

Is Support Always Helpful?

A quantitative analysis of the effects of external support on
intrastate conflict duration



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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between various types of external support and the duration of intrastate conflicts. Between 1975 and 2017, the majority of conflicts received external support in one shape or form and the effects of internationalising conflicts through the provision of external support are multiple. Existing literature has found that external involvement generally prolongs the conflicts but still few studies examine the durational effects of different types of external support separately. Thus, in this study, the relationship is explored through a quantitative analysis carried out through the Cox Proportional Hazards Model using newly made available data on the provision of external support. Furthermore, the study is informed by the theory that external support introduces veto players and their agendas that complicate resolution as well as the theoretical arguments that not all types of support exhibit the same effects. The findings of the study indicate that the provision of weapons, access to territory and funding are significantly associated with a decreased likelihood of conflict termination. The results of this quantitative study further highlight how the effects of external support should be studied disaggregately to come closer to the true consequences of providing external support to parties in conflict.

Key words: external support, conflict duration, veto player theory, cox proportional hazards model, statistical analysis

Words: 9604

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1 Introduction

Since the full-scale invasion two years ago, the ongoing war in Ukraine has been an ever-present shadow in Europe. It is a war with brutal consequences for human life that yet to this day we do not see the end of. However, since the Russian invasion in February 2022, Ukraine has not stood alone. Ukraine has received massive support, from the European Union as well as individual nation states (EEAS, n.d.; European Parliament, 2024). It is possible to argue that Ukraine is dependent on international support, as shown by the fears that have been raised over potentially wavering support from the United States – something which could have detrimental effects on Ukraine’s capacity to continue fighting against Russia (Boot, 2024; Jakes, 2023; Hooghe et.al., 2024). The case of Ukraine and the ongoing war thus tells us something: contemporary wars are rarely confined to a single state, or simply two states. Despite the often-drawn distinction between intrastate and interstate armed conflicts, conflicts rarely occur strictly within a state or between two states since more often than not external support is involved in some form or another (Cunningham, 2010: 115; Meier et.al., 2022). This reflects the crucial role that external support plays. It is not only in the case of the Russo-Ukrainian war that external support plays a part. Rather, other examples include when a total of 18 countries were involved in the Libyan Civil War in 2011 and similarly in the conflict in Syria, many countries got involved by providing external support to the parties of the conflict (Karlén, 2016). It is thus clear: to understand contemporary armed conflicts and war, it is of great importance to further investigate the role of external support for conflict duration.

The present study is specifically focused on how external support has affected intrastate conflict duration between 1975 and 2017. During this period at least 80 percent of all intrastate conflicts involved external support (Meier et.al., 2022). Notably, it is also, especially in the post-Cold War period, that conflicts have become increasingly internationalised through external support, seeing a quite dramatic increase since 2004 and with a record number in 2019 (Regan, 2002; Meier et.al., 2022). Recently updated research on external support in armed conflicts has also pointed out that military interventions in

particular have increased and that external support is the most common on the side of the government (Meier et.al., 2022). Thanks to improvements in terms of data availability and the more disaggregated nature of the available datasets it opens up for further investigation of how external support in internal armed conflicts affects conflict dynamics and processes, something this study does.

The topic of conflict duration and what affects it in different conflicts has been extensively researched where scholars have found many different aspects and variables affecting whether conflicts last a shorter or longer time. One of those aspects is namely external involvement from one or more third parties in the conflict which has been found to affect various conflict dynamics, where conflict duration is one. Although it has been researched extensively, it is only relatively recently that research has started to more thoroughly disaggregate and study how different types of external support can affect the conflict process and its dynamics in different ways (Meier et.al., 2022: 549). This warrants new research and focus on the topic in line with that new and more disaggregated data has been made available through the External Support in Armed Conflicts Dataset (ESD) from 2022.

Furthermore, this study fills a research gap as it, in contrast to the focus of some previous studies, focuses not on *what type of outcome* the conflict has but rather specifically on *the effect external support has on conflict duration*. In addition to this, this study is based on the use of the new and updated *External Support Dataset* to disaggregate between different types of external support, for instance if it regards support with weapons, training, intelligence or troops, and also be able to include a more recent timeframe to study the potential effects of external support. Importantly, it is also in the timeframe between 2004 and 2019 that this focus is particularly interesting to study given the quite dramatic increase in external support during this period (Meier et.al., 2022). Additionally, the period from 2010 and onwards has seen conflicts, where at least one actor is a government, causing an increased number of fatalities (Davies et.al., 2023: 693). All in all, this has led me to formulate the research question for this study which is presented in the section below.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between external support and conflict duration and assess whether this type of involvement from external actors makes the conflicts last longer, or shorter or has no significant effect on conflict duration. The time frame chosen for this study is the period between 1975 and 2017. To do this a quantitative analysis is employed and the research question guiding the study reads as follows:

Q: How does external support in intrastate conflicts affect conflict duration?

1.2 Thesis Structure

To begin with, a section on relevant previous research to the topics of conflict duration and external support in armed conflicts are presented and discussed. Within the same section, the principal theoretical argument is presented and hypotheses are formulated accordingly when they can be drawn from theory and previous research. Afterwards, the thesis moves on with a methodology chapter including the research design, model, overview of the data, operationalisations as well as some data and source criticism. Subsequently, the statistical analysis follows where the hypotheses are tested to answer the research question. Lastly, in the concluding discussion, the results of the study are discussed in relation to previous research.

2 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, previous research on conflict duration and external support are presented as well as what the overarching theoretical argument of this study is. Together this forms the theoretical framework that guides the study and builds the foundation for hypotheses as well as for the motivations of the control variables introduced in the next chapter on methodology. The hypotheses are presented in this section and subsequently tested in the statistical analysis.

2.1 Previous Research and Theoretical Argument

In order to place the subsequent findings of this study in a context, this section delves into themes that have emerged in previous studies on what affects duration generally as well as how external support, specifically, affects conflict duration. The study's focus is on intrastate conflicts which are conflicts where one party is a government and the other a non-governmental party, such as a rebel group (Gleditsch et.al., 2002: 619).

2.1.1 Conflict Duration

This study adds to previous research on conflict duration as well as provides further evidence about how external support influences conflict duration. Previous studies on conflict duration have pointed out that there are two main ways intrastate conflicts end, (1) military victory for either side, (2) a negotiated settlement between the parties (Cunningham, 2010: 116; Balch-Lindsay et.al., 2008).

This section will explore what has been found and discussed in the existing literature and discern certain factors that affect duration that are either shared or inconclusive. One of the factors that have been found to influence the duration of intrastate conflicts, making them longer, is *ethnic fractionalisation*, which refers to how ethnically divided a country is (Collier et.al., 2004: 262-263). But, the relationship has also been found to weaken and lose

significance when controlling for other factors such as coup d'états or revolutions (Fearon, 2004: 286-287). However, when that specific variable was dropped, ethnic fractionalisation once again proved to be associated with a longer duration (Fearon, 2004: 286-287). Another study, specifically focusing on this relationship, found strong evidence that ethnic fractionalisation affects conflict duration, but only in those cases where large parts of a population are excluded along categorical lines, according to ethnicity whilst in other cases it proved insignificant (Wucherpfennig et.al., 2012). Later studies have also found that ethnic fractionalisation does show a significant and robust effect on duration and is associated with lengthier intrastate conflicts (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2010).

