

## ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Prior Rebel Experience Of Leaders And Its Influence  
On Physical Integrity Rights**Adil YILDIZ<sup>1</sup><sup>1</sup> University of Mississippi, Department of Political Science, Oxford  
ayildiz@go.olemiss.edu ORCID ID: 0009-0005-0020-3726**GELİŞ TARİHİ/RECEIVED DATE: 18.07.2023 KABUL TARİHİ/ACCEPTED DATE: 16.11.2023**Yıldız, A. (2023). Prior Rebel Experience of Leaders and Its Influence on Physical Integrity Rights.  
*Aurum Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 8(2), 173-196.**Abstract**

Previous research shows that leaders' prior experiences influence their policy decisions. The existing human rights literature focuses mainly on country-level factors, such as economic development, regime type and the conflict situations to explain violations of rights. This research contributes to a flourishing literature on leaders' role in upholding rights by theorizing why and how the prior experiences of leaders affect the propensity to violate physical integrity rights. It is argued in this article that leaders with a rebel experience, and who have experienced victory in rebellion are less likely to respect human rights, while those who have suffered defeat are more likely to do so. Both types of leaders have demonstrated a willingness to take risks, but in the former case, victory reinforces their belief in taking risks, leading them to keep risk-taking, whereas in the latter, defeat teaches leaders to become more risk averse. Infringing on human rights is indeed risky, potentially leading to negative consequences such as a damaged reputation, accountability, and social upheaval. The empirical analysis of the research demonstrates that having a rebel background alone does not inherently influence a leader's behavior regarding human rights; what matters is the outcome of the rebellion. The probability of showing respect for rights decreases when a rebellion is won, while it increases when there has been a previous loss in rebellion. The article highlights the importance of using leaders, rather than just states, as a unit of analysis to explain why certain countries commit human rights violations.

**Keywords:** Leaders, Rebel Experience, Human Rights, Physical Integrity Rights

## Liderlerin Geçmiş İsyan Deneyimi ve Bu Deneyimin Kişi Dokunulmazlığı Hakkı Üzerindeki Etkisi

### Öz

Önceki araştırmalar, liderlerin önceki deneyimlerinin, onların siyasi kararlarını etkilediğini göstermektedir. Mevcut insan hakları literatürü, hak ihlallerinin nedenlerini, temel olarak ekonomik gelişme, rejim tipi ve çatışma durumları gibi ülke düzeyindeki etkenler ile açıklamaktadır. Bu araştırma, liderlerin önceki deneyimlerinin, onların kişinin dokunulmazlığı hakkını ihlal etme eğilimini neden ve nasıl etkilediğini açıklama ve liderlerin bu hakları korumadaki rolüne ilişkin olarak gelişen literatüre katkı sağlama hedefi gütmektedir. Bu makale, isyan deneyimine sahip ve isyanda zafer kazanmış liderlerin insan haklarına saygı gösterme olasılıklarının daha düşük olduğu, buna karşın yenilgiye uğramış olanların bunu yapma olasılığının daha yüksek olduğu hipotezini savunmaktadır. Makale bu hipotezi şuna dayandırmaktadır; her iki lider türü de risk almaya yönelik isteklilik göstermiş iken, muhtemel olarak, ilk durumda zafer, risk alma inancını pekiştirerek onları risk almaya devam etmeye yönlendirirken, ikinci durumda yenilgi, liderlere riskten kaçınmayı öğretmektedir. İnsan haklarının ihlali risk taşıyıp, potansiyel olarak itibarın zedelenmesi, hesap verme sorumluluğu ve toplumsal kargaşa gibi olumsuz sonuçlara yol açabilir. Makalenin bulguları şunları göstermektedir; tek başına isyan deneyimine sahip olmak bir liderin insan haklarıyla ilgili davranışını esasen etkilememektedir, fakat etkili olan isyan deneyiminin sonucudur. Haklara saygı gösterme olasılığı, bir isyan kazanıldığında azalırken, daha önce bir isyanda kayıp verildiğinde artmaktadır. Bu araştırma, bazı ülkelerde neden insan hakları ihlallerinin işlendiğini açıklamak için, bir analiz birimi olarak devletlerden ziyade liderleri kullanmanın önemine vurgu yapmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Liderler, İsyan Deneyimi, İnsan Hakları, Kişi Dokunulmazlığı Hakkı

### 1. Introduction

The possible influence of leaders on human rights has received little attention in the literature so far. This research, which investigates such an impact on a global scale, therefore represents a significant contribution to the field. It ventures beyond the confines of existing theories, offering original insights through the development of novel possible explanations. In doing so, the research aims to shed new light on the pivotal role that leaders possibly play in shaping human rights policies.

Broadly, the reasons behind state leaders' human rights violations are being questioned in this article, explaining first why leaders with rebel experience matter and what makes this particular experience relevant to human rights. More specifically, the article poses the following research questions. Why do leaders target civilians, and how does their time as a prior rebel leader shape their views on human rights once they become a leader? Does the success of their rebellion give them a different perspective compared to those who failed? To address these questions, the article further develops novel possible explanations, linking leaders' behavior towards human rights to their prior rebel experience, as both require a considerable degree of risk-acceptance.

Risk-acceptance is linked to a willingness to take chances and engage in actions with uncertain outcomes, which can possibly reflect imprudent choices without much consideration for potential risks (Zuckerman & Kuhlman, 2000, p. 1000). In the context of politics, leaders with a relatively high level of risk acceptance may be more likely to take authoritarian measures to maintain their power, such as suppressing opposition and using force to quell dissent (see Franklin, 2019; Davenport, 1995; Gurr, 1986). Although these measures come with risks such as backlash or more severe consequences from the international community, they may believe that maintaining power is worth the risks. Overall, such leaders can feel more empowered by engaging in harsh responses, which may seem beneficial in maintaining their power (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003, p. 10).

