Sabine Otto[1]

The Civilian Side of Peacekeeping: New Research Avenues

[1] Uppsala University, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala, Sweden, E-mail: sabine.otto@pcr.uu.se

Abstract:
Almost three decades ago the United Nations (UN) entered an era of multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations, in which civilian and uniformed personnel work together. At the same time, human rights promotion became an integral part of such missions. Due to data limitations, there is little systematic knowledge about how civilian staff impacts human rights standards in the countries UN peacekeeping operations are deployed. I address this lacuna in two ways. First, I briefly outline the importance of civilian staff in UN peacekeeping operations and their roles in promoting human rights. Second, I provide explorative descriptive statistics on the number of civilian personnel in UN peacekeeping operations and the occurrence of violence against civilians committed by state forces.

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1 Introduction

In the *Agenda for Peace* in 1992, former United Nations' (UN) Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali recognized the central role of civilian personnel and he laid the foundation for human rights integration in UN peacekeeping operations. Since then, the UN has entered an era of multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations, in which civilian and uniformed personnel work together. Traditionally, UN peacekeeping operations' main task was to separate combatants after ceasefires with the help of uniformed personnel. Contemporary peace operations, in contrast, tend to be sent to ongoing civil wars and their mandates routinely include civilian tasks such as voter education, providing humanitarian assistance, strengthening local institutions, and human rights promotion as prerequisites for long-lasting peace. Even though civilian personnel are a central part in UN missions and promoting human rights is a core pillar of the the UN and their peacekeeping operations, our knowledge about the impact of civilian staff on human rights standards is limited. This is surprising, given that military involvement alone cannot improve human rights performance. Instead, it requires activism, negotiation, persuasion, and capacity building (Hafner-Burton, 2014; Sikkink, 2011), which are core competences of civilian rather than uniformed personnel. Against this backdrop, I propose to shift the research focus from the military to the civilian side of peacekeeping operations and to explore how the civilian components of UN peacekeeping operations contribute to improving human rights.

Due to data limitations, recent quantitative research focuses on peacekeeping operations' military effectiveness to reduce deadly violence and to prolong negative peace (Di Salvatore & Ruggeri, 2018), ignoring the civilian side. Earlier studies have theorized about the effect of civilian components of peacekeeping operations on positive peace and democratization (Fortna 2008a; 2008b; Doyle & Sambanis, 2006). However, these studies rely on aggregated measures distinguishing merely between the presence or absence of multi-dimensional UN missions. There are less than a handful quantitative studies that explore whether UN peacekeeping operations affect human rights standards (Murdie & Davis, 2010; Murdie, 2017) and whether civilian personnel reduce violence (e.g. sexual violence, Kirschner & Miller, 2019). Case study research, in contrast, has explored the effectiveness of civilian activities on human rights performances. In some cases the civilian components contribute to long-term improvement in human rights practices (e.g. Cambodia, Whalan, 2013), in others they score poor (e.g. Ivory Coast, Bellamy & Williams, 2013). While very insightful, small-N case studies only allow for limited generalizability. On the other hand, there exists literature on describing recruitment challenges (de Coning, 2011), institutional constraints (da Costa & Karlsrud, 2013), or the roles of civilian personnel in peacekeeping operations (Eckhard, 2018). However, these studies are disconnected to UN peace operations' effectiveness. Taken together, the peacekeeping literature is surprisingly silent on the relationship between civilian components of peacekeeping operations and human rights practices.

Sabine Otto is the corresponding author.

2 Civilian personnel and their roles to improve human rights

Civilian personnel play two key roles in UN peacekeeping operations. First, a variety of the mandated tasks are due to their civilian nature carried out by civilian personnel such as the promotion of human rights, rule of law, civil society, local governance, election support, or conflict management. For instance, human rights officers monitor and document human rights abuses but also educate stakeholders. Second, civilian personnel often take on bridging functions between the international and local level. For instance, Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) are national staff with local expertise that join the military personnel (e.g. MONUSCO, UNMISS, and MINUSMA) to help explain the local context, to formulate adequate responses, and to build trust (Kullenberg, 2016). Translators and civilians in support positions similarly serve as links between peace operations and host countries (Eckhard, 2018).