In previous studies on what makes states more susceptible to conflict, low state capacity has been highlighted as a risk factor. With insufficient state capacity it is argued to be harder to avoid neighbouring conflicts spilling over or for instance control the trade flow of weapons (Braithwaite, 2010: 314). Although it is focused on the risk of conflict onset, it could be argued that factors affecting whether conflict is more likely to occur or not also have a lasting effect on the conflict process as a whole, namely its capacity to continue fighting against rebel group(s) or seek a negotiated settlement. This reasoning is echoed in another study which ascertained that countries whose state capacity is low, are associated with experiencing longer intrastate conflicts (Hegre, 2004: 248). Finally, one of the prominent factors affecting conflict duration that can be discerned from the existing literature is whether and how external support was provided to one or more parties in a conflict (Regan, 2002). This will be delved into and discussed in further detail in the paragraphs below.

2.1.2 External Support and Conflict Duration

Despite being characterised and defined as intrastate conflicts external factors are often present in the form of external support from a third party, thus internationalising these “internal” conflicts (Cunningham, 2010: 115). The phenomenon is particularly visible after the Second World War (McKibben & Skoll, 2021: 481). This notion of external support in intrastate conflicts is echoed in the vast body of research already examining external support and its effect on conflict processes and dynamics such as duration.

A theory in previous research that has been developed to explain why the involvement of external third parties in civil wars could lead to a longer duration of those conflicts is the

veto-player theory outlined in Cunningham (2006). This theory was originally designed to explain how the presence of more actors, or players, in government policies complicates and lengthens the process, since more actors can veto any decision that does not fit their agenda or objectives, thus extending the process and making it harder to reach a decision on that government policy (Cunningham, 2006: 877). However, what is done by Cunningham (2006: 877) is that the original theory is adapted and translated to fit the context of civil wars, since as he puts it, “Civil wars can be thought of as violent conflict over policy”. Essentially, the process of reaching a decision over government policy is likened to that of reaching a decision at the negotiation table, trying to reach an agreement and thus ending the civil war. This is then theorised, similar to the case of government, to make it harder to reach such an agreement when more actors, beyond the primary warring parties, are involved such as in the case of external support by a third party (Cunningham, 2006: 877). The effect of veto players in civil wars has also been explored in the context of pro-regime militias acting as veto players with an interest in continuing the conflict and disrupting the chances for conflict resolution (Aliyev, 2020).

Another theme that has emerged in previous studies on the consequences of external support for conflict duration is that the motives of the external party can be different from only helping to end the conflict for humanitarian reasons, which can complicate the resolution of conflicts even more (Balch-Lindsay & Enterline, 2000). Moreover, despite previous arguments that multilateral support is more ‘neutral’ and expected to shorten conflict duration, Regan (2002) found that the opposite is true. Regan (2002) further argues that a potential reason for this is that multilateral support rarely is ‘neutral’ despite being deemed as such, which is perhaps a testament to the fact that external supporters can also act in their own interest. Thus, the external supporter’s own objectives may be prioritised in favour of a quick termination of fighting and resolution to a conflict if it is not aligned with their aims. The studies that have focused on what affects the external supporter’s decision to intervene has for instance found that economic incentives such as oil, previous colonial ties or proximity to the conflict increases the likelihood that an external party will intervene (Bove et.al., 2015; Chacha & Stojek, 2019; Hammarström & Heldt, 2002; Findley & Teo, 2006).

In general, a majority of the previous research on external support and its effects on the duration of conflicts has found that it increases the duration of the conflicts (Regan, 2002; Cunningham, 2010; Karlén, 2016). However, Regan (2002: 71) starts by arguing that the

reason for external support is logically to shorten the duration of conflicts as a type of conflict management but concludes after the statistical analysis that it increases the duration of conflicts a lot. Another study on the topic, theorises that external support to a government can alter their cost-benefit analysis regarding whether they should or can, for instance, continue fighting and finds it generally leads to a military victory for that side (Balch-Lindsay et.al., 2008: 349). At the same time, however, if the external support goes to the rebel side it was found to increase the government's willingness to negotiate rather than risk losing militarily (Balch-Lindsay et.al., 2008: 350). Taken together, the findings from the previous studies discussed above leads me to formulate the following hypothesis:

H₁: External involvement through external support in intrastate conflicts is associated with a longer duration.

Furthermore, in recent years the importance of disaggregating the different ways in which external support can be provided and how it affects the outcomes of intrastate conflicts has been highlighted (McKibben & Skoll, 2021; Sawyer et.al., 2017). It also somewhat echoes the findings by Balch-Lindsay et.al. (2008) by theorising that different kinds of external support to different sides of the conflict, government or rebels, affect the recipient's reading of the conflict and the likelihood of a certain outcome (McKibben & Skoll, 2021: 499; Sawyer et.al., 2017). Additionally, Sawyer et.al. (2017) argues that not all types of external support provided will have equal effects on the likelihood of the termination of a conflict. Moreover, they also argue that it is necessary to study the effects of these different types of external support separately and forgo the focus oftentimes limited to direct, or *hard*, aspects of external support in armed conflicts. (Sawyer et.al., 2017). In the study by McKibben & Skoll (2021: 490) an older version of the ESD is used to study the effects of different types of external support grouped in what they conceptualise as either '*soft*' or '*hard*' support, where it is not possible to know which type of support was provided in a given situation only that it was one or more types of either *soft* or *hard* support. They argue that if a third party provides support of a more *soft* nature, for instance, intelligence, funding or training it can signal to the other side in the conflict that the external supporter is not willing to provide '*hard*' support such as weapons or troops and therefore the recipient might be more inclined to want to reach a negotiated settlement to avoid a costly defeat (McKibben & Skoll, 2021: 486). Whereas if *hard* support is provided it could bolster the recipient to think it can win a military victory and thus be motivated to continue fighting rather than see negotiations for resolutions as

desirable (McKibben & Skoll, 2021: 498-499; Cunningham, 2017). In line with the conceptualisation of 'soft' and *hard* external support, I have thus formulated the following two hypotheses where H₂ concerns the '*hard*' support and H₃ the so-called '*soft*' support. Consequently, I will thus be able to explore both the supposed different effects of '*hard*' and '*soft*' support whilst also looking at the individual effects of the different types of external support as is expressed in the two hypotheses below:

H₂: ['Hard'] External support where weapons or troops are provided is more likely to increase duration compared to the provision of 'soft' support.

H₃: ['Soft'] External support such as intelligence, training, materiel and logistics, access to territory and funding is less likely to increase duration compared to the provision of 'hard' support.

In addition, building on how external support has been found to make conflicts last longer it has also been found to be particularly apparent when both sides of the conflict are recipients of support (Aydin & Regan, 2012). In these scenarios, it is theorised that supporting both parties further complicates the resolution since the parties are then bolstered and able to keep fighting and less likely to view termination of fighting as desirable (Aydin & Regan, 2012). Given this, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H₄: External support provided to both sides in a conflict is associated with a longer duration compared to support provided to only one side.