Depending on whether leaders experience a victory or a defeat, their insights and evaluations can differ. This paper explains this, using a cognitive bias called “the overconfidence bias”<sup>1</sup>. Winning and losing can lead to various lessons being learned. For example, winning could make them think that their decisions and actions were correct, reinforcing their current views and strategies. By contrast, losing could make them re-examine their strategy and consider different methods or perspectives. In the context of rebel experience, victorious rebels can continue taking chances and imprudent actions to achieve gains, while defeated rebels can choose the opposite approach, as their experience of taking risks and using aggressive behavior failed.

Former rebels possess firsthand experience and knowledge of the conditions, impacts, underlying causes, and dynamics of human rights violations (see Mitchell et al., 2014). This understanding can enable them to recognize that grievances e.g., arising from human rights issues can potentially increase the risk of future rebellions. Their specific knowledge of local communities, acquired through direct involvement and proximity, further strengthens this assumption (McKay, 2005; see also Garbino, 2023). By leveraging their comprehension of social networks, power structures, and vulnerabilities, rebels can perceive issues related to rights as opportunities to exert control over specific groups or individuals within the community, thereby maintaining their power.

More specifically, this research hypothesizes that leaders with rebel experience will be less inclined to exhibit respect for rights compared to their counterparts who lack such experience. It also hypothesizes that leaders who have emerged victorious in a rebellion will demonstrate a lower propensity for respecting rights, whereas those who have experienced defeat in a rebellion are more likely to exhibit a higher degree of respect for rights. It is worth noting that, as per Ellis et al. (2015, p. 729), in this article, “rebellion” refers to the intentional use of violent actions to overthrow established authorities, such as government officials. Moreover, “rebels” are individuals who engage in such rebellions.

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1 The term “overconfidence bias” refers to a psychological bias that can influence decision makers to perceive the outcome of an uncertain event as less risky than it actually is. This cognitive bias is also associated with prioritizing one’s own needs over long-term goals. Furthermore, it is considered to be one of the most prevalent and influential cognitive biases that can impact decision-making processes (Li et al., 2017; see also Campbell et al., 2005).

This paper begins with a brief overview of the research on human rights and their common violations, delving into questions such as what constitutes human rights violations (conceptually and empirically) and what causes them. Then, it introduces leaders' experiences into the study of human rights violations, exploring how their prior experiences influence their actions and policy choices while in office. Next, the paper presents possible explanations about how certain experiences (i.e., having a rebel background with either a win or a loss) affect leaders' propensities to violate rights. It then outlines the data used to test this argument and provide the statistical results, demonstrating whether findings hold significance using multiple regression analysis. Finally, it leads to a conclusion section.

## 2. Human Rights Violations and Leader Experiences

### 2.1. A Brief Overview of the Research on Human Rights and Common Violations

"Human rights" is a combined term" (Douzinas, 2007, p. 9). The prevailing understanding of human rights as a concept is that each individual is entitled to several absolute rights that are inherent to them solely because they are human (Donnelly, 2008, p. 1). Stated differently, these rights are inalienable, non-forfeitable, and equally valid for everyone. These descriptors are utilized by international legal organizations such as the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which was established to safeguard the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)<sup>2</sup>, and the United States (US) Agency for International Development (USAID)<sup>3</sup>. Although the tenets of human rights are contested, the concept is almost universally accepted and straightforward. Nevertheless, there are multiple analytical debates surrounding the nature of rights, the occurrence of human rights violations, and the empirical methods used to measure and study them.

While there is an abundance of human rights literature that covers various rights considered as human rights, some stand out more than others, namely "physical integrity" rights that relate to the inviolable protection of individuals. For example, governments cannot inflict physical violence on individuals, and individuals are entitled to remain free from harm or violence. Specifically, political imprisonment, torture, extrajudicial killings, and disappearances are common actions that violate the inviolability of the physical body (Cingranelli & Richards, 1999, p. 403). These actions, which cause physical pain or hardship, are generally accepted by scholars, including Cordell et al. (2022), Sundstrom (2005), and Finnemore and Sikkink (1998), as the standard conceptualizations of human rights violations.

Human rights violations are generally committed by states and governments, as they hold the ability to exercise power over individuals. Questioning what accounts for human rights violations indeed parallels why some authorities commit more violations than others. The literature has discovered several empirical findings that predict governments' probability of breaching human rights. For example,

2 "...the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family..." (United Nations, 1948, pmbl.)

3 "Human rights are inherent to all human beings, irrespective of nationality, sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, or any other status." (USAID, 2016, p. 6)

Poe and Tate (1994, p. 863) find that a country's level of economic development and democracy are negatively associated with human rights violations. The reasoning behind the findings on economic development seems plain. The countries that are the most impoverished, where economic scarcity has created significant social and political strife, are likely to be the most unstable and therefore more inclined to use repressive measures to maintain their grip on power (Mitchell & McCormick, 1988, p. 478). Conversely, it stands to reason that in more developed nations, where people are generally more content, the elites will require less repression to stay in control (Henderson, 1991, p. 1226). Moreover, democracy offers citizens the means to remove potentially harmful leaders from power before they can pose a significant threat. Additionally, the liberties inherent in democracy can make it simpler for citizens to expose instances of repression, causing the majority or international community to turn against leaders who attempt to abuse their power (Poe & Tate, 1994, pp. 855-856).