The two civilian functions outline above are likely to affect governments' human rights performances, because civilian personnel in UN peacekeeping operations can affect the reasons that drive human rights violations.[1] The literature offers two broad rationales to explain variations in both human rights standards: governments' willingness to commit human rights violations and governments' inability to restrain human rights violations (Hafner-Burton, 2014). Governments might be willing to torture and kill to reach political outcomes (Valentino, 2014). Human rights violations can also be a consequence of the inability of leaders to control their sub-ordinates (Englehart, 2009). Changing governments willingness and building effective organizational capacity to improve human rights standards require civilian qualities such as agency, negotiations, advocacy, and persuasion (Sikkink, 2011). Civilian personnel, broadly speaking, may affect human rights practices in two ways. First, due to various soft forms of interactions such as negotiations behind closed doors, confidence building, dialogue between opposing parties, and information provision, civilian personnel can persuade abusive governments to comply with human rights standards in the short run (tactical changes in committing human rights violations) and long-run (strategic changes in committing human rights violations). Second, civilian personnel are involved in capacity-building activities to strengthen control and accountability of military and police forces, which in turn contributes to decreasing opportunistic violence. Since reforming and strengthening institutions takes time, human rights performances are likely to change with time delay.

3 Trends in new data on civilian personnel

To date, publicly available data that capture the civilian dimension of UN peacekeeping operations are missing. Ideally, one would match the mandated tasks carried out by UN missions to the civilian personnel that has the expertise to do it. The civilian job categories are wide-spread and include civil affairs, human rights, political affairs, finance, administration, etc. However, accessing fine-grained data to extract such information across time and space is unfeasible. I circumvent this challenge by separating conceptually and empirically between the *capacity* of civilian personnel and their *activities*. The latter refers to the implemented activities of peacekeeping policies that are assigned by mission mandates (e.g. human rights promotion, Blair & Smidt, 2018). Capacity pertains to the ability to carry out stated objectives. While both activities and capacity are crucial to understand how the civilian side of UN peacekeeping operations affects human rights promotion, I focus here on civilian capacity.

The ability to execute civilian tasks is, among others, depend on the size of the civilian component. Therefore, I measure civilian capacity as the number of civilian personnel deployed in UN peacekeeping operations, which are authorized by the UN Security Council and directed by the Department of Peace Operation (DPO).[2] The data are compiled based on reports from the UN Department of Public Information (DPI) and the UN Department of Field Support (DFS). The sample contains all countries that have been affected by at least one civil war and it covers the period between 2001 and 2018 at the monthly level.

First, I explore the global trend in civilian personnel deployment. The left panel of Figure 1 shows the smoothed trend of the number of civilian personnel between 2001 and 2018 at the monthly level. The figure shows that the number of civilian staff declined between 2001 and until mid 2002, increased significantly between 2002 and 2010, and declined drastically since then. While in January 2001 9600 civilians were deployed, the number dropped to 7200 in 2002, increased to roughly 19,500 in December 2010 before decreasing to 12,300 in October 2018. What can explain the decline in civilian staff since 2010? One explanation could be that it reflects a general decline in the number of personnel in peacekeeping operations. If that would the case, the number of uniformed personnel should decrease similarly. The right panel of Figure 1 depicts the smoothed trend of the number of uniformed personnel (troops, police, and observers) for the same time period. Similarly to the the civilian personnel, the number of uniformed personnel increases massively from 32,500 in 2001 to almost 97,000 in September 2011. In contrast to the civilian personnel, the number of uniformed personnel re-

mains relatively stable for a few years, increases further to 105,000 until December 2015 before it declines to 87,000 in October 2018. Comparing both trends shows that the sudden decline in civilian personnel does not correspond to an overall decrease in number of personnel sent to UN missions.

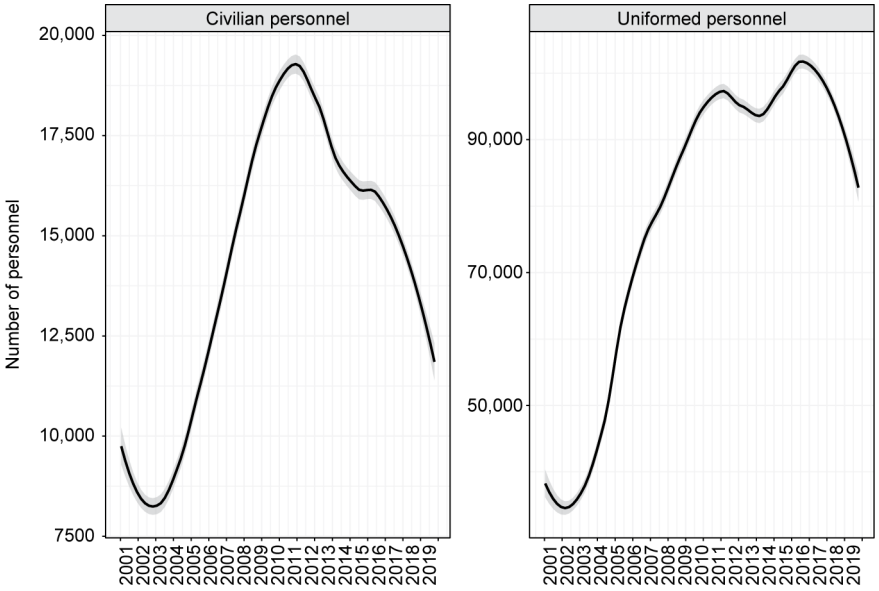

Figure 1: Number of civilian (left panel) and uniformed (right panel) personnel deployed in UN peacekeeping operations per month between 2001 and 2018. Please note that the scale of the y-axes differ.