3 Methodology

In this section, the methodology of this quantitative study is outlined, limitations are discussed, and the choice of material is explained. To clarify the focus and how the statistical analysis is conducted, the dependent and independent variables, as well as the control variables, are operationalised following the previously explained purpose of the study and the previous research on these topics.

3.1 Research Design

As discussed in previous chapters, the point of this thesis is to examine how external support affects the duration of intrastate conflicts. This is done through a large-N comparative statistical analysis which is useful as it minimises the risk of selection bias (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 251). In order to conduct the statistical analysis the data program Stata (version 18.0) is used. Considering I go into the analysis with pre-determined variables and data to analyse, it is thus considered a deductive study (Lamont, 2015: 98; Halperin & Heath, 2020: 34-35).

3.2 Datasets

This study uses three existing datasets which are merged together to form one large dataset in order to examine how the variables interact with one another. The data is derived from two datasets from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) as well as the Quality of Government Dataset (QOG) in order to add control variables for the testing of potential spurious relationships with a multivariate analysis (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 455). Given this, the study uses secondary data, collected and aggregated by someone else (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 195). This can be argued as a disadvantage since I have not myself collected the data

and therefore do not have complete insight into or control over how it was collected. Although I have not compiled the data in the datasets myself, the sources of the data are well established. In addition, the two datasets from the UCDP are accompanied by codebooks on how the variables are defined and operationalised which adds to the transparency of the data.

UCDP External Support Dataset (2022)

As previously mentioned, the External Support Dataset (ESD) by Meier et.al. (2022) covers the time period between 1975-2017 and is the principal dataset that was used to develop the research question for this study. The ESD is also the dataset employed for the independent variables, namely different aspects of external support, which is used to examine whether this factor has a significant effect on the duration of intrastate conflicts. When it comes to the sources and material that were used to construct the dataset it is stated that open-source material, in several different languages, were used, such as news articles, official reports by non-governmental organisations or governments together with academic articles and books (Meier et.al., 2022: 546-547). Moreover, the data was manually coded and reviewed “to ensure intercoder reliability” and includes over 10 000 observations (Meier et.al., 2022: 546-547). There are three versions of this dataset available, and this present study uses the dyadic version. This is due to the fact that it is compatible for merging with the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset discussed in the paragraph below.

UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (2023)

As for the dependent variable, the duration of intrastate conflicts is calculated using the ESD and the UCDP/PRIO Armed conflict dataset in conjunction with one another. The UCDP/PRIO dataset covers the time between 1946 and 2022, but given that the ESD only stretches from 1975 to 2017 the study is limited to this period of time. The sources this dataset relies on are primarily those of the UCDP and the Correlates of War (COW) (Gleditsch et.al., 2002; Davies et.al., 2023).

The Quality of Government Standard Dataset (2024)

This dataset is a bit different from the two datasets presented above since it compiles the variables and data of several different datasets into one large dataset. Hence, when citing this dataset I also refer to the original datasets as instructed by the QoG Dataset Codebook (Teorell et.al., 2024). Two of the control variables retrieved from this dataset, the variable for

ethnic fractionalisation and the variable for state capacity, are introduced and operationalised further below.

3.3 Operationalisation

In this section, the dependent, independent and control variables are operationally defined by clarifying how they are understood and used in the study. A short motivation of why the specific control variables have been chosen is included and speaks to the previous research. For the purpose of operationalisation, two different commands in Stata have been used to illustrate the continuous and categorical variables. For the continuous variables, which are in themselves quantifiable, the command *summarize* is used and it displays the variables' number of observations, e.g. the 'frequency', the mean, standard deviation as well as minimum and maximum values present (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 395; Stata.com "summarize"). The categorical variables are qualitative variables, meaning that they are not quantifiable in themselves but have been assigned a value in order to quantify them. For these variables, the command *tabulate* is used to display the variables' frequency and the percentage that frequency is equivalent to (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 396-397; Stata.com "tabulate oneway").

3.3.1 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is the duration of intrastate conflicts and is measured as a continuous variable. The unit of analysis for the dependent variable is dyad-year. The conflict duration is limited to the intrastate conflicts between 1975 and 2017, given that it is the available period when using the UCDP External Support Dataset. The year a conflict is considered to have started is limited to when it for the first time reached 25 battle-related deaths as determined by the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Davies et.al., 2023; Gleditsch et.al., 2002; Pettersson, 2023). Not all conflicts have a formal ending since some "peter out rather than end with an agreement" (Gleditsch et.al., 2002: 625), thus, for this study, a conflict is considered to have ended when three years of uninterrupted inactivity has been recorded. Similarly to how the start date is recorded, a conflict is considered active as long as it keeps reaching a minimum of 25 battle-related deaths a year (Meier, 2022).

3.3.2 Independent Variables

Seeing as this study seeks to understand the effect of external support on conflict duration, it is relevant to begin with conceptualising ‘external support’ in this study. This is especially important since previous research has sometimes used external intervention, military intervention, and external support interchangeably without specifying what exact type of external support is explored which is something that could risk attributing significance to types of external support that might prove to be non-significant. Unlike many previous studies, this thesis tests both the effects of external support in general and the effects of different types of support. In the following, I thus provide an operationalisation of the independent variables of the study.

In the External Support Dataset external support is defined as follows: “*the provision of militarily relevant assistance by an outside party to a warring party with the intent to assist that party in an ongoing armed conflict*” (Meier et.al., 2022: 546). As this dataset is what this present study builds upon, this definition will also be employed for this study. In the article introducing the ESD Meier et.al. (2022) recognises that there is a wide range of outside parties that could provide support, but that the dataset is limited to on the one hand support by foreign governments, and on the other support by rebel groups (Meier et.al., 2022: 546). Whether external support is provided and whether a specific type of support is provided or not is a binary, or dummy, variable taking either the value 0 or 1 (Meier, 2021). In the statistical analysis, the different tables explore different types of support, all incorporated within the umbrella of external support, as the independent variables. This is facilitated by the disaggregated nature of the ESD (Meier et.al., 2022: 551). The idea behind this is to explore the potentially differential effects of different types of support as it has been highlighted in more recent literature to be an important venture point for studying these effects in various aspects of a conflict process (Meier et.al., 2022: 552; Sawyer et.al., 2017: 1145). The disaggregated types of external support included in the present study are weapons, troops, intelligence, training, materiel & logistics, access to the supporter’s territory and lastly funding. Separately, external support to both sides is also included as one of the independent variables. Down below, two figures are included to operationalise the occurrence of these different types of external support later explored in the statistical analysis.