In the same research, Poe and Tate also find that population size and the existence of armed conflicts are positively associated with violations of rights. On the one hand, a larger population increases the frequency of potential instances of coercion from a statistical perspective, and also creates strain on a nation's resources and environment, ultimately leading to a reduction in available resources (Henderson, 1993, pp. 323-325). On the other hand, when faced with the threat of armed conflict, governments may resort to repression. The challenge to their authority makes them more likely to use coercive measures, including violence, to alleviate these challenges. (Poe & Tate, 1994, p. 859). Alternatively, they may utilize the disorder and turbulence as an opportunity to increase their authority and quell any opposing views. Through emergency measures and military courts, they may circumvent typical legal processes and suppress political adversaries (see Davenport, 1995; Tilly, 1985; Gurr, 1986). Furthermore, governments tend to prioritize national security over individual human rights during periods of war, which can result in a lack of responsibility for any misconduct committed by government forces. This can be justified by governments as they may claim that their actions were necessary for the protection of national security (see Bae, 2022; Wolff & Maruyama, 2023).

## 2.2. Introducing Leader Experiences into the Research on Human Rights Violations

Personal experiences during different periods of life make a difference in forming individual behavior. Prior experiences, especially during pre-adulthood when individuals establish their own homes, have a significant impact on one's personality and risk tendency later in life (Helfrecht & Dira, 2023). Previous life experiences and the lessons learned from them shape how individuals assess the future costs and benefits of their preferences and the course of action they see as likely to be successful. Additionally, accumulating knowledge and experience leads to the development of cognitive shortcuts, which allows individuals to make choices that require little effort (see Jervis, 1976, p. 153). The totality of prior experiences affects individuals' "frame of reference" when evaluating what happens in life (Matthews, 1954, p. 3). This applies not only to leaders but also to others by and large, although George (1980, p. 27) specifically focuses on leaders and contends that leaders' prior experiences endow them with self-competence, which George describes as a "sense of personal efficacy". Prior experiences make leaders

more knowledgeable about certain situations, which subsequently decreases the level of uncertainty they have about relevant policy options.

Horowitz et al. (2018), Horowitz and Stam (2014), and Fuhrmann and Horowitz (2015) show that leaders' life experiences (e.g., prior rebel or military experience) affect their policy choices (e.g., eagerness to value weapons and violent strategies, and initiate military disputes), arguing that such experiences, alongside domestic political institutions, shape leaders' beliefs and risk attitudes. Horowitz et al. (2018), for example, focus on the prior military experience of leaders and the ramifications it has for coercion. The authors contend that leaders who have had previous military careers are relatively more inclined toward coercive challenges and demands. Hence, such leaders fall into crises more often and are more likely to initiate militarized disputes against adversaries that are likely to mount rather than concede. Horowitz and his coauthors find that leaders with a military background initiate comparatively more impetuous challenges that are more likely to be retaliated against by adversaries.

### 3. Linking Leader Experiences to Human Rights Violations

In addition to military backgrounds, many leaders have previous experience in rebel movements and some of them have seized power as national leaders through these movements. Horowitz and Stam's (2014, p. 536) argue that participating in a rebel group is proof that a person is potentially more amenable to risk, indicating a greater acceptance of conflict analysis. Moreover, they demonstrate evidence that leaders with a rebel background tend to be more willing to take risks and are more likely to use military force compared to leaders with no rebel experience. Rebel experiences, especially those culminating in success, build up the utility of taking risks, using violence as an effective tactic (Corr, 2004). For example, Mao Zedong became the leader of China after his rebel experience, which led to serious violations of rights. Under Mao's leadership, a large number of people, such as officials, intellectuals, academics, and legal personnel, were subjected to "reeducation through labor" for numerous years, a process that involved harsh penalties (Cohen, 2019). As Kennedy (2011) indicates, Mao's successful rebel experience, among other factors, made him more likely to consider that similar strategies (i.e., tapping into belligerent behavior and its efficacy) would be useful.

As implicitly argued in the previous paragraph, the crux of the argument of this article lies, to a considerable extent, in the premise that former rebel leaders exhibited a proclivity for brutality throughout the course of their rebellion. Based on the existing literature, this assertion may not hold true in certain instances. Some rebels may purposefully avoid adopting brutal strategies during their armed rebellion to cultivate support from the international community (Jones & Mattiacci, 2019, p. 7). However, the substantial strength of the argument also lies in the inherent assumption that engaging in rebellion inherently necessitates a significant degree of risk-taking. Drawing on their risk-taking tendency, former rebels can still be more willing to employ harsh methods if they believe they will have favorable results. In adapting their strategies accordingly to their advantage, rebels can perceive such methods as effective in securing power and maintaining stability (McWeeney et al., 2023).

How can rebel experience be considered more relevant when it comes to human rights issues? One can observe that former rebels possess a unique understanding of human rights issues as a result of their experience, which makes them more valuable subjects of study. Former rebels have often witnessed and participated in human rights violations, and abuses during armed conflicts. They have firsthand experience of the conditions under which these violations occur, the impact on individuals and communities, and the underlying causes and dynamics (Mitchell et al., 2014). Such an experience and knowledge can help them see that grievances e.g., resulting from human rights issues may potentially increase the risk of future rebellions. This assumption is reinforced by the specific knowledge that rebels have of local communities, which is acquired through their direct involvement and proximity to the areas in which they operate (McKay, 2005; see also Garbino, 2023). They can perceive issues that may be potentially related to rights, as a means to exert control over certain groups or individuals within the community. They can further leverage their understanding of social networks, power structures, and vulnerabilities within the community to pressure such groups or individuals to uphold their power.

