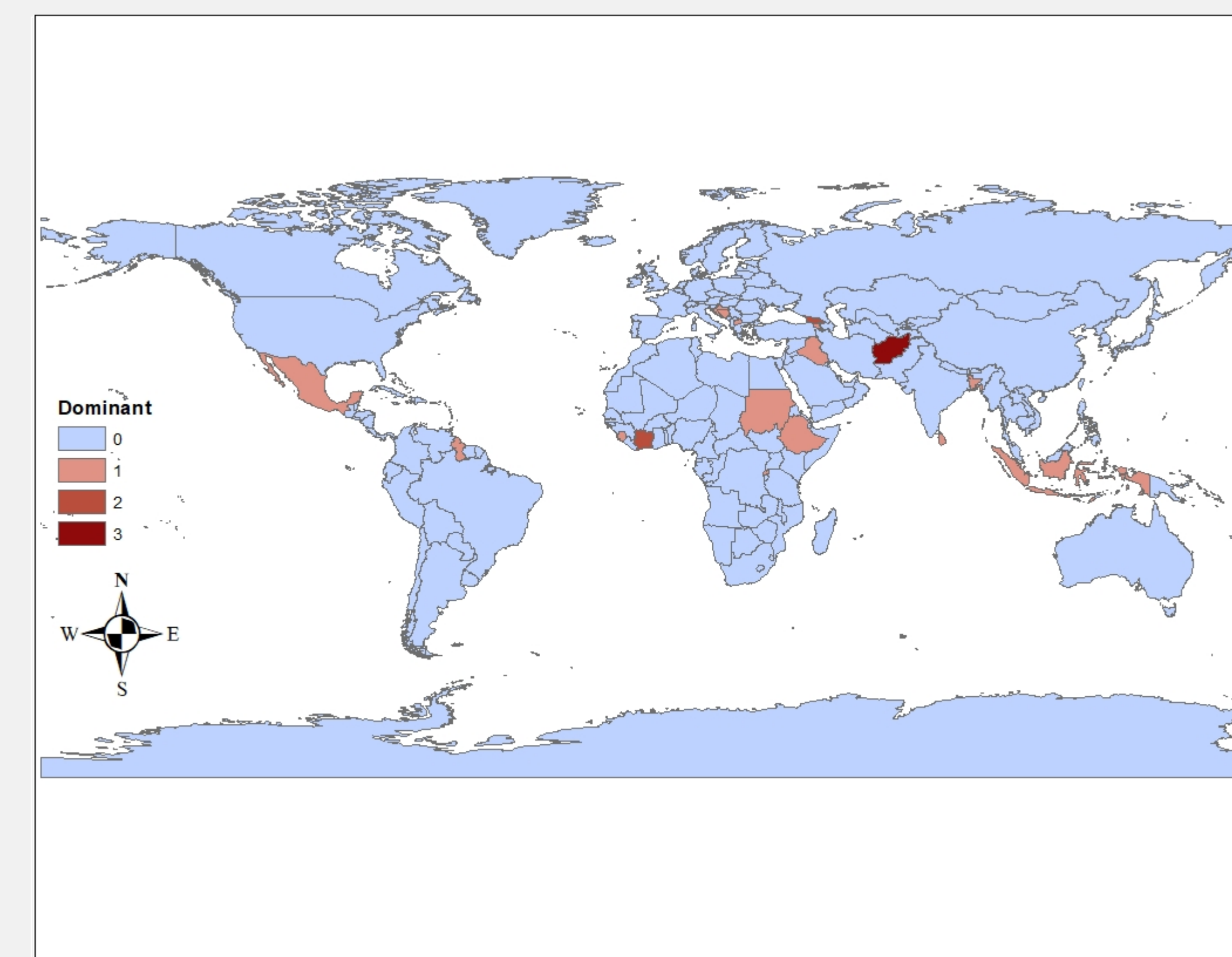
Africa, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe appear to drive a large portion of our findings. We would like to consider region-specific factors that may drive our observed relationships.

We are interested in eventually examining how different kinds of PGMs may influence IDP and refugee flows differently.

PERIPHERAL PGMs



DOMINANT PGMs



Sunni Awakening movement, Iraq

Janjaweed militia, Sudan

Arkan's Tigers, Yugoslavia