Variable & Description		Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Weapons	0 = no	905	41.23	41.23
	1 = yes	1,290	58.77	100.00
Troops	0 = no	1,771	80.68	80.68
	1 = yes	424	19.32	100.00
Intelligence	0 = no	1,828	83.28	83.28
	1 = yes	367	16.72	100.00
Training	0 = no	832	37.90	37.90
	1 = yes	1,363	62.10	100.00
Materiel & Logistics	0 = no	940	42.82	42.82
	1 = yes	1,255	57.18	100.00
Territory	0 = no	1,431	65.19	65.19
	1 = yes	764	34.81	100.00
Funding	0 = no	1,171	53.35	53.35
	1 = yes	1,024	46.65	100.00
Total		2,195	100.00	

Figure 1. Operationalisation of the different types of external support

External support to both sides

Additionally, a variable indicating whether external support was provided to only one of the sides in the conflict or both of them. The reasoning behind including this as a control variable in the statistical analysis is because of findings in previous studies on external support's effect on duration, where it has been found that when both sides are recipients of external support, it is associated with lengthier conflicts (Aydin & Regan, 2012), while 'biased interventions' where only one side receives support are generally shorter (Karlén, 2016: 124; Regan, 2002: 71). Whether external support is provided to only one or both sides of the conflict is accounted for in the ESD under the variable name *ext_bothersides* and is a binary variable where the value 0 means that only one side of the conflict received support and the value 1 means both sides received support (Meier et.al., 2022; Petterson, 2023: 25).

Variable	Description	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Both Sides	0 = one side	1,739	96.50	96.50
	1 = both sides	63	3.50	100.00
Total		1,802	100.00	

Figure 2. Operationalisation of support to both sides

3.3.3 Control Variables

In this section, the control variables used for the multivariate analysis are introduced and motivated as for why they are relevant. The role and importance of control variables come into play after an apparent relationship has been established through a bivariate analysis. The function of control variables is to analyse whether their introduction means the relationship observed between the dependent and independent variables is no longer holding up and loses significance, meaning that the apparent relationship is a factor of another variable (Lamont, 2015: 111). If this is the case, the relationship between the dependent and independent variables would be spurious (Lamont, 2015: 111).

State Capacity

A first control variable is *state capacity*. This control variable is chosen because of the existing literature that has found that countries with low state capacity are more likely to experience conflict as well as longer duration (Braithwaite, 2010; Hegre, 2004). The variable is derived from the Hanson & Sigman State Capacity Index. It is a continuous variable named *lld_capacity*, where the state capacity is estimated through a Bayesian latent variable analysis (The QoG Standard Dataset, 2024; Hanson & Sigman, 2020; Hanson & Sigman, 2021). The estimated state capacity is based on three dimensions, extractive capacity, coercive capacity, and administrative capacity and the index has data until 2015 covering 181 countries (Teorell et.al., 2024; Hanson & Sigman, 2020; Hanson & Sigman, 2021).

Ethnic fractionalisation

As the literature review of the previous research revealed, *ethnic fractionalisation* in a country has sometimes been found to be associated with a longer duration of intrastate conflicts, but the effect nonetheless seems to remain inconclusive. With this in mind, I have

chosen to include ethnic fractionalisation, *fe_etfra*, as a control variable to see whether it has a significant effect on conflict duration and whether it can indicate a spurious relationship between the dependent and independent variables. The data for this variable is retrieved from the QoG Dataset and is available from 1946 to 2023 and covers 157 countries. The variable is continuous and measures ethnic fractionalisation in values between (0) perfectly homogenous and (1) highly fragmented (Teorell et.al., 2024: 550-551; Fearon, 2003).

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
State Capacity	8,793	0.230	(0.959)	-2.31	2.964
Ethnic Frac.	11,522	0.491	(0.260)	0.001999	1

Figure 3. Operationalisation of continuous control variables

Conflict Intensity

Furthermore, a variable for *conflict intensity* is also introduced in the multivariate analysis, which is an important feature in the categorisation of conflicts and something I want to examine to see whether it has any effect on duration. Conflict intensity is defined as “[...] what level of fighting a state-based conflict or dyad reaches in each specific calendar year”, following the definition and operationalisation made in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch et.al., 2002: 619; Davies et.al., 2023). The conflict intensity variable has two categories and is measured as a binary variable where a conflict is defined on the level as either *Minor*, “At least 25 but less than 1000 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.” or *War*, “At least 1000 battle-related deaths in one calendar year.” (Gleditsch et.al., 2002: 619). Conflict intensity is a categorical variable which therefore in itself cannot be quantified, but the two different categorical measures, *minor* and *war*, have been assigned numerical values that are quantifiable, values 1 and 2 respectively (Pettersson, 2023). As displayed in the figure below, the majority of intrastate conflicts recorded in the data are *minor* wars.

Conflict Intensity	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
1 = Minor	2,256	77.85	77.85
2 = War	642	22.15	100.00
Total	2,898	100.00	

Figure 4. Operationalisation of categorical control variable

3.4 Model

For the statistical analysis, this study uses a *Cox Proportional Hazards Model* for the duration analysis to test the hypotheses made. The reason behind using the *Cox Proportional Hazards Model* is that it is a semi-parametric model which takes into consideration that the effect of variables may change over time. If this part is not taken into account it may lead to biased results regarding what effect the independent variables actually have (Box-Steffensmeier & Zorn, 2001: 971-974). Moreover, the fact that the hazard rates are only observed at failures, in this case when the conflict is considered ended, makes it especially fitting for a study such as this where there is a possibility and likelihood that the covariates' effect might change over time (Cunningham et.al., 2009: 584). Using the Cox regression model, which is part of the “Event History” models in statistics, is also in line with what many political science scholars have done in academic research on conflict duration (Box-Steffensmeier & Zorn, 2001; Cunningham, 2006; Balch-Lindsay et.al., 2008; Karlén, 2017). Originally and most commonly, the *Cox Proportional Hazards Model* is used in medical sciences for duration or survival analysis of patients when certain aspects are factored in, such as getting special treatment or drugs (Cunningham, 2017). Despite its origin, Cox regression has proved to be useful when studying effects over time in conflicts, where external support can be likened to the treatment, and when the conflict ends it would mean in medical science that the patient has died (Regan, 2002: 64).

One of the most important and central aspects of the *Cox Proportional Hazards Model* is the hazard ratio. Hazard ratios are used to interpret the likelihood of a given event, or outcome, occurring (Box-Steffensmeier, 2001: 974). In this study the interest is in the duration of conflicts, and how long it takes for them to end. The end thus translates to the ‘event’ we anticipate to occur at some point in the analysis. The way in which the hazard rate is interpreted revolves around the value 1. If the value of the hazard ratio is smaller than 1 it decreases the likelihood of the event in question happening, whereas if the value is larger than 1 it increases the likelihood of the event occurring (Box-Steffensmeier, 2001: 974). Down below, follows a visualisation of how one can understand or imagine the *Cox Proportional Hazards Model*. The point marked on the timeline as “independent variable” is in this study whether and in what way external support has been provided to a party in an intrastate conflict.