To construct novel explanations, this paper begins by essentially asking, firstly, whether violating human rights poses a risk, and if so, what are the potential consequences. One of the primary reasons why violating human rights can be risky for state leaders is that it can have adverse effects on the state's reputation in the global arena. The international community typically denounces human rights abuses, which can lead to economic sanctions or diplomatic isolation, ultimately damaging the state's global reputation and hindering its ability to engage in international trade and diplomatic relations (see Garriga, 2016; Barry et al., 2013). Furthermore, perpetrator states can be intervened under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)<sup>4</sup> principle by third parties such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the United Nations (UN) to stop large-scale human rights abuses, as witnessed in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo during the 1990s (Shaw, 2014). Another reason why violating human rights can be risky for state leaders is that it can result in social turmoil and instability within the state. The occurrence of human rights abuses can trigger public protests, demonstrations, and other forms of unrest, which can weaken the state's stability and security (Cottle, 2011). A third reason why violating human rights can be hazardous for state leaders is that it may expose them to legal ramifications. International courts can take action against state leaders who commit human rights violations, leading to significant fines and penalties. Furthermore, national courts and domestic legal systems may hold state leaders accountable for their behavior, which can result in criminal charges and imprisonment, or even death (e.g., Muammar al-Qaddafi, Nicolae Ceausescu) (Britannica, 2023a, 2023b; Sikkink, 2011).

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4 The concepts of "R2P" (Responsibility to Protect) and "humanitarian intervention" are indeed distinct, with different legal bases and underlying principles. R2P permits the application of force only when all other options have been exhausted and a state is blatantly incapable of safeguarding its own citizens. In contrast to humanitarian intervention, R2P exclusively addresses the four crimes (i.e., suffering from genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing) outlined in the concept and does not encompass other humanitarian crises and calamities (Australian Red Cross, 2011, p. 14).



As this article identifies, leaders with a rebel background are prone to being more risk-acceptant than other leaders due to at least three reasons. At the outset, it is common for rebels to operate in high-risk surroundings that require prompt decisions with incomplete information. Such circumstances can lead to a tendency to take risks and act imprudently. One example of a rebel leader operating in a high-risk environment is Charles Taylor, who was Liberia's former President. Prior to holding the presidency, Taylor led the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) during the country's civil war in the 1990s. He was recognized for his readiness to take risks and use violent tactics, which allowed the NPFL to capture territory and eventually take control of Liberia. Nevertheless, Taylor's imprudent actions and disregard for human rights resulted in numerous war crimes and atrocities perpetrated against civilians (Park, 2006).

Moreover, rebel participants frequently confront considerable hurdles and difficulties in their struggle against the state. In order to attain their objectives, they may have to take significant risks and resort to unorthodox approaches, which may foster a proclivity for risk-taking conduct. A famous example of this is the Cuban Revolution under the leadership of Fidel Castro, who was faced with a formidable and well-equipped government that had the backing of the United States. To overcome this challenge, Castro was compelled to take significant risks and resort to unorthodox strategies, such as guerrilla warfare and mobilizing the population through propaganda and education. These approaches ultimately led to the overthrow of the Cuban government and the establishment of a socialist state. Castro's experience in the revolution and his success in taking risks could have influenced his subsequent decision-making as a political leader, including his involvement in international conflicts and his alliances with communist nations during the Cold War (Prevost, 2007).

Finally, the mindset of a rebel leader can be shaped in a way that perceives risks as a crucial factor in achieving success. Consequently, this mindset can foster a disposition to take risks in domains, including policies that affect human rights. A case in point that exemplifies this assertion may be Idi Amin, who staged a military coup in Uganda in 1971 and subsequently became the country's leader. It is plausible that Amin's past as a military officer and a rebel leader might have influenced his proclivity for risk-taking and his tendency to embrace unorthodox approaches to consolidate his authority. As the president, Amin executed policies that brought about numerous human rights violations, including the expulsion of Asians of different ethnic backgrounds from Uganda, causing over 60,000 people to flee the country. It is possible that Amin's outlook, shaped by his previous experiences, contributed to his decision-making process that showed little regard for human rights (Leonard Boyle, 2017).

Thus far, this research has established that violating human rights is a risky behavior, and leaders with a rebel background tend to take risks. However, the question remains as to why they would violate human rights and what benefits they may see in doing so. Additionally, what factors may affect their decision-making process as to whether outweigh potential benefits of violating rights over facing consequences. It is commonly assumed in the field of political science that leaders will do whatever it takes to maintain



their hold on power, as Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003, p. 10) suggest that “leaders want to maximize their control over policy choices and minimize the price...”. Hence, the overarching explanation could be that leaders may violate rights as they see beneficial to maintain their power. Empirical evidence (e.g., Horowitz & Stam, 2014, pp. 542-554; Fuhrmann & Horowitz, 2015, pp. 78-83) indicates that leaders with a rebel background are more likely to implement harsh policies against external political challenges. Such leaders, e.g., pursue absolute national security by means of nuclear weapons, viewing them as a form of protection against invasion and alleviating concerns about the potential erosion of sovereignty. Then the question arises why such leaders would not consider drastic policies against internal challenges as well. In the name of national security, these leaders could use harsh measures to suppress opposition and dissent, as well as to discipline the citizens, pontificating on the importance of political stability and order (see Franklin, 2019; Davenport, 1995; Gurr, 1986).