Another reason could be that the number of civilian personnel is determined by the number of UN peacekeeping operations. Figure 2 depicts the number of UN peacekeeping operations per month. Up to 2009, the trend resembles the trends of civilian and uniformed personnel. The number of missions increases to 11 in 2009. After a stable phase for a few years, their number increases further to 13 in mid 2018. While the number of mission continuously increases, the number of civilian personnel declines since 2010, indicating that individual missions rely on less civilian personnel.

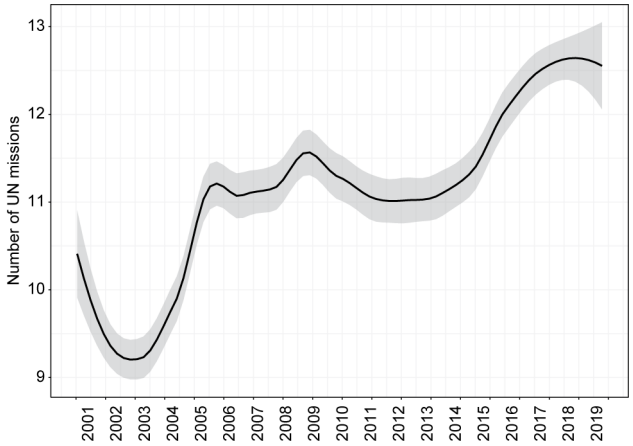

Figure 2: Number of UN peacekeeping operations deployed per month during 2001 and 2018.

Figure 3 shows that UN peacekeeping mission rely less on civilian and more on uniformed personnel. The figure displays the proportion of civilian personnel of the overall personnel. The trend is negative over time. While in 2001, 22% of all personnel deployed to peacekeeping operations were civilians, the share dropped to 12% in October 2018. Taken together, the decline in the number of civilian personnel during 2010 and 2018 seems not be related by overall number of personnel and the number mission deployed. Unpacking the causes of the reduction of the civilian personnel is a promising avenue for future research.

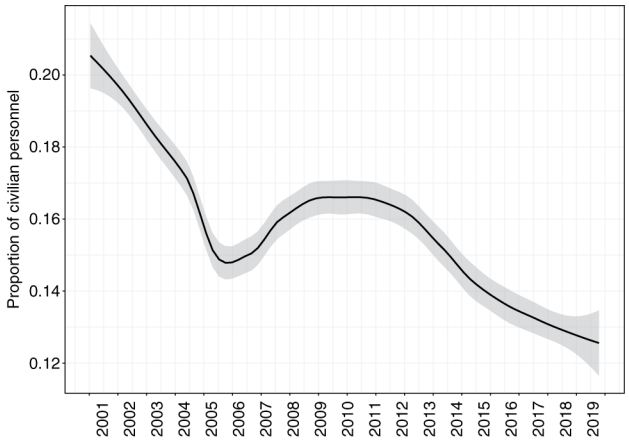

Figure 3: Proportion of civilian personnel of total personnel deployed in UN peacekeeping operations per month.

4 Civilian personnel and governments' human rights violation

In a next step, I explore the association between the number of civilian personnel and human rights violations. As aforementioned, civilian personnel can help to exchange information between conflict parties, and advise and discuss with government officials behind closed doors. These civilian interventions can impact governments to change their decisions to commit human rights violations in a face-saving manner and on short notice. To capture human rights performances with a fine-grained temporal resolution, I rely on intentional killing of civilians by governments forces as an indicator of violating physical integrity rights. I combine the civilian personnel data with the occurrence of violence against civilians committed by government agents (VAC, Eck & Hultman, 2007; Högbladh, 2019; Sundberg & Melander, 2013) at the monthly level. Occurrence of VAC is coded as a dummy variable, taking the value 1 if government forces intentionally killed civilians in a month and 0 otherwise. In Figure 4, I plot the average number of civilian personnel (x-axis) against the probability of VAC occurring at the monthly (y-axis). The shape of the trend does not show a clear increasing or decreasing relationship between civilian capacity and VAC. The probability of VAC is increasing but also decreasing as the average number of civilian personnel increases. However, higher numbers of civilian personnel seems to be associated with a greater risk of VAC compared to the minimum level of civilian staff.