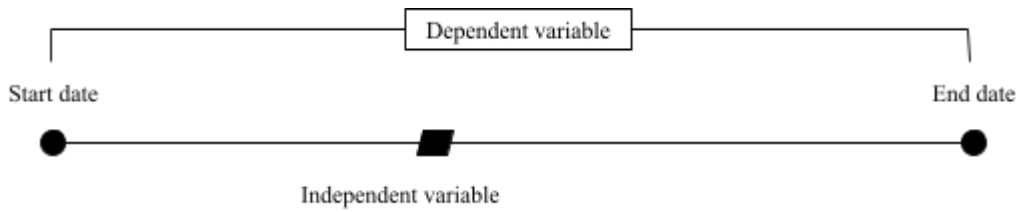


Figure 5. Visualisation of the Cox Proportional Hazards Model

3.5 Limitations

Firstly, the period of time studied, 1975-2017, has been chosen with regard to both the data availability from the UCDP datasets and the fact that particularly the post-millennium period is less studied. Secondly, as with most quantitative studies, there are certain limitations that come with statistical analyses. For instance, it is taken into account by the article introducing the ESD that there can be potential risks of biases in data collection since the dataset relies on media-based, open-source data (Meier et.al., 2022: 547). However, it is also argued that the risk of this has decreased slightly since more recent conflicts are being covered more and documents which used to be classified can many times now be accessed retrospectively (Meier et.al., 2022: 547). The risk of potential biases with selection bias is likely also mitigated by the fact that this study relies on data from widely recognised and trusted sources. As with all quantitative research, it is worth acknowledging that generalisability of results can be difficult to assume and that causation is not the same as association. But, the fact that the study uses a large number of cases is also a factor that increases the confidence in the robustness of the results (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 251).

4 Statistical Analysis

In this chapter, the statistical analysis of the data is presented, which is designed in several parts. Firstly, a section of descriptive statistics is discussed, followed by the regression analyses of both bivariate relationships and the results of the multivariate analysis through a *Cox Proportional Hazards Model*, or Cox regression for short. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Firstly, it is relevant to start with descriptive statistics in regards to the aim of the study. This is shown in the following graph.

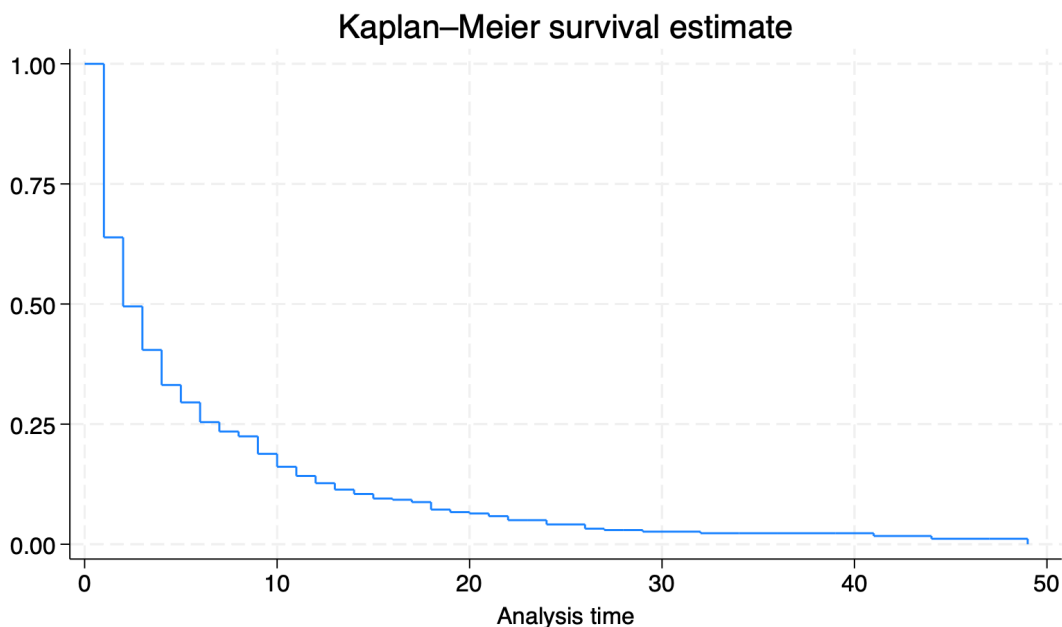


Figure 6. Duration of intrastate conflicts, 1946-2017

Figure 6 above is included to provide a visualisation of the shortest duration recorded in this study, which is 1 year, and the longest recorded duration which is 49 years. It is also possible to discern from this figure roughly how many conflicts last a certain amount of time.

Furthermore, it is relevant to show the descriptive statistics regarding the variable of external support, which is provided below.

ext_sup	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
0 = no external support	393	17.90	17.90
1 = external support	1,803	82.10	100.00
Total	2,196	100.00	

Figure 7. Table over external support provided, 1975-2017

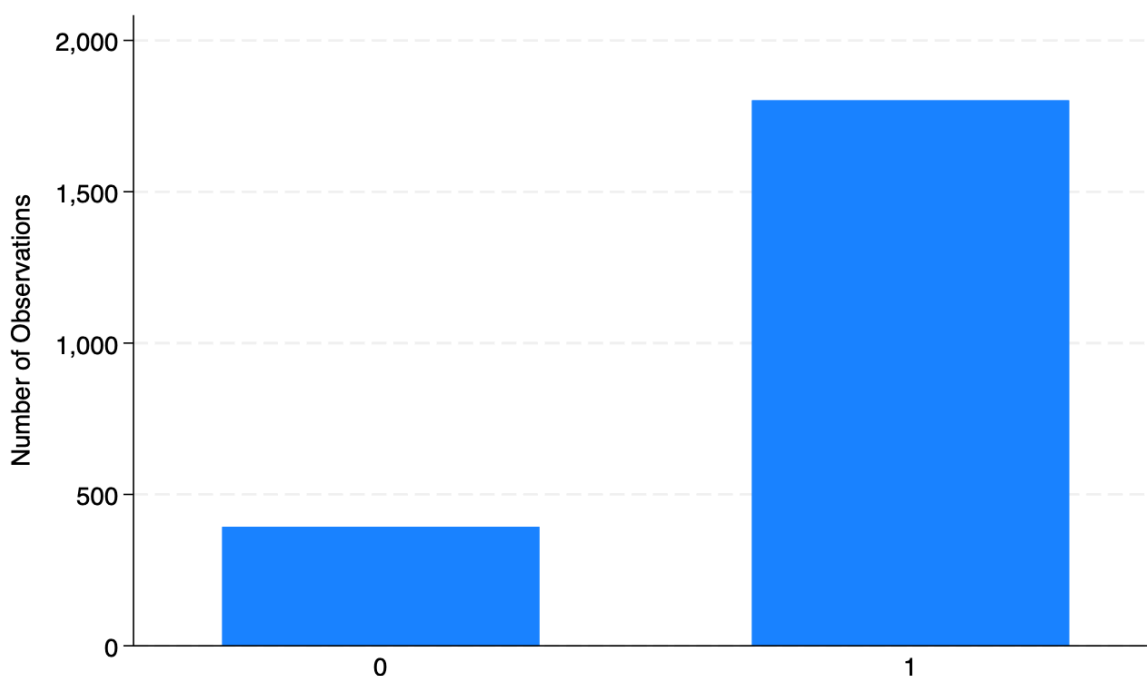


Figure 8. Bar chart over external support provided, 1975-2017

As shown in the two figures above, the variable *ext_sup* codes whether external support was provided or not. As illustrated in the table, the number of observations where external support was provided amounted to 1,803, or in percentage 82.10 percent, and only 393 of the observations, 17.90 percent, received no external support. This means that a majority of the intrastate conflicts between 1975 and 2017 received at least one type of external support at some point. In summary, the descriptive statistics have shown us that the majority of intrastate conflicts between 1946 and 2017 last between one and ten years. Then, Figures 8 and 9 tell us that an overwhelming majority, about 82 percent, of all intrastate conflicts

between 1975 and 2017 which appears to be showing a relationship between external support and conflict duration.