### 3.1. Rebel Participation

**Hypothesis 1:** *Leaders who have rebel experience should be less likely to show respect for rights than those who do not have such experience.*

Risk acceptance serves as the overarching mechanism that is likely to prompt leaders to engage in human rights violations, while there exist several underlying mechanisms connecting a leader's acceptance of risks to their decision to engage in such violations. Risk acceptance can act as a catalyst, causing leaders to overlook the potentially negative consequences of violating human rights more easily (see Demir, 2017; Johnson, 2004). Understanding this requires delving into the psychological and rational aspects of their decision-making process. Psychologically, leaders who are prone to accepting risks may display a cognitive bias called the “illusion of control”. This bias causes them to believe they have a greater degree of control over outcomes than they truly do (Qadri & Shabbir, 2014; Kannadhasan et al., 2014; Langer, 1975). As a result, they tend to underestimate the potential negative consequences of their actions. From a rational choice approach, risk acceptant leaders may rely on rational calculation based on perceived low probabilities of negative outcomes. They could evaluate the potential costs of violating rights as relatively insignificant compared to the anticipated gains, showing more desire for gains than aversion to losses, as argued by prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 2013), such as consolidating power, maintaining stability, or achieving their objectives (see McDermott, 2004; Levy, 1992).

An illustrative case example emerges when examining the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone during the tumultuous 1990s. Originating as a rebel group under the leadership of Foday Sankoh, the RUF embarked on a mission to overthrow the government and seize control in pursuit of power (Rashid, 2023). This strategic move by the rebel leader, Sankoh, suggests a calculated assessment that the potential benefits associated with acquiring power – such as control over resources and political influence – outweighed the perceived costs and risks associated with rebellion. Following an extended period of armed conflict, the RUF underwent a remarkable transformation

into a political party through a peace agreement. In 1996, Sankoh assumed leadership of the party, marking a significant shift after the country's inaugural democratic elections (Zack-Williams, 1999). Despite Sankoh's initial aspirations of fostering stability and economic development in Sierra Leone, his leadership unfolded with a conspicuous overconfidence that resulted in adverse consequences. This included corruption, economic mismanagement, and human rights abuses, as demonstrated by Padilla et al. (2007).

Furthermore, even if some risk-acceptant leaders may be more aware of the negative consequences, they could still believe that they can get away with violating rights without facing any significant repercussions, as they perceive such violations to be useful or necessary. This confidence persists, despite their assumption of the possibility of punishment, as its uncertainty lingers. Doherty and Wolak (2011) find that when there is uncertainty about the fairness of a procedure, individuals tend to rely on their preexisting beliefs to make decisions as a cognitive shortcut. These beliefs can shape their perceptions, preferences, and actions. In the context of risk-acceptant leaders, as discussed earlier, this could manifest as a justification for their actions, where they prioritize their desired outcomes over the potential consequences. They could view violating rights as a means to achieve their goals, perceiving the usefulness of such transgressions as outweighing any perceived risks. Consequently, their belief in the utility of these actions, coupled with the reliance on preexisting beliefs under uncertainty, can contribute to their perception that they can escape serious repercussions for their actions.

### 3.2. The Outcomes of Rebel Participation: Victory or Defeat

**Hypothesis 2:** *Leaders who have won in a rebellion should be less likely to show respect for rights, while leaders who have lost are more likely to do so.*

It is also crucial, of course, to gain insight into the experiences that leaders underwent during their rebellion. Specifically, the outcome of being either victorious or defeated could shape the leaders' perspectives on those experiences, as well as their approach to employing current strategies and actions overall (Ellis et al., 2015, p. 729). The earlier discussion about risk acceptance should be modified considering whether leaders' prior rebel experience culminated in a victory or defeat. Because depending on this, they can have different insights and evaluations where such outcomes can lead to various lessons being learned. For instance, winning can lead leaders to believe that their decisions and actions were correct, strengthening their current views and strategies. Conversely, losing can cause leaders to re-evaluate their strategy and consider alternative methods or perspectives. Specifically in the context of rebel experience, successful rebels could continue to take risks and engage in imprudent actions to achieve gains, while unsuccessful rebels may opt for a different approach as their past experience of taking risks and using aggressive behavior failed. Therefore, it is important to consider the different outcomes of the previous rebel war, as they can have a distinct impact on the future risk acceptance behavior of leaders.

Expanding upon the enduring impact of a leader's prior engagement in a successful rebellion, we can delve into the transformation of their governing style and its consequences for human rights. Successful rebel leaders, upon achieving victory, could undergo a significant shift in their leadership ethos. Their triumph can imbue them with a heightened sense of power, which, in some cases, might lead to a disregard for institutional checks and balances, resulting in a greater proclivity for rights violations in the name of maintaining power and control. On the other hand, leaders who have faced defeat in rebellion could go through a comprehensive reevaluation of their strategies, which can encompass a shift towards more peaceful approaches. The bitterness and humility borne from failure can lead them to prioritize more rehabilitating actions. Consequently, such leaders could exhibit a more conciliatory governing style and may be more susceptible to human rights considerations.

Henceforth, this research hypothesizes that rebel victors are more likely to engage in human rights violations, drawing on the risk acceptant behavior, whereas those who suffered defeat are less inclined to do so. One can attribute this contrast to the overconfidence bias that mainly results from, as discussed above, leaders becoming reinforced in their current views and strategies by winning. In contrast, leaders who lose a war should have a different effect on their risk acceptance and decision-making calculus. Since their current strategies did not lead them to success but rather to failure, they should be more likely to be cautious. However, to provide more precise insights, further elaboration is necessary. Overconfidence bias can reinforce risk acceptant behavior after winning, leading people to become complacent or overconfident after a string of successes and continue to take risks (Gallo, 2021). This phenomenon has been observed in various studies related to decision-making biases. Overconfidence bias can lead people to believe that they are more skilled or knowledgeable than they actually are, which in turn can lead them to take risks that may potentially have negative repercussions (Koellinger et al., 2007). It can result in an underestimation of the risks associated with a specific decision or action, reinforcing risk-acceptant behavior (Dhir & Mital, 2012). Additionally, it can lead to the disregard or devaluation of information that contradicts one's beliefs or expectations, causing individuals to take risks without adequately considering potential consequences (Friedman, 2017).