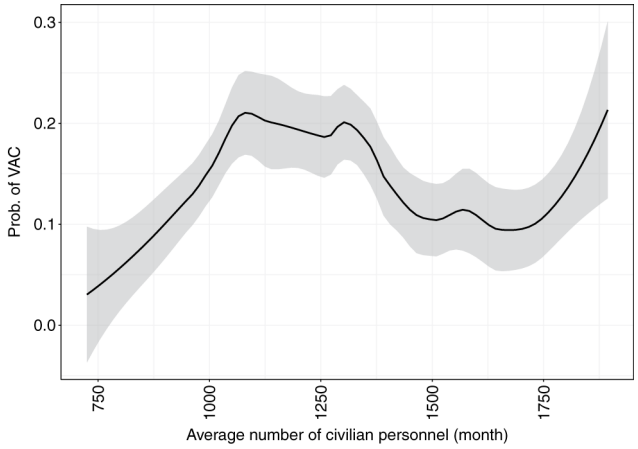

Figure 4: Probability of VAC and average number of civilian personnel per month.

While the literature on uniformed personnel has found strong support that a higher number of troops reduces the occurrence of VAC (e.g. Fjelde, Hultman, & Nilsson, 2019), the Figure 4 seems to tell a different story for civilian personnel. What can explain the diverging patterns? Civilian personnel in UN peacekeeping operation do not carry out their work in isolation but rather in conjunction with uniformed personnel. To account for the joint presence, I plot in Figure 5 the share of the civilian personnel in peacekeeping operations (x-axis) against the probability of VAC (y-axis). The overall trend is negative, suggesting as the share of the civilian personnel becomes greater (and the share of the military personnel lower), the risk of VAC decreases. While the probability of VAC is 30% when only 12% of all personnel in UN peacekeeping operations are civilians, the risk drops to 5% when 18% of all staff are civilians. However, the data also suggest that a civilian share above 19%

may contribute to increase the probability of VAC occurring. These patters speak to findings in the case study literature to balance the military and civilian components in UN peacekeeping operations. A certain amount of military personnel is necessary to provide a minimum of security for civilians to carry out their work. On the other hand, effective human rights promotion is only possible with sufficient civilian capacity (e.g. Katayanagi, 2002).

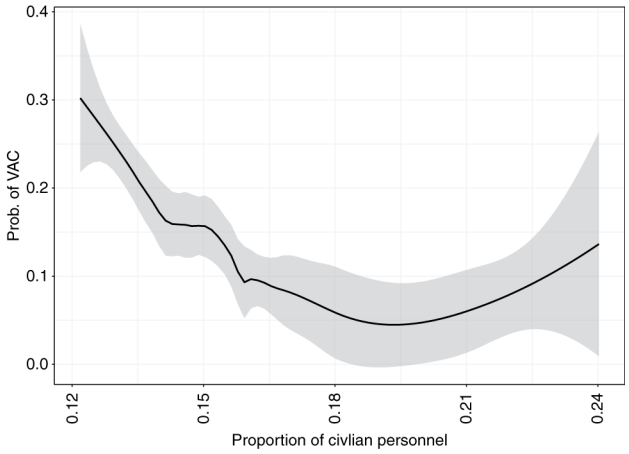

Figure 5: Probability of VAC and share of civilian personnel.

5 New research avenues

More and more UN peacekeeping operations adopt an increasingly diverse and wide range of civilian activities, and the promotion of human rights has become an integrative part of most current multi-dimensional peacekeeping operations (UN Peacekeeping, 2018). Studying the civilian side of peacekeeping operations complements existing research on peacekeeping effectiveness by focusing on those actors in UN missions that should have the strongest impact on human rights performance. The exploratory descriptive statistics presented are inconclusive whether civilian capacity contributes to decreasing governments' intentional killing of civilians. There are, however, some caveats with the exploratory descriptive statistics presented here. First, a higher number of civilian personnel may actually contribute to a higher number of reported of killings. Human rights officers monitor, document, and publish governments' bad behavior. The relationship shown in Figure 4 may rather pick up the number of reporting than civilian staff's effect on governments violent behavior. Second, I have not addressed potential selection effects. UN peacekeeping operations tend to go to the hard cases. A higher number of civilian personnel is likely to be deployed to countries, whose governments are more likely to kill civilians. Once we take reporting and selection bias into account, the results are likely to be more conclusive. Another avenue for future research is to theorize and test the mechanisms of how civilian capacity affects governments' human rights performance. Existing research mostly relates civilian based mechanisms to peace duration (e.g. Fortna, 2008b) or institutional capacity (Steinert & Grimm, 2015) but not to human rights. Furthermore, there is a need to go beyond intentional killings and evaluate the effect of civilians capacity on different forms of human rights violations and potential substitution effects.

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Notes

1 I focus on *de facto* human rights practices and I am primarily concerned with physical integrity rights, which include the rights not to be tortured, extra-judicially killed, disappeared, or imprisoned for political beliefs.
2 The previous name of DPO was Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).

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