4.2 Bivariate Analysis

With a start in the descriptive statistics, it is then necessary to continue the analysis with a bivariate statistical analysis of the two variables. This is shown in the following graph:

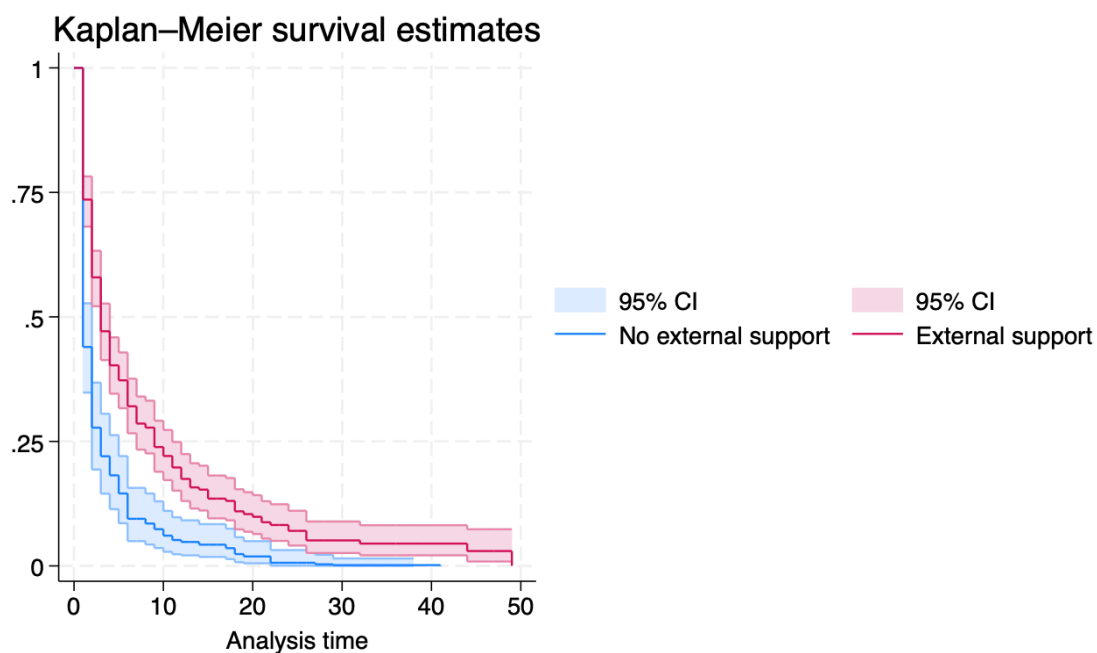


Figure 9. Survival estimates of intrastate conflicts by external support, 1975–2017

In the figure above, a Kaplan-Meier survival estimate illustrates the difference in duration between conflicts that have received external support and when they have. The graphed figure illustrates support for the relationship between external support and longer conflict duration, in line with what has emerged from previous studies. Thus, it also means that a bivariate relationship is found between the dependent and independent variables. To the figure's right, the CI or confidence interval is 95 percent which indicates that we can be sure that the range, the difference between the data's lowest and highest values, contains the true population value 95% of the time (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 413). Having established that

there exists a bivariate relationship between external support and conflict duration it is time to test whether this relationship is maintained or spurious with a multivariate analysis.

4.3 Multivariate Regression

In the following paragraphs, the *Cox Proportional Hazards Model* for the regression analysis is executed and its results are presented and discussed below each corresponding table. The control variables are introduced one by one allowing for examining how the potential associations between variables might change (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 463). At the bottom of all tables, the *N* refers to the number of observations for each model.

Table 1. External Support

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
External Support	0.549 ** (0.062)	0.581 ** (0.067)	0.597 ** (0.083)	0.597 ** (0.085)
Conflict Intensity		0.535 ** (0.095)	0.453 ** (0.099)	0.459 ** (0.100)
State Capacity			0.809 * (0.068)	0.803 * (0.070)
Ethnic Fractionalization				0.861 (0.265)
<i>N</i>	2195	2151	1510	1496

Note: Standard errors in parentheses

** p<.01, * p<.05

In Table 1 the *Cox Proportional Hazards Model* with *external support* as the independent variable is presented. Consequently, this table tests H_1 which supposes that intrastate conflicts where external support is provided last longer.

In order to understand whether there is a relationship between the variables the significance level is tested to see if the *null hypothesis* can be rejected or not. A null hypothesis refers to an assumption that the effect of an independent variable on the dependent variable will be zero, or at least not significantly different from zero (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 432). It is here where significance testing comes into play, because if the p-value indicating the significance

level is less than 0.05 it means that it is considered meaningfully different from zero, the null hypothesis can be rejected and the value is statistically significant (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 432). As can be seen in Model 1 of this table, the relationship between *external support* and intrastate *conflict duration* shows a statistically significant positive relationship. This is evidenced by the 0.549 ** value, where the two stars indicate a strong relationship since the p-value is less than 0.01 which means that the significance level is above 99 percent. Thus, the H₁ of this study can be confirmed. In addition, it is valuable to interpret the hazard ratios since they show how much more or less likely it is that an event occurred. In this study, the event in question is when a conflict ends. If a hazard ratio is larger than 1 it means that it increases the risk of the event happening whereas a hazard ratio with a value less than 1 displays the opposite (Box-Steffensmeier, 2001: 974). Therefore, the value in Model 1, 0,549, tells us that when external support is provided there is about a 45% decreased risk, or chance, that the conflict will end. To summarise, this means that the provision of external support decreases the likelihood that a conflict will end with the result showing strong statistical significance.

Subsequently, when the control variables are introduced in Models 2, 3 and 4, *conflict intensity* shows a positive relationship with a strong significance level above 99 percent. Likewise, *state capacity* also indicates a significant positive relationship, although only with one accompanying star meaning a significance level of above 95 percent. The variable for *ethnic fractionalisation* does not show statistical significance and therefore does not appear to be associated with conflict duration in this case. The results of these three additional models with the control variables included, still show a strong significant relationship between external support and conflict duration. The positive slope of the hazard ratio is also slightly increased which means that the likelihood that a conflict ends is decreased slightly as the control variables are introduced.

Table 2 examines the relationship between external support provided in the form of *weapons* and *troops* and whether it has a significant effect on intrastate conflict duration as well as whether the accompanying control variables indicate a spurious relationship or not.