In sum, this discussion indicates that leaders with rebel experience who have previously achieved success could be more susceptible to overconfidence bias, which may lead them to persist in taking risks and, consequently, increase the likelihood of engaging in human rights violations. It is crucial to remember, as discussed earlier, that such violations can serve as a means to maintain power despite their inherent risks. Rebel victors, due to their overconfidence, are better positioned to take such risks in comparison to the losers. By contrast, leaders who have experienced a rebel loss may have their confidence diminished, leading them to take fewer risks compared to their victorious counterparts. The experience of defeat can have a humbling effect on leaders and make them more cautious in their decision-making. They can become more aware of the challenges, risks, and complexities involved in achieving their objectives. Then they can have a more realistic understanding of the potential pitfalls and may be more inclined to weigh the potential negative consequences of their actions. Consequently,

they could prioritize stability, seek to avoid further setbacks, and focus on mild actions rather than engaging in risky or aggressive strategies. In line with this argument, Chaudhry et al. (2021) find that leaders who are willing to take risks, such as those with backgrounds in the security sector or previous experience as rebel or revolutionary leaders, are more prone to employing force as a means to enhance recruitment. Furthermore, through their experimental study, Xue et al. (2010) find that losses can create a sense of caution and a desire to avoid negative outcomes, leading individuals to become more conservative in their decision-making and opt for safer and less risky choices.

Finally, one could reasonably ask: If they lost the rebellion, how did these rebel leaders become the leaders of the country? This question is valid for rebel losers only because rebel winners naturally take over the government and come to power as the leaders of the country. However, for the rebel losers, the scenario appears quite different. There are several ways through which rebel losers might come to power as the state leader later on. These typically include post-reconciliation processes after the rebellion, with institutional elements involved. For example, during the era of apartheid in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) led a resistance movement against the discriminatory policies of the apartheid government. This, along with other anti-apartheid groups, was considered a rebel movement by the ruling authorities. Nelson Mandela, a prominent leader of the ANC, was imprisoned for his involvement in anti-apartheid activities. As apartheid began to crumble under international pressure and internal resistance, negotiations between the apartheid government and the ANC gained momentum. In the early 1990s, then-president F.W. de Klerk initiated discussions with Mandela, who was released from prison, to dismantle apartheid and transition to a democratic, non-racial government. Former rebel leaders of the ANC, including Mandela, who had been considered terrorists by the apartheid government, were granted amnesty for their involvement in anti-apartheid activities. Afterwards, Mandela became the first black president of South Africa in 1994 (O'Neil et al., 2020, pp. 716-722).

#### 4. Research Design

Do rebel activities (e.g., resulting in victory or defeat) make leaders more or less likely to be respectful of human rights? Providing an empirical answer to this question necessitates data on human rights and the involvement of leaders in rebel movements. As previously highlighted, physical integrity rights have been central to the spectrum of human rights, and their violations are commonly conceptualized in the literature as political imprisonment, torture, extrajudicial killing, and disappearance. These serve as the common variables<sup>5</sup> in the CIRI Physical Integrity Data, 1981–2010 by Cingranelli and Richards (2012); thus, it is used in this research for an empirical analysis of human rights. More concretely, using country-year as the unit of analysis, the research analyzes 164 countries, covering a time period from 1981 to 2004, including 3,142 observations. These numbers increase to 169 countries and 3,180 observations

<sup>5</sup> The physical integrity index (scale, 0-8) is calculated by summing the scores for political imprisonment (scale, 0-2), torture (scale, 0-2), extrajudicial killing (scale, 0-2), and disappearance (scale, 0-2). Since the dependent variable is measured on a continuous scale, and there are several independent and control variables, this research uses multiple regression analysis.

when V-Dem's *core civil society index* is incorporated, replacing the *polity* variable from the Polity IV data in a different model (Coppedge et al., 2021; Marshall & Jaggers, 2009).

As for rebel experiences, the research uses the Leader Experience and Attribute Descriptions (LEAD) data set, built by Ellis et al. (2015) on the Archigos data set developed by Goemans et al. (2009), providing information about the individual lives and experiences of over 2,000 state leaders from 1875 through 2004. In the LEAD data set, the authors operationalize rebel experience with two variables. *Rebelwin* is 1 if the leader had prior rebel background and won a rebel conflict, and 0 otherwise. *Rebelloss* is 1 if the leader had prior rebel background but lost a rebel conflict, and 0 otherwise. Although Ellis and her collaborators note that the outcomes of victory and defeat were coded based on the results of war as demonstrated in the COW (intra-state) data set (Sarkees & Wayman, 2010), they are not specific about how exactly they considered these outcomes. The COW data set has various conflict outcomes such as side A wins, or side B, compromise, stalemate etc. However, this research made sure that they coded only the clear win or defeat outcomes by comparing the outcome of the intra-state conflicts in the COW data set to leaders being observed as winners or losers in the LEAD data set.

This research runs tests that employ the country year<sup>6</sup> as the unit of analysis, which means there is one observation per country and per year. In the LEAD data, the same country normally can have multiple leaders in the same year. For instance, in 1974, the LEAD data have both Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford as the United States observations, creating two 1974 observations. Since the dependent variable, *physical integrity rights index*, is just measured at the country year level (e.g., one value of rights for all the US years), the research collapses those observations in the LEAD data down to one observation per year, taking the mode for the binary (i.e., rebel and military background variables), mean (i.e., age, time in office) or median (i.e., level of education) for the continuous variables.