Table 2. External Support: Weapons and Troops

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Weapons	0.647 ** (0.070)	0.684 ** (0.076)	0.646 ** (0.085)	0.648 ** (0.087)
Troops	0.816 (0.121)	0.913 (0.138)	1.105 (0.202)	1.133 (0.208)
Conflict Intensity		0.569 ** (0.104)	0.465 ** (0.104)	0.467 ** (0.105)
State Capacity			0.810 * (0.072)	0.802 * (0.073)
Ethnic Fractionalization				0.757 (0.230)
<i>N</i>	2195	2151	1510	1496

Note: Standard errors in parentheses

** p<.01, * p<.05

Table 2 explores H₂ which assumes that the provision of weapons and troops increases the expected duration of intrastate conflict more compared to when intelligence, training, materiel and logistics, access to territory or funding are provided. Since this hypothesis is dependent on the results from Table 3 in order to assess whether it can be verified or falsified, I will thus comment on both H₂ and H₃ together under Table 3. In Model 1, where only the two types of external support are included in the analysis, only the variable for weapons displays a statistically significant positive relationship, with a high significance level of above 99 percent as indicated by the two stars. Models 2, 3 and 4 are then added and the control variables are introduced accordingly.

In the three models following Model 1, *conflict intensity* and *state capacity* are again, similar to Table 1, showing statistical significance. In addition, also similar to Table 1, they do not indicate a spurious relationship between external support through providing weapons and intrastate conflict duration. This relationship, as observed in Model 1, stays consistently of strong statistical significance, as indicated by the two stars accompanying the results of the variable for *weapons* in all four models. Looking at the hazard ratios of the significant values, the value in Model 1 displays a positive relationship with a value of 0.647. This value informs us that the likelihood that a conflict will end is decreased by about 35 percent when weapons are provided. Subsequently, when conflict intensity is added in Model 2, the

likelihood has increased somewhat, but it is still a 32 percent decreased likelihood that the conflict will end. In the last two models, the value of the external support's effect on conflict duration returns to almost the same as in Model 1.

In Table 3 below the relationship between the independent variables, *intelligence*, *materiel & logistics*, *access to territory*, *training*, *funding* and intrastate conflict duration are shown.

Table 3. External Support: Intelligence, Materiel & Logistics, Territory, Training, Funding

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intelligence	0.948 (0.164)	0.907 (0.163)	1.097 (0.249)	1.090 (0.248)
Materiel & Logistics	0.902 (0.128)	0.978 (0.141)	0.913 (0.155)	0.900 (0.154)
Territory	0.587 ** (0.082)	0.548 ** (0.080)	0.535 ** (0.090)	0.545 ** (0.092)
Training	0.939 (0.128)	0.934 (0.129)	0.963 (0.153)	0.982 (0.161)
Funding	0.612 ** (0.084)	0.638 ** (0.089)	0.661 * (0.108)	0.664 * (0.109)
Conflict Intensity		0.576 ** (0.105)	0.521 ** (0.116)	0.525 ** (0.118)
State Capacity			0.852 (0.074)	0.838 * (0.074)
Ethnic Fractionalization				0.775 (0.239)
<i>N</i>	2195	2151	1510	1496

Note: Standard errors in parentheses

** p<.01, * p<.05

In this Table, it is H₃ that is tested and it supposes that the provision of intelligence, training, materiel & logistics, access to territory or funding increases the likelihood of longer duration less compared to the provision of weapons or troops. In Model 1 where only the five types of external support are included as independent variables, it is only provided access to *territory* and *funding* that display statistically significant positive relationships between themselves and intrastate conflict duration. The value of access to *territory* is accompanied by two stars which indicates a significance level above 99 percent something which is true for the value of *funding*. The hazard rate for the first of the two statistically significant independent variables

regarding external support in this table, access to *territory*, the value indicates that the likelihood that a conflict will end is decreased by roughly 42 percent. For the second statistically significant variable in Model 1, *funding* shows a decreased expectation that a conflict will end by about 39 percent.

In the subsequent Models 2, 3 and 4 the value and slope of the value for when access to *territory* is provided is lower and thus farther from 1 which shows that the likelihood of a conflict ending further decreased, circulating around 47 percent less likelihood that a conflict will end. Out of the three control variables included to check for potential spurious relationships, *conflict intensity* and *state capacity* are once again both statistically significant with significance levels of above 99 and 95 percent respectively. But, the 95 percent significance level for *state capacity* in this table is only displayed once the variable *ethnic fractionalisation* has been included in Model 4. In particular, it is *conflict intensity* that appears to be associated with a longer duration of conflicts, with hazard rates of between 46 and 52 percent decreased likelihood of conflicts ending. Neither indicates that the relationship between access to *territory* or *funding* and longer duration is spurious, and the variables therefore remain statistically significant throughout all models. However, it can be added that although access to *territory* is statistically significant by 99 percent throughout all models, the *funding* variable drops to a significance level of 95 percent in Model 3 and 4, indicating that the inclusion of *state capacity* might be the culprit of this. As a consequence of the results in Table 3, both H₂ and H₃ can be falsified.

Table 4. External Support: Both Sides

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Both Sides	0.393 (0.229)	0.419 (0.245)	0.445 (0.262)	0.448 (0.263)
Conflict Intensity		0.555 ** (0.106)	0.445 ** (0.102)	0.450 ** (0.104)
State Capacity			0.776 ** (0.075)	0.773 * (0.078)
Ethnic Fractionalization				0.959 (0.395)
<i>N</i>	1802	1762	1270	1258

Note: Standard errors in parentheses

** p<.01, * p<.05

In Table 4 above, H₄ which supposes that “[e]xternal support provided to both sides in a conflict is associated with a longer duration compared to support provided to only one side.” is tested. However, as can be discerned from Table 4 the variable for support to *both sides* in a conflict displays no statistical significance in either of the models. Similarly to previous models, the control variables for *conflict intensity* and *state capacity* show statistical significance on the duration of intrastate conflicts. Seeing as this variable proved to be statistically insignificant in this analysis, I therefore do not interpret the hazard ratios.

4.3.1 Summary of Findings

First of all, out of the three control variables, *conflict intensity* displayed strong statistical significance throughout all tables and models, *state capacity* in all tables and most models whereas *ethnic fractionalisation* displayed no statistical significance in any of the tables. Second of all, out of the four tables testing the four corresponding hypotheses it was only H₁ that could be verified. Table 4 testing H₄ supposing that external support to both sides increases the expected duration resulted in showing that the variable for *both sides* was not statistically significant in the analysis. As for H₂ and H₃ the results of the statistical analysis show, in contrast to what the hypotheses expected, that the provision of ‘*soft*’ support increases the likelihood that a conflict will continue, and be longer, more than when the ‘*hard*’ support, weapons or troops are provided. In total, this analysis included seven different types of external support and of those it was three that showed statistical significance: *weapons*, access to *territory* and *funding*.

5 Concluding Discussion

This thesis set out to explore the relationship between external support and the duration of intrastate conflicts through doing a quantitative analysis. Via the review of a rich body of previous research and theoretical assumptions, a total of four hypotheses were formulated. In the methodology chapter the dependent, independent and controlling variables were operationalised as well as the statistical model for this study was introduced. The statistical model, the *Cox Proportional Hazards Model*, was then subsequently applied to the regression analyses and produced both significant and insignificant results. For the final part of the essay, this chapter will discuss and further interpret the findings from the statistical analysis in relation to what theory and previous research have said.