Various control variables are included in the empirical models. As previously demonstrated in the literature review, population size, GDP per capita, measures of war, and the regime type (e.g., measures of democracy) have an impact on human rights violations. Therefore, all these measures are included, taking population and GDP per capita from the World Bank (2012) data, ongoing and number of armed conflicts from the UCDP/PRIO armed conflict data set (Themner & Wallensteen, 2012), and measures of the regime type (*polity*) come from the Polity IV data (Marshall & Jaggers, 2009). Civil society organizations are also considered since there is evidence that they are linked to human rights, playing a vital role in the promotion, protection, and monitoring of human rights (see Buyse, 2018; Renshaw, 2012). To include measures of civil society, V-Dem's *core civil society index* is used (Coppedge et al., 2021).

Moreover, as demonstrated in the literature, military experience is indicative of conflict-prone behavior. Hence, additional variables regarding leader experiences and occupations are included, such as military career and specific military experiences (e.g., combat experience). Additionally, several individual

<sup>6</sup> The research uses country fixed effects to account for country-level factors, based on the Hausman test results (see Amini et al., 2012).

variables (i.e., age and education level) along with leaders' time in office<sup>7</sup> are incorporated. By including these variables, this research analysis improves the models to ensure that its findings are not merely a result of limited inclusion of leader background variables or generational effects (Horowitz & Stam, 2014, p. 542).

On the other hand, temporal dependence is addressed in the models by including a lagged dependent variable with a one-period lag, based on the results of the serial correlation test<sup>8</sup> for panel data. Finally, various model specifications are generated considering the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF), which indicate the level of multicollinearity in a regression analysis (see Marcoulides & Raykov, 2019). Notably, there appears to be a linear association between the civil society index and polity variables, as well as the variables related to military experiences and military careers. Therefore, these variables are run in different models.

## 5. Statistical Results

This research hypothesized that leaders with prior experience in rebellion would be less inclined to respect rights compared to leaders without such experience. Additionally, it predicted that leaders who have emerged victorious in a rebellion are less likely to show respect for rights, while leaders who have suffered defeat are more likely to do so. Table 1 presents the results of the Ordinary Least Squares regression (OLS) models on physical integrity rights, indicating the significant differences in the probability of violating rights across various models. Leaders with prior rebel experience are more likely to violate rights only if they have been victorious, while defeated leaders are more respectful.

Having a rebel experience (i.e., rebel service variable in the models) shows a negative correlation with the propensity to respect rights, although this correlation does not reach statistical significance, thereby failing to provide support for the initial hypothesis. Conversely, the outcome of the rebel experience demonstrates statistically significant predictions, with leaders who were previously victorious (i.e., prior rebel win variable) in rebellion displaying a negative correlation with the inclination to respect rights, while leaders who experienced defeat (i.e., prior rebel loss variable) exhibit a positive correlation. This finding supports the second hypothesis. Overall, Table 1 exclusively provides statistical evidence for the second hypothesis across all the models, while lacking any statistical support for the first one.

7 This measures the number of days a leader has served in office, starting from the beginning of their term until the beginning of the year being referred to.

8 I employed the Stata command *xtserial*, which executes the Wooldridge test to detect serial correlation in panel data (Drukker, 2003, pp. 169-171).

**Table 1:** The Impact of Rebel Experiences on the Physical Integrity Rights (PIRs), 1981-2004

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
	<i>PIRs</i>	<i>PIRs with military career</i>	<i>PIRs with core civil society index</i>
PRIOR REBEL WIN	-0.493** (0.197)	-0.556*** (0.201)	-0.410** (0.187)
PRIOR REBEL LOSS	1.043** (0.498)	1.041** (0.468)	0.929** (0.410)
REBEL SERVICE	-0.103 (0.140)	-0.003 (0.144)	-0.136 (0.132)
MILITARY SERVICE, COMBAT	0.044 (0.116)		0.005 (0.113)
MILITARY SERVICE, NO COMBAT	-0.026 (0.141)		-0.048 (0.137)
MILITARY CAREER		-0.200 (0.149)	
ONGOING ARMED CONFLICT	-1.029*** (0.157)	-1.036*** (0.158)	-1.010*** (0.154)
COUNT OF ARMED CONFLICTS	-0.271*** (0.102)	-0.267*** (0.101)	-0.268*** (0.102)
POLITY	0.041*** (0.011)	0.037*** (0.010)	
CORE CIVIL SOCIETY INDEX			0.942*** (0.240)
POPULATION	-0.885*** (0.250)	-0.846*** (0.249)	-0.974*** (0.252)
GDP PER CAPITA	-0.009 (0.137)	-0.007 (0.139)	-0.037 (0.139)
LEADER AGE	0.002 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)
LEADER EDUCATION LEVEL	0.058 (0.054)	0.042 (0.054)	0.050 (0.051)
TIME IN OFFICE	0.001* (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
ONE-PERIOD LAGGED DV	0.391*** (0.026)	0.390*** (0.026)	0.390*** (0.025)
<i>Constant</i>	17.297*** (3.879)	16.769*** (3.857)	18.459*** (3.753)
<i>N</i>	3,142	3,142	3,180
<i>R-squared</i>	0.314	0.314	0.312
<i>Log likelihood</i>	-4660.816	-4658.9	-4703.754
<i>SE adjusted for</i>	164 clusters	164 clusters	169 clusters

*Notes:* To control autocorrelation effects, a lagged dependent variable is included in each model. And to control for heteroscedasticity, robust standard errors are clustered by country, employing Huber-White heteroskedastic-robust standard errors (White 1980; Huber 1967; see also Cameron and Miller 2015).

(Two-tailed tests) \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Source<sup>9</sup>

9 This table was prepared based on data provided by various sources. These include the CIRI Physical Integrity Data, 1981–2010 by Cingranelli and Richards (2012), the Leader Experience and Attribute Descriptions (LEAD) dataset by Ellis et al. (2015), World Bank (2012) population and GDP per capita data, the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict dataset by Themmer and Wallensteen (2012), the Polity IV data by Marshall and Jaggers (2009), and the V-Dem dataset by Coppedge et al. (2021). The analysis was conducted using Stata and R software packages. All the data used in this research are accessible to the public.



To interpret the magnitude of the statistical results based on Model 1, there is evidence suggesting that the successful rebel experience of leaders has a statistically significant negative effect on respect for physical integrity rights. Its coefficient of -0.493 implies that, on average, rebel victory is associated with a decrease by a score of 0.493 in the respect for rights, compared to other leaders, holding other variables constant. Physical integrity rights include a measure ranging from 0 to 8, with 8 indicating more respect. To evaluate the magnitude of the change, we can consider this range. Therefore, a decrease of 0.493 may be considered relatively small, as it represents approximately 6% of the range (i.e.,  $0.493/8 = 0.0616$  or 6.16%). On the other hand, leaders who have been defeated in a rebellion appear to be associated with a higher level of respect for physical integrity rights. More specifically, rebel loss leads to an increase in respect for rights by a score of 1.043. Again, to assess the practical significance, an increase of 1.043 may be considered a moderate to large change relative to the effect of rebel victory, covering approximately 13% of the range ( $1.043/8 = 0.1304$  or 13.04%).

In summary, the statistical results indicate an interesting relationship between a leader's previous rebel experience and their subsequent behavior regarding the respect for rights. The lack of correlation between rebel experience in general (without considering the win or loss outcome) and respect for rights suggests that merely having a rebel background does not inherently influence a leader's behavior regarding human rights. This finding highlights the importance of examining the specific outcome of the previous rebel experience, such as victory or defeat, to understand its potential impact on a leader's behavior on rights. As such, the experience of winning a rebellion decreases the likelihood of demonstrating respect for rights, while a previous rebel loss increases it.

## 6. Conclusion

In this research, an original argument is formulated concerning the prior experiences of leaders in relation to human rights respect and is tested using a recent dataset comprising the past experiences of over 2,000 state leaders. More specifically, it examined how leaders and their specific rebel experience can independently influence policies that have implications for human rights. Explaining how leaders influence a state's national policies in a systematic and predictable manner does not imply that institutional and country-level variables are irrelevant. In fact, the research findings revealed that variables such as population, regime type, and the country's conflict situation have significant predictive power on respect for human rights. Nonetheless, the certain previous experiences of leaders also provide crucial insights into governments' human rights abuses and the future behavioral patterns and beliefs of leaders regarding human rights practices.

It is crucial to understand the type of experiences that leaders had during their rebellions. The outcome, whether victorious or defeated, can differently shape their perspectives, strategies, and overall approach. Leaders who achieved victory could strengthen their beliefs and strategies, viewing their risky decisions as correct. On the other hand, leaders who experienced defeat could reassess their strategies and

consider different methods. These can lead victorious rebels to continue taking risks, while defeated rebels may opt for alternative strategies to maintain power, such as controlling their citizens. Whether such leaders continue to take risks is linked to human rights, as violating them carries significant risks, including potential adverse outcomes such as damage to a leader's reputation, potential backlash or more severe consequences from the international community, being held accountable, and causing social unrest. Therefore, this research hypothesized that leaders who have emerged victorious in a rebellion are less likely to show respect for rights, while leaders who have suffered defeat are more likely to do so. Additionally, a more general hypothesis is also tested, suggesting that leaders with prior experience in rebellion would be less inclined to respect rights compared to leaders without such experience.

However, the results of testing these hypotheses indicate that having a rebel background alone does not inherently influence a leader's behavior regarding human rights; what matters is the outcome of the rebellion. The probability of showing respect for rights decreases when a rebellion is won, while it increases when there has been a previous loss in rebellion. Therefore, this article establishes a statistically significant association between the prior (rebel) experiences of leaders and their likelihood to hold up to physical integrity rights upon assuming power. The preceding involvement in rebellion shapes leaders' propensity to take risks, which further links such an experience of leaders to human rights violations aimed at preserving power, such as suppressing opposition and using force.

More broadly, this study illustrates the feasibility of further investigating how the backgrounds of leaders can impact government behavior. It also highlights that leaders possess significant influence in shaping certain policies, particularly regarding human rights issues, such as the adoption of stricter or more lenient approaches toward citizens. Nonetheless, the previous involvement in rebel activities can be connected to leaders' behavior in other policy areas e.g., social and welfare policies or even migration policies that may interest numerous scholars. Furthermore, one could explore the impact of the prior experiences of leaders and its interaction with political institutions. Research on leaders thus represents a promising avenue for future research.

## **BEYANLAR / DECLARATIONS**

### ***Destek ve Teşekkür Beyanı***

Yazar, Benjamin T. Jones'a ve anonim hakemlere bu araştırmayla ilgili faydalı geri bildirimleri için teşekkür eder.

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“COPE-Dergi Editörleri İçin Davranış Kuralları ve En İyi Uygulama İlkeleri” çerçevesinde aşağıdaki beyanlara yer verilmiştir:

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### **Declaration of Compliance with the Ethical Principles**

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The author of this study declared that the Ethics Committee approval is not required for this study.

### **Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı**

Yazar herhangi bir çıkar çatışmaları olmadığını beyan eder.

### **Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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