To reiterate, the findings in the statistical analysis led me to reject H_2 , H_3 and H_4 as well as to verify H_1 . However, regardless of whether the hypotheses were able to be verified or falsified the regression analyses still indicated several statistically significant results which are valuable and worthy of further discussion. The outline of this discussion begins by discussing the results in Table 1, then moves on by discussing Tables 2 and 3 and then the results in Table 4. As a reminder for the discussion, the study's four hypotheses are presented below:

H₁: External involvement through external support in intrastate conflicts is associated with a longer duration.

H₂: ['Hard'] External support where weapons or troops are provided is more likely to increase duration compared to the provision of 'soft' support.

H₃: ['Soft'] External support such as intelligence, training, materiel and logistics, access to territory and funding is less likely to increase duration compared to the provision of 'hard' support.

H₄: External support provided to both sides in a conflict is associated with a longer duration compared to support provided to only one side.

The results of the regression analysis presented in Table 1, testing H₁, showed that external support as a whole has a strong statistical significance level and that when external support is provided the likelihood that an intrastate conflict will end is decreased by 45 percent. These results therefore concur with the numerous previous studies explored in the theoretical framework, which have found that the provision of external support is significantly related to increased conflict duration. This gives further support to the theories about veto players and the external supporter's own potentially competing objectives complicating the resolution of conflicts, as theorised by Cunningham (2006), Balch-Lindsay & Enterline (2000) and Regan (2002). The phenomenon is interesting, since at least on the surface one might expect that it might help bring an end to conflicts, seeing as Regan (2002) argues it can be considered a type of conflict management, but perhaps not a very successful one. At the same time however, if one thinks of external support as a type of conflict management when the objective of the intervening third party is to contain the conflict within the area it exists to avoid it spreading to nearby states or regions, which the external supporter often belongs to (Hammarström & Heldt, 2002; Findley & Teo, 2006). This is by extension thus also apparent in the introducing example of this thesis, the current interstate conflict between Ukraine and Russia, which for many of the states providing support is not only about helping Ukraine defend itself but also to defend the rest of the region (European Parliament, 2024).

When it comes to the assumptions in H₂ and H₃, that different types of external support such as more 'hard' or 'soft' types of support do not have the same amount of impact on the duration of conflict. The hypotheses were falsified in the multivariate Cox regressions in Tables 2 and 3, and actually displayed the opposite phenomenon to that of my hypotheses. The hypotheses were formulated through the previous research and in particular the theorising by McKibben & Skoll (2021), that the different types of support, 'soft' or 'hard' signal different things affecting the outcome of conflicts differently. Unlike McKibben & Skoll (2021) who sort the different types of external support into either 'soft' or 'hard' and test their effect on the outcome of conflicts, this thesis portrayed these effects disaggregately. The results show that not all types of external support, at least not with the parameters set forth in this quantitative study, display a significant relationship. However, contrary to the hypotheses formulated through the previous research and theoretical framework, the opposite

relationship was visible. What is shown in the analysis is that the two types of support decreasing the likelihood that a conflict will end, *funding* and access to *territory*, grouped as 'soft' support, displayed more decreased likelihood for conflict termination than *weapons*, which were grouped as 'hard'. These results would therefore instead suggest that what might be at play is something more in line with the reasoning of Sawyer et.al. (2017). According to Sawyer et.al., (2017), fungible external support to especially rebels, such as funding and weapons, result in more uncertainty about the opponent's capabilities reducing the willingness to seek negotiation and resolution, thereby increasing the duration of conflicts. Given that the findings from the statistical analysis demonstrates *funding* and *weapons* to be among the three types of support with statistical significance that increase duration whilst other types of support displayed no statistical significance on duration at all, this would further support the notions argued by Sawyer et.al., (2017) and Meier et.al., (2022) that one needs to study and examine the effects of external support disaggregately.

Concerning the Cox regression in Table 4, it tested the supposed relationship between external support provided to both sides in a conflict and increased duration as stated in H₄. However, when tested the variable both sides proved to not be statistically significant. Due to this I did not elaborate on the hazard ratios in that table. The fault line of this could potentially lie with the fact that, referring to Figure 2 in the chapter on methodology, the occurrence of support to both sides of a conflict only amounted to 63 observations recorded, equivalent to 3.5 percent. The decision to include this as a hypothesis to test was however grounded in the previous research which had pointed to the consequences of this, something I deemed relevant to test using the ESD.

As for the three control variables included in the multivariate regression analyses to test for potential spurious relationships between the dependent and independent variables, two out of three controls displayed statistical significance at at least some point. The only control variable that did not indicate any statistical significance in the analyses was the variable for *ethnic fractionalisation*. In line with what could be expected from previous research regarding the role of *state capacity* in matters of conflict, this thesis found that it has a statistically significant effect on the duration of conflicts. State capacity displayed statistical significance in all models and tables except for Model 3 of Table 3. Somewhat surprisingly, it did however once again show a 95 percent significance level in Model 4 of that table once the variable for ethnic fractionalisation had been added. Finally, *conflict intensity* was introduced

as a control in Model 2 of all tables and indicated that it had a statistically significant relationship with conflict duration with a 99 percent significance level in all tables and models.

Now, what can these findings actually tell us? Well, the results do concur with previous research on the fact that the provision of external support significantly decreases the likelihood of conflict termination. Since the continuation of conflict also means a continuation of violence and death, the aim would reasonably always be to end conflicts as soon as possible. However, as has been exemplified in the existing literature, external supporters often have their own reasons and objectives for intervening, which could be conflicting with the objectives of the fighting parties or in conflict with a swift resolution to the conflict. However, relating it to the example of the war in Ukraine, most would wish to see an end to the war, but it is likely few who want to stop providing support to Ukraine. This raises an interesting tension in the field of external support, whether one ought to be a staunch supporter or opponent of external involvement or something in between. Ideally, it would have been useful in this study to be able to differentiate between whether the external support was provided to the rebel side or the government in the conflict, as has been put forth in previous literature. My initial idea was to focus on pro-government support specifically, but due to the fact that the variable indicating this is only available in the triad version of the ESD which was coded in a specific type of way, I could not modify it to fit the other datasets within the scope of this thesis, but it could be a starting point for further research.

In conclusion, this thesis has sought to answer the research question “*How does external support in intrastate conflicts affect conflict duration?*”. To answer this question, the study has shown that one out of four hypotheses made could be verified, but the independent variables displayed statistically significant effects on duration in all tables except Table 4. However, not all the types of external support included in Tables 2 and 3 displayed this significance, it was only the provision of *weapons* in Table 2 and access to *territory* and *funding* in Table 3 that significantly decreased the likelihood that a conflict would end. Finally, this study displays further support for the arguments that external support and its consequences for the conflict process are necessary to examine in a disaggregated manner as is evidenced by this study since not all kinds of support display the same or any significant effect on the duration of intrastate conflicts.

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Data available upon request